

# Cosmopolitanism's Uneasy Relationship with Pluralism

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## Abstract

Attempts to integrate cosmopolitanism with a recognition of the pluralism of value across cultures have largely relied on the idea of a Rawlsian overlapping consensus. I argue that such a strategy has significant limitations in addressing the concrete normative challenges posed by pluralism and propose that instead of a universal moral ideal we utilize a toolkit of values to better engage with these practical challenges. The toolkit approach is partly inspired by the Confucian value of rightness as appropriateness to the present circumstances and weighing other values as we encounter them in such circumstances. Confucianism is the inspiration for another value in my toolkit, a meta-value I call “accommodation,” that applies in case people disagree over first-order values and urges us to seek to maintain constructive relationships with those with disagree with us. From accommodation and from the Zhuangzi I derive the ethical-epistemic value of humility that involves the kind of respect for the other expressed through the drive to learn about the cultural matrices, life-histories and life-choices they make that go into explaining who they are and why they take perspectives that are different from and may conflict with our own. This value is not directed by the imperative to decide who is right when there are differences but is receptive to learning from the differences and the possibility that such learning may facilitate accommodation.

**Keywords:** Cosmopolitanism, pluralism, accommodation, epistemic humility, Confucianism, Zhuangzi

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## **I. Introduction**

Cosmopolitanism as an ethical view is most commonly understood as the assertion of our equal membership as citizens of the world who possess a dignity beyond price (Nussbaum 2019, 2). Some of its most prominent advocates, such as Martha Nussbaum and Kwame Anthony Appiah (2010), have attempted to temper its universalism with measure of pluralism. Their strategy, it seems to me, is based on a generalized version of Rawlsian overlapping consensus: despite the plurality of values to be found across and within cultures, we can acknowledge each other as citizens of the world based on shared values. To introduce the difficulties arising from such a strategy, I begin with Rawls' surprisingly tentative statement of overlapping consensus. There are compelling reasons for his tentativeness, and I go on to tie these with difficulties that Nussbaum and Appiah themselves acknowledge in their attempts to reconcile value pluralism with cosmopolitanism.

The difficulties motivate my attempt to chart an alternative direction for cosmopolitanism, different from but not necessarily incompatible with the overlapping consensus approach. It is not necessarily incompatible because my approach acknowledges that moral, social and political traditions across the world may share values when such values are specified at a very abstract level of description. Such overlapping consensus, however, is far from sufficient to provide helpful guidance on the concrete, practical issues that cosmopolitanism was originally meant to address. Rather than being an ethical or social and political proposal for how cosmopolitanism should be configured as a first-order normative ideal spelling out in a comprehensive and general fashion what it means to treat all others as citizens of the world, my approach is to provide a toolkit to deal with the fundamental pluralism of value we face as we strive to recognize each other's moral status across national boundaries. This toolkit is to be used to engage with concrete, practical issues. While it contains definite value content, it is meant to provide those grappling with the issues not values with determinative answers to the issues but rather methods and orientations so that they may productively engage with each other in trying to resolve these issues in their time and place.

The toolkit approach is partly inspired by the Confucian value of rightness as appropriateness to the present circumstances and weighing other values as we encounter them in such circumstances. Confucianism is the inspiration for another value in my toolkit, a meta-value I call “accommodation,” that applies in case people disagree over first-order values and urges us to seek to maintain constructive relationships with those with disagree with us. From accommodation and from the *Zhuangzi* I derive the ethical-epistemic value of humility that involves the kind of respect for the other expressed through the drive to learn about the cultural matrices, life-histories and life-choices they make that go into explaining who they are and why they take perspectives that are different from and may conflict with our own. This value is not directed by the imperative to decide who is right when there are differences but is receptive to learning from the differences and the possibility that such learning may facilitate accommodation.

## II. Nussbaum's and Appiah's Rawlsian Revisions to the Cosmopolitan Ideal

Consider Nussbaum's later qualifications (2019) of the cosmopolitan ideal she had previously formulated (1994). Using Rawlsian language of “comprehensive doctrine covering all of human life,” she presents a version of the ideal that purports to be compatible with the plurality of “reasonable” comprehensive doctrines (2019, 14, 214–16, 247). What these doctrines will have in common, Nussbaum thinks, are ideas of human dignity, human equality, rights, and human capabilities, the last of which is a distinctive feature of her own view.<sup>1</sup> Nussbaum explicitly acknowledges her debt to Rawls:

They [political philosophers] ought to argue for principles that could ultimately prove acceptable to all citizens in a pluralistic society, in what Rawls calls an “overlapping consensus,” without requiring

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<sup>1</sup> For the initial statement of the capabilities view, of which Nussbaum gave its most prominent philosophical development, see Sen (1974, 1979a, 1979b).

them to abandon their religious commitments or to convert to some dominant religion in order to accept the principles. (216)

As to the pluralism she believes to be reasonable, her focus is mainly on the variety of religions, some of which share a commitment to the centrality of rationality in their comprehensive views of human life, but others of which do not (Nussbaum 2019, 215). She thinks the cosmopolitan should make room for the latter as well. In addition, she expresses a great deal of sympathy for Grotius' "complex and indeterminate position on humanitarian intervention" based on the complexity of autonomy as a moral value (107). Autonomy is not only expressed in the rights of individual persons but in the right of peoples to self-government. Nussbaum agrees with those who see the nation-state as still the best kind of institution for the realization of this latter right. But the rights of peoples and the rights of individuals, though mutually supporting, can also severely conflict when the laws passed by a people abrogate the rights of individuals. Nussbaum cites genocide, slavery, and the rape of women as instances of "extreme and excessive" violations of human dignity that can justify humanitarian intervention into the internal affairs of a nation. However, beyond these cases of clear justification for intervention, she also acknowledges that the issues created by the collisions between national sovereignty and individual dignity are profoundly complicated (127).

Appiah's cosmopolitanism combines the idea of obligations to others that go beyond "kith and kin" with the idea of seriously valuing human lives, made particular by certain practices and beliefs. Since the particularity of human lives is wide, we should not expect nor desire that everyone and every society converge on just one mode of life (Appiah 2010, xv). "[T]here are many values worth living by," and since "you cannot live by all of them," "we hope and expect that different people and different societies will embody different values" (144). For Appiah, however, there is a kind of moral minimum that bounds the pluralism: the "core moral ideas" increasingly embodied in "our" conception of basic human rights, including "needs for health, food, shelter, education," "certain options" everyone ought to have: "to seek sexual satisfaction with consenting partners; to have children if they

wish to; to move from place to place; to express and share ideas; to help manage their societies; to exercise their imaginations.” Finally, people need protection from needless pain, unwarranted contempt, and the mutilation of their bodies” (162–63). Though Appiah does not mention Rawlsian overlapping consensus, it seems functionally equivalent to the idea of a moral minimum, presumably shared by societies he hopes will otherwise embody different values.

This is how Nussbaum and Appiah propose to combine pluralism with something that everyone, or everyone who is reasonable, can agree upon as the foundation for cosmopolitan obligations across all national boundaries. The basic idea is that people can converge on the same substantive values for regulating their relationships with each other even though they diverge in their justifications for these values, based in their comprehensive views on the origin of the world, on the place of human life in the world, and notions of right and wrong. The important point here is that these values are the common point of agreement, and they are first-order values for regulating the relationships between people or a government in relationship to its people.

