Quaestiones Infinitae

PUBLICATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

VOLUME CXIII

Copyright © 2018 by Dascha Düring

All rights reserved. No parts of this dissertation may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, electronic, mechanical, or by any means, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing of the author.

Cover art: Paul Ziche

ISBN: 978-94-028-1085-1
Printed by: Ipskamp

Of Dragons and Owls

rethinking Chinese and Western narratives of modernity

Van Draken en Uilen

Chinese en Westerse moderniteitsnarratieven heroverwogen

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Utrecht op gezag van de rector magnificus, prof.dr. H.R.B.M. Kummeling, ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties in het openbaar te verdedigen op woensdag 20 juni 2018 des middags te 12.45 uur

door

Dascha Katerina Düring

geboren op 28 april 1987
te Amsterdam

Promotoren: Prof. dr. D. Beyleveld
Prof. dr. P. Ziche
Prof. dr. H. Roetz

This work is part of the research programme ‘Human Dignity as the Foundation of Human Rights?’, funded by the Netherlands Organization of Scientific Research (NWO).

Voor mijn vader

Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling along the dam of the Hao river, when Zhuangzi said, 'See how the minnows come out and dart wherever they please! That's what fish really enjoy'. Huizi said, 'You're not a fish – how do you know what fish really enjoy?' Zhuangzi said, 'You're not I, so how do you know that I don't know what fish enjoy?' Huizi said, 'I'm not you, so I certainly don't know what you know. On the other hand, you're certainly not a fish – so that still proves that you don't know what fish enjoy!'. Zhuangzi said, 'Let's go back to your original question. You asked me *how* I know what fish enjoy – so you already knew that I knew it when you asked the question. I knew it by standing here beside the Hao'.[*]

[*] Zhuangzi 2013, 'Autumn Floods', 138

Acknowledgements

In one of his satirical plays, Oscar Wilde has a character pronounce that the only thing to do with good advice is to pass it on, as it is 'never of any use to oneself'.* I am afraid that there is a sense in which I subscribe to the character's pronouncement. Upon starting this PhD project, Deryck Beyleveld told me that the best thing to do would be to work my way to the very end of what I thought I wanted to write in order to see if this was actually what I wanted to write, and to do so as soon as possible. This would have been a great idea. It is, however, not quite how things went down. Only some three years into my appointment did I, and at a turtle's pace at first, really commence working on the manuscript. As a result, the final months of the trajectory were chaotic and messy. But it was finished. And what is more, it became a manuscript that I am tremendously happy with. Not because I think that this work is anywhere near perfection – it is, without a doubt, still rough around the edges. But I feel that I've been able to take leaps in my own thinking, and connect various themes that are important to me, in ways that I could not have imagined when I started. This gives me an enormous sense of possibility. And this has only been possible because of the unrelenting support of my supervisors, Deryck Beyleveld, Paul Ziche, and Heiner Roetz. You have involved me in a variety of inspiring meetings and projects, given me the freedom to read and write things seemingly unrelated to my dissertation, and provided me – so much faster than can be reasonably expected – with invaluable feedback when the manuscript was finally coming into existence. I do not have the words to express my gratitude. All I can say is that I will try to be as supportive and inspiring a mentor to the students that I have the honour to supervise now, and hopefully will have in the future, as you have been to me.

And of course, there have been other fantastic human beings that have made this project possible. First of all, there is my mother. You have had a rough ride in the past years, but your support has been at least as unrelenting as that of my supervisors. Secondly, there's Marcus Düwell and Rutger Claassen. Although you were not officially part of the supervising squad, I am incredibly grateful for your

* Oscar Wilde 2005, *An Ideal Husband*, 38

comments on my writings, as well as your involvement in my judgment and being more generally. I hope that I have been able to return the favour, and can continue to do so in the time that is yet to come. And of course there's all the other wonderful, remarkable, and crazy people of the Philosophy Department – enriched, in recent years, by our colleagues from Religious Studies. You have been a large part of what I have come to think of as home. I cannot name all of you, this would make this acknowledgement obnoxiously lengthy, but you know who you are. I am very happy that you exist, and that I've had a chance to get to know you. The same holds for all of the other great scholars that I have met over the past decade, with whom I have had the opportunity to talk about beautiful ideas. Rudolf Makkreel, Jeeloo Liu, Li Chenyang, Klaus Steigleder, and Bert van den Brink deserve special thanks as members of the reading committee.

And last, but certainly not least, there's my friends. Again, I cannot name everyone. If you read this though, you are certainly included. But I want to mention two of you explicitly, Jasmijn Wienk and Mirjam de Bruin. From you, and with you, I have learned what friendship can really mean. And from you, and with you, I have learned how extraordinary that really is. I feel honoured that you will stand beside me as my paranymphs, and I look forward to all of the adventures that we will embark on in the future.

Dascha Düring, May 2018

Contents

Modernity or modernities?

In discussions in what is conspicuously called 'comparative philosophy' it is often assumed that the relation between Chinese and Western philosophical traditions is essentially one of *disparity*. It is then held that when one studies what Chinese and Western philosophers thought and taught 'on their own terms', thus without imposing alien concepts or commitments upon them, one will find that they offer radically opposite views on the cosmos and humanity's role therein. This tendency to think in terms of disparity, which Zhang Longxi describes as 'negative mirror-imaging' (Zhang 1998, 56) and Heiner Roetz as a 'hermeneutics of contrast' (Roetz 2012, 301), is peculiar. Why would there be a tendency to assume such opposition? It is not commonplace in other philosophical domains. When someone studies the relation between Aristotle's and Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of politics, it is not obvious that he will from the start anticipate finding essentially opposition; when another analyses the systematic import of Mencius' and Mou Zongsan's understanding of human nature, it is also not evident that such contrast will be presupposed.[1] But why not? There is a gap of more than two millennia separating the figures in both the first and second pair – does this not provide at least equally compelling grounds to presuppose disparity? It seems as if philosophers' location in *time* is not considered to constitute grounds for differentiation as fundamentally as their location in *space* does. But why would that be so? Why would philosophers, upon entering a comparative dialogue, suddenly start to think in terms of contrast rather than accommodation?

Of course, this is not a new development. In the 17th and 18th century, for example, various Western thinkers developed images of the relation between Orient and Occident through the same contrasting hermeneutics.[2] The French essayist Voltaire and the German philosopher Christian Wolff, notably, did so in a manner that presented a critical view on the West – Wolff was even ousted from his chair

[1] In this manuscript, the nameless agents entering the stage will be considered male, so no "shes" but only "hes" will appear in what follows.

[2] The Orient-Occident contrast was obviously not used merely to frame the relation between China and the West, but also to frame that between the Middle East and the West – as Edward Said famously elaborated in his 1978 work *Orientalism*.

as professor at the university of Halle after giving a lecture that presented Confucian China as the moral, secular superior to Western society. The next generations of German philosophers, notably Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, upheld the same contrast but in its inverse form: now the Western opposition to China played out in favour of the former, presenting Confucian society as one of blind traditionalism, lacking what they considered 'free subjectivity'.[3] And this thinking in terms of contrasts was obviously not a Western Enlightenment invention either: the peoples of both Chinese and Greek antiquity were in the habit of thinking in terms of Us and Them: in terms of oppositions between those who belonged to the in-crowd and those who did not and were thus 'barbarians'. Ideas which, some argue, remained equally alive in Qing dynasty China as they were in Europe of the same age. (J.K. Fairbank and S.Y. Teng 1941)

And of course, especially also the recollection of the more recent *historical* meeting of the two cultures plays a role here. It has not been sixty years since Mao's proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) ended what in China is sometimes called 'the century of humiliation': a century in which Western colonial powers used and abused China and its resources, caused the collapse of its ideological mainstays and political institutions, and triggered various internal rebellions and wars that cost the lives of millions. Add to this that the territories of Hong Kong and Macau were only returned to Chinese sovereignty in respectively 1997 and 1999 and it is obvious that historical abuses are strongly present in relatively recent memory. This could make that there is a sense in which the comparative dialogue is still trying to make sense of the past: that it might still be trying to understand why the two civilizations met the way they did. And in that regard, it may be explicable that China and the West are considered in terms of disparity – their historical meeting partly *did* play out in terms of opposition.

This is, furthermore, also an imaginary that the government of the People's Republic aims to enhance through *political* means. The communist Party often pits China against the West in governance and communication. This appears in various forms; from policy documents warning public officials against the corrupting influence of Western ideas on Chinese ideology to attempts at barring the celebration of Christmas rituals, the government of the PRC appears to

[3] For the (variable) European reception of China, see Heiner Roetz 2013.

consider it important to guard China against the so-called 'Western values'.[4] And considering that the power of the Party is dispersed over many or even most parts of the Chinese public sphere, it is not altogether far-fetched to assume that its political strategy also feeds into comparative discussions on the relation between East and West.

However, although these historical and political considerations doubtlessly reinforce the tendency to think of China and the West as opposites, they provide merely circumstantial insight into the *philosophical* prevalence of the hermeneutics of contrast. The contrasting methodology is also employed by those who are not quite vulnerable to political pressure. And the thinking in terms of oppositions also appears as prevalent among those who are interested in understanding the relation between Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives with an eye to the *present*, rather than the historical past. Indeed, this way of thinking is especially prominent in cross-cultural philosophical discussions on the predicament of the present – discussions, more specifically, on the idea of *modernity as a problem*.

This may sound strange, or at least surprising, to the ears of our average Westerner; is modernity still a topic of critical discussion, then? Has the fundamental normative dispute of whether modernity is something that we should want not been resolved ages ago? Obviously modern life knows levels of freedom and well-being that were in the past reserved to only a very select few, and perhaps we could also say that life in modernity is more interesting, or at least less predictable, than it would have been in the past. Many people have the opportunity to travel, to learn, to experience things that in older days would have been unthinkable – and it is quite the invaluable asset that we no longer tend to die of a simple case of the flu. However, there are also those who feel that somehow modernity has broken its promise. That, despite all of its conveniences, modern life is less *humane* than it should have been: that modernity promised moral

[4] The 'Asian values' discourse that enjoyed particular momentum in the 1990s, although having lost some of its appeal after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, is still often invoked in these contexts. 'Chinese values' and 'Asian values' often in these contexts appear to be used interchangeably, so that China is taken as representative of East Asia as a whole. I come back to this frame elaborately in chapters 1–2, but see Amartya Sen 1997; Wm. Theodore the Bary 1998.

progress, promised a world in which more and more people would be able to live a dignified life, but delivered a world in which our very humanity hangs in the balance. It is not hard to think of illustrations of the latter suspicion. We live in a world in which just eight men own the same wealth as the poorest half of the world population, in which 65,5 million people have been made into refugees by war and persecution, in which the self-proclaimed 'leader of the free world' denies the climate change that in the future will force even more people from their homes. A world, in other words, in which a fundamental *lack* of humanity is considered to have become ingrained in many of our formal and informal institutions – there are those who feel that, despite all of its benefits, modernity is an age in which human beings are barred from leading a genuinely human life.

One could wonder why this diagnosis of modernity, also if it were true, would invite a discussion of Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives as opposites. Is this not a problem of scale, that is unfortunate but simply inherent to an urbanized, globalized, and increasingly technologized world? Are these pathologies not the price that we simply have to pay for the security, comfort, and dauntlessness of modern life? In a sense, this is precisely the question that is at stake in much of the philosophical discourse on the relation between Chinese and Western worldviews. Some will assume that this – the way we live now – is simply what modernity *is*, for better or for worse. But others suggest that from the viewpoint of China this is not self-evident. Of course, China has in the past decades modernized in a way that is largely comparable to the West – it has "westernized", if you want. But that would be exactly the point. There may be good reasons to hold that China has not modernized out of free choice: that the way in which the nation has in the past decades soared through technological and economic changes cannot be understood independently of the aim to bring itself up to par with Western powers such that it would never again have to suffer the suppressions of the past. There may be good reasons to hold, in other words, that China has only modernized out of strategic necessity; a necessity that, moreover, now seems to be resolved. Now that China has come into its own as global powerhouse, now that China is no more dependent on Western powers than the latter are dependent on China, it is no longer evident that it needs to follow the example set by the West – it is no longer evident that it must, alongside the various technological and economic developments that are associated with modernity, also invest in the social and political institutions (individual rights, liberalism,

democracy) that Westerners often consider to come as a packaged deal with the former. Now that the dragon has awoken, in other words, some argue that the time has come for asking what *modernity on Chinese terms* would mean.

The hermeneutics of contrast, then, ties in especially also with what has in the past two decades been discussed under the banner of the 'multiple modernities' thesis, and it is also in this context that I am primarily interested in examining its potential. The multiple modernities thesis, in the words of its late protagonist Shmuel Eisenstadt, states that 'the best way to understand the contemporary world – indeed to explain the history of modernity – is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs', and, moreover, implies that 'modernity and Westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only "authentic" modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others'. (Eisenstadt 2000, 2–3) The claim, for short, is that there is not *one* but *multiple* modernities, each with its own particular location in not only time but also space: modernities, on this model, are considered to be grounded in and, at least to an extent, also limited to the *culture* from which they develop. In context of the dialogue between China and the West this more specifically entails, as Tu Weiming elaborates, that 'Confucian modernity is not, in essence, Westernization or Americanization' but rather implies a 'new way of conceptualizing the form of life, the habits of the heart, or the social praxis of those societies that have been under the influence of Confucian education for centuries'. (Tu 2000, 207) China, and then especially China as representative of Confucian East Asia more broadly, appears in these discussions as the possible bearer of a competing concept of modernity. So considered, it is explicable that comparative philosophers exhibit a tendency to think in terms of opposition rather accommodation: what is at stake, at least insofar as life in the present is the object of critical discussion, seems to be precisely whether there are reasons to hold that there are multiple possible modernities, and whether a modernity on Chinese terms would be superior to the supposedly Western one that most of us now live. And since the latter objective seems to depend precisely on the extent to which modernity on Chinese terms could be considered *different* from the Western counterpart, the prevalence of the hermeneutics of contrast is at second glance not so surprising.

That the prevalence of thinking in terms of contrast rather than accommodation appears as *explicable* when we consider the comparative philosophical discussion in context of the discourse of multiple modernities, does of course not yet mean that it is *reasonable* to do so. The latter is what stands to be examined here. Is it sensible to assume that there are as many possible modernities as there are 'cultural programs'? Does it indeed make sense to consider the relation between China and the West in the contemporary world in terms of a 'modernity with Chinese characteristics' that poses a radical alternative to its prior Western counterpart? Do we have good grounds to assume that the hermeneutics of contrast, as it is prevalent in many contemporary discussions[5], can indeed disclose an opposite, and more humane vision on life in the modern world?

This would, at the very least, presuppose that the hermeneutics of contrast is capable of showing that Chinese and Western normative viewpoints exhibit radical and fundamental *incommensurability*: it would have to show that there are good reasons to accept that Chinese and Western traditions have, in a way that is decisive for what they think the human lifeworld can and should be, ideological commitments that diverge to the extent that China and the West cannot be expected to map out a communal track towards a future world. This means, in other words, that I examine modernity here not as a state, but especially as a project: as a projected trajectory in time that is driven by specific ideological commitments and reflects upon socio-political institutions, technological developments, and environmental conditions in light of these. So considered, the question whether there are good reasons to assume that Chinese and Western viewpoints ground radically different modernities cannot be decided by pointing to the institutional differences of Chinese and Western countries alone; mere *description* of formal or informal institutional differences cannot ground the more radical kind of opposition that the multiple modernities thesis advances. What is needed to ground the latter, is a reason to accept disparity between Chinese and Western views on modernity as a *normative project* – and if a case can indeed be

[5] There are also very many who do not think in terms of such contrasts – I have in no way intended to suggest that this is "the" trend in cross-cultural discussions as such. However, as this *is* a commonplace and popular hermeneutics in contemporary comparative discourse and there *are* many academics, public intellectuals, and other prominent figures who think in this way, it is crucial to gain a grasp on whether the hermeneutics is sound.

made for accepting that Chinese and Western viewpoints exhibit radical and fundamental opposition on the latter level, then there may be good reasons to think that they hold mutually exclusive, and thus truly alternative concepts of modernity.

This study thus examines to what extent the hermeneutics of contrast can give us reasons to accept that China and the West have incommensurable views on modernity, where the latter is considered as a normative – rather than descriptive – concept. This is relevant, it should be emphasized, not merely for the (self)understanding of China: it is equally relevant for the (self)understanding of the West. Also within the West itself, the idea of modernity is often – for better or for worse – associated with a particular contemporary Western lifestyle, and the question into the multiple modernities thesis in context of the cross-cultural dialogue between China and the West asks precisely to what extent it is sensible to think of modernity in such a culturally constituted manner.

Methodology

I start by systematically reconstructing the general lines of the narrative that thinks China and the West as radical opposites. I map out the *kinds* of oppositions are commonplace to assert in discussions in comparative philosophy: what is being denoted when people talk of Chinese and Western philosophical traditions as opposites in light of this larger, looming question of how to judge life in the modern world. On one level, I suggest, those who think in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast tend to narrate how Chinese and Western perspectives *assert* opposed views on politics, on morality, on subjectivity, and try to develop a critique of what are perceived to be the pathologies inherent to the modern Western take on these matters through recourse to the contrast with the Chinese alternative. But they do not merely reconstruct and criticize how the modern West happens to think about concrete practices and institutions. On another, and underlying level, the 'oppositional narrative' attempts to disclose *why* the West has come to uphold such pathological views in the first place: it attempts to reconstruct what characterizes the Western way of thinking, and in which regard the Chinese form of thought is different such that we can expect it to ground an alternative concept of modernity. I reconstruct the general lines of the narrative on both these levels, on the level of the specific substantial assertions that are attributed to Chinese and

Western philosophical perspectives and on the level of the structural features that are associated with their forms of thinking, in order to get into view what kinds of oppositions are effectively implied when it is held that Chinese and Western traditions are radical opposites – to pave the way, so to speak, for the normative question whether there are good reasons to approach issues in comparative philosophy from a presumption of opposition.

This, however, is considerably more complicated. Indeed, it is at all unclear *how to judge* to what extent this oppositional narrative follows a sound philosophical strategy. The problem is that it is not quite clear how to understand the nature of the beast that is the object of study. We are trying to develop a perspective on "narratives" on modernity, perhaps even on something as elusive as what Jean-François Lyotard once called 'grand narratives': reconstructions of philosophical traditions in terms of grand interpretations of the meaning and value of nature, history, culture, subjectivity – in terms of stories involving 'great heroes [or great villains, DKD], great dangers, great voyages, great goals'. (Lyotard 1984, xxiv) The oppositional narrative, as it happens, develops its perspective through recourse to grand interpretations on the relation between Chinese and Western intellectual history, where philosophers who thought and taught millennia and continents apart are placed in dialogue, but especially also opposition, to galvanize the idea that a modernity spawned by the Chinese tradition will be humane where its Western analogue is essentially broken. There is nothing "wrong" with this. Indeed, perhaps developing critical and constructive views on something as grand as the predicament of the present necessarily requires to be thought in terms of grand narratives: in terms of narratives that reflect upon the *longue durée* as well as the *longue tournée*, the long-term as well as the worldwide. But developing a normative perspective on these narratives is difficult – it is like asking whether Nietzsche was "right" when he declared God to be dead, or whether Lu Xun spoke the "truth" when he suggested that the Confucian past consumes the future. Because such interpretations are grand or even grandiose, it is difficult to establish when they can be considered sound: it is difficult to at all establish the *standards* on the basis of which we can reasonably judge the philosophical quality of narratives in the first place.

Judging narratives on the basis of *empirical* standards, for one thing, will not always be of much help. That is not to say that narratives do not need to pay heed

to empirical facts – on the contrary, some narratives must surely be falsified because they have the relevant facts wrong. An obvious example, and one that shocked the Western world to the core, was the racial ideology of the nazis: a narrative that reconstructed the development of history in terms of a clash of the races, where 'race' was held to describe a biological category that determined people's cognitive and physical abilities as well as character traits. Biology, of course, should not be considered to work in that way, and therefore there are clear grounds to dismiss the nazi narrative as false (as there were of course various others!). Another, less overtly harmful example is the textbook economic story on the genesis of money: the narrative that asserts that first there was barter, and since barter was so depressingly inconvenient people at some point invented money to make interactions go smoother. In fact, there is no evidence that there ever was even *one* society wherein barter was practised; and as such, there are again good reasons to dismiss the so-called 'myth of barter' as false.[6] But although narratives must be falsified when they make assumptions that clearly fly in the face of the facts, empirical standards will not always be of much help in judging their quality in any positive sense. If we want to judge the potential of Nietzsche's narrative on God, for instance, attempting to empirically verify whether the latter is "really" dead will not yield the relevant insights. Nietzsche, after all, does not quite offer us *information* about the way the world is: he rather attempts to (re)configure the relevant facts such that a (new) perspective through which human beings can interpret their world and understand and orient themselves therein can be disclosed. As such, because narratives and interpretative schemes deal with facts in a way that considers these in their broader meaning and normative significance, measuring their quality on the basis of whether they correspond to empirical fact not always makes a significant contribution.