Nussbaum and Appiah differ from Rawls mainly in using broader, more general language meant to suggest what might be reasonable for people across the whole world to accept. This is appropriate, given that Rawls’ “political not metaphysical values” are more specific to the culture of liberal democracy. I shall argue here that a more careful look at Rawls’ stated expectations for achieving an overlapping consensus are carefully hedged, and a sober look makes them look tenuous even at the time of his stating them, and since then, expectations have way downhill from there. When we get to Nussbaum and Appiah, we find similar careful hedging, to their credit, but the hopes for achieving an overlapping cosmopolitan consensus have similarly taken a turn for much worse.

### III. Declining Prospects for an Overlapping Consensus on Cosmopolitan and Liberal Democratic Values

For Rawls, the “political not metaphysical” conception of justice affirms “very great values” such as “equal political and civil liberty; fair equality of opportunity; the values of economic reciprocity; the social bases of mutual respect between citizens” (Rawls 2011, 139). Rawls’ prototype of overlapping consensus on such values is between three types of persons with different comprehensive doctrines: one who reasons from religious ideas such as the impossibility of forcing salvation on another; another who reasons from a comprehensive moral theory such as utilitarianism or Kantian deontology; and a third who has no overarching theory that orders all important values but who holds that political values “normally outweigh whatever nonpolitical values conflict with them” (146).

Consider Rawls’ the phrase “normally outweigh.” Further, at the same time he says political values are very great values, he also says that political values are “not *easily*” overridden (Rawls 2011, 139; italics mine). In another place he adds that in supposing all the main historical religions admit of an account of free faith, except for certain forms of fundamentalism, that he is perhaps “too optimistic” (170). Such fallibilistic and exception-granting language implies reluctance not only to make conclusions that hold necessarily, but even conclusions for all circumstances we might expect to occur sooner or later or even have experienced in the past or present. This cautious language suggests that an overlapping consensus should not be regarded, as some of Rawls’ supporters and critics might regard it, as an inevitable (or intended, in the case of critics) outcome of the judgments of all reasonable persons who reason correctly from their comprehensive doctrines or political values. Rather, it might be read as a goal for which one might have a reasonable hope but not a reasonable expectation of fulfilling.

Consider an interesting observation that Rawls makes about the relation between most people’s democratic political values and their comprehensive doctrines. The relation is “slippage.” Because “[m]ost people’s religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines are not seen by

them as fully general and comprehensive, and these aspects admit of variations of degree,” there are “many ways for liberal principles of justice to cohere loosely with those (partially) comprehensive views, and many ways within the limits of political principles of justice to allow for the pursuit of different (partially) comprehensive doctrines” (Rawls 2011, 160). Rawls envisions that basic political liberties such as the right to vote and freedom of political speech and association might initially get adopted as a *modus vivendi*, a political compromise based on the self or group interests between parties with conflicting comprehensive doctrines. Once they see the good that such liberties do, however, they might find ways to further specify or fill-in their partially comprehensive views so as to be more compatible with liberal political values.

Rawls is profoundly right, I believe, to point to significant indeterminacy and fluidity in people’s moral beliefs, even some of the most basic beliefs. It is not implausible that they could be led to revise or further specify those beliefs to make them fit with other values they have come to approve or to accept. But this plasticity and fluidity can go in directions other than towards the approval of liberal democratic political values. In fact, the most notable movement of recent times is away from the kind of liberal democratic values on which Rawls had pinned his hopes for an overlapping consensus. This has taken place in Rawls’ home country, the world’s oldest democracy.

As of October 2023, at least 14 states in the U.S. have enacted laws since January 1, 2021, that make it harder for citizens to vote. In the same period, 23 states have enacted laws expanding voting access. Moreover, the states enacting restrictive laws are ones in which voting is already relatively difficult, while those enacting expansive laws tend already to have more accessible voting processes. Access to the right to vote depends on the state you live in (Brennan Center for Justice, 2023). This indicates a shrinkage of overlapping consensus on basic democratic values. Perhaps most ominous of all is the fact that the country seems deeply divided on the question of whether the 2020 presidential election was fairly decided by the vote, and at the time of this writing, the 2024 election is already being denigrated with pre-emptive accusations of vote “fixing.”

The mirror image of Rawls' hopeful expectation that satisfaction with liberal political values will prompt people to adjust their comprehensive doctrines to get a better fit with these values is that disillusionment with those values, or with the way they are realized through our current institutions, has prompted a significant number of people to adjust their comprehensive doctrines toward non-liberal political values. And there is an understandable basis for such adjustment if liberal political values, as institutionalized, are of most service to elites in societies. Their institutionalization is rife with gaping inequalities that grind at the self-respect and dignity of the bottom layers, leaving hopelessness in their wake, and instilling insecurity and fear in the shrinking middle. Economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton (2020) have documented the "deaths of despair" suffered by working-class America, resulting in declines in life expectancy and in dramatically rising numbers of death from suicide, drug overdose, and alcoholism. The indeterminacy and fluidity of most people's comprehensive doctrines can be fully as much an opening for widening division rather than a crystallization of overlapping consensus. This is what seems to be happening to us now. Slippage is going the wrong way.

On a more theoretical level, Rawls' pinning some of his hopes on the plasticity of foundational moral beliefs means that overlapping consensus is not a result of the *logic* of what follows from these beliefs. That is, sufficient common ground does not follow from the content of the fixed content of those beliefs. At best, it is a possibility given that people have sufficiently positive *lived* experience under a regime of liberal political values that people gradually change the content of their beliefs in the direction of an overlapping consensus. It is the kind of life afforded to people that might produce such positive change.

We do not have a clear, well-confirmed explanation for the current and increasing dissensus on liberal democratic values. An explanation with some intuitive plausibility is economic inequality. The U.S. is but one instance in which there have been massive transfers of power and wealth from the poor and middle classes to the top, and this could be linked to a profound loss of trust in the democratic institutions that have failed to prevent and reverse these transfers, indeed, have



collaborated in allowing and facilitating them through law and policy, creating a vacuum for authoritarian, populist, and nativist regimes to move in (and here I do not use these terms for the same phenomenon, but different but overlapping ones), too often resulting in greater corruption, self-dealing, worsening inequality and political violence (UNDESA 2020).

Further complicating the situation is that worsening inequality may not be the only significant factor in the movement away from liberal democratic values. Another factor, possibly interacting with the economic one, but quite possibly having a significant independent influence, or even more of an influence than the economic factor, is the importance of people's social and cultural identities and the way these identities have waxed and waned in relative, or even simply perceived, influence on the social and cultural lives of the societies containing them. Owen Flanagan, in his comments on the workshop papers leading to this volume, commented on one possible explanation for the influence of social and cultural identity, which is differences in basic psychological dispositions, with some having strong preferences and needs for stability and predictability and others more welcoming of novelty and change.<sup>2</sup> Such differences in basic dispositions undoubtedly have a genetic component, but the manner in which they manifest themselves may be highly influenced by the rapidity of social change; social and political structures affecting how societies deal with such change; and the degree of familiarity that groups with different social and cultural identities have with one another and their frequency of interaction. Many of the same factors, and the same uncertainties, can be raised as possible explanations of the movement away from the cosmopolitan values Nussbaum and Appiah champion: human dignity and equality, and fundamental human rights applied across national boundaries. These two phenomena, the decline of liberal political values and of cosmopolitan values, seem to be inter-related.

For example, positive and negative attitudes toward immigration within a society seem to be linked to positive and negative attitudes,

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<sup>2</sup> For a survey of current literature on this topic and related ones, see van Baar and FeldmanHall (2022). See also Hatemi et al. (2013).

respectively, toward the home countries from which immigrant groups constitute a majority or sizable proportion of the racial or ethnic population. And these attitudes may be connected to the valence of attitudes toward liberal political values and orthodox cosmopolitanism. Positive and negative attitudes towards immigrant groups seem linked to positive and negative perceptions (whether justified or not) of the economic impact of these groups on their new countries, especially among those who perceive their economic welfare to be directly affected by the presence of immigrants (see National Academy of Sciences 1997). There is a tendency for those who have been adversely impacted by globalization to associate it with increased immigration to their society and with the increasing diversity of population (even though there is good reason to doubt a straightforward causal impact of immigration with negative impacts of globalization; See Castañeda and Shemesh 2020). Nevertheless, those who perceive globalization as prompting immigration to their societies and with decline in their own economic status may be inclined to accept curtailment of the rights of these groups and to reject cosmopolitan values.

However, the importance of social and cultural identity to people may play an independent role in their antagonism towards immigrants and toward a constructive role for their nation in international affairs. Yotam Margalit observes that long-term structural social developments such as:

. . . increased access to higher education, growing ethnic diversity, urbanization, more equal gender roles—have led to greater acceptance of diverse lifestyles, religions, and cultures. These changes, and the perceived displacement of traditional social values, have caused a sense of resentment among segments of the population in the West, particularly among white men, older people, conservatives, and those with less formal qualifications. Increased exposure to foreign influences that comes with globalization, and even more so the effects of waves of immigration, has exacerbated the sense of a cultural and demographic threat. As a result, formerly predominant majorities have felt their social standing erode and have become increasingly receptive to populist charges against a disconnected, cosmopolitan elite that has turned its back on them. (Margalit 2019, 165).

It is unsurprising that we do not have very clear, well-confirmed ideas about the causal connections between the various possible factors relating to decreasing commitment to liberal political values and to cosmopolitan values. All we know is that there is great cause for worry. That is why Nussbaum's and Appiah's careful hedging to a kind of overlapping consensus on orthodox cosmopolitan values is well-taken but looking increasingly like Rawlsian hopes for overlapping consensus. Recall that Appiah is in effect proposing a kind of overlapping consensus on the moral minimum he specifies. His strategy is to acknowledge fundamental differences in value but to suggest there is enough in common on which to base a modest cosmopolitanism.

#### **IV. Qualified Endorsement of Cosmopolitanism from Nussbaum and Appiah**

While moral concepts, even "thickish" ones such as courage, cruelty, and politeness, will appear in the moral vocabularies of different cultures, Appiah acknowledges that shared understanding on a general level will not prevent cultures from disagreeing over how to apply those concepts to particular cases (Appiah 2010, 59). He further acknowledges that people may share values but disagree as to what weight to give to them relative to other values that can come into conflict with them (63). These value differences apply to Appiah's core ideas such as "health," "education," "freedom of expression," and "helping to manage one's society." Many of them, such as the last, are specified at such an abstract level that they inevitably will receive very different interpretations and given different priorities relative to other core ideas.

Nussbaum does not cede as much to pluralism as Appiah does, but neither does she give much assurance that the concessions he makes to pluralism don't also apply to her version of cosmopolitanism. In fact, giving room for religions that do not make rationality central to their vision of human life seems to open the door wide to similar problems of adjudication concerning the interpretation and prioritization of values. The pride of place Nussbaum gives to advancing human capabilities seem susceptible to the same problems of interpretation as

Appiah's core moral ideas. The conflicts between national sovereignty and individual human dignity that Nussbaum rightly acknowledges can yield many issues of indeterminate resolution.

I do not dismiss the value of hopes for a modest cosmopolitan consensus where we can find it, but where we are likely to find it is also likely to make for a very limited and context-specific partial consensus. There is no universe of Platonic forms that provides the hidden answers to the complex moral problems of pluralism that Nussbaum, Appiah, and Rawls acknowledge in their work. This is not to say that some things look clearer than others. Nussbaum lists genocide, slavery, and the rape of women. Aside from this list, I think we ought to combat the naked and morally egregious exploitation and extractive projects of global capitalism. We ought to oppose brutally repressive regimes that are clearly suppressing speech and dissent for the sake of holding on to power and not for the sake of their citizens.

## **V. Taking from Confucianism to Chart an Alternative Kind of Cosmopolitanism**

We are faced with problems arising from differences over the interpretation of values we might or might not share, and problems arising from differences over priorities to give these values when they conflict. There are strands from the early Chinese tradition that provide useful starting points for an answer that goes beyond the thin reed of overlapping consensus.<sup>3</sup> Confucianism, and the work centered on the person of Confucius himself, provide some of these starting points.

Confucius makes clear that he has no expectation of coming to an ultimate agreement on important substantive matters:

The Master said, "You can study with some, and yet not necessarily walk the same path (*dao* 道); you can walk the same path as some, and

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<sup>3</sup> I have been developing a version of strands of an alternative answer in Wong (2006; 2011; 2018; 2023). For some earlier thinking on cosmopolitanism developed with Marion Hourdequin, see Wong and Hourdequin (2019).

yet not necessarily take your stand with them; you can take your stand with them, and yet not necessarily weigh things up in the same way.” (*Analects* 9.30, as translated in Ames and Rosemont 2010 [133])

Our journey is with others, and we should expect to differ with them even as we jointly pursue the realization of our shared aspirations. “Weighing” is a matter of judging how ethical considerations stack up against each other, especially when they conflict. Reasonable and informed people can judge differently given their value priorities and unique fund of experiences in life. This point resonates with John Rawls’ characterization of the “burdens of judgment”: because our most cherished values do not come with the guarantee that their realization will be fully compatible, and because we may be forced to restrict some values for the sake others, we will inevitably differ over how to best balance our values (Rawls 2011, 56–57). As reasonable and rational we have to make different kinds of judgments.

In a famous passage, Confucius says, “Exemplary persons seek harmony not sameness” (*Analects* 13.23, as translated in Ames and Rosemont 2010 [169]).<sup>4</sup> In other work, I develop what this kind of harmony involves, but I shall have to simply sketch it programmatically for my purposes here (see Wong 2020). Harmony, not surprisingly, involves what I called “shared understanding,” which includes agreement on values, even if on the broad and abstract level (dignity, equality) that can lead to disagreement when we get more specific. Thus shared understanding can co-exist with disagreement. We can pursue the reasons why the different sides disagree and thus arrive at greater shared understanding. But we may not arrive there, at least not at a complete and full shared understanding. In such cases, we need what I call the value of accommodation, the striving for constructive relationship in the face of continuing disagreement (Wong 2006; 2020).

I conceived of this value in the process of constructing an ethical theory in a contemporary framework, but I have been influenced by Antonio Cua’s interpretation of the Confucian value of *ren* 仁 as requiring the effort to repair “the rupture of human relationship”

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<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of harmony in the Chinese tradition, see Li (2014).

and to shape “the expectations of the contending parties along the line of mutual concern, to get them to appreciate one another as interacting members in a community” (Cua 1989, 281). I have argued that accommodation, as a second-order value that applies in case of first-order moral disagreement, is a necessary element of all adequate moralities because of the ubiquity of moral disagreement. If moral disagreement always became the occasion for the cessation of constructive relationship, we would be unable to carry out the cooperation that is the heart of human life.