[6] The harm in the Adam Smith-textbook economic narrative lies in that it builds its entire theory on the assumption that human beings, in the earliest societies, (already) interacted as self-interested traders of goods. Anthropological research of the past decades has shown that this assumption is unfounded: it is much more plausible that in these early societies, people just *gifted* other people goods when they needed them. Needless to say, whether one assumes that human beings are naturally self-interested or inclined to accept the viewpoint of another as a reason for action has far-reaching implications on how one thinks about social relations and (the limits of) state power. (See also David Graeber 2011, 21–41)

Similarly, accuracy in representation of *historical sources* will neither generally provide the most helpful standard of judgment. That is not to say, again, that narratives may simply violate what we know of history – on the contrary, some narratives are clearly problematic because they fail to observe the relevant historical material. This is precisely the reason why we nowadays tend to be hesitant in taking stories on the relation between Chinese and Western thought by e.g. the previously mentioned Western Enlightenment thinkers at face value: we know that their understanding of relevant sources such as the *Lunyu* (the *Confucian Analects*) cannot have been more than limited – that much of their reflections were speculations and projections rather than informed judgments – and as such we have good reasons to refrain from taking their representations of the Chinese tradition, whether these be favourable or derogatory, seriously. But although historical accuracy must thus play a role in judging the quality of narratives when it is problematically lacking, it can, again, not always be expected to contribute much to our positive understanding of these. When Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman* is concerned, for instance, such standards will not help much. Lu's story relates to Confucianism, but it does not purport to represent what Confucius actually taught: Lu, rather, reflects upon the historical development of Confucianism and especially its implications for the way in which people thought and acted, and arranges these considerations such that a critical perspective on what he perceived as problematic traditionalism is opened up. As such, there is little point in examining the *Lunyu* to see whether Lu's "depiction" of the Confucian texts is accurate – what we want to know is whether his perspective on a certain way of *dealing* with Confucianism is sound. Thus, also insofar as narratives zoom out from historical detail in order to develop a hermeneutic perspective on a general development, measuring their quality on the basis of the accuracy of their representation of historical sources will not always be helpful either.

But there are, of course, additional judgments that we can make about narratives: judgments that concern their *internal* qualities, within the constraints posed by empirical and historical accuracy. Some narratives, although they do not violate any standards of empirical or historical accuracy, are clearly problematic in other ways. Narratives, for example, can be *conceptually inconsistent.* An at hand example is posed by Francis Fukuyama's notorious 'end of history' thesis. In the late 80s, early 90s, Fukuyama recurringly argued that:

> The triumph of the West, of the Western idea, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism… What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period in post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. (Fukuyama 1989)

There are clearly many things that we can adduce against Fukuyama's claims – and a lack of imagination could certainly be one of them. But fundamentally, Fukuyama's narrative raises questions with regards to its consistency. What Fukuyama wants us to accept, what he wants to convince us of, is that mankind has invented a particular ideology that can no longer be improved on: Fukuyama's position stresses that the completion of history entails the *Aufhebung* of ideological orientation as such. That shows that Fukuyama, like Hegel, thinks of history as the development of self-consciousness: he thinks of history, as Karl Jaspers has put it, as 'at the same time happening and *conscious* of this happening'. (Jaspers 1983, 290; my italics, DKD) But that means that Fukuyama is effectively suggesting that liberal democracy heralds the end of human self-consciousness as such – and that does not seem conceivable as a human condition, let alone as a form of human government. The case of Fukuyama thus shows that there are narratives that, although they do not necessarily get the facts or the historical sources wrong, configure those facts in such a way that the encompassing narrative violates basic requirements of conceptual consistency.

But there is an additional standard that can be used to measure the internal quality of a given narrative. There may be reasons to think that some stories are problematic, even if they do not violate any standards of empirical or historical accuracy nor the basic requirements of conceptual consistency. A prominent as well as urgent example is posed by the contemporary doomsday scenarios as these are developed in light of the issue of climate change. Take, for instance, the instantly (in)famous article 'The Uninhabitable Earth' by David Wallace-Wells. The first sentences of the article read: 'It is, I promise, worse than you think. If your anxiety about global warming is dominated by fears of sea-level rise, you are

barely scratching the surface of what terrors are possible, even within the lifetime of a teenager today'. (Wallace-Wells 2017) The article proceeds to develop various dimensions of the predicted consequences of climate change – heat death, the end of food, climate plagues – all of which contribute to the overall message: the climate apocalypse is nigh, and even if we manage to drastically lower our carbon footprint today, it will come too late. Now, this story is not empirically or historically inaccurate. Indeed, much of it is based on what we know to be true.[7] And neither does it violate any laws of internal inconsistency – on the contrary, it is precisely its consistency that makes its message so daunting. But the doomsday scenario is *practically* disorienting, or even stifling. The narrative effectively emphasizes that human action does not, or does no longer really mean anything in the greater scheme of things: since the climate apocalypse is presented as *inevitable*, it is emphasized that our actions cannot be reasonably expected to change anything anymore. This is problematic in a practical sense: not only does it fail to contribute to our abilities to interpret our world and practically understand and orient ourselves therein, it actually *cripples* the latter abilities. The narrative disempowers human beings in their abilities to develop practical perspectives on the world and their own role and responsibility therein. And although that in no sense means that the it cannot be true – it may very well be that many of the relevant windows of opportunity have already passed – it does mean that the narrative is problematic from a practical point of view.

This highlights tour through the narrative landscape has shown us that, although the nature of the narrative poses a challenge to attempts to measure its philosophical quality, the latter enterprise is far from impossible. Narratives, we have found, are responsive to standards of empirical and historical accuracy. The employment of these, however, cannot be sufficient for determining their quality; although empirical and historical standards seem relevant for determining whether narratives meet certain side constraints, they do not tell us much about the substantial quality of the narration. For determining the latter, questions of internal coherence or consistency and practical empowerment will be more becoming.[8] To

[7] Of course, scientists are not in complete agreement about the specifics of the scenario. Cf. https://climatefeedback.org/evaluation/scientists-explain-what-new-york-magazine-article-on-the-uninhabitable-earth-gets-wrong-david-wallace-wells/ , accessed February 2nd 2018

[8] In this manuscript, 'coherence' and 'consistency' will be used interchangeably.

further illustrate these points, let me round up this preliminary discussion on the methodology of judging the philosophical quality of narratives through recourse to an example of a successful, rather than a flawed one. Here is an excerpt of one of the most famous narratives that world history has ever known, and one that has significantly impacted on both China and the West:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations … namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness … At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production … with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. (Marx 1977)

This is, of course, an excerpt of Karl Marx' narrative on the developmental process of relations of production, which plays a central role in his dialectical materialism more broadly. What makes Marx' narrative such a successful one? This is, surely, not his dealing with historical sources. Although Marx' reflections are well-informed, especially in their Hegelian heritage but also in their portrayal of political-economic theories, this is not where the main source of their power lies. Nor is this purely their empirical facticity: although Marx obviously considered the reality of the social world to be crucial to understanding historical development (hence the 'materialism'), his forte is not that he got the facts right. Indeed, and taking these together: the power of Marx' narrative lies not in its *correspondence* to what we know empirically or historically. It lies, rather, in its capacity to *configure* the relevant considerations into an encompassing vision on the lifeworld that allows people to see it as something that is in their power to *change*. Marx developed a hermeneutic scheme that formulates a clearly defined logic in historical development and a set of landmarks on the basis of which it

becomes possible to situate social realities within that developmental process – logic and landmarks, moreover, that do not (like Fukuyama's) internally contradict each other, but mutually enhance each other as formal and material drives of the narrative as a whole. Indeed, Marx' narrative is so well put together that it allows for self-reflection and -critique, as well as modification of its internal constitution. We could, for instance, argue that Marx failed to foresee the extent to which technological development would change the social world – for instance, that an 'amusement industry' would arise[9] – and that a contemporary Marxist scheme of interpretation would need a technologically updated view on the relevant material conditions. And we could, for example, be suspicious of the nigh determinist edge of the Hegelian-Marxist concept of historical development, and hold that a truly future-oriented Marxism would need to build more openness into its formal structure. The point is that Marx' narrative is *open* to such internal critique and revisions, and can evolve along lines of spatial and temporal differentiation without losing its hermeneutic force. Marxism now, as Marxism then, gives us a framework through which we can interpret the world in a way that empowers our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves therein – and whether or not we buy into its story, we can see that it is in these regards a good one. The hermeneutic force of Marx' narrative lies in its ability to configure and reconfigure relevant facts and historical considerations into an internally coherent practical perspective on the human lifeworld, that presents it to us, as Austrian writer Robert Musil aptly put it, as an 'assignment rather than a given'. (Musil 1978, 16–17)

It is in this light, then, that I will examine the philosophical quality of the oppositional narrative: on the basis of the *hermeneutic* standards that measure – *not* so much whether it got the facts and historical sources right; there is already much outstanding literature on that, but whether it provides an *internally coherent practical perspective* on modernity. And although this examination will thus be philosophical in nature, it should be emphasized that this does not mean that it is

[9] If there are already reasons to consider religion, as Marx said, an 'opium for the people' – a tranquillizer to make them forget that they are being oppressed – then there may be good grounds to be very suspicious of phenomena such as Netflix indeed… See also Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno's 'The Culture Industry: enlightenment as mass deception'. (Horkheimer & Adorno 1997, 141–92)

a strictly theoretical exercise. For many people in East and West still holds that when they meet, what they see is an Other; and when we think about the world that we live in and the kind of future that we want to build, such perceptions inevitably become operational. As such, and since these perceptions are framed and informed by narratives such as the one introduced in the above, it is important that we understand to what extent these are sound. Of course this project will not lead to a final verdict about the quality of the oppositional narrative – no single project can, and it is perhaps dubious whether final verdicts can at all be made about things such as grand narratives. What, hopefully, the project is able to do is disclose the hermeneutic presuppositions of the narrative that thinks China and the West as radical opposites, and subject these to constructive criticism. In this way, the point is not to complete the philosophical discussion, but rather to contribute to developing possible ways of conducting it differently: to conduct it in a way that shows careful awareness of the impact that narratives and their hermeneutic presuppositions have on the ways in which we approach cross-cultural issues. And if the project provides insight in methodological possibilities of dealing with narratives in philosophy – all the better.

Chapter overview

The *first* chapter aims at a general introduction into the contemporary debate on Chinese and Western philosophy insofar as it approaches their relation in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast. I reconstruct recurrent oppositions as these are said to define the relation between Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives on the basis of the works of Chinese and Western authors that adopt a prominent place in the contemporary comparative philosophical field. I suggest that there are three main issues on which Chinese and Western philosophies are held to provide contrasting positions: on the issue of *politics*, where China is thought to adopt a communitarian approach whereas the West is oriented towards liberalism; on the level of *morality*, where China is said to reason in terms of rites and the West rather held to be focused on rights; and on the matter of *human subjectivity*, that China is seen to consider in terms of social roles where the West is said to think in terms of isolated individuality. I try to reconstruct the oppositions as these are developed on these different levels into a coherent picture such that the general structure of the oppositional narrative comes into view, and subsequently ask to what extent it can be taken to provide – considered on its own, narrative terms –

a compelling hermeneutic perspective on the relation between Chinese and Western philosophical traditions that gives us reason to consider the two as opposites, and thus as traditions that possibly ground alternative concepts of modernity. Although on this level of reasoning, the hermeneutics of contrast expresses important concerns and possibly also discloses genuine pathologies regarding the conditions of life in the modern world, I suggest that the oppositions as these are set up on the level of specific substantial assertions are by themselves insufficient to support the stronger claim that Chinese and Western traditions are radical opposites. The real presumption of opposition, I try to show, cannot be found on the level of Chinese and Western views on specific substantial matters at all, but is found on a different level altogether: the presumption that Chinese and Western views on politics, morality, subjectivity are radically opposed is informed by the idea that the two uphold radically different *forms of thinking* as such.

The *second* chapter explores the latter presumption, the presumption that Chinese and Western forms of thinking – the working of their "minds" – showcase radical disparity. In my reconstruction of the opposition between Chinese and Western forms of thought, I follow primarily the oppositional narrative as it is developed by David Hall and Roger Ames – the first a postmodern philosopher, the second a sinologist, who have in tandem published works on the relation between Chinese and Western traditions that have exercised incredible influence on the comparative field. This is a deliberate choice; the story, insofar as Chinese and Western forms of thinking is concerned, is developed in various different ways and contexts both within China and the West. The reason why I focus on Hall and Ames, those who have influenced their works and those who follow in their footsteps, and not others, is because their narrative makes an exceptional attempt at systematic comprehensiveness: Hall and Ames, much more so than many others, try to develop an encompassing account of the development of Western thought and its antithetical relation to its Chinese counterpart. They reconstruct Western thinking as a form of thought that is essentially *rational* and transcendent, and has an inherent tendency to produce a disenchanted world – the kind of broken modernity that we are now said to live. Contrary to this, they furthermore suggest, Chinese thinking is essentially *aesthetic*: it is a radically immanent form of thinking, that produces a radically immanent world – and one that should be expected to sire a better modernity than the one we are living in now. Although their narrative, I will

suggest, shows much critical potential in its contrasting of strategically-rational and aesthetic forms of thought, it creates fundamental hermeneutic difficulties in its presupposition that rational and aesthetic forms of thought form separate, even radically opposed perspectives – indeed, precisely the fixation on setting up Chinese and Western views as radical oppositions, I will argue, is what prevents the oppositional narrative from developing the critical potential of the aesthetic such that it can be developed into an internally coherent practical perspective that may be rallied against the modernity that it had diagnosed as pathological.

In the *third* chapter, I will take up what I consider to be one of the primary virtues of the oppositional narrative: its idea that the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and perspectives could be productively developed as a critique of the way the modern world is organized through recourse to the *aesthetic* as a crucial nexus for the way in which human beings understand and orient themselves in the world. I think that this conviction is generally right, and that it is therefore important to investigate the possibilities of stripping the narrative on the relation between China and the West from its – somewhat myopic – fixation on opposition, to rework it such that its ideas on the aesthetic can be made to speak as critical and constructive forces vis-à-vis the organization of modern life. In this chapter, I will take some first steps in this direction through recourse to the reflections on the nature and role of the aesthetic by *Immanuel Kant*. This is of course a peculiar choice – Kant, as will become clear in the first and second chapters, is often presented as the absolute antithesis of Chinese thought. Notwithstanding, the Kantian viewpoint develops an understanding of the aesthetic that, as I hope to make insightful, upholds and endorses precisely what the oppositional narrative portrayed as significant about aesthetic thought; it, however, develops the latter in a way that does not suffer the similar hermeneutic difficulties. What the Kantian project essentially does, I argue, is present the aesthetic as one form of judgment among others: as an 'epistemic attitude', more specifically, that makes critique in the first place possible. Aesthetic judgment, on this view, is considered to be characterized by a particular *openness*: when we adopt an aesthetic attitude towards the world, so Kant, we judge it in a way that is free from any ulterior goal or purpose – when we judge aesthetically, we imaginatively 'play' with the way the world affects us without proceeding to determine anything on what it is or should be. And insofar as developing a critical perspective presupposes precisely the ability to consider something for how it can

be otherwise – for what it may *become* – the ability to adopt an aesthetic epistemic attitude can be advanced as the necessary precondition to critique as such.

The *fourth* chapter takes up this epistemic framework that represents the aesthetic as crucial to the possibility of critique, and further explores what it would *practically* entail to assign the aesthetic a central role in the hermeneutic perspective from which human beings interpret the world and their own role therein. The latter is necessary if we are to understand how we may deploy the critical potential of the aesthetic in the context of modernity as a problem, and what the implications of doing so are for our understanding of the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews. This chapter thus tries to map out what deploying the aesthetic as a lens through which to critically analyse modernity can be expected to mean in practice, and it does so through recourse to the works of *Friedrich Nietzsche*. This is again somewhat cheeky – Nietzsche, by figures such as Hall and Ames, is often presented as nemesis of Kant, and as friend of China. Nevertheless, I hope to make plausible, at least insofar as his reflections on aesthetics are concerned, Nietzsche can be very productively read in dialogue with – perhaps even as follow-up on – Kant. I shall, at least, propose to read Nietzsche as taking up the general hermeneutic framework of Kantian aesthetics, and situating or "applying" it in context of what he perceives to be a concrete lifeworldly threat to the possibility for human beings to understand and orient themselves practically. In such a context, thus in context also of the kind of concrete threats that the first and second chapters associated with (Western) modernity, Nietzsche shows us the lengths that we may have to go if we consider what it means to take aesthetic openness as guideline for critique. Considered in the concrete contexts of the historico-cultural lifeworld, Nietzsche shows, assigning the aesthetic a central role in the hermeneutic scheme through which we interpret the world essentially involves that we accept an epistemic and normative commitment to organize our lifeworld as something that is open to *change*. As such, aesthetically oriented critique comes with the requirement that not only our lifeworld itself, but also the ways in which we ourselves tend to judge it must be scrutinized on their potential to serve the *future* – and if found an impediment to agency, to change, must be subjected to a process of careful destruction. To the extent that we want to develop an internally coherent practical perspective around the aesthetic, Nietzsche shows, there is no longer anything that can be considered as beyond possible criticism.

The *fifth* chapter tries to bring these considerations together. From the perspective on the aesthetic as developed through recourse to Kant and Nietzsche, a perspective that foregrounds the critical and future-oriented dimensions of aesthetic openness, I reflect back on the hermeneutics of contrast and its potential to develop a practical perspective on modernity that empowers our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves therein. My suggestion will be that although the contrasting hermeneutics claims an aesthetic orientation for itself, its basic hermeneutic presuppositions ultimately *contradict* the very idea of aesthetic openness. Indeed, I will try to make plausible that an aesthetically oriented approach to cross-cultural philosophy considers culture never merely as an inheritance of the past: culture, rather, must always also be seen as a responsibility towards the future if it to have a place in a critique of modernity that allows for the possibility of radical change – that enables human beings to approach the world in a way that is both hermeneutically and practically open. As such, the analysis of the aesthetic rather emphasizes that it may be time to start thinking of the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews in terms of accommodation rather than contrast: that it may be time to think, not in a multiplicity of modernities, but in terms of a multiplicity of cross-culturally inspired philosophical narratives of *this* modernity, and then especially also the openness of its future.

The Hermeneutics of Contrast

It was described in the introduction that discussions in contemporary cross-cultural philosophy often follow a particular narrative that recounts the relation between Chinese and Western perspectives in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast. This narrative, I have furthermore suggested, is especially also a denunciation of modernity, which it conceives in its given form as a specifically Western phenomenon that China would never have produced in the similar, inhumane way. Indeed, this oppositional narrative seems aimed to give body especially also to the idea that there is not one but multiple modernities, and the Chinese tradition holds the resources to develop a radically alternative, and potentially superior vision on life in the modern world. It is ultimately my purpose to evaluate whether the narrative is philosophically sound, whether there are good reasons to think of the relation between China and the West in terms of contrasting concepts of modernity, but before doing so it is needed to elucidate what it recounts in the first place. This introductory chapter will cover first ground in that direction: it reconstructs the doctrines and views that are attributed to modern Western philosophy, considers how the Chinese way of thinking about similar topics is said to differ, and questions to what extent these supposed oppositions indicate that the Chinese tradition can indeed be expected to ground alternative commitments to modernity as a normative project. I will thus not yet engage the underlying question of what the implications are of holding Chinese and Western forms of thinking to be radical opposites as such – this will be the focus of the next chapter. My intention here is rather to give a first, more general impression of, as well as a preliminary evaluative perspective on, the kinds of doctrines and institutions that the oppositional narrative generally reconstructs as the primary bones of contention in the meeting between Chinese and Western worldviews.