A fuller specification of accommodation includes an epistemic openness and preparedness to expand one’s conception of the good and the right upon further understanding and appreciation of other ways of life; a willingness to act on one’s own moral positions in ways that minimize or reduce potential damage to one’s broader relationship to others who have opposed positions; and a willingness to at least sometimes compromise on what one might have achieved in realizing one’s moral position for the sake of sustaining a broader relationship with disagreeing others.

At this point it is appropriate to underline the differences between accommodation as a moral value and the idea of overlapping consensus that underlies Nussbaum’s and Appiah’s attempts to join cosmopolitanism with a meaningful pluralism. The values on which there is supposedly overlapping consensus are substantive first-order values: for Rawls, political values such as freedom to practice one’s religion, and for Nussbaum and Appiah broadly described values such human dignity, equality, and human rights. Accommodation, on the other hand, is a second order value that grants the likelihood of continuing and serious disagreement over how to specify and apply such first-order values and over their priorities relative to each other in specific contexts.

One might still call this value the result of a kind of overlapping consensus, but the consensus is on the kind of second-order value that requires us to continue working with others to find specific grounds for cooperation while acknowledging our serious first-order disagreements. It does not purport to give us first-order values on which we may converge, even if our comprehensive views give us different routes to

those values. Accommodation, furthermore, does not require us to find first-order values on which all concerned societies will agree. Where consensus among a number of parties is sufficient to solve a specific problem, or even to make partial progress on it, that is enough reason to go for it and work on getting more in the future (It is likely that any real progress on addressing climate change will have to take this form if it is to go beyond the expedient forms of unenforceable and insincere agreements that have so far masqueraded as progress among the nations). Accommodation is the moral endorsement of a civil form of politics.

Accommodation goes along with the recognition that we cannot expect to foster a growing consensus, if that is the most desirable outcome to seek, on the kind of cosmopolitan values Nussbaum and Appiah have in mind through the Rawlsian strategy of “If you build it, they will come.” The saying is taken from the 1989 movie, *Field of Dreams*, in which an Iowa farmer hears a voice whispering it, which inspires him to build a baseball field in his cornfield, and to which the ghosts of baseball greats, and the farmer’s late father, come to play. The saying has come to mean that if you create something worthwhile, people will be drawn to it, and it well expresses Rawls’ hope that if we create a society that protects and supports people’s freedom to try to realize their conceptions of the good, they will come to have an allegiance to that society. But not only do we face the challenge of realizing a society in which the desired values come to true life, but we also lack a very good idea of how to do it. At present, the problems that stand in the way of realizing it, such as growing inequality and our opposed tribal cultural and social identities, are quite possibly deeply implicated in moving considerable numbers of people to accept other values. We would do well to affirm the epistemic virtue of humility considering our lack of understanding and uncertainty. But the only way we can progress is by seeing how much headway we can make in attempting work with others on the more specific and daunting challenges that we face now.

This last point highlights another element of Confucian ethics I would like to bring to bear on an alternative project for cosmopolitans who take pluralism seriously. The concept of rightness or *yi* 義 should

be glossed as appropriateness to the circumstance. The Confucian ethic is deeply contextual in its approach. Morally exemplary persons may normally act in accordance with a standard set of norms, *jing* 經, but in complex situations they will go beyond the standard norms and exercise discretion, *quan* 權. *Jing* is like going through the normal pathways to accord with the *Dao* 道. *Quan* is going off these pathways in unusual circumstances to accord with *Dao*. *Jing* and *quan* are interrelated by being different aspects of *Dao*. Both are ways of doing what is *yi* 義.

If we combine the Confucian concepts of harmony, of *yi* and of *quan*, we get the effort to resolve disagreements through a continuous effort to reach a balance of shared understanding, disagreement, and accommodation to that disagreement. We can never expect a “once and for all” resolution, but a continual process of adjustment in accordance with changes in conditions, people, and what they believe. We are not assured of an answer underwritten by Platonic forms but only one created through fallible human effort. Unlike Rawlsian overlapping consensus, we are not conveniently given a regime in a thought experiment that realizes the relevant values to which people are expected to react favorably. Any resolutions we create do not necessarily carry over for similar problems described at an abstract level, because our resolutions will be geared to the particularity of the problem we are addressing.

A third element cannot be encapsulated neatly in a Chinese term coming from Confucian texts, but emerges from an interpretation of how a working consensus, including agreements to disagree over some important matters, comes from relationships built up over time from many acts, many of them small, some of them gestural toward the willingness to accommodate, some being actual acts of accommodation on various matters, and built from practices and institutions that bring people together who do not wholeheartedly choose to be with each other. The ground for a consensus is not constructed on a once-and-forever basis but must be continuously made and remade from a fabric of relationships, which is itself subject to wear and weakening and tearing apart that must be mended. This interpretation is based on Confucius’s and Xunzi’s acute awareness of the need for the continued



practice of rituals in which we rehearse and enact the desired set of attitudes that ready people to work one another.

There is no grand set of principles expressing the normative content of cosmopolitanism, but rather a matrix of relationships within which different nations, perhaps even different subunits of nations such as American states, can join in partnerships to address problems that require international and global action such as pandemics and climate change—these two being connected as the latter drive humans and animals closer together into the same spaces, thereby increasing the probabilities for transmission of pathogens. Cosmopolitanism means the most when there is something that requires international and global action. Agreement on a grand set of principles will not give us meaningful solutions to complex and rapidly evolving problems. Indeterminate and general values, and the hedging and fuzzy priorities we posit if pressed to give them can only be usefully specified through finding and constructing what they might mean concretely when engaging with problems. We do not obtain more consensus through moral argument alone, if that has ever been true, but through showing that cooperation produces a better situation for the relevant parties. But we must produce the better situation. We can only know the commonalities in goals and values that will enable coordinated response across global communities when we engage with each other, not only on the problems, but also in attempting to reach mutual understanding on what is concretely important to different communities. We will not know ahead of time what bases for cooperation we will find in the search for solutions.

## **VI. Taking from the *Zhuangzi* to Chart an Alternative Cosmopolitanism**

Given that these problems will often involve the interactions of communities with significantly different ways of life, and the ways that the particularities of history and the ways nations and peoples have interacted with each other that feed into our sense of what is required of us now to adequately treat them as fellow citizens of the world, I

propose that Daoism, and in particular the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*, contributes other relevant elements of an alternative cosmopolitan approach, to be integrated with the elements I take from Confucianism. Orthodox cosmopolitanism assumes we already have the values on which there can be global convergence and that it is possible to give some kind of rank ordering of values that pertain to treating others as fellow citizens of the world. The alternative approach I draw from the *Zhuangzi* values epistemic humility that is continuous with ethical respect for the other and a curiosity to learn about the cultural matrices and history that has led to perspectives that we have likely distorted through the lens of our own cultural matrices and history. This normally is a difficult matter for people to accomplish, especially if they are in practical conflict with each other. Coming to vividly acknowledge the alternatives to one's entrenched beliefs and practices is what the *Zhuangzi* is about.

The second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, “Qiwulun” (齊物論), presents a picture of the relation between human beings and the world as originally emerging from a single source, a Great Clump that blows its breath through the myriad hollows of the earth to give life to the myriad creatures. The blowing of the Great Clump and the unique expression its breath gives to each of the hollows constitute the “piping” of Heaven and earth. The symphony of piping constitutes a vast alternation of endless and varied expressions. Humanity has its piping too, born of the need to classify and order: we distinguish between “this” and “that” and between “right” and “wrong.” We “select” (*qu* 取) from the alternations to conceptualize our worlds (to “make-up” [*cheng xin* 成心] our minds as to what is there) and locate ourselves in them, giving ourselves starring roles (“Qiwulun” §3).

We think we are right: our world is the world. The *Zhuangzi*'s critique of this epistemological egoism reminds of contemporary theories of conceptual relativism advocated by Nelson Goodman (1978) and Iris Einheuser (2011). On this view, facts such as what things are in the world and the properties they possess are not there independently of how we conceptualize them. We carve out facts from the stream of goings-on in our environment. An independent world is responsible for this stream, and we systematize and structure it, using only a very

small portion of what we could glean from that stream to make sense of and navigate through that world. That we must filter out most of what we receive through our senses is necessitated by the limitations of our cognitive equipment. The world independent of us does constrain the range of viable conceptualizations. Metaphors for this process of selection that creates things and facts about them include sculpting a statue out of marble or naming a particular constellation such as the Big Dipper through discerning a certain pattern of stars in the sky. The process of selection cannot produce just any range of facts, just as one cannot make any pattern given the location of stars in the sky or produce a certain kind of statue out of any block of marble. The constraints come from the nature of the input from the world, the features of our sensory and cognitive apparatus, and the nature of the interaction between the two. It is just that the constraints do not determine a single correct systematization.

The *Zhuangzi* reminds us of the partiality of our conceptualizations and our tendency to subordinate others to our own view of things, including our view of what they need. The *Zhuangzi* contains a story about a seabird that came to roost on the outskirts of the state of Lu. The Marquis of Lu took the bird in his chariot to the temple, where he had prepared a banquet for it, playing the best court music and laying out the best chops. The bird looked worried and distressed, not daring to eat, and was dead in three days. The Marquis was trying to nourish the bird with what nourished him, but if he truly wants to nourish the bird, he would let it perch in the deep forest, roam over sandy plains, float on rivers and lakes, feed on the eels and fish, fly in formation and find its resting-place where ever it pleases (“Zhile” [至樂] §5). Our need to see ourselves as right, not just right about ourselves but right about others, is the lens through which we judge others.

The *Zhuangzi* also tells a story about a frog who lives in a caved-in well. Because he is the lord of this little world of his, king of the pollywogs, he is very proud of himself. But he doesn't know how small his world is until a turtle comes and tells him about the vastness of the sea. He is crestfallen. We human beings are like the frog, not realizing how little our worlds are (“Qiushui” [秋水] §10.2). If we wish to discern the needs of others, we must “forget” or “lose” the self and its need to

be right, to be the star of the show.

In the same chapter, it is pointed out that the rulers of the Three Dynasties sometimes yielded their thrones to others and sometimes passed them on to their sons. The ones who acted on these policies at the wrong time got called usurpers, and the ones who did it at the right times were called righteous. The implication is that no uniform rule, such as yielding or passing on, can be relied upon. Ruo of the Northern Sea replies, “[D]o not restrict your will, but expansively limp and stagger along with the *Dao*. A bit later, he adds, “[D]o not unify your conduct, but be uneven and varied along with the *Dao*” (“*Qiushui*” [秋水] §6).<sup>5</sup> A given instance of passing on the throne to others or to one’s sons was right or fitting to that moment, but human beings mistakenly infer a general uniformity in the rightness that goes beyond that moment. Reliance on our conceptualizations, our selections from the alternation, when they have overrun the occasions on which they are apt, does not enable us to travel the uneven and varied *Dao*. From the perspective that seeks general uniformity, we are limping and staggering along in an unprincipled eclectic fashion. From the standpoint of the *Zhuangzi*, we are responding to what is right for the present moment, which invariably escapes any general uniformity we may want to impose on it.

In “Wandering Far and Unfettered” (“*Xiaoyaoyou*” [逍遙遊]), *Zhuangzi*’s friend *Huizi* is unable to make use of huge gourds he had grown, either as water containers or as water dippers. Frustrated, he smashes them to pieces. *Zhuangzi* chides his friend for not being able to see through the tangled weeds clogging his mind a use for the gourds that had not occurred to him: lashing them together to make a raft to float upon the lakes and rivers. The tangled weeds are expectations based on our learning and past experience that can obscure much of what demands response in the present moment.

We are bidden to set aside the preconceptions that form the boundaries of our conceptualized worlds, to tamp down the way our egos are involved in maintaining those worlds, and to respond to the present moment. When the decision we must make is how to act toward others,

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<sup>5</sup> This translation is adapted from Ziporyn (2009, 72).

we must try to connect with their minds and even more basically, what moves them beneath all conscious deliberation (their *qi* 氣, or vital energies). To do this, we must be prepared to be moved by them, to open ourselves and our own vital energies to them. The story in the *Zhuangzi* that best conveys these ideas features Confucius and his star student Yan Hui. The student wants to go advise a reckless young ruler careless of the lives of his people. Confucius rejects all of Yan Hui's preconceived plans and preconceptions of how the ruler will respond to him. Confucius tells him that he must prepare himself for the encounter by "fasting" (*zhai* 齋) his mind. It is likely that the reference to meditation, and Confucius tells him that he must listen with his mind more than his ears, with his vital energies more than his mind. The vital energies are an emptiness, a waiting on things. Yan Hui goes away to fast his mind and comes back to Confucius that he has had an experience of his self as not yet having begun to exist ("Renjianshi" [人間世] §2).<sup>6</sup>

One aim of fasting the mind and sitting and forgetting is to loosen the grip of limiting preconceptions that obscure one's view of the other, including a self-forgetting that tamps down the need to see the world as one in which one has the starring role (Confucius warns Yan Hui about the way that good deeds easily turn into strivings for a good name). Invoking the leader metaphor for the internal organization of the person, psychologist Joachim Krueger (2003) has characterized the ego as like "a totalitarian government," shaping its perception in such a way that it protects a sense of its own good will, its central place in the social world and its control over relevant outcomes" (585).

The *Zhuangzi's* keen awareness of the way that learned conceptualizations of the world both enable our navigating and narrow our perception of it is very much in line with current views of perception as both bottom-up (sensory-input) and top-down (what we see is very much shaped by what we expect to see). Listening with one's *qi* may suggest the possibility of stilling the over-eager made-up mind to enhance bottom-up processing in relation to top-down processing that has become distorting and unhelpful in dealing with a present that fits ill with the conceptual molds we bring to it. It also suggests

<sup>6</sup> See Ziporyn (2009, 27) for an English translation.

use of the body to act in the world, because interacting with the world, including other people, is a way of getting varied sensory input, seeing whether it accords with our expectations and adjusting accordingly. Perhaps unsurprisingly, humans have impressive abilities to read one another's nonverbal language of physical postures, gestures, and facial expressions, a kind of knowledge that often sits below conscious awareness (Rosenthal et al. 1979; Edwards 1998; Lieberman 2000). We learn complex patterns of motor responses involved in playing musical instruments and driving cars, in which the acquired knowledge is not fully accessible to conscious awareness (Clegg, DiGiralamo, and Keele 1998). In the *Zhuangzi's* "The Primacy of Nurturing Life" (*Yangsheng zhu*), Cook Ding's marvelous, dance-like cutting up of the ox demonstrates supreme intuitive attentiveness to the spaces within the joints where he may pass his knife without nicking his blade. Confucius's dialogue with Yan Hui points to the need to navigate the psychic spaces of the person with whom one is interacting, emptying the mind as much as possible of stifling preconceptions about who this person is.