I will do so by collecting the oppositions that are recurring and prominent in the comparative philosophical literature and systematizing these into one encompassing vision on the opposition between East and West. That means that I will present these oppositions in context of the overarching grand narrative in which I want to engage them: I reconstruct them *as if* they, by the authors mentioned and cited below, are presented in the systematically structured

approach to Chinese perspectives on Western modernity as I represent them. They are often effectively *not* so presented, but in much more freestanding ways. Since my purposes, however, are to get the elements into view that would be associated with the concept of a modernity on Chinese terms and to distinguish the latter from the supposedly Western version that we now live, it is important to get the narrative into view in a way that is optimally internally coherent – and it would also violate basic principles of charity to examine whether it tells a compelling story before having presented it so. But as such, it should be emphasized, the overall picture that will be sketched in what follows purports at a reconstruction and not exegesis, and the reader should keep in mind that what is being represented here does not purport to replicate the way the oppositions are presented in the contemporary literature but to reconfigure these such that they paint a systematic picture of the main doctrines and views that the oppositional narrative attributes to Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives, as well as how these are held to differ.[1]

This, however, does not mean that the bigger picture that I will sketch in this chapter formulates merely my two cents on these matters. Although I here and there draw upon authors who do not adhere to this oppositional narrative[2], there is a specific group of prominent scholars whose general positions I think are accurately grasped by the perspective I develop here. This notably includes (but is not limited to) David Hall and Roger Ames, Herbert Fingarette, Henry Rosemont Jr., Lee Seung-Hwan, Daniel A. Bell, David Wong, Fan Ruiping, and Mary Bockover – a mix of Chinese scholars and what Robert Cummings Neville affectionately calls 'Boston' or 'Yankee Confucians' (Neville 2000), whose

[1] The reader should also keep in mind – as was also emphasized in the introduction – that this is no sense purports to be a representation of the literature at large. There are equally many who are not sympathetic to thinking in terms of such oppositions at all, and approach questions regarding the relation between Chinese and Western worldviews in a way that is very careful to presume dichotomies. The fact of the matter is, however, that the oppositional narrative is very influential, and is therefore important to also examine on its own terms.

[2] This concerns especially papers by Joseph Chan, Li Chenyang, and Albert Y. Chen. I draw upon their thoughts here to try to reconstruct alternative Chinese ways of looking at potentially problematic Western doctrines and institutions in an as internally coherent systematic way. I thus do *not* wish to suggest that they themselves think about Chinese and Western worldviews as radical opposites.

positions converge in their approaching of the relation between Chinese and Western philosophy in terms of contrasts rather than accommodation. It is to them that I attribute the oppositional narrative insofar as Chinese and Western takes on modern doctrines and institutions are concerned, and it is also their proposed approaches to the cross-cultural dialogue that I propose to examine on their philosophical authority.

More concretely, I will in this chapter reconstruct the commonplace oppositions on three levels to subsequently inquire to what extent we have reasons to think that these support the idea that the modernity that many of us now live is its specifically Western version, and one to which the Chinese tradition can be expected to provide a radically different, and potentially superior alternative. These levels are the level of the *political*, that of the *moral*, and that of *human subjectivity*.[3] On all of these levels, I contend, the hermeneutics of contrast expresses important concerns and possibly also discloses genuine pathologies regarding the conditions of life in the modern world. However, as I try to show, it is ultimately not on this level that the real source of the presumed opposition between Chinese and Western traditions lies: although the oppositional narrative sketches an insightful picture of the various differences between Chinese and Western views on politics, morality, subjectivity, it does not – and insofar as subjectivity is concerned, ultimately *cannot* – provide us with a reason to interpret these differences as oppositions. As such, the real discussion on whether Chinese and Western normative viewpoints differ to the extent that China and the West can be expected to uphold incommensurable perspectives on modernity appears to take place on a different level altogether: on that of the so-called Chinese and Western 'forms of thinking' as such. It is the presumed opposition on the latter, underlying level, I will suggest, that informs the contrasts as these are developed

[3] The reader familiar with the contemporary comparative discussion might wonder why I do not give explicit attention to the issue of *human rights*, as it is such a prominent topic on the comparative agenda. The reason for this is that those who argue that human rights are a typically modern Western thing that cannot claim authority in China do so through recourse to the claim that they come hand in hand with i) liberal political institutions, and/or ii) a rights-based morality and/or iii) an individualistic conception of the human being. And since these latter three claims are precisely those that will here be discussed, it seems superfluous to address human rights explicitly. For representative bundles on the topic see: James T.H. Tang (ed) 1995 and Tu Weiming & Theodor De Bary (eds) 1998. For a critical perspective see Heiner Roetz 2012 and 2017.

insofar as views on politics, morality, and the human being are concerned; and it is also on this underlying level, ultimately, that the evaluative question into the hermeneutics of contrast will have to be decided.

But to show this, and also provide the reader unfamiliar with these discussions with a general introduction in the theme, let me first turn to the commonplace oppositions as these are held to characterize the relation between Chinese and Western views on politics, morality, and subjectivity.

Political opposites: liberalism and communitarianism

Those who oppose Western liberalism to Chinese communitarianism tend to associate the former primarily with the figures of Immanuel Kant and John Rawls (cf. e.g. Joseph Chan 2002, Daniel A. Bell 2005, Bai Tongdong 2008). This is interesting, since the 18th century German philosopher Kant is often read as an advocate of republicanism rather than liberalism. But since Rawls considered himself to be a Kantian and was by far the most popular figurehead for American communitarian target practice in the 1980s and 1990s[4], it is explicable that Kant and Rawls are taken as representative of the Western liberal tradition. Now, on the Chinese reading liberalism so-attributed is seen to revolve around the protection of the right to freedom – where the right to freedom seems essentially to be read as aimed to protect *freedom of choice*. As Lee Seung-Hwan states, when '[l]iberals recognize the "presumption in favor of liberty," [they hold] that unless there is a sufficient rational basis for limiting the liberty of the individual, the law and the state should always leave the individual to make a free choice' (Lee Seung-Hwan 2002, 8; cf. also Daniel A. Bell 2005, 224–5, Li Chenyang 2014, 902–19). This freedom of choice, moreover, is seen to be grounded not so much on the basis of the substance or content of the options at hand, but on the formal or structural presence of alternative possibilities: liberals aim to protect freedom

[4] There are, as can be expected, also significant overlaps between the liberalism-communitarianism debate as it was conducted in Western philosophy in the 80s and 90s and the opposition as it is sketched here; the difference being, of course, that the communitarian alternative is fleshed out somewhat differently insofar as China is concerned, which also has impact on the way in which Western liberalism ends up being understood. To my view, the discussion is more interesting in dialogue with the Chinese perspective because the latter is in some sense more radical than just the Western version of communitarianism, but I leave the reader to his own thoughts on that matter.

by aiming to 'secure more options in action and choice' (Lee Seung-Hwan 1991, 4) – they are considered to focus on the quantity and not the quality of alternatives. Choosing freely, on this reading, is much like wandering through a supermarket and having the possibility of choosing between different kinds of oranges on the basis of several criteria set to select which item best satisfies individual preferences (Joseph Chan 2002, 291). On the oppositional reading of the relation between Chinese and Western philosophy, it is almost as if the latter considers man as free to the extent that he can roam the world like a customer: to the extent that he can choose for himself, unimpeded by external impediments, what to buy and where to buy it.

Understandably, such emphasis on free choice is on the Chinese viewpoint taken to translate into what is essentially a *laissez-faire* politics. Lee continues, 'Being committed to a presumption in favour of liberty, liberals endorse the principle of non-interference. No-one should interfere with anyone else without justification – while one can do anything if one does *not* interfere with anyone else' (Lee Seung-Hwan 1996, 368–9). Indeed, Western liberalism is held to see the development of 'conceptions of what is of value in human life, ideals of personal virtue and character, and the like' (John Rawls 1988, 252) as a strictly *private* matter, in which the public – i.e. everyone that is not invited into the private sphere – should not mingle. As such, the protection of free choice is then also seen to ground 'the idea that there is a clear distinction between the private and the public, and [that] their relation is one of conflict' (Bai Tongdong 2014, 347). Judging what is required to live a virtuous life as well as determining whether to act upon those requirements is considered as something that individuals should choose for themselves, unimpeded by undesirable influence by others. Indeed, seemingly much to the concern of our critical narrators, Western liberalism's commitment to justice appears to imply that ideas on the good life – on virtue, duty, dignity – should be banished from the public realm of politics altogether (Russell Arben Fox 1997, 568). The only thing that liberal politics seems to be concerned with, Fan Ruiping protests, is the 'principles regarding the distribution of … instrumental goods': the distribution of means or instruments, 'such as income and wealth', that every individual needs in order to exercise his freedom of choice, regardless the more specific 'intrinsic' goods that he is interested in choosing (Fan Ruiping 2010, 47–8). What is more, adds Randall Peerenboom, liberal politics is merely concerned with the 'adjudication of self-interested individuals' conflicting

claims', where the sole purpose of governance is to restrict one man's freedom of choice where it impinges upon that of another (Randall Peerenboom 1990, 19). This is then also considered a hard limit of the government's mandate: political authority is considered as justified on the basis of the social contract – an 'artifice constructed on the basis of the self-interest of those who contract to build it' (Henry Rosemont Jr. 2015, 61) – and the moment that the government acts against the (hypothetical) consent from its citizens it is thus considered illegitimate. Even if citizens' lives are centred on the satisfaction of capitalist interests at the expense of for instance a 'thick sense of community and deep bonds of social solidarity' (Lee Seung-Hwan 1996, 375) or the 'responsibility of care for the environment' (Tu Weiming 2001, 249), the government is not allowed to interfere. Indeed, on the oppositional narrative, there is a sense in which Western liberalism considers the government as adversary to the individual rather than steward: it is suggested that even if government interference is justified, it is still *interference*; even if government authority may be a necessary evil, it is still an *evil* (Andrew J. Nathan 1986, 113). On this reading, it seems almost as if Western liberalism prefers for there not to be a public sphere of politics at all.

Chinese communitarianism is held to sketch quite the different picture. Unlike the liberal counterpart with its emphasis on freedom, it is argued, the Confucian tradition *lacks* the concept of autonomy as freedom of choice altogether. Herbert Fingarette explains this absence through recourse to the metaphor of a 'way without crossroads' (Herbert Fingarette 1972, 18–36). The Western understanding of freedom of choice is implicitly present in this metaphor, namely as the way *with* crossroads: Western freedom, supposedly, is like the freedom to turn left or right in a garden of ever-forking paths. The Confucian tradition, so Fingarette, also works with the metaphor of the road – the *Tao* – but as one that *must* be travelled: 'Written characters that appear frequently in the [*Confucian Analects*] are those meaning path, way, walk, tracks, follow, go through, from, to, enter, leave, arrive, advance, upright, crooked, level, smooth, stop, position' (Ibid, 19). But not those denoting a crosscroads, a choice between alternative routes. Indeed, 'there is no *genuine* option, either one follows the Way or one fails. To take any other route than the Way is not a genuine road but a failure … to follow *the* route' (Ibid, 21). Such failure is not considered a choice; it is a lack of understanding of what is according to the Way, or the lack of willpower to continue to travel it (Ibid, 35–6). Joseph Chan remarks that this of course should not be seen to imply

that Chinese people do not make choices: 'Confucius himself suggests that in some circumstances it is up to a gentleman to choose whether to stay in government or step down when the Way does not prevail in politics; in either case, the gentleman's choice should be respected' (Joseph Chan 2002, 291). But the point is, Chan suggests, that from the Confucian viewpoint the way in which people reflect upon their own actions and their own agency cannot be understood in terms of choice: this reflection 'neither confers … authority on one's act nor explains one's real motivation. Instead, from the agent's own point of view, it is a matter of *necessity* to act in accordance with [the *Tao*]' (Ibid, 292). Indeed, Lee adds, insofar as a concept of freedom can be reconstructed in Chinese communitarianism, it lies not in self-determination as freedom of choice but precisely in this idea of conforming to the Way that one believes is worth following (Lee Seung-Hwan 1996, 369).

The Chinese communitarian viewpoint on the structure of the socio-political sphere that follows from this Confucian picture is, unsurprisingly, held to be radically different from its liberal counterpart. Because the organization of politics is not thought to revolve around the idea of freedom as absence of interference by others, the traditional Chinese outlook on the aim and organization of politics is held to differ. What is said to drive the Chinese communitarian project and to separate it from Western liberalism, is that it seeks to protect and cultivate something like a 'communitarian way of life' (Daniel A. Bell and Kanishka Jayasuriya 1995): to protect and cultivate social harmony by supporting strong bonds with family and community. 'The society that Confucians aim to build is … one of virtuous individuals who live in harmonious relationship with other members of a community' (Lee Seung-Hwan 1991, 2). Such an outlook on politics resists a hard distinction between public and private, as was held to be central in the liberal idea of choosing for oneself what to think or do. Bai Tongdong explains that on the Confucian view there is continuity and complementarity between the private and the public, insofar as the two realms can at all be distinguished. More specifically, 'communal and political relations are analogous to, and should be modelled after, familial relations' (Bai Tongdong 2014): politics is an extension of the family, the public sphere an extension of the realm of the household. This is then also held to make that what on the liberal viewpoint would be considered human beings' private affairs, are from the perspective of Chinese communitarianism rather a *public* business – and potentially even a *political*

problem. Unlike the liberal tradition, in Chinese communitarianism ideas of the good life, of dignity and virtue, are said to be given pride of place in the public realm: in Chinese politics, 'the good must be prior to the right' (Ewing Y. Chinn 2007, 73). Indeed, to the extent that justice presupposes the possibility of divergence between the interests of (different) citizens and those of the state, it is unclear to what extent it has a place in Chinese politics at all. 'Chinese constitutions presupposed a harmony of interests between state and citizen. They did not encourage or even recognize the possibility of conflict between the two' (Andrew J. Nathan 1986, 113; cf. also Randall Peerenboom 1990). This is represented in the meritocratic structures of political discourse and institutions, which are said to be structured on the basis of the principle that 'political power should be distributed according to moral merit', where merit is measured on the basis of whether one is 'virtuous, benevolent, learned, wise, and capable' (Joseph Chan 2007, 188). Thus selected officials, moreover, are not expected to withhold their moral views from governance and policymaking; on the contrary, they are expected to rule *from* ability and virtue (Daniel A. Bell 2015, 63–110). And that means, at least to an extent, that the government is allowed – or even supposed – to teach the people how to act: 'Good leaders, according to Confucianism, behave like benevolent and authoritarian fathers' (Li Ma and Anne Tsui 2015, 17). Or in other words, people's judgments and actions are, at least in part, the government's responsibility (Bai Tongdong 2008, 23). Although citizens can perhaps be allowed to 'gently remonstrate' (Confucius 1955, IV: XVIII) with the authorities if they feel that certain policies stray from the Way, the government – like the parent – ultimately ought to be obeyed. And that makes that the legitimacy of its authority is said to be independent of the (hypothetical) consent of its subjects: only in the case wherein government authority no longer fulfils its role qua government, as for instance when it acts against the material or moral well-being of its people, can its authority be negated. (Mencius 1955, IAIV; cf. also Bai Tongdong 2008, 24)

In light of this rough overview of what appear to be the main features attributed to respectively the Western and Chinese perspectives on politics by the oppositional narrative, Western liberalism and Chinese communitarianism seem to uphold very different commitments indeed. Whereas Western liberalism is held to centre its political reflections around the concept of the right to self-determination as freedom of choice, Chinese communitarianism is thought to

emphasize rather the necessity of conforming to the Way or *Tao*. This is perceived to translate into a politics of non-interference on behalf of the former. Western liberalism is said to advocate a politics that has as its primary aim to secure that individuals are respected in the freedom to choose for themselves what to think and do; a freedom that liberalism tries to facilitate by ensuring that the public domain of politics remains neutral vis-à-vis citizens' private ideas on the good life. Indeed, liberal politics appears to be understood essentially as a procedural politics, as a politics of administration: on the oppositional reading, Western liberalism promotes a politics that revolves around the adjudication between individuals' competing interests, where the government is merely allowed to restrict one man's freedom of choice if it impedes on that of another. Chinese communitarianism is said rather to hold opposite priorities, to endorse a priority of the good over the right: Chinese politics is held to strive for protecting a communitarian way of life by teaching people how to think and act as well as invest in family- and community-building policies. The latter involves a stark rejection of the distinction between public and private: it considers the public realm of politics rather as an extension of the household. And that also has implications for the way in which the legitimacy of political authority is conceived: whereas in Western liberalism authority is seen as legitimate to the extent to which it can appeal to (hypothetical) consent, in Chinese communitarianism the government is not dependent on the approval of its citizens – just like a father's authority is not dependent on the consent of its children. The only way in which political authority can be lost, it is said, is when a government forsakes its governing role.

Now, it is clear that this narrative on Chinese and Western views on politics has enormous expressive power – and also illustrates how expressive the genre of the narrative as such can be. And certainly, this narrative discloses concerns about life in modern societies that will be recognizable to many. Via the contrast with the Chinese philosophical perspective, the story paints a picture of the Western political sphere that seems in some fundamental sense eroded; as if Western politics does not, or no longer, revolve around or even address genuinely *human* concerns. And it seems that there are senses in which this picture is accurate: there *are* obvious problems related to politics in the modern West, and it is also potentially constructive to address such problems in a cross-cultural setting – in a setting where different perspectives on politics may learn from each other's

successes as well as flaws. Simultaneously, however, there are pressing questions to be be raised here; questions that must be addressed before we can conclude that the oppositional narrative tells a philosophically sound story.[5] What I am here especially interested in is, as said, to what extent the oppositional narrative – considered on its *own* terms – has in its discussion of politics shown us why we should think of the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast. Has the narrative indeed given us sufficient reasons to accept that Chinese and Western traditions have political ideologies that are so radically different that it cannot reasonably be upheld that China and the West have commensurable commitments to modernity as a normative project? Although the above-recounted considerations on politics have elaborated various differences between Chinese and Western views on politics this is, interestingly, as of yet unclear. At a closer look, namely, it is uncertain to what extent the narrative has actually given us reasons to understand Chinese and Western views on politics as *oppositions*. One could wonder, for instance, whether it would not be possible to give questions regarding the good life pride of place in politics *and* to allow for a pluralism in answers to those questions; whether the public sphere cannot be one where we treat each other as if we were relatives *and* respect the our fellow citizens in the thoughts and actions they want to keep private; whether politics cannot strive for the development of resilient and sustainable communities *and* accommodate individual freedom in judgment and action – indeed, perhaps the state is not *either* a necessary evil *or* a benevolent father, but rather a little bit of both. Indeed, it seems that, at this stage at least, Western liberals and Chinese communitarians alike could say 'yes' to all of these questions, and could do so, moreover, from their own political presuppositions.

[5] We could wonder, for example, to what extent the depiction of Western liberalism has been charitable or whether it is not rather liber*tarianism* that was here portrayed, we may wonder whether the so-called pathological character of Western politics has not been overstated; whether the picture painted of Chinese communitarianism was not overly rose-coloured, and whether obvious empirical facts about the Chinese political system (which is not all roses either) have not been illegitimately ignored. We may ask these, and various other questions regarding the historical and empirical *accuracy* of the oppositions so reconstructed. But since I had set out to ask, *not* to what extent the oppositional narrative gives a *correct representation* of the contemporary world and the theoretical viewpoints thereon (whether the narrative got the relevant facts right), but rather whether it configures those facts in a manner that is internally consistent and supports our capacities for understanding and orienting ourselves practically, I will not further dwell upon these matters here.

But if this is so, then the oppositional narrative does not seem to have really given us reasons to assume that China and the West have incommensurable political ideologies. It has shown us differences, yes, and therewith provided us plenty of food for thought for – critically – reflecting on the current organization of Western politics. But it has not shown us that any of these differences in fact turn out to constitute mutually exclusive political viewpoints: it has not given us a reason for interpreting these differences as philosophical *oppositions* that create a watershed division between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews. Without such a reason, Chinese and Western viewpoints could at this stage just as well be thought to provide a somewhat different emphasis in addressing political questions as they could be held to provide mutually exclusive perspectives on these questions themselves. And that suggests that the reasons why some think of the relation between China and the West in terms of radical opposition ultimately has little to do with their views on politics.

Thus, at this stage the oppositional narrative raises questions about the way in which the modern Western has organized its political institutions – and critical ones for that. But is raises questions and criticisms on which, at least at this stage, liberal philosophers might just as well *agree* with their Chinese colleagues, and moreover from their own ideological commitments. As such, the narrative it does not yet tell us why we would have reasons to buy into the idea that Chinese and Western 'cultural programs' should be expected to sire radically opposed modernities. If there are reasons to accept the latter thesis, then these must derive their normativity from elsewhere – from radical and fundamental incommensurability on a level other than that of the political.

Moral opposites: rights and rites

In the opposition between rights and rites, the former are often associated with 18th century Western Enlightenment thinking, or more specifically, with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (Henry Rosemont Jr. 1991, Randall Peerenboom 1995, Tu Weiming 2012). Kant himself did not speak of *human* rights specifically and some think that the concept sits uneasily with his philosophical framework as such, but the association is reasonable since the contemporary understanding of human rights is unmistakably strongly influenced by what Tu Weiming calls 'Enlightenment mentality': a consciousness of the importance of 'liberty, equality,

progress, the dignity of the individual, respect for privacy, government for, by and of the people, and due process of law' (Tu Weiming 1998, 3). Interestingly, and in direct relation to the perception of liberalism as sketched in the above, in contemporary discussions in comparative philosophy these "Kantian" or "Enlightenment" rights appear to be essentially conceptualized in terms of *interests* (see Joseph Chan 1999, David Wong 2004, Roger Ames 1988). This is not self-evident; in many or perhaps even most contemporary Western discussions the moral rights are, in the moral sense, considered to protect subjects' 'will' rather than their interests (see e.g. H.L.A. Hart 1955, Alan Gewirth 1978), but in contemporary comparative literature the former conceptual possibility does not appear to be at all present. Randall Peerenboom argues that an important reason why it is considered obvious that rights protect interests, is that the Chinese term traditionally used to translate 'rights' – *quanli* – means something like 'weighing-interests'. The second character, the character *li*, says Peerenboom, denotes interest, benefit, advantage. Indeed:

> Traditionally the root *li* connoted not merely interest but a selfish interest... *Li* was also associated with *si*, which means private or personal, and by extension, biased, partial and selfish (as in *zisi*). In contrast, *yi* was associated with *gong*, which referred to a public-interestedness, a concern for the welfare of others, and hence an impartiality reflected in such terms as *gongping* (fairness) or *gongzheng* (justice). Whereas the *xiaoren*, a petty person, pursued *sili*, the *junzi*, a morally cultivated or exemplary person pursued *yi* and *gong*. (Randall Peerenboom 1995, 365)

Although this seems somewhat overstated, as there is also the idea of general or shared *li*, Peerenboom may be right in stating that there is an association with the pursuit of personal interests when one speaks about subjective rights. But if this is so, then there appears to be an obvious reason why the idea of rights is from the Chinese viewpoint considered as grounded in interest: the latter is included in the literal meaning of the term. As such, there seems to be a certain egoistic connotation to the very word used to translate the notion of rights into Chinese: rights suggest to protect the interests of those who claim them over and against those of others, and perhaps could by extension even be said to pit the individual against his community or collective. And this connotation, Peerenboom continues,

is only corroborated by the addition of '*quan*'. The character *quan* is held to suggest a sense of expediency or contingency in the weighing that it denotes: *quan*, Peerenboom says, is 'opposed to *jing*, which connotes regularity and a sense of principle' (Ibid, 365; see also Steven C. Angle 2003, 205–25) – *quan* is suggested to denote a conditional or even instrumental form of weighing. But that means that rights are not merely suggested to protect self(ish)interests; there is a further utilitarian or instrumental dimension to the Chinese translation of the term in the suggestion that weighing is calculative (cf. also Theodor De Bary 1988, 183–4). And if Li Lianjiang is furthermore right in his observation that since the word for rights – '*quanli*' (权利)[6] – and the word for power or authority – '*quanli*' (权力) – are homophones these are often used interchangeably (Li Lianjiang 2010, 58), then yet another element of contingency is introduced: if rights are associated – not only with the weighing of interests but also with power, then there is also a sense in which '*right*' is taken to mean *might*.

Now, we should of course not conclude from this that from the Chinese point of view rights can *only* be conceptualized in the somewhat reductive sense of protecting self- or selfish interests. But it does explain why much, if not most of the literature that engages the relation between the Western rights-centred and Chinese perspectives on morality understands the former as setting at odds individual interests and the common good, the collective, the community, the state. It may be the case that without further elaboration, the Chinese perception of rights and rights-based moralities will tend towards assuming that what is at stake is the weighing of the interests of the individual *over and against* those of others: it may tend towards assuming, in the terms of Karl Marx, that individual rights are essentially 'rights of *separation*'. (Marx 2012) And this seems precisely to be the way in which rights are described in the oppositional narrative. Rights are portrayed as creating a moral vacuum around the individual person in which he is free from undesirable external interference; as protecting a 'sphere of autonomy and the fundamental interests of individuals' (Lee Seung-Hwan 1996, 373). They are described as placing 'a fence around each individual, a fence that can only be opened by the owner of the fence, a fence that remains effective no

[6] The Chinese characters are here mentioned primarily to give the non-Chinese reader of the text an idea of what the corresponding symbols look like, and how these – in this case specifically – differ. In what follows I will similarly only include the characters if it fulfils purposes of clarification.

matter where the individual chooses to go' (Herbert Fingarette 2007, 111). Rights-based moralities are portrayed as 'emphasizing what each individual, qua individual, is entitled to claim from other members' and giving 'no emphasis to a common good' (David Wong 2004, 33). Indeed, Albert Chen sketches the Chinese view on Western rights as a natural progression of 'asserting one's interests, claiming one's rights, and pressing one's case by taking the other party to court' (Albert Y. Chen 2003, 261). This suggests that on this critical narration, there is an important sense in which the Western concept of rights is suggested to conflate the moral and the legal sphere: rights are essentially considered as entitlements to a private space that individuals claim against others and are prepared to defend in court. And what the Western perspective on morality is then considered to essentially involve is a form of weighing, calculating a balance, adjudicating between human beings qua 'aggregate of self-interested claimers' (Lee Seung-Hwan 1996, 368).[7]

Unsurprisingly, the Chinese perspective on morality is held to be radically different. Gratefully making use of the homophony of 'right' and the most common translation of '*li*', the narrative that portrays Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives as radical opposites suggests that on the former *rites* rather than rights are assigned a central role. Indeed, Fan Ruiping goes so far as to say that '*li* is the essence of Chinese civilization' (Fan Ruiping 2010, 165). In the previously cited work, Herbert Fingarette developed his influential understanding of rites as 'holy ritual' or 'sacred ceremony' (Herbert Fingarette 1972, 6): rites are the implicit social codes that normatively structure practices of human interaction, and thereby articulate how a community is ordered as well as prescribe how in specific circumstances, specific actions should be carried out. Such practices include not merely the 'well-known Confucian ceremonies, such as the family rituals of capping, wedding, mourning, and sacrificing, the village rituals of drinking, banqueting, and archery, and the state rituals of interchanging missions, visiting the emperor, and sacrificing to Heaven' (Fan Ruiping 2010, 165), but also 'the behaviors we exhibit in such simple activities as greetings,

[7] What, interestingly, seems to be altogether lacking from this picture is that rights can obviously also pertain to *groups* – to *nations* even. This would seem to soften the fury of the claim somewhat. But as it is my intention here to reconstruct the oppositional narrative as it is told in the literature, I will stick to the reading that sees rights univocally as claims that pertain to individuals.

leave-takings, sharing of food, and much more of the social intercourse we have with our fellows: Saying "please", "thank you", "excuse me"; shaking hands when we are introduced to someone; surrendering our subway seat to a senior citizen; standing up while we applaud a particularly fine artistic performance – all of these, too, are *li*'(Henry Rosemont Jr. 2015, 143–4). Rites, in other words, articulate normative patterns that govern one's activities from dawn till dusk, from the cradle to the grave; and it is by acting in accordance with rites, moreover, that human beings shape their raw potential into moral in the sense of virtuous character.

By conforming to the *li*, human beings are thus held to develop their truly human potential. But conforming to the *li* is not considering something as a regulation that relies on force for compliance; it is rather considering something as *sacred*. Fingarette in this context speaks of there being something 'magical' about ritual action. He writes:

> In well-learned ceremony, each person does as he is supposed to do according to a pattern. My gestures are coordinated harmoniously with yours – though neither of us has to force, push, demand, compel, or otherwise "make" this happen. Our gestures are in turn smoothly followed by those of the other participants, all *effortlessly*. If all are "self-disciplined, ever turning to li", then all that is needed – quite literally – is an initial ritual gesture; from there onward everything "happens". (Herbert Fingarette 1972, 7–8; my italics, DKD)

In successful ritual action, we no longer even speak of a *conformity* to *li* in any literal sense; in successful ritual action there is a perfect synthesis between the outward form of the rite and the inner disposition of its participants – *li* are suggested to have a normativity that is 'aesthetic' rather than law-like in nature (see also Theodor De Bary 1996, 24–46; Bryan Van Norden 2007, 101–12).[8] Acting in accordance with rites is perhaps like playing a piano sonata by Bach, wherein certain melodic standards have to be met in order to count as Bach's

[8] Fingarette, Hall, Ames and many in their wake use the term 'aesthetic' explicitly in this context. Neither are they the first to do so; ascribing Chinese concepts an aesthetic status knows a longer tradition. I come back to this more extensively in the next chapter.

sonata at all, but where the pianist is allowed, perhaps even encouraged, to *embody* the piece in whatever particular way is appropriate to him. The fundamental and overarching virtue that is so developed and cultivated, is the virtue of *ren*, usually translated as benevolence or humaneness.[9] *Li* therewith has a distinctive socializing function: the morally upright man, who has cultivated his virtue by acting in accordance with rites, is essentially a social being. And, on Fingarette's reading, that also means an essentially *public* being: 'To act by ceremony is to be completely open to the other; for ceremony is public, shared, transparent; to act otherwise is to be secret, obscure, and devious, or merely tyrannically coercive. It is in this beautiful and dignified, shared and open participation with others who are ultimately like oneself that man realizes himself' (Herbert Fingarette 1972, 16). And it is especially in the latter quality that *li* 'establish the ethos of a given community' (David Hall & Roger Ames 1995, 214): through acting in accordance with rites human beings become part of the community of man. Indeed, by acting in conformity with *li* human beings become a 'transparent medium through which the *Tao* is expressed' (Roger Ames 1994, 196–7). And although this suggests that in the strict sense there can be no place for moral conflict, in the situation wherein human beings for some reason find themselves in disagreement it is *mediation*, rather than litigation, that is expected to adjudicate the dispute. As Chen explains, 'The dominant Confucian philosophy requires officials – instead of judging the dispute and imposing a binding judgment on the parties – to mediate the dispute and search for a solution which is agreeable to and voluntarily accepted by the disputants' (Albert Y. Chen 2003, 262).

Now, against the background of this rough overview of what seem to be the main features attributed to the Western and Chinese moral viewpoints, the rights- and rites-based moralities seem to offer quite different pictures indeed. On the Chinese perception, the Western rights-based viewpoint on morality seems chiefly concerned with the protection of individual interests: rights suggest to protect individuals' private interests over and against those of others, including those of the collective or the state. Moral reasoning and judgment, correspondingly, are considered in terms of the weighing of those interests: in terms of calculating the balance between various (sets of) interests such that every individual is paid what

[9] I come back to *ren* below; I here wanted to mention it so as to anticipate the link between *li* and *ren*.

he is due. And when individuals feel that this calculus has not played out in their favour, when people feel that they have not been given what ought to be theirs, the natural consequence is to take the issue to court: legal action is perceived to form the natural follow-up on moral disagreement. The Chinese rites-based moral perspective, on the other hand, is suggested to completely lack such utilitarian overtones: rites are not about interests but about virtues, and he who acts in conformity to rites immerses himself in the implicit rules and rhythms that bind society together rather than separating himself by insisting on what is rightfully his. Indeed, by acting in accordance with rites and by thus following the Way, the virtuous man becomes one with the community – a state incompatible with the very idea of individual claims or entitlements, let alone their adjudication in court. In the unlikely event of a conflict it is mediation, rather than litigation, that is supposed to settle dispute.

This discussion of the oppositions between East and West as these are taken to be found on the level of morality adds to our more general understanding of why the two are often seen to be opposites. The assumption that liberalism centres on the adjudication of individuals' competing interests is explicable if one takes into account that the very concept of a *right* appears as inextricably bound to self-interest. When rights are seen to have predominantly negative connotations or are even straightforwardly held to conflict with the spirit of morality, it is unsurprising that China is sceptical of the idea that the public sphere of politics has as (one of) its primary aim(s) the protection of those rights – and, to the extent that its perception of the concept of rights is well-grounded, perhaps rightly so. Perhaps there is a fundamental point to the idea that rights are often invoked to protect individual interests over and against others. There is, at least, no denying that rights are also often invoked to protect the interests of the high and mighty – to secure the interests of the high and mighty *against* those people who need rights to protect the interests that they cannot protect themselves. However, we should again be wary of jumping to more radical conclusions. Also if there are indeed fundamental problems with the way in which rights have been institutionalized, does that give us reason to think that Chinese and Western moral commitments diverge to the extent that the two normative perspectives exhibit radical incommensurability? There are again many questions that can be asked at this

point[10], but what matters for my purposes is whether the oppositional narrative, considered on its own, narrative terms, makes a compelling case: whether it develops an internally coherent perspective around the claim that there are good reasons to think of Chinese and Western perspectives as radical opposites. And like with the discussion on politics, that is of yet unclear – already because it has not been made clear whether rights effectively apply to the same job as rites do. Does a rights-based morality necessarily reduce *all* that is moral to claims and entitlements? It may very well be seen as emphasizing a specific dimension of a more general view of moral relationships, which in the latter, more general quality could also include a doctrine of duties and virtues. Joseph Chan makes this point when he states that rights should be seen to function as a 'fallback auxiliary apparatus that serves to protect basic human [needs] in case virtues do not obtain or human relationships break down' (Joseph Chan 1999, 228). But if that is so, one could wonder whether rights- and rites-based moralities could not peacefully – or even productively – coexist. One could wonder whether it is not possible to endorse rights *and* rites, whether we cannot accommodate moral norms that are law-like in nature *and* those ritual practices that have aesthetic normativity, whether we cannot commit to respecting the well-being of individual human beings *and* that of the collective and/or state. It may be that some of these ultimately turn out to constitute untenable combinations, but at this stage this remains an open question – without further elaboration, it is at this stage just as reasonable to conclude that Chinese and Western views on morality emphasize different aspects of what is essentially a similar commitment to respect for humanity, as it is to conclude that they uphold radically opposed views on morality itself. But this again means that, insofar as there are good grounds for thinking that China and the West hold incommensurable views on modernity as a normative project, the source of such incommensurability must lie elsewhere; the

[10] One could for instance wonder whether the Western concept of a right is here defined as a *moral* concept at all and not rather in terms of certain abuses that are a contingent feature of their current institutionalization, whether the description of Chinese morality is not problematically idealized, or whether it is not implausibly suggested that self-interestedness is a commodity imported from the West – why, for instance, would Confucius and Mencius frame large parts of their moral teachings against self-interestedness *if the latter did not pose a problem also in their own time*? All these questions are important, but, again, since it is not my purpose to consider whether the narrative gets the facts right but how it configures those facts, I will not discuss these further here.

reason why some think about the relation between China and the West in terms of disparity seems to have little to do with their perspectives on morality.

So far, the oppositional narrative raises fundamental concerns about the way in which rights have been institutionalized – and concerns that, it seems, should be taken a lot more seriously than they often are. But, again, this is something on which Western philosophers may very well agree with their Chinese colleagues, also from their own ideological commitments; at least at this stage, there are insufficient reasons to accept the claim that the abuse of rights cannot be criticized from a rights-based moral standpoint. It may be that there ultimately are reasons to accept that there is an internal problem to the very concept of rights such that it necessarily fails to respect humanity, that there a conceptual opposition between rights and rites, but this is at this stage an open question. As such, the narrative does not yet tell us why we would have reason to believe that Chinese and Western viewpoints ground radically different modernities. There may be such reasons, of course, but then these must derive from further oppositions.

Anthropological opposites: individuals and social roles

The Western view of the human being as individual appears, in the comparative discussion with China, to be primarily associated with the philosophical views of, again, Kant and Rawls (Henry Rosemont Jr. 1991, Randall Peerenboom 1993, Mary Bockover 2007, Fan Ruiping 2010). Robert C. Solomon, however, in a book that has exerted quite some influence on especially the American narrators of the narrative that opposes East and West, notes that on this point Kant was constitutively influenced by Rousseau. The latter, on Solomon's reading, fathered what was to become the modern Western understanding of the human being;

> Strolling in solitude through the lush forests of St Germain during the early adolescence of the modern age, Jean-Jacques Rousseau made a miraculous discovery. It was his self. This self was not, as his more scholastic predecessor Descartes had thought, that thin merely logical self, a pure formality that presented itself indubitably whenever he reflected: 'I think, therefore I am'. Nor was his the frustrated, sceptical search that led his friend Hume to declare, paradoxically, that 'whenever I look inside myself, there is no self to

> be found'. What Rousseau discovered in the woods of France was a self so rich and substantial, so filled with good feelings and half-articulated good thoughts, so expansive, natural, and at peace with the universe, that he recognized it immediately as something much more than his singular self. It was rather the Self as such, the soul of humanity. (Robert C. Solomon 1988, 1)

This self, which Solomon also calls the 'transcendental self' or the 'transcendental ego', is 'timeless and universal' (Ibid, 34). The conception of the human being that according to Solomon stood at the cradle of Western modernity is one that essentially distinguishes between those features that human beings universally share and those that contingently pertain to them, where the former are included, and the latter excluded, in the understanding of the human person. It is precisely in this quality – as what Isaiah Berlin called a 'splitting of personality into two' (Isaiah Berlin 1971, 134) – that the Western understanding of the human being is portrayed in the oppositional narrative. Henry Rosemont Jr. associates the Western concept of the self with Rawls' idea of the person under the veil of ignorance: the idea of a person as a 'disembodied "mind" … the choosing, autonomous essence of individuals, which is philosophically more foundational than are actual persons, the latter being only contingently who they are and are therefore of no great philosophical significance' (Henry Rosemont Jr. 1988, 175). Fan Ruiping, who in Solomon's line speaks of the 'transcendental conception of personhood', makes a similar point when he argues that the Western tradition understands human beings as 'anonymous equals' (Fan Ruiping 2010, xiii): on his reading, Western selves are constituted by those powers that they abstractly and anonymously share, and not by those grounded in particular relations and particular circumstances. And Roger Ames, to name a last example, likewise suggests that the Western tradition emphasizes the 'innate, intrinsic, inviolate … equal' dimensions of personhood over and against those 'specific, and always fluid, circumstances' that define human beings as persons (Roger Ames 1997). The Western tradition, thus, appears to be perceived as understanding the human being as a hollow man, or as a silhouette perhaps: as constituted by abstract features that can be timelessly and universally attributed, and precede – normatively, if not historically – the actual, concrete, and particular ways in which personality is filled in or fleshed out. In the structural sense, the Western human being is read to be constituted by the mere capacity to choose.

The subsequent question is of course which features more specifically are then considered to be included, and which are to be excluded, from the Western understanding of the human person. On the oppositional narrative, the answer to this is clear: the features that are included are the *cognitive* capacities, such as autonomy and reason or rationality, and those that are excluded are the *social* features, such as feelings of pity, benevolence, compassion, and sympathy. Indeed, Mary Bockover states that the Western person is 'exclusively independent' (Mary Bockover 2007, 127): on what is considered the Western viewpoint, the human being is essentially what he is taken to be prior to and independent of his social roles and relations. He is the 'autonomous chooser with full control over his history and destiny' (Edwin Hui 2002, 158), including the potential social roles that he has agreed to play and the possible social relations that he has opted to engage in. Although this means that other people may be 'crucial in maintaining this construal of the self … they are primarily crucial for their role in evaluating or appraising the self or as standards of comparison. Others do not, however, *participate* in the [Western subject's] own subjectivity' (Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama 1994, 569). Western persons are atoms, self-sufficient outside of society. And although this may also imply that they are seen as self-interested claimers competing for a scarcity of goods (Randall Peerenboom 1993, 38; cf. also Donald Munro 1977, 6–8), it at the very least involves that they are isolated (Roger Ames 1994, 195) – the Western soul, it seems, lives and dies in solitude. And that means, that on this narrative, the Western understanding of the human being has exactly become that which Alexis the Tocqueville had warned it would be. The West has come to conceive of human being as *individuals*: as 'owing nothing to anyone, as expecting nothing so to speak from anyone; as always accustomed to consider themselves in isolation, and as readily imagining that their entire destiny is in their hands'(Alexis de Tocqueville 2010, 884; cf. also Michael Nylan 1996, 1–27). On reading that opposes East and West, the Western human being is an individual, unimpeded by the ties that bind.