In the Confucian text *Mengzi* there is an analogy between the mind that has developed the virtues and acquires authority to govern the whole person, on the one hand, and on the other hand, persons with the virtues acquiring the authority to govern state and society. The analogy relies on a perceived pattern in the proper arrangement of authority within the person and within state and society: there is a "part" that has the authority—the mind in the case of the person and leaders who have developed their minds in the right fashion in the case of state and society. The *Zhuangzi* alerts us to the hazards of this reasoning on both sides of the analogy: the made-up mind will often have an extremely narrow and rigid view of the world that falters in the face of complexity and change eluding the entrenched and static perspectives we have inherited from the past; leaders invested in their own virtue and expertise become isolated from the people whose welfare they are charged with advancing, and come to see that welfare through the lens of their own education, past experience and priorities.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For extensive discussion of the analogy and the Zhuangzian critique, see Wong (2022).

If we extend the Zhuangzian critique of the mind as having the proper authority within the person to state and society, we recognize that differently situated people can have their own vital information relevant to governance. Just as the mind within the person can be rigidly “made-up” about what the world is like and how to navigate within it, the acquired expertise and the social compartmentalization that results from increased power and influence can have their narrowing and distorting effects on leaders’ view of what benefits “all” the people. “Elite capture” serves as a name for a pervasive phenomenon of social systems: the “well positioned and resourced” tend to advance visions of the social good that are narrowed by their experience of the paths they have navigated in their own lives (Táiwò 2022, 18).

## **VII. The *Zhuangzi* and the Idea of a Confucian Governing Elite**

The idea that the morally better among us should have the power to govern the rest of us is a perpetually tempting one, especially if we help ourselves to the idealizing assumptions that such an elite could come into being and furthermore that they could be given or assume the levers of power, that the practical know-how it takes to lead and administer could be combined with moral depth and reliability of virtue, or at least that those with moral depth and reliability of virtue could identify and work with those with the practical know-how, and finally that such leaders could establish relationships of trust and loyalty with the people they govern. The *Zhuangzi* gives us reasons to be skeptical that any group of human beings could fulfill these idealizing assumptions. It casts doubt on the idea that one select group of human beings could have a morally superior and comprehensive view of the good of all and that they would know how to implement such a view in a manner that would be accepted by the rest.

### **VIII. Joining Confucian and *Zhuangzian* Insights to Chart an Alternative Cosmopolitanism**

Though the *Zhuangzi* is generally and deeply pessimistic about ameliorative social and political projects, we who seek to advance in the face of such pessimism can use its insights at a time when societies are impaired by deep divisions to address existential threats. There are several ways in which insights from the *Zhuangzi* are compatible with or reinforce insights I have here drawn from Confucianism. As indicated earlier, we may get from Confucianism the concept of *yi* 義, rightness as appropriateness to the present circumstances, and a conception of harmony that advocates accommodating to disagreement as well as striving for shared understanding in the context of a matrix of ongoing and evolving relationships across nations, subnational groups, and international groups that foster the willingness and wherewithal to accommodate and to reach and enact shared understandings in the context of addressing real practical problems.

There are ways to act on these values that are compatible with and reinforced by the *Zhuangzi's* urging of cognitive flexibility, its desire to set aside the strictures of worlds that have been constructed around the ego-enhancing needs of the self, whether this self is personal or the self that conforms to cultural ideals. A conception of social harmony that strives for accommodation with those who continue to disagree with us is also compatible with and reinforced by the sort of cognitive flexibility and epistemic humility that the *Zhuangzi* urges. The *Zhuangzian* emphasis on acting according to what is suited the present moment has very clear resonance with Confucian *yi* as appropriateness to the circumstances. The epistemology of cognitive flexibility in the *Zhuangzi* can in fact be applied to the cultivation of the Confucian ability to see what is appropriate to the circumstances. This speaks for the possibility of bringing Confucianism and Daoist insights together in an alternative sort of cosmopolitanism that is not focused on formulating a definitive set of normative principles for one world, whether from overlapping consensus or not, but rather preparing ourselves to harmonize with others on specific occasions and with reference to particular problems who come from different worlds,



or rather, who carry their worlds within them.

This alternative sort of cosmopolitanism is focused on the present moment in the sense that we try to address values in conflict as they are instantiated in context, which come into conflict in particular ways, each of them having a force that does not necessarily carry over into other contexts. Considering these particularities may give us ways to balance and reconcile them, and to try to bring about mutual accommodations in case we cannot reach shared understandings. This new sort of cosmopolitanism places as much emphasis on an epistemology as the ethical. In fact, it is an epistemology that is ethical in its import. A crucial way of showing respect for others is to try to understand them and the worlds they carry within them. An epistemology like this will emphasize virtues such as humility, openness, and the courage to question one's own assumptions. An epistemology like this will have to be social in the sense that it recognizes that inquiry is social: collaborative, but also challenging, not only to others, but to oneself, in the presence of those others. It does not strive to reach agreement on overarching normative principles but rather seeks collaboration on urgent problems that of necessity call for international and global joint action.

## **IX. Are Confucian and Zhuangzian Insights Too Different to Be Integrated Into a New Cosmopolitanism?**

It might be objected that Confucianism and the Daoism of the *Zhuangzi* are founded on premises that are too different to be combined in the way that I propose. But the very idea that there are "premises" from which these philosophies, each conceived as cohesive monoliths, can be drawn is objectionable to me. That is to imply there are premises of enough specific and clearly definable substance that they can be said to entail the conclusions of a rich, internally diverse, and long-lived philosophical tradition. This is too static and excessively indiscriminate a view to take of philosophical traditions. It also does not account for the way that earlier ideas and formulations were taken by a generation of the tradition's proponents and combined with philosophies that

surely were regarded as competitors, the most prominent example of which is the way that Neo-Confucians appropriated Buddhist metaphysics and fashioned it into a Confucian moral metaphysics, and then proceeded to read it back into the texts of the early Confucians. That also does not account for the major differences between Zhu Xi's and Wang Yangming's Neo-Confucianisms.

Rather than conceiving of traditions on the model of premises and conclusions, it is more suitable to observe that viable philosophical traditions are like living organisms which adapt to their current environments. And they adapt through the evolution of organs that evolved in response to past environments. Thus the idea of accommodation mostly clearly found in passages of the *Analects* significantly inflects the idea of harmony with the idea of benefiting from diversity and disagreement. Accommodation is a theme that can be in tension with the idea of a Confucian meritocracy—that the sage knows best—and requires the idea of meritocracy to be significantly tempered by accommodation to diversity and disagreement. Tempering goes pretty much missing in *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*, but harmony inflected by diversity is an idea that seems eminently suitable for our time. Epistemic humility is especially prominent in the *Zhuangzi*, but also has its correlates in Confucianism, again especially in the *Analects* (2.17: “To know when you know something and to know when you don't know, that's knowledge”). So I think that some of what we can get from the *Analects* and some of what we can get from the *Zhuangzi* is compatible, up to a certain point and in certain respects.