The Chinese tradition is then held to provide a radically different perspective. Other than its Western counterpart, the Chinese understanding of the human being is characterized by a 'conscious refusal to accept, rather than lack the conceptual apparatus to perceive, the exclusive dichotomy between body and mind' (Tu Weiming 1994, 177), and it therewith does not recognize a distinction like the one

between transcendental and contingent parts of the person or self. Central to the Confucian viewpoint on the human person, rather, is the normative idea that the different aspects of his mental and physical nature should be harmonized: 'the body, as our physical nature, must be transformed and perfected so that it can serve as a vehicle for realizing that aspect of our nature known as … the heart-mind, *xin* (Tu Weiming 1994, cf. also Li Chenyang 2010). Indeed, what is at stake in the Confucian concept of man is not the raw, undeveloped features that "precede" the way in which he has actually developed himself: 'Being a person is something one *does*, not something that one *is*; it is an achievement rather than a given' (David Hall & Roger Ames 1987, 139; my italics DKD). Peerenboom even goes so far as to state that, Confucianism holds that 'At birth, before the process of enculturation, of becoming humane, we are not different from the other beasts' (Peerenboom 1990, 22); which is echoed by David Wong when he argues, 'We begin life embodied as biological organisms and become persons by entering into relationship with others of our kind' (David Wong 2007, 332). Insofar as it is at all meaningful to speak of man as "preceding" the way in which he has developed himself, Confucianism is held to consider such a state as animalic rather than transcendental.

The achievement of humanity or personhood is then fundamentally a *social* one: on the Confucian viewpoint, one is thought to become a genuine human being by virtue of participation in society: personhood, humanity, are considered functions of socialization. Wong explains that this is already linguistically evident: the character used to denote the person in a normative sense is '*ren*' (仁), the same character used to refer to humanity or benevolence as the most fundamental Confucian virtue. And this character 仁, moreover, is composed of the descriptive word for 'man' (人) and that for 'two' (二): the character representing the normative concept of the human being literally means something like 'man-to-man-ness' (David Wong 2007, 332; cf. also David Hall & Roger Ames 1987, 113–4). Indeed, on the Chinese viewpoint there is a sense in which human beings are held to be part of each other's subjectivity: the Confucian self is said to be a 'field of selves' (Roger Ames 1994, 192–4) – a bundle of social relations or social roles, such as those of father, son, friend, or citizen. And those are held to be roles that he lives, not plays. As Rosemont exclaimed in what was to become one of the most-cited passages in the comparative literature, in Confucianism:

> [T]here can be no me in isolation, to be considered abstractly: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others. I do not play or perform these roles; I am these roles. When they all have been specified I have been defined uniquely, fully, and altogether, with no remainder with which to piece together a free, autonomous self. (Henry Rosemont Jr. 1988, 177)

Every human being is considered the concrete, particular, and unique embodiment of the roles that he lives. These roles are, at least to an extent, not chosen, but *had*: it is not the human being that makes the role important, but the role that gives significance to the human being. It is precisely the task of humanity, the performing of which makes one into a human person, to come to see these roles not as Rousseauian 'chains and burdens to be escaped from, or to be borne and suffered' (Mei Y.P. 1967, 328), but as social responsibilities through which humanity realizes fulfilment. And although this could perhaps be taken to imply that human beings are defined as the subjective dimension of what the *li* objectively prescribe (Herbert Fingarette 1972, 42) or as the 'aggregate sum of the roles that they live' (Henry Rosemont Jr. 2015, 94), it at the very least means that they cannot be isolable individuals – Chinese subjectivity, so it seems, is necessarily shared. It is shared, in first instance with the family (Diane Obenchain 1994, 153–4; Fan Ruiping 2008), and then in concentric circles expanded to include the community from local to global (Tu Weiming 1994, 27–33). And that means that, on what is arguably the Chinese view, there is a fundamental sense in which the human being "coincides" with his community.

In light of these considerations, the Western and Chinese understandings of the human being at first sight indeed do appear to be crucially different. On this reading, the way in which the Western philosophical tradition is held to have thought about the human person or self seems to appear as outlandish indeed. What stands out is already the arguable tendency to think about the human being as "split" into features that are universal and normatively significant, and those that are contingent and unimportant from a normative point of view. But this is only exacerbated by the features that are consequently thought to belong to the universal part of the self: the oppositional narrative seems to consider it incomprehensible and also detrimental to assume that it is man's cognitive or

rational capacities that fundamentally matter to his humanity. In the Chinese philosophical tradition, it is rather said, ideas on what the human being is and should be centre on the presumption of harmony of the various bodily and mental features. Such harmony is normative on different levels, notably within the human being as a harmony of the heart-mind, and between human beings as a harmony in intersubjectivity. Concomitantly, it does, on this reading, not seem to make much sense to see the human being as prior his social roles or relations: the Chinese person is rather held to exist qua person – as opposed to qua beast – *in* the roles that he lives. And that also means that other than Western persons, who are seen to be defined by the abstract rational capacities that they universally and anonymously share, Chinese selves are inherently variegated in the particular and concrete social relations in which they find themselves. Indeed, whereas on the Chinese viewpoint humanity or human personality is an achievement that one works towards in the social roles and relations that one finds oneself "thrown" in, on the Western perspective humanity is a given that is independent of social relations – normatively speaking, a human being is on the latter reading always an autonomous chooser first, and all other things, optionally, second. It is in the latter regard that the Western person is considered an individual: as a being that, in principle, exists as an isolated atom, independent of and prior to social roles and relations. And it is precisely in this sense that the Chinese tradition is claimed to know no concept of individuality as applicable to human beings: Chinese persons, arguably, *live* the ties that bind.

These considerations are elucidating with regards to the presumption of opposition in Western and Chinese perspectives on both politics and morality. When the Western tradition is perceived to understand human beings as individuals in the sense of isolated atoms, as opposed to beings for whom social embeddedness has constitutive significance, then it is not very surprising that a fundamental lack of humaneness is presumed to run through Western thinking at large. When human beings are considered to essentially be autonomous choosers; when all commitments, including social ties to the family and community, are merely normative and significant to the extent that the individual has freely endorsed them; when others are not really part of one's subjectivity; then it is not very surprising that the individual is perceived as an individual *over and against* others. An individual, moreover, that needs rights to protect his splendid isolation: to protect the private space necessary to exercise his capacity of choice from

interference by others. Rights that, in principle, could be mobilized against social peers such as family members; and rights that, additionally, are held to be protected by the liberal state.

The question again is: is the above-reconstructed story philosophically sound? Does the oppositional narrative give us compelling reasons to think of the relation between Chinese and Western perspectives in terms of oppositions? Indeed, do their normative views on subjectivity diverge to the extent that China and the West should be expected to hold incommensurable visions on modernity? Also on this level, I will ultimately suggest that the answer is in the negative – however for different kinds of reasons than were encountered in the above, and reasons that are interesting from our hermeneutic orientations. Also if we again disregard the various empirical and historical questions that could (and should) be raised in response to the above-reconstructed position, at this level of reasoning something appears to be happening that is altogether different from what we encountered on the levels of the political and the moral. On the one hand, the oppositional narrative appears to be getting *closer* to the kinds of differences it needs to be able to make the case for disparity between Chinese and Western views on modernity. It has not, surely, provided these yet. Even if we again overlook the various questions that could be raised vis-à-vis the accuracy of its depictions, the narrative has as of yet given insufficient reasons to understand the differences between Chinese and Western views on the human being as radical oppositions. We can again rightly ask, for instance, whether sociality cannot be considered important while still endorsing individuality, whether a certain reflexive distance to one's roles cannot be allowed for while still endorsing the prominence of social relations, whether it is not possible to reconstruct features or capacities in which human beings universally share while also acknowledging the normative prominence of the particular ways in which they have developed their personality – whether it is not so that the differences as discussed highlight somewhat different answers to the question 'what is the human being?' rather than formulate radically opposed views on this question itself. Also if the oppositional narrative is to show that Chinese and Western views on the human subject are different to the extent that there are grounds to consider that China and the West uphold mutually exclusive concepts of modernity, it needs to provide ulterior reasons that explain why these differences should be understood as oppositions. However, the oppositional narrative seems to exhibit more potential on this level of human

subjectivity than it did on that of the moral and political. Unlike with its discussions on the latter level, insofar as *subjectivity* is concerned it seems clear that *if* there are indeed compelling grounds for holding that Chinese and Western traditions have radically opposed views, *then* there also appear to be grounds for accepting fundamental disparity between Chinese and Western views on the project of modernity. If China and the West really have incommensurable ideas on what the human being is, can, and should be, then they also cannot be reasonably expected to map out a communal track towards a future world – without an understanding of the human subject that is at least in some senses shared, we seem to be lacking ground to presuppose any commonality whatsoever. That suggests, in other words, that even though the oppositional narrative also in its discussion of human subjectivity still needs to adduce ulterior reasons that explain why the differences it develops should be considered as oppositions, it seems to have come closer to grasping the *kinds* of reasons that these could be – differentiation concerning views on the human being appears to exhibit a kind of potential that differentiation on the level of morality and politics did not.

On the other hand, the oppositional narrative seems here to start pushing the limits of what it, judged on its own terms, has the ability to advance. I have in the above paragraph written as if it is a serious possibility that the narrative ultimately develops reasons for thinking that Chinese and Western viewpoints uphold radically opposed concepts of human subjectivity. But can it? Can we consider it to be a practical possibility that, after decades of deliberation, philosophers East and West together come to the conclusion that what it means to be human in China is really opposite to what it entails in the West? It is difficult to understand what this would at all involve. Would Western scholars then for the last time shake hands with their Chinese colleagues, intrigued by how well these odd non-human chaps managed to mimic human behaviour all these years? Will Chinese scholars tell their families that the creatures they saw on their travels abroad may have looked like humans, but were really something else? Indeed, could the scholars "together" come to the conclusion that there is no common humanity to speak of? The scenario sounds like great material for stories of the likes of Lu Xun, Franz Kafka, or Haruki Murakami, but it seems hard to even imagine this as a practical possibility – but the latter, of course, is what the narrative intends. And perhaps a similar thing holds for the differences that the narrative already claimed. If we revisit the idea that the Western human being is an autonomous chooser first, and

all other things, "optionally", second – is this something we can take at face value as a practical possibility? What would it really mean to be a human being that is wholly independent of social roles and relations: can such a being speak? If so, how has he learned to, if not in social relations? Can he think? Thought without any possibility of communication seems impossible. But if so, can such a being be considered really human, *also* from what is supposedly the Western emphasis on rationality? And inversely, when we recall the supposedly Chinese idea of subjectivity being shared – can this be taken literally? What would it mean to think of the human being as nothing other than his social roles? Could, to such a being, social roles and relations at all appear as meaningful and normative? The very notion of a subject identifying with a social role already seems to presuppose that there is at least some reflexive distance between the subject and that role. Without any such distance whatsoever it becomes difficult to understand what the concept of a social role, but also that of subjectivity itself, could entail in the first place, *also* from the Chinese emphasis of sociality.[11] Not only in its suggestion that Chinese and Western concepts of subjectivity may turn out to be truly incommensurable but also in its effective description of the differences in Chinese and Western views on subjectivity, the oppositional narrative pushes, and possibly already oversteps, the limits of what can be understood as a practical possibility.

Insofar as its account of Chinese and Western views on human subjectivity is concerned, the oppositional narrative thus raises somewhat different issues than it did on the levels of morality and politics. Although also on this level, the narrative, as of yet, did not provide reasons to understand the differences that it highlights as oppositions, our discussion did disclose things that we did not encounter in the discussions on politics and morality. On the one hand, our discussion of the oppositional narrative's account of Chinese and Western views on subjectivity showed the kind of questions that we should be asking if we want to gain in-depth understanding of the relation between Chinese and Western worldviews and the possibility that they ground incommensurable concepts of modernity: questions into their respective visions on what the *human being* is, can, and should be. Subjectivity appears to be fundamental to the question of modernity in a way that

[11] This point, albeit not in context of the cross-cultural dialogue between China and the West, is developed in detail by Martin Hollis (Hollis 1985).

politics and morality are not.[12] On the other hand, our discussion emphasized that these questions were evidently not addressed in a hermeneutically sound way: in a way that is careful not to overstep the limits of what we can coherently understand as a practical possibility. As with the narratives discussed in the introduction, it is clear also here that it cannot be the case that simply anything goes: there are internal, hermeneutic constraints on the kinds of claims that narratives can advance – and the claim that Chinese and Western traditions have radically opposed views on the human being clearly oversteps those. Insofar as subjectivity is concerned, *differences* are likely. *Opposition*, however, appears – especially also hermeneutically speaking – as a bridge too far. And that is a significant result.

Chapter conclusion

Having discussed the hermeneutics of contrast insofar as it considers how Chinese and Western traditions think of politics, morality, and human subjectivity, it is clear that there are many whose disappointment with modernity runs deep. And what is indeed striking about the images that the oppositional narrative sketches of life in the modern world is that these, in some fundamental sense, are suggested to lack *humanity*. The narrative reads as if it essentially wants to accuse modern institutions, and perhaps even the way modern man understands and orients himself, of being inhumane; as if modernity does not enable people to live a truly human life – a life in accordance with human dignity. Needless to say, this is a strong accusation. But it seems, at least in part or in outline, eerily recognizable. This, additional to raising various poignant questions vis-à-vis modernity, emphasizes the expressive power of the grand narrative as a philosophical genre – and, to the extent that Lyotard was right in diagnosing the grand narrative in Western philosophy as 'deceased', provides grounds for critical rethinking of the validity of the latter claim.

[12] That is of course not to say that (differences in) views on morality and politics bear no relevance to our understanding of the project of modernity – obviously they do. But it is to say that views on the moral and political drives behind modernity are relevant because they stand in relation to, or are the expression of, human subjectivity.

Despite all of its expressive power, however, the oppositional narrative did not as yet give us reasons to think that it could be a good idea to consider the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast. The narrative highlighted various differences between Chinese and Western views on politics, morality, and subjectivity, but it did not provide reasons to interpret these differences as *oppositions*. As such, the narrative, at this stage at least, has not given us grounds to hold that our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves in the world will be enriched or enhanced if we assume that there are multiple modernities – the typically Western one that many of us now live, and the rivalling modernity with Chinese characteristics that might ground a radically alternative, and possibly more humane form of life under conditions of modernity. Thus, insofar as there are good reasons for understanding Chinese and Western traditions in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast, these must derive their normativity from elsewhere.

As already indicated, however, there is another level on which the oppositional narrative sets Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews off against one another: on the level of their forms of thinking – not about particular substantial matters, but rather their forms of thinking *as such*. Hence the follow-up question that will be addressed in the next chapter, is to what extent the narrative has the potential to develop differences on the latter level such that we may be given reasons to think of the relation between China and the West in terms of contrasting concepts of modernity: to what extent differences in Chinese and Western forms of thinking will give us reasons to think that adopting a hermeneutics of contrast enables us to interpret the modern world in a way that empowers our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves therein. And that is the question to which I shall now turn.

Magic, disenchantment, and the possibility of critique

The previous chapter explored oppositions that are commonplace in contemporary discussions in comparative philosophy insofar these are conducted in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast. We found that, although the oppositional narrative discloses various concerns and possibly also pathologies concerning life in the modern world, it remained impossible to judge to what extent its story is philosophically sound: it remained impossible to judge whether there are good reasons to accept that Chinese and Western viewpoints uphold radically different views of modernity, also if we heuristically assume that the narrative has the relevant empirical and historical considerations right and set out to judge it strictly on the basis of hermeneutic standards – if we set out to judge whether it develops an internally coherent practical perspective, that is. The reason for this was that the narrative, insofar as it considers its oppositions on the level of what Chinese and Western traditions (supposedly) substantially assert with regards to politics, morality, and subjectivity, does not provide grounds to understand the differences that it highlights as *oppositions*: on this level, the narrative did not show that Chinese and Western perspectives exhibit the fundamental incommensurability that would be needed to support the idea that they hold radically opposed commitments to modernity as a normative project. And I took that to mean that, if there are reasons to consider Chinese and Western traditions in terms of oppositions, these reasons must operate on a different level altogether.

Our previous discussion of the oppositional narrative, although it did not itself provide grounds to consider Chinese and Western traditions as oppositions, did however point beyond itself into a direction where such grounds of opposition possibly *can* be found. The discussion suggested that the issue of *subjectivity* plays a pivotal role in the way we understand modernity and the possibility that different cultural programs have radically different views thereon, but simultaneously indicated that subjectivity is not an issue on which we can simply assume opposition – subjectivity may be a matter regarding which we cannot "simply" assume anything. There are obvious reasons for this. We cannot think about what a human being is in the same way we can think about what cars or cats are, for the simple reason that *we* are human beings, and thus function as both subject and

object in this process of reflection. There is, in other words, an irreducible *self-reflexive* dimension to the issue of human subjectivity: when we think about what a human being is, this thinking cannot be independent of how we understand the latter but must be *part* of our understanding of the human being as such. Our *thinking* about subjectivity, thus, must be part of our *concept* of subjectivity, which is not similarly the case when cars or cats are concerned. And that means that, insofar as we want to further examine differences between Chinese and Western views on subjectivity as possible grounds of incommensurability in their concepts of modernity, it is important to consider Chinese and Western takes on what it means to *think* something in the first place.

As previously indicated, this latter matter forms a huge bone of contention in discussions on the relation between China and the West. Indeed, the presumption that Chinese and Western worldviews showcase structural oppositions insofar as their ways of thinking are concerned, knows a (relatively) long history. Hegel, notably, already claimed that Chinese and Western thought works in crucially different ways (Hegel 1975, esp. 116–124), and this presumption appears over and over again, in various forms and formulations, in the centuries to come. It seems especially also the perceived differences on this level that inform the considerations that were discussed in the previous chapter: the reason why the relation between Chinese and Western traditions is often considered in terms of *opposition* rather than mere differentiation, it seems, is that Chinese and Western traditions are presumed to exhibit radical and fundamental disparity in their *forms of thinking* as such. Hence, the second chapter aims to reconstruct the structural oppositions as these are perceived to characterize Chinese and Western thought and therewith, mutatis mutandis, their views on the human subject. And, having thus brought the oppositional narrative into view more fully, the chapter proceeds to pose the normative question whether there are indeed good reasons to think of the relation between Chinese and Western traditions in terms of such opposition: whether the narrative is indeed capable of giving us reasons to accept that China and the West, insofar as the structure of their thought is concerned, exhibit radical and fundamental incommensurability such they cannot be expected to converge in their views on human subjectivity and the way that it is to be articulated in modernity as a normative project.

The first, *reconstructive* part of the chapter proceeds to collect prominent and recurring oppositions as these are found in the literature on Chinese and Western thought – or, as it is sometimes eccentrically said: the Chinese and Western 'mind' – and systematizes these into an encompassing vision on the relation between East and West. Generally speaking, insofar as the reconstruction is concerned, my approach is here the same as it was in the previous chapter. In terms of the selected literature, however, I follow the general line of the narrative as it is recounted by David Hall and Roger Ames, and draw upon works by others, notably Marcel Granet, Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northrop, and Joseph Needham, to get the narrative into view in a maximally coherent way.[1] As was also explained in the introduction, the reason why I focus on these authors and not others – the narrative, namely, is told in comparable ways in various contexts in both China and the West – is because of the impact that their works currently have on the comparative field. Hall and Ames' collaborative books are some of the most cited works in the contemporary literature, not just in the West but also by scholars of Chinese origin, and especially Granet, but also Northrop and Needham play an important backgrounding role in the way Hall and Ames, and those endorsing their view, develop their narrative on Chinese and Western thought. It should thus be emphasized that also this chapter aims primarily to paint a *systematic* picture of the main oppositions that are considered to divide Chinese and Western forms of thinking such that it can be asked whether the general narrative is sound – I do not purport to provide an overview, let alone a reflection of the literature in general. Simultaneously, I do think that the picture I sketch in what follows captures the themes and trends of the oppositional narrative on Chinese and Western forms of thinking as these are recurrent – not only in the story as it is told by Hall, Ames, and those who follow in their footsteps, but in the broader discourse that considers the relation between China and the West in terms of disparity.

The second, *normative* part of the chapter proceeds to ask whether the oppositional narrative is philosophically sound: whether there are indeed good reasons to hold that Chinese and Western "minds" differ to the extent that China

[1] There are, again, other scholars playing a part in this chapter, and not all of them would approach the relation between China and the West in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast. Especially important to name is Benjamin Schwartz, but also Angus Graham: neither sinologist would wholly support the narrative as told by Hall and Ames, although they converge on some points.

and the West cannot reasonably be expected to converge in their understanding of modernity as a normative project. I shall, as explained before, judge the narrative *not* primarily on the basis of empirical or historical accuracy; there are already many philosophers and sinologists discussing the question whether the oppositional narrative has its facts about Chinese and Western philosophy right. My aims are again *hermeneutic* in nature: I want to examine whether the oppositional narrative develops an internally coherent practical perspective – whether the picture that it paints, considered on its own terms, empowers us in interpreting the world and orienting ourselves therein. But especially also measured against this latter standard, I will attempt to show, the narrative displays fundamental problems. The problem is not unlike the one we encountered in discussing the supposed opposition in Chinese and Western views on the human subject. The narrative, namely, sets up the oppositions between Chinese and Western forms of thinking in such a radical manner that inconsistencies arise concerning the status of its own narration: it develops the disparity to the extent that it denies itself a perspective from which it can reflect upon Chinese and Western forms of thought. Additionally, the narrative overplays its hand in the attempt to advance Chinese thought as the superior alternative: it makes its case by culturally quarantining Chinese thought within its own 'immanence' such that everything that was presented as valuable about it in the first place loses its practical significance. The oppositional narrative, therewith, seems to develop the claim that Chinese and Western minds work in radically disparate ways in a way that actually confirms that Hegel was right – and that is a conclusion that we have good grounds to reject.

But let me now turn to reconstructing what is held to be the opposing forms of Chinese and Western thought.

Western thought, or: rationality, transcendence, and disenchantment

Those who think of China and the West in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast tend to qualify Western thought or Western thinking[2] as 'causal' or 'rational'. The

[2] Most of the authors that are here discussed speak of 'thinking', 'thought', or the Chinese or Western 'mind' – my preferred term is 'understanding' since it suggests a broader form of grasping that is not necessarily primarily cognitive. But I shall use the terms interchangeably here.

term ‘causal’ was used by Joseph Needham in the colossal research project *Science and Civilization in China* that he started in 1954, of which a central part was made up by what was to become known as ‘the Needham question’ – the question why modern science arose only in the (post)Galilean West and not in Asia, while the latter was in earlier times more advanced than the former.[3] Needham’s suggestion was that it is no coincidence that modern science started to develop in 17th century Europe: it was congruent with, or perhaps the culmination of, the causal – or as he also entitles it, ‘legal’ or nomothetic’ (Joseph Needham 1969b, 286) – form of thought that, according to him, had been dominant in the West since ancient times. Hall and Ames pick up this idea of causal thinking, and situate its origin more specifically with pre-Socratic figures such as Thales, Anaximenes, and Parmenides, whom they thus suggest stand at the cradle of Western thinking as we know it today. This form of thinking, in addition to being called ‘causal’, is by Hall and Ames entitled ‘rational’: Western thought, from the pre-Socratics onwards, is said to be essentially characterized by its rational structure. By this they mean that already these early Greek thinkers sought to develop ‘a single principle of explanation for things’ (David Hall and Roger Ames 1995, 18): one law, or one structurally singular set of laws, that would suffice for explaining the cosmos in its entirety. Hall and Ames state that this drive to develop one ‘logos of physis’, because of its aim at uniformity, is already problematic in itself, but becomes all the more so the moment that it is combined with what they call a ‘substantialist bias’ (David Hall and Roger Ames 1987, 71; 1995, 18): a predisposition towards substance over process or growth and a concomitant tendency to prioritize being over becoming. In tandem, they suggest, these two drives work towards the supposition that only being can be understood and that only what can be understood is – or inversely: that becoming cannot be understood and that what cannot be understood cannot really be. And thus already with the ancient Greeks they say that a tendency is detectable that ‘compel[s] us to suppress our most fundamental intuition: “All things flow” (David Hall & Roger Ames,

[3] The expanded version of the question reads: ‘Why did modern science, the mathematization of hypotheses about nature, with all its implications for advanced technology, take its meteoric rise only in the West at the time of Galileo [but] had not developed in Chinese civilization or Indian civilization’? (Joseph Needham 1969a, 16, 190)

1995, 105).'[4] Already with the ancient Greeks, on Hall and Ames' reading, Western rationalism infringes upon the possibility for things to appear in flux, or even prevents the latter from appearing in thought and experience altogether. And precisely this quelling, moreover, is subsequently said to stand at the cradle of the Socratic-Platonic invention of the distinction between the a priori and a posteriori: at the cradle of *transcendence*. Since being is considered to be opposed to becoming and since only the former can be thought, Hall and Ames suggest, the Western tradition considers all "true" understanding to be independent of experience: true understanding concerns a priori contemplation of the transcendent, abstracted away from the world in flux that we inhabit – from the world of what-is-not-yet, the chaos out of which thinking attempts to build a cosmos. As such, Western thought is held to make the world that we inhabit wholly dependent on a transcendent world, 'thus nothing in itself' (Roger Ames 2016, 3): the human world, as well as the knowledge we can have thereof, becomes categorically inferior to the "real" or "pure" world of transcendent Ideas or Forms, which is held to produce, determine, and sustain the former.[5]

On the oppositional narrative as developed by Hall and Ames, at this stage supported by Needham's influential project, already to the ancient Greeks is thus ascribed a certain form of thinking that is causal in the sense that it postulates a transcendent, infinitely superior world that is the "origin" of the human world that we inhabit. It is hard to say to what extent this story is endorsed by a larger audience in terms of its more technical details. But the point that exerts influence on the comparative discussion and is relevant for our purposes here, is that Western understanding is seen as a *rational* form of thinking which orders phenomena in a top-down or vertical way: through recourse to a *transcendent* that is "above" the world of experience (cf. also Robert Smid 2009, 79–141). And although the oppositional narrative will ultimately hold precisely this form of thinking to be responsible for our broken modernity, Hall and Ames speak with a

[4] Hall and Ames, apart from taking inspiration from the Chinese tradition, are at these points heavily influenced by (a particular reading of) the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. (See Whitehead 1978)

[5] Cf.: 'Strict philosophical or theological transcendence is to assert that an independent and superordinate principle A originates, determines, and sustains B, where the reverse is not the case. Such transcendence renders B absolutely dependent upon A, and thus, nothing in itself'. (Roger Ames 2016, 3)

certain fondness even of Socrates, whom they suggest allowed for different forms of understanding to peacefully coexist. Logos, on their view, in Socratic times still tolerated its cousins mythos and historia as alternative forms of understanding, where the latter two facilitated comprehension of and interaction with the world as it appears in concrete experience: the world of becoming. And although the seed of the rationalism is thus supposedly already found in ancient times, Hall and Ames consider it to be balanced out by alternative forms of thinking about the world and humanity's role therein – in antiquity, supposedly, the Western mind was not yet completely corrupted by rationalism and its myopic focus on transcendent, otherworldly "causes".

Over the course of Western history this is thought to change. The rationalism that was held to be inherent to Western understanding is thought to become tyrannical in what is loosely denoted as 'the Enlightenment' or 'modernity'; developments of which, on this reading, Galileo Galilei and Immanuel Kant represent distinct moments. Galileo's impact on the further development of Western thought is emphasized by especially sinologist Angus C. Graham, who seems to be following Needham when he writes that Galileo represents the moment wherein cosmology became *scientific*: he considers the latter to represent the attempt at understanding world order on the basis of systematic observation and measurement of natural phenomena, from which general laws or rules for explanation could be derived (Angus C. Graham 1989, 317–22). The central point, on Graham's reading, is that rationality therein became an 'analytic tool' rather than contemplative medium: cosmology no longer saw rational thinking as directed towards transcendent Ideas but rather towards phenomena and events in concrete experience, and enabled the acquiring of cognition of the physical world rather than knowledge of a metaphysical one. The implication of this switch in the character and direction of rationality, if I interpret Graham's line of reasoning correctly, is that it went hand in hand with the invention of the *fact*: the static and discrete worldly object that can be measured and quantified through a general concept such that true beliefs or objective cognition can be gained – rational thinking is now said to have become *objective*. Hall and Ames follow Graham's reading here, and moreover seem to consider this the quietus to the possibility of toleration between different forms of understanding. Although in earlier days rational knowledge was said to coexist, possibly even peacefully, alongside for instance mystical intuition and contemplation as alternative forms of insight, now that the former has begot the

character of objective knowledge, rationality is 'vindicated as omnicompetent' (David Hall & Roger Ames 1995, 115). And this move, on Hall and Ames' reading, is embodied by Immanuel Kant – who is here, in a much more fundamental sense than he was in the narratives discussed in the previous chapter, represented as the absolute nemesis of the Chinese tradition (see also Alfred North Whitehead 1978, 153–56). What Kant essentially does, on this vision on the development of Western philosophy, is take up this account of analytic rationality and the claim to objective knowledge that it grounds and apply it to *all* domains of possible thought and experience. Kant is thus seen to *broaden* the scope of application of the form of understanding that had become scientific with Galileo such that it was no longer considered merely adequate to ordering the realm of nature but also that of morality, history, aesthetics and religion (David Hall & Roger Ames 1995, 100–101). The a priori, in more technical Kantian terms, comes to concern transcendental concepts rather than transcendent Ideas, and thus the conditions of the very possibility of human thought and experience. This is not to say that transcendence disappears from Western thought. On the contrary, also the modern Western mind continues to order phenomena in vertical ways; the difference is merely that the ordering principles are no longer sought in an "above", but are held to originate from the human mind itself. From this Hall and Ames draw the conclusion that rationality, as objective cognition, is no longer considered as applicable merely to natural phenomena: it is now also the mode of access to moral, historical, aesthetic, and religious dimensions of the human lifeworld. From Kant onwards rationality, and only rationality, allows human beings to acquire real and thus objective knowledge, whatever the particular object of inquiry may be – such that no other form of understanding can genuinely count as understanding in the first place. Indeed, such that it becomes hardly conceivable that there even can be other forms of understanding. Rationalism and its internalized transcendence have, in the words of Friedrich Nietzsche – whom Hall and Ames consider Kant's arch enemy and the thinker who has 'begun the critique of the Enlightenment project' (David Hall & Roger Ames 1995, xviii) that they themselves continue – now become *tyrannical*.[6]

[6] The term 'tyrannical' is mine, not Hall and Ames'. From a Nietzschean perspective 'tyranny' denotes, as Tracy Strong, an outstanding Nietzsche scholar has put it, 'the failure to remember that we live in worlds that have been made: tyranny, one might say, is thus a forgetting of human agency'.

The grand vision on the development of Western thought thus continues its story into modernity, which is considered as a period in which causal or rational thinking expands its scope of application so far and wide that all phenomena in experience are taken to have become objects of rational cognition: they have become facts to be vertically organized in terms of 'stasis, discreteness, objectivity, measurability, facticity' (David Hall & Roger Ames, 105). What has in Nietzschean style been dubbed the 'tyrannical' nature of modern Western understanding thus emphasizes what on my reading is one of the fundamental charges of Hall and Ames, which entails that all dimensions of human life – including its spiritual ones – become drawn into the vortex of objectification that was to sweep over the West. On this reading, there is a sense in which modern Western thought in *all* of its possible extensions appeals to objectivity: as if all real understanding is mediated by transcendent principles and general laws, and thus hostile to the subjective and particular dimensions of immediate experience. On such a viewpoint, there is simply no place for a world-in-flux of which mythical or historical understanding can be had: the associative or narrative forms of ordering phenomena in which the latter are dependent have are held to have become outlawed under the tyrannical rule of rationalism. And that means, in other words, that Western thinking is said to disallow, by its very nature, for the possibility of historico-culturally embedded knowledge (Ibid, 17).

The Chinese Mind: aesthetics, immanence, and magic

The Chinese mind, as indicated, is then said to work in a fundamentally different way. Chinese thinking, it is argued, is 'correlative' in nature, and is therefore held to be radically antithetical to its Western counterpart. The thesis was comprehensively developed first by Marcel Granet, the early 20th century French sinologist and author of *La Pensée Chinoise* – 'one of the most influential works on China of the last century' (Heiner Roetz 2005, 51). Granet argued:

> The study of vocabulary proves the strikingly concrete character of Chinese concepts: the near totality of words denote singular ideas,

(Tracy Strong 2013, 354) I come back to Nietzsche and tyranny extensively in the fourth and fifth chapters.

> expressive of ways of being [manières d'être] that are perceived in the most particular of senses; the vocabulary describes – not the need for a [form of] thinking that classifies, abstracts, generalizes, that desires to operate in a way that is clear, distinct, and anticipates structures of logic – but rather completely the opposite, a dominant need to specify, to particularize, a drive towards the picturesque; it gives the impression that the Chinese mind operates in a way that is essentially synthetic, through recourse to concrete intuitions and not analysis – not by classifying, but by depicting. (Marcel Granet 1920, 104; my translation, DKD. See also Granet 1968)[7]

Correlative thinking, on the viewpoint of Granet, distinguishes itself by prioritizing or emphasizing the singularity and particularity of immediate experience and concrete intuition. Indeed, by suggesting that Chinese language is picturesque and its thought is depictive, 'Granet seems not only to regard the difference between the European and Chinese language as incommensurable, but also to recognize the Chinese thinking to some extent as ineffable' (Fung Yiu-Ming 2010, 297). Chinese concepts – insofar as the term is at all appropriate here – are considered to lack the quality of generalized forms of representation that allow for the determination and classification of the concrete objects in experience: they seem rather singular pictures that establish non-formalizable relations to the concrete experiences or intuitions they represent. Northrop held that this does not make that Chinese thinking lacks concepts altogether, but that these should be radically differently understood. Western thinking, he suggests, works with concepts by postulation: concepts 'the meaning of which in whole or part is designated by the postulates of some specific deductively formulated theory in which [they] occur' (F.S.C. Northrop 1948, 60). Chinese thinking, on the other hand, works with concepts by intuition 'where intuition means, not a speculative hunch, but the immediate apprehension of pure empiricism, which occurs in direct inspection or pure observation' (Ibid). Or as sinologist Benjamin I. Schwartz argued: other than concepts that establish a vertical relation to their objects in the sense that they refer to a group of things classified as belonging to the same

[7] A note on the translation: 'manières d'être' can also be translated as 'way of behaving' or even 'code of conduct'; I have opted for 'way of being' because it can be read to encompass the former two.

theoretical kind, Chinese concepts do not make reference to an idea which transcends the particularity of intuition. Chinese thinking instead 'relates concrete phenomena actually perceived in our ordinary experience to each other *horizontally*' (Schwartz 1989, 352).

In a very general sense then, this reading appears to understand Chinese thinking – qua correlative, 'coordinative' or 'associative' (Joseph Needham 1969a, 280) – as a fundamentally non-theoretical form of thinking, which makes it in the supposedly ancient Greek sense also a *non-rational* one. On the reading of Granet, Graham, Schwartz cs., Chinese thinking characteristically does not order phenomena in a top-down or vertical manner: its concepts are not formal abstractions that represent and classify sets of phenomena, but rather 'selective abstractions' (David Hall & Roger Ames 1995, 177) that establish concrete correlations between particular objects as they actually appear in immediate experience. Concomitantly, the tendency to prioritize being over becoming is held to be alien to Chinese thinking. Without the assumption of a 'single-ordered world' of which a priori understanding is possible, there is no impetus to give pride of place to permanence and substance rather than change and growth. Indeed: 'The language of correlativity is the language of *process*, the only language which gets us close to the immediate sense that "all things flow" (Ibid, 138, my italics, DKD). Chinese thought, in other words, exhibits a radical rejection of transcendence and remains rather under the perpetual spell of pure *immanence*: under the spell of the 'imminent, inchoate, and thus underdetermined, penumbra of the emerging cosmic order' (Roger Ames 2016, 20), that 'does not take over what it helps to exist, but acts through action that is neither dependent or expectant of any return, and makes things develop but without exerting authority' (François Jullien 2004, 93–4).[8] And because the Chinese form of understanding is thus said to be essentially correlative and immanent rather than rational and transcendent, it is already here suggested to lack the space for developing towards thinking the kind of objectivity that was deemed so problematic in its Western counterpart – 'rejecting transcendence', namely, is held

[8] The full paragraph reads: '[T]he virtue of immanence does not take over what it helps to exist (it remains uninvolved); it acts through action that is neither dependent nor expectant of any return (without applying pressure); it makes things develop (but without exerting authority). It functions without being transcendent'.

to entail 'denying the possibility of objective, and, hence, univocal meanings' (David Hall & Roger Ames 198–9).

More specifically, Chinese thought as non-rational thought is then classified as 'aesthetic', where aesthetic thought is understood to denote a form of ordering in which meaning is assigned symbolically. Other than subsuming phenomena under one another, as the Western tradition arguably does, Chinese thinking is said to place them 'side by side in a pattern' (Joseph Needham 1969b, 280): phenomena that are understood aesthetically appear in their immediate and concrete singularity, however with a capacity to imagine links to other phenomena as well as ideas whereby they can establish correlations to adjacent phenomena as well as assert the 'all-embracing manifold' of the lifeworld in its entirety (F.S.C. Northrop 1946, 331–46). The Chinese mind, on this reading, always thinks in terms of immediate relations between *this* phenomenon or experience and *that* event or idea; it lacks the supposedly Western tendency to abstract towards general concepts that subsume various phenomena at the same time and in the same way. The immanence of Chinese thought, therewith, is of a radical kind: it is held to ground an 'alternative aesthetic conception of world order' (Roger Ames 2016, 20), a holistic one perhaps, in which the symbol serves as the only possible form of (re)presentation. This is radical because it forwards a notion of symbolic ordering that is not conscious of its own symbolism: there are *only* symbols and *everything* is a possible subject of symbolic representation, such that it is only really possible to consider the meaning that is so attributed and not the formal relation between the subjects so correlated as such (Hermann Köster 1958, 9–12; 20ff; see also Lucien Lévy-Bruhl 1948). And that means that Chinese thought is held to lack a concept of truth as well as the notion of a discrete fact altogether (Donald Munro 1969, 55; Chad Hansen 1985; Angus Graham 1989, 350). Indeed, 'in the absence of what we would take to be logically defined relationships, there is not much to discipline what appears to be a welter of disparate detail' (David Hall & Roger Ames 1995, 253)[9]; aesthetic thought and the radical immanence that

[9] Hall and Ames herein explicitly state that things such as Jorge Luis Borges' *Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge* pass as examples of aesthetic thought. The latter, which in philosophical circles became famous through Michel Foucault's quotation in the preface of his book *The Order of Things*, describes a fictional Chinese encyclopaedia in which animals are divided into: '(a) those belonging to the Emperor, (b) those that are embalmed, (c) those that are tame, (d) pigs, (e) sirens, (f) imaginary animals, (g) wild dogs, (h) those included in this classification, (i) those that are crazy-

it is said to involve seems to resist ulterior ordering of the meaning that is thus symbolically dispersed altogether. When the roof of a chariot is held to symbolize heaven and its base the earth, these do not *represent* them: they *are*, in the only meaningful sense of the term, heaven and earth (Hermann Köster 1958, 20). And that does not merely mean that Chinese thinking allows for mythical, historical, or even mystical understanding: it implies a stronger thesis. It implies, as Hall and Ames explicate, that Chinese thought is per definition embedded in the historically and culturally shared life-world, and cannot transcend or abstract from this context without losing its meaning and normativity altogether (David Hall & Roger Ames 1995, 17). Chinese thought, in other words, is said to advance precisely the kind of historico-culturally embedded understanding that Western thought is held to be hostile to.