I qualify the similarity because Confucianism combines these virtues of epistemic humility, respect and openness to the other with a deep and rich ethic composed of values such as *ren* 仁, *yi* 義, and *li* 禮. I am not purporting to combine these values in all their Confucian glory with what I get from the *Zhuangzi*, but, on the other hand, there is real resonance between *yi* as appropriateness to the situation and Zhuangzian “going with the present ‘this.’” On the other hand, the *Zhuangzi* urges us to stand at a distance from such cultural specificity and to be prepared to adopt whatever set of distinctions between what is to be approved or disapproved and between “this” and “that” that serve the present moment and our relationship with whomever we are

dealing with. There are deep affinities and deep differences between the Analects and the Zhuangzi, which reminds me to cite Franklin Perkins's well-taken observation that we are starting to go beyond the way the Warring States philosophical debates were traditionally received from the Han dynasty onwards, which transformed what was in fact "a tangled network of interconnected positions and disputes into a handful of distinct positions or 'schools' that can be considered in relative isolation" toward a different approach to the early texts "more as complex points along a continuum" (Perkins 2014, 18). That is, the boundaries between the assumed schools are now blurring in a constructive way, and we are now readier to recognize much greater diversity within the "schools" than we have previously recognized.

It is not just the affinities between Confucianism and the Daoism of the *Zhuangzi* that speak for integrating important insights from both, but also their conflicts. They complement one another, precisely in the way they conflict. That is, they show the weaknesses of each other, and their strengths indicate how the other's weaknesses can be addressed. In so doing, they show why an integrated approach is better than either one on its own. Confucianism, with its faith in the sagacity of an elite group, even one that draws from all sectors of society (which itself is a highly idealized assumption: Yan Hui sticks out in many different ways among Confucius's students, his impoverished background among these ways), is prone to all the dangers of elites who confirm each other's sagacity and fundamental assumptions. And the longer they attain and stay in influential positions and receive acclaim for their past performance, the more self-confirming and rigid their viewpoints become. Even those who attain power in large part through their empathy, gratitude, and ability to understand the perspectives of others are in danger of losing these qualities the longer they stay in power because power tends to change relationships between leaders and followers. The experience of having power can make us less dependent on others and shifts our focus from what others think and feel to our own goals and interests (even if these include interests in other people's interests, we are liable to go by our congealed and inflexible conceptions of what their interests are), and therefore undermines one of the primary checks on losing those qualities that

helped one gain power in the first place (Keltner 2016). The *Zhuangzi* primes us to be wary of exactly such dangers of the “made-up” mind. On the other hand, it sometimes lapses, or appears to lapse, into the dream that one can operate with complete cognitive flexibility, a perpetual and continuous going with the “present ‘this.’” That is why an integration of these Confucian and Zhuangist insights is required. I remind the reader, moreover, that I am calling for integrating insights *to be gleaned from* Confucianism and the *Zhuangzi*, I am proposing neither a new version of Confucianism nor of the *Zhuangzi*, but as noted at the beginning, a toolkit take insights from these philosophies. Of course, it might be argued that the insights come with other ideas that are incompatible when combined with each other, but there must be independent argument for this criticism that is not based on characteristics that these philosophies possess as wholes (and of course, I have argued that there is much diversity and disagreement within these wholes, however one draws the boundaries).

It might be claimed that Western forms of particularism can be likened to some of the themes I have derived from Confucianism and the *Zhuangzi*. Up to a point that is right. On the other hand, the most prominent forms of particularism defended in contemporary Western philosophy are primarily meta-ethical in motivation and founded upon arguments about the variability of reasons according to context and the way that different reasons within a context are holistically related to one another (see Dancy 1993, 2004). While there is force to the primarily abstract arguments in favor of Western particularism, Confucianism and the *Zhuangzi* have in common is their willingness to tell stories and give instructive examples of particularistic judgment and reasoning. The *Mengzi*, for example, provides stories of Shun’s judgment and action in difficult situations of conflicting values, and the reader is expected to take as models these stories and utilize analogical reasoning to get practical solutions to their present situations (see Wong 2002, 2012). The *Zhuangzi* similarly opens for the reader a world of new possibilities by, for example, Zhuangzi’s chastising his friend Huizi for having a mind of “tangled weeds” that is cannot be flexible enough to think of new uses for the huge gourds he has grown. The *Zhuangzi*’s Confucius urges Yan Hui to cultivate an emptiness within

himself that is capable of responding to the present “this” of the ruler.

## **X. Listening to the *Qi* of the Body Politic and Educating Citizens About Each Other**

This leads to my final proposal for the new cosmopolitanism, and it is one that addresses the problem of elite capture, to which all endorsements of moral hierarchies are liable. This proposal can be supported from both Zhuangzian and Confucian grounds, though it is also true that Confucianism is also liable to the problem of elite capture. That is why it needs integration with some ideas from the *Zhuangzi*. Democratic institutions that should be offering appealing alternatives to authoritarian and despotic governments seem to be increasingly captured by money, power, and elites who are cut-off from or cynically manipulate the most disadvantaged communities in their own societies in the oldest game of divide and conquer. The resulting divisions are raucous and discouraging, the blatant manipulations by officials and media deplorable. Even the well-intentioned and more virtuous elites tend to adopt and act on views of the “common good” that are bounded by the circles in which they were educated, socialized, and exercise power.

One of the more intriguing ideas motivated by such worries about democracy is that of an “open mini-public,” which provides ordinary citizens with agenda-setting power, to put a proposal on the agenda of the legislature or to a constituency-wide referendum (Landemore 2020, 136). A striking realization of a deliberative mini-public is the Irish Citizens Assembly, whose work resulted in the adoption of groundbreaking laws on abortion and marriage equality (see Farrell et al. 2019). What citizens said during their group discussions was put online as a channel of communication to the broader public (though one of the take-away lessons is that such a channel should be given robust support and needs to be more frequently and vigorously used). Some of the most compelling debriefing comments made by citizen participants in the Assembly concerned discussions they had with other participants which changed the lessons they had drawn from their past personal

experiences with the issue at hand. The three-dimensional humanity of their interlocutors had a great deal to do with their changing their minds.

A compelling illustration from the Assembly features a man named Finbarr O'Brien who long associated homosexuality with pedophilia based on his having suffered sexual abuse as a child. Finbarr met a gay man named Chris Lyons at the Assembly. Though initially panicked by meeting Chris, Finbarr was disarmed by Chris's admission that he felt out of place at the Assembly in the presence of so many important people. Finbarr felt the same way. They both had the same direct manner. During their conversations, Finbarr revealed to Chris the source of his previous animosity toward homosexuals. Chris told Finbarr about his difficulties in coming out, including that his own mother regarded him as a pedophile. Immediately before the vote on the proposal for legalizing marriage equality in the Irish constitution, Finbarr on the spur of the moment got up to speak. As the camera focused on him for the live broadcast over the internet, Finbarr told his story about abuse (which he had not told to his wife or to his sons) and the resulting animosity toward homosexuals before he got educated about the difference between homosexuality and pedophilia. He found out, he said, that gay people are "the perfect person" (Berkner 2020). The vote turned out 79/100 in favor of marriage equality in one of the most socially conservative countries of Europe. If we are to take the case of Finbarr and Chris as indicative of what can happen in a mini-public, we should perhaps focus not on the bare bones of the information they exchanged with each other, but on the way that information came in the form of personal experience, not just or not even through arguments, expressed by two people who came across of fully human to each other, as "perfect persons."