Now, if there remained some doubts regarding the extent to which grand narratives are employed by those who consider the relation between Chinese and Western traditions in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast, I suspect these have now vanished – the position that portrays China and the West as radical opposites employs as grand a narrative as they come. The question, to which I shall shortly turn, is whether it is a "good" one: whether the oppositional narrative provides us with an internally coherent perspective from which we can look at the world in a way that empowers our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves therein. But before doing so, it is necessary to connect a few remaining dots: to get into view how precisely these considerations on Chinese and Western thinking should be understood to relate back to the normative considerations as these were discussed in the previous chapter – how, in other words, dimensions of Chinese and Western epistemology are held to impact on their normative outlook on the world and humanity's role therein.

acting, (j) those that are uncountable, (k) those painted with the finest brush made of camel hair, (l) miscellaneous, (m) those who have just broken a vase, and (n) those which, from a distance, look like flies'. This serves to illustrate that the claims about the immanent and aesthetic character of the workings of the Chinese mind are radical indeed. (see Foucault 1970, xv; Borges, 2017)

Normative implications: Chinese and Western promises of modernity

In the above, what is perceived to be the Western form of thinking was developed as a causal, *rational* form of thinking: as an activity in which reason imposes general forms of representation – concepts and conceptual schemes – upon the world as it appears in concrete and immediate experience, which allow for determination and classification such that phenomena in intuition appear as individual objects belonging to a general kind. Such conceptual ordering was said to manifest in the commitment to *transcendence* that is supposedly inherent in Western thought: its concepts order phenomena 'vertically', thereby intending to provide the grounds for objective knowledge – for subject-independent, a-historical, culture-transcending truth. This rationalism, furthermore, was not considered to be restricted to a specific domain, such as that of science: since Kant, at least on Hall and Ames' reading, made all domains of possible thought and experience subject to the rule of reason, Western thinking was said to have become oriented towards objectivity in general. That means, in other words, that reason was considered to have become tyrannical: to have become hostile towards forms of thinking or understanding, such as the traditional mythos and historia that attempted to grasp the world as it appeared in flux, because these do not meet criteria of objectivity and are therefore not considered to be genuine forms of understanding in the first place. Chinese understanding, on the other hand, as an *aesthetic* form of understanding, was said to be *immanent* in that it interacts immediately with singular objects in concrete experience. From the viewpoint of the Chinese mind, arguably, the world appears not as object of conceptual cognition but as impressionable to the provisional establishment of correlations or associations between singular and unique phenomena. Aesthetic "concepts", then, lack the character of general and abstract forms of thought: they are rather particular intuitions or images to which is ascribed the power to symbolically represent other singular phenomena in (possible) experience, and thus constitute the Chinese world as a holistically ordered whole. Indeed, Chinese thought, in its aesthetic and symbolic quality, was said to lack the notions of objectivity or truth altogether: Chinese thought was considered to be irreducibly subjective, historical, cultural – as if it cannot be abstracted from such embeddedness in the particularity of circumstance without losing its meaning and normativity.

The normative implications for the Western outlook on the world and humanity's role therein can be drawn with relative ease.[10] The line of thinking seems to proceed as follows: if we assume that, in Western thought, rationalism involves a kind of thinking in which phenomena can only appear as facts; and if we assume that, moreover, rationalism in the modern West has become tyrannical and does not tolerate alternative forms of thinking alongside itself; then the rationalism that was in first instance appropriate only for explaining the world scientifically has now become the epistemic attitude through which the Western mind works in general. The Western commitment to transcendence, in other words, is held to have become the defining feature of its thought per se. Graham in this context points to the distinction between fact and value. Because modern Western thought is committed to a categorical distinction between fact and value – committed to the principle that something is *either* a fact *or* a value but never both – and has developed such that scientific rationalism has become tyrannical, he suggests, it can no longer understand the world in terms of value *at all* (Angus Graham 1989, 350). The modern Western world, therewith, is held to have become objectified: it is suggested to have been made into a cabinet of things – reified or 'thingified', '*Verdinglicht*' (Georg Lukács 1968, 83–222) – to the extent that it appears as wholly devaluated. This latter devaluation seems also what Hall and Ames consider to be the fundamental pathology that is the practical implication of the tyrannical form of Western rationalism. A world that can only ever appear as a world of facts, a world in which phenomena are always merely individual instantiations of a general kind, they suggest, is a world wherein these phenomena appear as essentially *substitutable*: as interchangeable with other manifestations of the same concept, and thus as lacking inherent value or worth. Understanding the world in terms of things, in other words, is held to preclude the possibility of

[10] Admittedly, neither the above-engaged literature nor the discourses that were discussed in the previous chapter develop the self-reflexive links between forms of thinking and matters of thought as systematically as one might expect – perhaps the narrators feel that these are so obvious that they speak for themselves and do not need systematic explication in the first place. These links are notwithstanding relatively easily drawn, in part because they have been elaborated before: for example the Frankfurt School's narrative on the relation between rationalization and objectification and Weber's narrative on that between rationalization and disenchantment strikes many similar chords to the oppositional narrative – and will in all likelihood also have functioned as sources of inspiration in the latter's development (see e.g. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno 1997; Max Weber 1919).

phenomena appearing as valuable in their uniqueness (David Hall & Roger Ames 1987, 134–8) – the world of things, as Weber had famously put it, is a 'disenchanted' one (Max Weber 1919). But if that is so, if modern Western thought essentially rationalizes the world into objects and facts, then it does not, or does no longer, have the conceptual space for normative judgment that is not modelled after a factual one. And that means that implicit in the very fabric of the Western normative outlook on the world is a tendency of objectification, reification, devaluation, such that even if Western thought reflects upon the core normative question of what it means to live a human life, its rationalizing and objectifying structure prohibits it from grasping humanity as anything other than an abstract concept of which individual human beings appear as substitutable or interchangeable instantiations. But if this is so, if modern Western thought cannot even think what is in the normative sense *human* about humanity, then the oppositional narrative seems to have good reasons to be very suspicious of Western views on politics, morality, subjectivity indeed. Then rationalism and its commitment to transcendence have cursed Western thought such that it is bound to corrupt everything that it touches – not altogether unlike King Midas and his golden touch, who ended up petrifying even his own daughter.

Chinese epistemology is, in this context, considered to have rather opposite impact. The core of the normative implications of the nature of Chinese thinking seems to reside in that the orientation of its thought, as Granet argues, shows more of practical wisdom or 'sagesse' than of any theoretical intention (Marcel Granet 1968). Chad Hansen elaborates this by saying that Chinese thought is oriented towards a 'knowing-how' rather than a 'knowing-that', which 'need not involve conscious, propositional knowledge', but rather the skill to 'make discriminations or distinctions which have, via the attitudes that go along with the division, implications for action' (Hansen 1983, 66–7). When one knows something, on this reading, one understands what something is not in the isolated sense of what it *fact*ically is; rather, one understands the *value* of something in its embeddedness in the social context wherein human beings orient themselves practically – as creatures with the capacity to act. Indeed, Graham argues that because Chinese thinking resists the distinction between fact and value altogether, the Chinese mind 'is not yet detached from the spontaneous comparing and connecting which precedes analysis, in which expecting the same as before one is already responding in favour of it or against; in anticipating what will happen one knows

how to act' (Angus Graham 1989, 350). Because phenomena of possible experience are said to sensibly appear as singular objects that symbolize the cosmos as a whole, they seem to naturally appear as meaningful in their uniqueness: what is thought aesthetically naturally appears as valuable, or as social anthropologist John Beattie had it, as 'worth thinking' (Beattie 1965, 71).[11] Chinese thought, other than its modern Western counterpart that was said to lack the conceptual tools to grasp normative significance in the first place, is held to be a practical activity at its very core: the very Chinese way of ordering is held to prioritize the evaluative disposition that has apparently been eroded in the West. The consequence of this is that there is a supposedly irreducible 'nonsubstitutability' to the Chinese form of structuring: the phenomena that the Chinese mind is directed towards are said to per definition appear as irreplaceable particulars rather than interchangeable instantiations of a general kind (David Hall and Roger Ames 1987, 134–8). And that means that the Chinese world is not, like the Western world arguably is, a disenchanted world. Because the Chinese mind orders aesthetically rather than rationally, it seems incapable of objectification and rather appears as continuously driven to symbolically represent the *Tao* as is 'common to all things and all persons' but 'can never be experienced by itself' (F.S.C. Northrop 1946, 334–5). In its aesthetic quality and under the spell of radical immanence, Chinese thought is said to produce a world that naturally appears in all of its spontaneity, value, and uniqueness – perhaps even as enchanted or 'magical' (Herbert Fingarette 1972; Lucien Lévy-Bruhl 1986). And that, then, obviously also holds for its views on politics, morality, the human being. Since Chinese thinking is held to be essentially evaluative, the very idea of objectification is inconceivable: on the Chinese viewpoint, rather, there arguably can be no discrepancy between the aim of developing a normative understanding of humanity and his lifeworld and the "conceptual" tools in doing so. Indeed, human beings *naturally* appear as the valuable and unique creatures that they are, which significance is subsequently held to trickle down to all of the practices and (inter)actions wherein they participate (Eliot Deutsch 1982, 129 – 30; Ni Peimin 2014, 173–98). As Hall and Ames echo Graham: 'there is a real value in the correlative cosmos, since those who live in it know not only what it is, but also what is should be' (David Hall & Roger Ames 1995, 130; Angus Graham 1989, 350). And if this is indeed so, then the aesthetic character and immanence central

[11] The original reads: 'What is said symbolically must be thought to be worth saying'.

to Chinese thought make that it seems indeed radically opposed to its Western counterpart – the Chinese mind blesses rather than curses everything that it is directed towards.

From this viewpoint, it seems clearer why the differences between Chinese and Western views as these were discussed in the previous chapter are so often considered to articulate radical opposition. When Chinese and Western forms of thinking are incommensurable, then so will be the ways they think about the world and humanity's place therein: if Chinese and Western minds work in truly disparate ways, then they can be expected to uphold incommensurable views on the human being and what his place in the world can and should be too. And if there are indeed reasons to accept the latter thesis, then we should also accept that China and the West may have disparate views on what it means to live a human life and how the latter possibility can be institutionally protected and encouraged: then there may be good reasons to hold that the previously discussed differences may articulate genuine oppositions. Indeed, if there are reasons to accept that Chinese and Western perspectives on what humanity can and should be are incommensurable, then we should also allow for the possibility that China and the West have disparate views on modernity as a normative project: then there are good reasons to hold that their ideological commitments diverge to the extent that China and the West cannot be expected to map out a shared vision on a future life-world towards which they can communally work. If there is fundamental and radical difference in Chinese and Western structures of understanding and self-understanding, in other words, then there may be good reasons to think that they uphold mutually exclusive, and truly alternative concepts of modernity as well.

And prima facie it could be thought that there *do* seem to be reasons to accept that there is fundamental and radical difference in Chinese and Western forms of thinking. At this level, even much more so than on the levels discussed in the previous chapter, the narrative paints a mesmerizing picture. And, on various points at least, a compelling one for that. Its suggestion that there is a particular form of thinking that forms the origin of the pathologies of modern life as these were previously discussed, that this form of thinking is strategically or instrumentally rational in nature, and that it is the outgrowth of an older form of thought characterized by a detached, distanced attitude towards the world in perception, seems quite plausible. Indeed, its idea that beside such strategic

rationality there exists another form of understanding, a form of understanding that we may call 'aesthetic' and is immediate and focused on the singular object in intuition that can ever only be symbolically signified, seems convincing as well. And if it is so that Western thought has from its very inception exhibited a predisposition to the former kind of rationalism and has in modernity even allowed it to become tyrannical, then there seem to be good reasons to be critical towards the Western tradition as such. Inversely, if it is so that Chinese thought knows nothing of these ills, and even disallows for the possibility that things appear as anything other than valuable in their uniqueness, then there seem to be grounds for embracing the Chinese tradition as a roadmap towards a better future. Indeed, if the above-sketched perspective on Chinese and Western forms of thinking holds, then there seem to be good reasons to assume that our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves in the world will be enriched or enhanced by considering the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast. Such contrast may help us understand the source of the pathologies of modernity, and contemplate how to enable alternative, more humane ways of life in the modern world – it may help us to identify the broken modernity that we now live as merely its Western interpretation, and to try and transform it in the direction of a modernity with Chinese characteristics.

However, looks can be deceiving – and we should be especially wary of deception when looks make us promises that show uncanny correspondence to what we want to believe. And those who are disillusioned with the strategic or instrumental rationality that appears to be increasingly sedimented in the doctrines, institutions, practices of the modern world may *want* to believe that the latter is the natural outgrowth of the basic Western commitments to reason and transcendence that stand opposed to Chinese emphases on aesthetics and immanence. Those who feel that the contemporary world is broken beyond repair may *want* to believe that a modernity with Chinese characteristics promises the possibility of another way of living. Those who have lost faith in modernity may *want* to believe that there is not one, but multiple versions thereof – such that a truly human life under conditions of modernity can still be realized. And all these wants are perfectly reasonable. But want is a bad foundation for belief. Indeed, want is even a bad foundation for hope when it is directed towards a scenario that is, for whatever reason, unattainable. False hope, as Hall and Ames' purported ally Nietzsche emphasized, does not aid us in living a good life, but 'is the worst of all evils,

because it prolongs the torments of Man' (Friedrich Nietzsche 1967, Bd.2, 82). Hence, also when the above-reconstructed vision resonates with our personal thoughts and experiences – *especially* when it does so – it is crucial to scrutinize whether, beyond all of its good looks, the oppositional narrative has developed a sound philosophical story. And we are now in the position to address the latter, evaluative question.

Self-reflexivity and the hermeneutical limits to the presumption of the Other

Although the oppositional narrative on this level indeed seems to give us reasons for understanding the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and perspectives in terms of opposition rather than mere difference, there remains a variety of issues that would need to be addressed before we can take the above-reconstructed considerations as grounds to favour the multiple modernities thesis and the supposedly Chinese version thereof. In light of what was discussed in the introduction, there are various lines of questioning to which the above-reconstructed narrative can be subjected.

First of all, we may ask whether the narrative does not fly in the face of what we know to be *empirically* correct: whether it does not ignore or misrepresent relevant empirical facts, like the previously discussed 'myth of barter' misrepresented the way in which historical peoples engaged in economic interaction. We may, in this way, question whether the oppositional narrative does not make assumptions about Chinese and Western thought that contradict what we know about the ways in which human beings in Chinese and Western countries effectively lived and thought. With regards to Western thought and its supposed inherent tendencies to objectify, reify, and disenchant the world, it is not so obvious that it does. As we also noted in the previous chapter, there appear to be very good reasons to hold that there *are* fundamental pathologies to the way in which the modern West has organized its formal and/or informal institutions; pathologies, moreover, that may very well have to do with precisely the kind of strategic rationalization that the narrative here identified as a key feature of Western thought. Of course much more could (and should) be said about this, but at least prima facie the narrative's characterization of Western thought does not evidently get the empirical facts wrong. With regards to the Chinese mind and its supposed power to have the 'ten thousand things' that make up the world appear as valuable in their uniqueness,

this is somewhat more dubious. One could wonder, as we also noted in the previous chapter, why for instance the classical Confucians – but also the Daoist and Buddhist thinkers – developed such elaborate arguments *against* self-interested and instrumentalist ways of dealing with the world and its inhabitants if such phenomena did not pose a problem. Why would e.g. Confucius and Mencius frame their teachings as targeting forms of strategic reasoning if the latter was not present also in China? But if it indeed was, then the thesis that the Chinese world *naturally* appears as inherently valuable seems to ignore or even contradict relevant empirical facts.

Secondly and similarly, we may ask whether the narrative stands up to basic standards of accuracy in its discussion of relevant *historical sources*: whether it does not dismiss or distort the traditions that it takes to be representative, like for instance Hegel distorted the teachings propounded by Confucianism. And on this point, there may be reasons for scrutiny regarding the portrayal of *both* the Chinese and the Western traditions. One could wonder, for instance, to what extent it makes sense to portray the philosophy and culture of both traditions as internally unified wholes. One might just as well think that these have often shown internal *tension*: that philosophy, in both China and the West, was often a critical response to rather than mere articulation of cultural norms and practices, and that also within Chinese and Western philosophy discussion rather than plain agreement set the standard. And we may ask similar questions on the more detailed level of the philosophers and philosophies that were considered. Is it plausible to understand Immanuel Kant's project of internalizing the transcendent as if it made a certain form of rationalism tyrannical? Is it obvious to read the Confucian teachings as advocating an aesthetic worldview conditioned only by its own immanence? Both can be contested.[12] And although again much more could and should be said about this, it is clear that if suspicions of the former or the latter kind prove to be well-founded, then the oppositional narrative seems to violate basic standards of accuracy in its depiction of historical sources.

[12] I will come back to a different way of reading Immanuel Kant in the next chapter. For an alternative way of understanding the Confucian texts see especially the work of Heiner Roetz, whose philosophical project in a sense could be considered an attempt to wrest classical Confucianism from the tendency to spellbind its meaning and normativity within the confines of radical immanence. I return to such considerations in the fifth chapter, but see esp. Roetz 1992.

While such matters of empirical and historical accuracy are of course crucially important, we have set out to examine the oppositional narrative on other merits. What I want to examine, assuming for now that the narrative does not irreparably violate standards of empirical and historical accuracy, is to what extent it tells a compelling story when it is judged on its *own* terms, thus also regardless of whether it got the empirical and historical facts right: to what extent the oppositional narrative can be considered to develop an internally coherent perspective on life in the modern world that enhances our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves therein. And although this latter issue can of course not be completely disjointed from the way in which the narrative links to empirical and historical dimensions of the human life-world, it does require that we take quite different – hermeneutic – standards as decisive in measuring its philosophical quality. However, and as already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, especially also when judged in terms of its hermeneutic prowess, there are fundamental problems with the portrait that the oppositional narrative paints. I will here zoom in on the two that I deem to be the most fundamental. The first concerns the *internal consistency* in its narration, and suspects that the narrative forces itself upon a forked path of which either direction leads to incoherence; the second regards the way it tries to develop an alternative *practical* perspective, and suspects that the narrative cannot develop aesthetic orientation as an alternative as long as it insists that the Chinese worldview cannot transcend radical immanence.

As we have seen, the oppositional narrative develops its critical perspective on Western thought by way of an account of its developmental history, in which especially its purported tendency to think in rational, causal structures – to think through recourse to the transcendent – is said to spiral out of control and culminate in a modernity in which not even humanity can appear as normatively significant. In so doing, the narrative seems to claim that Western thought was *predestined* to develop the pathological tendencies of objectification, reification, devaluation from its very inception: that it was inevitable that the rationalism and transcendence ingrained in its roots would ultimately manifest in the kinds of pathologies that were identified with the modern West. Indeed, this seems to be precisely the point: precisely because of its suggestion that the Western way of thinking was doomed to produce a pathological modernity, the narrative is able to

give substance to the suggestion that it may be a good idea to reject it – to consider the possibility of a modernity on Chinese terms and what would be involved in taking steps in the latter direction. But if we hold our horses for a moment and look at the *status* of the narration as such, a pressing question imposes itself: from what *perspective*, namely, does the oppositional narrative develop this story? As Hall and Ames would be the first to concede, there can be no such thing as what Thomas Nagel has called a 'view from nowhere' (Nagel 1986). But that raises the question into the "somewhere" from whence narrative is told – and there appears our fork. At first sight, it could perhaps be thought that the viewpoint of narration is obviously that of China. This, upon closer look, however cannot be coherently upheld. The perspective of Chinese thought and its radical immanence, as we have seen, cannot abstract from the particularity of the historico-culturally embedded lifeworld without losing its meaning and normativity, and that means that it is by its very nature *incapable* of moving towards the transcendent point of view from which it can be possible to reflect upon different forms of thought – indeed, from which it can be possible for a form of thought to even reflect upon itself. As such, it cannot be upheld that the story is narrated from the viewpoint of China without simultaneously denying the description of the latter that the narrative had itself provided.

But the perspective of Western thought neither seems eligible. If the oppositional narrative developed its reflections from the viewpoint of Western thought, then it would, after all, draw upon precisely the causal, conceptual framework that it wanted to present as problematic. Indeed, the entire claim that Western thought was predestined to grow into a pathological modernity is crucially *dependent* on the validity of general rules and causal explanations; otherwise it would be incapable of at all conceptualizing the kind of determinism that it attributes to Western thought. The very thesis that Western thought was always going to produce a broken modernity is causal. But if that is so, if, considered from the perspective of Western thought, the claims concerning the inevitable decline of the West are themselves dependent on the kind of reasoning that the oppositional narrative tries to warn us for, then it can only bring home its point by simultaneously stressing that it should not be taken as compelling.

As such, the oppositional seems to run into incoherence whichever side of the fork it travels: it can only hold to recount its narration from the Chinese viewpoint at

pains of rejecting its own description of the Chinese mind, and it can only hold to do so from the Western perspective at pains of simultaneously suggesting that its claims should be mistrusted. And this problem of course repeats itself if we raise the question from whence Chinese thought is described. It is clear, as Hall, Ames, and others would be quick to agree, that this cannot adequately be done from the Western viewpoint: since the very Western thinking was said to be corrupt, it would be impossible to grasp Chinese thought from the viewpoint of the West without corrupting the former too. But neither does the Chinese viewpoint appear as eligible candidate; that would mean, after all, that what was said in the above about Chinese, aesthetic thinking should *itself* be interpreted in symbolic terms. Indeed, if the Chinese world is radically immanent and its mind capable of only symbolic ordering, then it cannot accommodate the reflexive distance needed to reflect upon its own form of thought *at all*. From a perspective that is under the spell of radical immanence, as we have seen, only provisional correlations can be established between phenomena in that appear immediately – un-mediatedly – in thought or experience. But if that is the status of what was proposed concerning Chinese thought, then the vision that the oppositional narrative develops does not propose a systematic view on how the Chinese mind really works. If the nature of the narration is itself symbolic, then the narrative itself has the status of the kind of loose and meandering 'welter of disparate detail' that is attributed to the Chinese world. But if that is indeed the way in which we should read the narrative – which seems implausible since it makes a lot of self-reflexive claims – then statements such as that Chinese and Western minds work in incommensurable ways cannot be upheld. Such statements, after all, assert what Chinese and Western thought *are* – not merely here and now, but what they are *per definition* – and that is not the kind of claim that can be made from a viewpoint of radical immanence. Et voilà – there is our fork again, and either of its paths renders the oppositional narrative hermeneutically crippled.