The proposals to change the constitution in favor of the right to abortion and legalizing same-sex marriage were put up to a national referendum and passed. Another example of democracy as listening to the *qi* of the body politic is the Citizen Initiative Reviews (CIR), which have been a legislatively authorized part of Oregon general elections since 2010. The CIR gathers a representative cross-section of two dozen voters for five days of deliberation on a single ballot measure.

The process culminates in the citizen panelists writing a Citizens' Statement that the secretary of state inserts into the official Voters' Pamphlet sent to each registered voter (see, e.g., Gastil et al. 2018; Landemore 2020, 140).

A related phenomenon is "deliberative polling" (Fishkin 2009), which has produced promising results across the world (including China) by bringing together randomly selected people of diverse backgrounds to discuss issues many of which provoke vehement and entrenched disagreement such as energy policy, immigration, and what to do about crime. Citizens are supplied with briefing materials on the issues, hear talks given by experts, and meet in small discussion groups led by trained moderators. They were polled for their views at the beginning and at the end, and the results typically showed significant change. A concrete example of when such events had significant impact is the deliberative polling done in the American state of Texas on the issue of energy policy. This produced significant shifts in citizens' opinions on the viability of wind-power, which contributed to Texas utilities and governmental regulators investing in wind power (Galbraith and Price 2013).

These experiments in deliberative democracy among everyday citizens and residents should stimulate us to investigate the conditions under which constructive deliberation among them can take place and have institutionalized impact on the democratic process of decision-making.<sup>8</sup> They need to be institutionalized to minimize their use as convenient tools of politicians to merely placate sentiments of alienation and exclusion without significant impact on actual decision-making. Mini-publics need not replace representative legislative bodies, but they must have their own channels of input in systems of governance. There must be regular and institutionalized channels of communication and feedback between mini-publics and the public. This would be nurturing a kind of "listening to the vital energies" of the body politic.

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<sup>8</sup> See Courant (2021) for a balanced assessment of what has taken place so far and what needs to be done.

We tend to forget that cosmopolitanism should begin at home, and that our representation of our society's values, especially when we undertake comparisons with those of other societies, tend to be overly generalized and to favor the dominant values of elites. Cosmopolitanism itself as a social and intellectual phenomenon has tended to arise from elites: those with the money, education, and opportunities to travel and acquaint themselves with the cultures of other societies. Elites tend to be the winners in globalization, while most citizens of their societies bear most of the cost of their society's "winning" or losing.<sup>9</sup> A true cosmopolitanism will be more inclusive than this. Let me further suggest that mini-publics or deliberative polling of *international* groups of citizens could address questions such as the toll that climate change takes on non-elites in societies, and the possible shared interests that these communities might have across national boundaries, perhaps more shared interests than they would have with the elites of their own societies.

A disagreement I have with many advocates of mini-publics (such as Landmore 2020) is that they too often base their arguments solely on the narrow epistemic argument that more diverse voices can increase insight into the solution of complex problems.<sup>10</sup> This is true generally of deliberative democracy theorists, who in my view overestimate drastically the "unforced force of the better argument" (Habermas 1998, 37). The lamentable state of politics in many of our contemporary pluralistic democracies, especially the West, shows that having greater diversity of voices in discussion can deteriorate into polarization, antagonism, and dysfunctional politics. The value of accommodation is crucial for integrating difference and disagreement into common action when it is needed. Such a value must be supported by a fabric of social life that teaches and sustains virtues of humility, respect and open-mindedness toward others, that utilizes rituals that reinforce and rehearse such attitudes, and that incline people to find

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<sup>9</sup> For evidence supporting these claims, see Dellmuth et al. (2021).

<sup>10</sup> James Fishkin (2009) does pay close attention to how the meetings of deliberative polling should be conducted and the attitudes of the participants that need to be fostered for productive discussion to take place. This is in part the role of the moderator, who is given training for this.



shared understandings with each other even as they recognize their differences. Such virtues can be at once both Confucian and Daoist. At the same time, Zhuangzian appreciation for the way that differing circumstances and life histories can result in different perspective on the world, including the social world, not only reinforces the epistemic values supporting accommodation, but also clarify the ways in which overcoming our current narrowness of vision can benefit the problem-solving we need to conduct collaboratively, across the communities in our society that represent a good part of the cultural variety in the world, and across societies.

Narrowness of vision can not only obscure the ways that others are unlike us, but also ways they are like us. We need to acknowledge both the likeness and unlikeness. Confucians believe that our appreciation for the humanity of others is rooted in our vivid appreciation of the humanity of our family, that we need to see someone else's children or parents as having the kind of three-dimensionality we recognize in our own children or parents. This is why I think Justin Tiwald (in this volume) is right to ground our responsibilities to others elsewhere in the world in our common membership as a human species, but this common membership only becomes morally alive to us when we see our potential relationship with them as being in fundamental ways like our actual relationships with family and others with whom we have valued interactions). The perceived parallel includes seeing the difficulty we encounter in our relationship with these other strangers as not unlike the difficulties we encounter in our relationships with our own children or parents. The story of Finbarr O'Brien and Chris Lyons tells us all these things. Their ability to listen to one another was rooted in the way they connected as people, through one person's vital energies listening to the other person's vital energies.

The *Zhuangzi* indelibly confronts us with the outsiders and the stigmatized in our own societies, most often in the form of those with amputated limbs, the mark of having been punished for a crime. The most striking story that allows us to see a way in which we are like those who are likely to be shunned is Toeless Shu Shan, an ex-convict who seeks an audience with Confucius, who refuses to see him because of his past behavior. Toeless replied:

I just didn't understand my duties and undervalued my own body, and so I now lack a foot, but I come to you with something worth more than a foot still intact. Heaven covers all things. Earth supports all things. I used to think that you, Sir, were just like Heaven and earth—I never imagined you would instead say something like this! (“De Chong Fu” §3, as translated in Ziporyn 2009 [35]).

Who among us has not thought of making such a plea on behalf of ourselves, but without such eloquence? Indeed, “Heaven covers all things, and earth supports all things” (夫天無不覆，地無不載) would make a fine byword for a new cosmopolitanism. It expresses an elemental stance toward the inclusion of others, but it leaves open the contentful substance of such a stance, which we must create with them.

The political theorist Joseph Chan (2014) has proposed that a contemporary version of Confucianism can and must include a role for democratic electoral institutions that will make it possible for citizens to vote for leaders they can trust and whom they can hold accountable in case they become untrustworthy. He also acknowledges that citizens cannot perform this role well unless they attain a substantial degree of moral virtue. That is why he calls for moral education of citizens, to prepare them for the important role of wisely selecting their leaders and holding them to account when that is needed. Chan does not say much about the kind of education except that it must be a moral education that goes beyond mere civic education that informs us about the branches of government or the content of the constitution.

Person-to-person participation in democratic deliberation can be a central part of that education. It is education in being able to listen to others and when done properly, an education in connecting to their humanity. It is not the spectator sport that is American democracy. It is education by doing, as citizens must wrestle with disagreement and yet are given the job of discussing with others and voting on an actual proposal on the most challenging issues. Yan Hui can prepare for his discussions with the ruler by fasting his mind, but he won't really begin his education until he interacts with the ruler.

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