An additional hermeneutic difficulty appears if we heuristically pretend that the above-described difficulties can be overcome (which is a Big If, admittedly) and look at the *practical implications* of the proposals that the narrative makes vis-à-vis Chinese and Western thought. As we have seen, the narrative qualifies the Chinese mind as aesthetic: the Chinese mind is held to be incomparable to its Western counterpart in that it does not at all order thought and experience in vertical – in transcendent – terms, but rather disperses meaning symbolically and

thus grounds a radically immanent worldview. The issue is that to the extent that we can at all develop an internally coherent understanding of the Chinese alternative so described, it will not pose a very attractive one. This comes to the fore when we pause and truly try to understand what it would mean to take the claim that Chinese thought is aesthetic in the above-rehearsed sense at face value: when we try to understand what it could entail to think from a viewpoint that is immanent to the extent that it does not even allow for the reflexive distance to reflect upon its own form of thought. Does such a viewpoint enable people to develop a vision on the world wherein it appears as an assignment rather than a given? Does it enable subjects to critically reflect upon the way the world, and their own role therein, happens to be organized? Indeed, does it enable them to develop a normative view on themselves, their peers, and their environment *at all*? It seems not. The previously cited French sinologist François Jullien is explicit about this. The 'logic of immanence', he argues, makes that Chinese systems of interaction have an 'automatic nature': in the aestheticized Chinese world, he says, interaction works *mechanically*, thus without conscious intervention by human beings (François Jullien 2004, 100–103). The system, Jullien claims, 'remains *purely* mechanical: [the subject] is careful to never manifest or even feel the slightest preference, for the arbitrary nature of such subjectivity would impede the impeccable functioning of the system' (Ibid, 101).

And this seems indeed to be precisely what the oppositional narrative implies. If we take the oppositional narrative and its claims about symbolism and immanence at face value, then it provides us with a vision of Chinese thought that precludes the possibility of *agency*. Such a relation, after all, seems to presuppose that subjects have the capacity to assume at least some form of reflexive distance to the world, so that they can contemplate what the latter can and should be, and determine how to understand and orient themselves practically in light of these normative considerations. And since that is precisely what is here being denied, the portrait that the oppositional narrative paints of Chinese thought is – also if we heuristically assume that it can be made coherent at all – not very alluring. We cannot hope to change a world that we cannot criticize; we cannot criticize a world that we cannot imagine otherwise; and we cannot otherwise imagine a world to which we have no reflexive distance. The possibility of change is dependent on the ability to transcend, at least in some way, radical immanence. That also holds for change insofar as it is aesthetically perceived – like everything else, also the

aesthetic can only appear as practically significant to the extent that it is *conscious* of its own aestheticism. But this means that, insofar as it is the oppositional narrative's intention to develop a critical perspective on life under conditions of modernity that empowers us in our abilities to change the way the world is organized, in its depiction of Chinese thought it undermines its own hermeneutic prowess. And, although the story is here less interesting, that is of course precisely what it also does insofar as Western thought is concerned. If Western thought is indeed cursed such that it corrupts everything that it touches, then, in fairness, there is nothing left for Westerners to do. If the Western mind is *predestined* to produce a disenchanted world, a world wherein people cannot understand and orient themselves in a way that is in any significant sense *human*, then there are no grounds for hope. We cannot hope to change a world when the way we imagine it to be otherwise will itself be inevitably corrupted; when the way in which we criticize what is problematic about the present predicament is itself already again expressive of the problem. Indeed, we cannot even hope to gain anything by reflecting upon the world and our own place therein when the very activity of adopting a reflexive distance to the world is the source of the problematique. And this thus means that, to the extent that the oppositional narrative intends to develop a critical perspective on life under conditions of modernity that empowers our sense of agency, also in its depiction of Western thought it undermines its own project.

What this shows is that, aside from the various questions with regards to its empirical and historical accuracy, the oppositional narrative runs into substantial issues also when it is considered on its own, hermeneutic terms. The way in which it develops the opposition between Chinese and Western thought raises fundamental problems with regards to both the status of its own narration and the way in which it configures its considerations on Chinese and Western thought in the light of modernity as a problem. Both, in a sense, have to do with the oppositional narrative's tendency to overplay its hand. By setting Chinese and Western forms of thought off against each other as radical opposites, the narrative effectively deprives itself of a perspective from which it could coherently develop a vision on the workings of both types of "minds". And by developing the so-called symbolic and immanent character of Chinese thought as radical opposite to any form of rationality and transcendence that is associated with Western thinking, the narrative effectively eliminates the possibility of agency within its critical

perspective on the modern world. The oppositional narrative, in other words, seems to want to take its considerations too far: it seems to be so fixated on setting Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews up as radical oppositions, that it overlooks the importance of meeting basic hermeneutic standards in its own narration – it overlooks that, despite all of its valiant efforts to develop a critical viewpoint on what it considers Western modernity, the narration fails to paint a picture that is sufficiently coherent and practical such that we can actually use it as an interpretative scheme through which we can look at the modern world. And that is a pity.

Chapter conclusion

Having discussed the oppositional narrative insofar as it considers the relation between Chinese and Western forms of thinking, we are now in a position to more fully appreciate its ambition and scope. The narrative tries to develop a vision on life in modernity that does not merely take stock of what is wrong with it: it also attempts to show how this broken modernity has come to be what it is. And in certain, or even many regards it may very well have it right. It may very well be that a certain form of instrumental rationality underlies all of the pathologies that were discussed in the previous chapter; and it may very well be that aesthetic judgment as an alternative form of understanding could productively be employed as counterfoil here. It may also be the case that such strategic rationality took root in the Western tradition in a way that it could not in China; and it may be that aesthetic forms of understanding have traditionally been assigned philosophical priority in China in a way that these were not in the West. Indeed, there may even be reasons to consider rationalism as key characteristic of Western thought and aestheticism as that of its Chinese counterpart. All of this may very well be the case, and if that is so then these considerations provide valuable insights.

But what cannot be upheld is that Chinese and Western forms of thinking are radical *opposites*. This is, also disregarding the various empirical and historical questions that impose themselves, hermeneutically untenable – it is simply a (or many a) bridge too far. And that also means that the previously discussed differences on the levels of politics, morality, and notably subjectivity are perhaps better not considered in terms of oppositions either; without a good reason to presume that Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews exhibit radical

incommensurability in their forms of thinking, it also seems unwarranted to represent their matters of thought in terms of radical incommensurability. But that means that, taken as a whole, the oppositional narrative fails to elaborate why it could be a good idea to consider the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast. Indeed, our analysis has rather disclosed reasons *against* doing so: it seems precisely the insistence that Chinese and Western worldviews showcase radical contrast, radical incommensurability, that drew in the hermeneutic difficulties. Approaching the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and especially also their views on modernity as a normative project from the presumption that these are opposites, it seems, can be expected to harm our abilities of interpreting the world and its formal or informal institutions as something that we can change. The latter, after all, at the very least presupposes that the hermeneutic scheme that is being developed provides with an internally coherent way of interpreting the world, its problems, as well as possible sources of hope – a way that empowers our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves, that empowers our abilities to *act.* And since the oppositional narrative runs into severe problems on both counts, we should conclude that, as it stands at least, there are philosophical reasons to be very hesitant in accepting the claim that Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews, as well as their views on modernity, are radically opposed.

However, the question arises what would have been had the narrative not shot itself in the foot. Had we drawn different conclusions if the narrative had not allowed itself such a myopic focus on opposition? It is unmistakable that the narrative has developed many valuable insights in its discussion of the differences between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews. Indeed, at least on my view, a large part of the narrative reads as a chain of potentially powerful considerations. Would it not be possible to unleash their expressive power when we are a bit more careful not to violate hermeneutic standards? As said in the discussion on Marx' narrative in the introduction, narratives can very well be admissible for internal critique and revision and can evolve over time and space without losing their hermeneutic force. As such, it may be interesting to investigate the possibilities of stripping the oppositional narrative from what made it problematic, from what prevented it from developing an internally coherent practical perspective, and reworking its hermeneutic assumptions such that its

various insights could be developed and made to speak as critical and constructive forces vis-à-vis modern life and its pathologies that the narrative – in my often rightly so – diagnosed as pressing problems.

In what follows, I shall try to take some first steps in this direction.

The critical import of aesthetic judgment

We have seen in the previous chapters that the grand narrative that portrays Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives as radical opposites ultimately revolves around the presumption that there is a crucial difference between Chinese and Western forms of thinking. It suggests that Western thought is rational, orders through recourse to the transcendent, and exhibits an inherent tendency to objectification, reification, and devaluation. In this quality, Western thought is held responsible for producing a modern world whose doctrines, institutions, and practices lack humanity or humaneness where these should have been central. And the narrative suggests that the Chinese tradition, oppositely, has the intellectual resources to develop an alternative to what is thus perceived to be a typically Western modernity. It suggests that since Chinese thought is aesthetic, under the spell of radical immanence, and makes the world naturally appear as valuable in its uniqueness, a modernity on Chinese terms would provide an alternative and more humane vision on life in the modern world. Although we found that the narrative holds tremendous expressive power and at various points develops important insights on Chinese and Western traditions and their differences, it simultaneously infringed upon its own capacity for making these productive. Because the narrative seemed particularly adamant to picture China and the West as negative mirror images, it caught itself in severe hermeneutic difficulties. Approaching modernity, the source of its pathologies, as well as possible springs of hope for change from a hermeneutics of contrast seems – somewhat ironically – to *infringe* rather than improve upon the possibility of unlocking the critical and constructive potential of the insights that the oppositional narrative had put on the table. Since that, however, obviously does not mean that its entire narration should therefore be considered void, we raised the question of what could be made of the hermeneutic scheme that looks at modernity from a different approach to the relation between Chinese and Western traditions: the question of what kind of lens or frame could be developed if we drop the narrative's somewhat myopic focus on opposition, and interrelate the considerations that seemed to hold expressive force in a way that pays heed to hermeneutic requirements. This third chapter aims to take some first steps in this direction.

There are, of course, many different ways in which we could proceed at this stage. What I will do here is take up what I deem to be the narrative's primary virtues and try to synthesize these with the lessons that can be drawn from its flaws. These virtues, on my view, concern especially the narrative's general conviction that the possibility of adopting an aesthetic 'epistemic attitude' is crucially important for human beings' capacities to interpret the world and understand and orient themselves therein: that the possibility of adopting a specifically *aesthetic* stance towards the world is crucial for developing a practical perspective on the latter and one's own role therein as such. And these virtues also concern, consequently, the conviction that elaborating the aesthetic and its conditions of possibility in context of the question of modernity not only has the potential to help us understand its pathologies but also to disclose roadmaps for constructive criticism – roadmaps for imagining alternative ways of life under modern conditions. I think that this is essentially right, and that it is so in a practically significant sense. There is, of course, a subjective dimension to this, and it may very well be that there are those who are not inclined to buy into the idea that the aesthetic has any normative import. I hope, by the end of this book, to have given such readers reasons to at least entertain the possibility that aesthetic understanding may be crucial to our abilities for interpreting the modern world, but for now I will simply assume that it can indeed be worthwhile to examine this general conviction further. And as said, I thus try to synthesize this with the lessons that can be learned from the narrative's flaws: from, more precisely, the points at which it clearly ran into hermeneutic problems. This, as we have seen, *first* of all concerned a problem of *perspective*. In its account of Chinese and Western forms of thought, but also already in its account of their views on human subjectivity as discussed in the first chapter, the narrative seemingly failed to realize that it is problematic to speak of self-reflexive concepts – such as subjectivity or thought – as if these could be considered wholly independently of the perspective of the speaker: as if one can say anything about subjectivity or thought and presume that this does not reflect back on the subject who is expressing such thoughts. This clearly *is* problematic: if someone e.g. asserts that all assertions are false then this clearly must have ramifications for the status of this assertion itself. As such, any hermeneutically sound narrative that attempts to rally the aesthetic against the instrumental rationality that supposedly runs rampant in the modern world, needs to deal with these difficulties such that they do not give rise to practically detrimental inconsistencies. A *second* problem was posed by the issue of *immanence*. In its

account of the workings of the Chinese mind, the oppositional narrative claimed that its form of understanding is immanent in a very radical sense: it claimed that aesthetic understanding and its symbolic articulation are incommensurable with any form of transcendence whatsoever. But this cannot be upheld, at least not in the context of a practical engagement with modernity as a problem: radical immanence precludes the possibility of reflexive distance altogether, and thus also that of constructive criticism and even the mere imagination of things being other than they are in the here and now. Since it, as Jullien argued, implies an automaticity or even mechanism in the way people interact with the world as well as each other, radical immanence precludes the possibility that Chinese minds consider themselves as *agents*. (Jullien 2004, 100–103) And that is practically incomprehensible. As such, any hermeneutically sound attempt to develop the critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic must allow recourse to at least some form of transcendence. *Thirdly*, we encountered a problem related to the presumption of *determinism*. The oppositional narrative, most prominently in its description of Western thought but tacitly also in its assumptions on Chinese thought, appeared committed to the idea that certain forms of thought or minds *necessarily* produce certain kinds of "worlds" – more specifically, that Western thought necessarily produces a pathological world, and Chinese thought an 'enchanted' one. The issue with this, like with the previous problem, is that it straightforwardly denies basic presuppositions of agential self-understanding: since the ways in which we happen to think are apparently predestined to generate certain results, there is nothing left for us to do. And if the latter presupposition were to be integrated in subjects' hermeneutic schemes, it would have severe *negative* impact on subjects' abilities to orient themselves practically rather than enhance their capacities to interpret the world as something that they can change for the better. In this way, it is clear that any hermeneutically sound attempt to develop a vision on the pathologies of modernity must also refrain from portraying it as if all is doomed anyway – a hermeneutically compelling perspective on the world must allow for the possibility of agency.

This, still, leaves many possible ways of proceeding. An at hand option would be to consult philosophers or philosophies that have explored possibilities of understanding the role of the aesthetic as an epistemic attitude in the broader context of the way in which human beings understand and orient themselves in the world, such that its possible critical and constructive potential vis-à-vis

common, and possibly pathological interpretative schemes may be disclosed. This, however, could still be approached via different sources. What I choose to do here, is take the philosophical perspectives of *Immanuel Kant* and subsequently *Friedrich Nietzsche* as guiding. There is of course something cheeky about this: the oppositional narrative not only put forward Kant and Nietzsche as opposites, it also identified Kant as the nemesis of China and Nietzsche as its ally. As such, my choice of relevant sources is hardly normatively neutral. And in a sense, I thereby anticipate a point that I shall later on try to make in a systematic way, which concerns the way we can think about and operationalize the viewpoints of philosophers from different makings and also cultural backgrounds. But the primary reason why I choose to engage the thought of Kant and Nietzsche here, is that they both develop a perspective on the aesthetic that assigns the latter a central place in the enterprise of critique as such: Kant, as I shall attempt to make plausible, develops the capacity for aesthetic experience and judgment as a necessary precondition for the *possibility* of adopting a critical stance towards the world and our place within it, Nietzsche makes a similar point, but does so by *executing* critique himself and therein giving us an example of the kinds of hermeneutic commitments we must recognize if we are to take the aesthetic as guiding. In this chapter, I shall discuss Kant and the way in which he can be read to ascribe a central role to aesthetic judgment; in the next, I shall discuss Nietzsche and the way in which he tries to rally the aesthetic against the world as he perceives it.[1] Neither chapter is strictly meant as exegesis. As in the previous two

[1] Kant is of especially notorious in this context because of the comments he made on race in general, and on the Chinese in particular. And obviously, I fully agree that such comments are ludicrous and shameful and should never have been made. However, that does not as such provide grounds to decide that his entire philosophical programme is racist and should be ignored by contemporary thinkers with even an inkling of cross-cultural curiosity and respect. For one thing, if we consider Kant's comments on the Chinese as sufficient grounds for disregarding his philosophical project in the context of the intercultural dialogue, then we should be consistent about this and dismiss *any* philosopher who has at one point made racist, sexist, or otherwise morally dubious remarks. Suffice it to say that this will leave us with hardly any traditional resources – and not only on the part of Western philosophy, but on the part of the Chinese traditions as well. But more importantly, as careful readers we should accept the responsibility of distinguishing between things that philosophers said qua *historical* figures, which are embedded in and expressive of the various prejudices of their day and age, and qua *systematic* thinkers. Insofar as Kant's controversial comments on China go, I find it crystal clear that these belong to the former category. If Kant would have consistently taken his own philosophical project seriously he could have never made these

chapters, my purposes are primarily *hermeneutic* in nature: what I want to know how we may understand the role of the aesthetic in context of the broader question of how we can be able to change possibly pathological conditions of modern life, and what this means for our stance on the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews. I will read Kant and Nietzsche in this light. As such, it is perhaps it even best to say that I develop a *narrative* on the development of the aesthetic through recourse to the works of Kant and Nietzsche, which could be assigned a similar status as the narrative discussed in the previous chapters – I try, through discussing their works, to develop a scheme of interpretation through which a particular, aesthetically oriented, viewpoint on practical understanding and self-understanding is disclosed. But although I am thus primarily interested in developing a narrative on Kant and Nietzsche, if what follows raises some questions with regards to how e.g. Hall and Ames depict the role of Kant and Nietzsche in the development of Western thought – all the better.

What I shall more concretely do in this chapter is develop an interpretation – a narrative – of the nature and role of the aesthetic in Kant's critical philosophy, where it is my primary aim to bring out why there could be reasons to think that aesthetic judgment could be crucial for the possibility of critique: why there could be reasons to think that the aesthetic is crucial for our abilities to develop critical and constructive practical perspectives on the world and our own role therein. I will do so by reconstructing Kant's theory of judgment, and the way in which aesthetic judgment is held to relate to other (theoretical-empirical and practical-normative) epistemic attitudes to the world. As I will attempt to show, Kant assigns the aesthetic a dual role in the broader hermeneutic framework. Aesthetic judgment appears, first of all, as what Kant scholar Rudolf Makkreel has entitled a 'pre-figurative' role, in which the aesthetic judgment is advanced as the original and spontaneous hermeneutic activity without which subjects would not be

claims – nor the equally pejorative ones about for instance women, Americans, and bastard children. (It is possible that Kant, later in his life, began to realize this; at least his later writings often argue *against* the presumption of superiority of the white race and *against* the justifiability of colonialism. See Pauline Kleingeld 2007) Therefore, although I think that it is a shame that (the earlier) Kant made his racist and colonialist statements and that he should have known better, it is the systematic structure and the spirit of his philosophical system that is relevant when we want to critically and/or constructively engage Chinese and Western philosophical traditions. For a critical perspective on approaches like the one I propose see e.g. Bryan Van Norden 2017.

capable of developing their powers to consciously relate to the world at all. But the aesthetic judgment also appears, secondly, in its 'configurative' employment, and it is especially in the latter sense that the ability to judge aesthetically is considered a source of critical and constructive potential. In this latter quality, precisely the aesthetic epistemic attitude is assigned the potential to judge the world in an *open* way, to 'disinterestedly engage' visions of what it *can become*, and it is precisely the latter kind of judgment that enables the imaginative kind of reflexive distance that is perquisite for critique as such. And that provides substantial first grounds for developing the critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic in an internally coherent practical perspective on the question of modernity and Chinese and Western takes thereon – or so I shall attempt to make insightful.

But let me begin by saying a few words on how I understand Kant's general project, and especially the notion of *critique*.

Kant's critical project: balancing between dogmatism and scepticism

In the preface to the first edition of the first Critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason*[2], Kant situates the concept of 'critique' between dogmatism on the one hand, and scepticism on the other. Dogmatism, Kant explains, is a 'despotic' form of thinking that is grounded in truth claims that command approval, but cannot be proven (*CPR*, Aix; see also Bxxxv). The kind of dogmatism that Kant is concerned with is metaphysical dogmatism, and considering that he lived in 18th century Europe it seems probable that what he had in mind was especially dogmatism about God. In this line, dogmatism would for instance assume that God exists, ascribe to "him" certain properties, and consequently postulate consensus on questions regarding the meaning of life and how human beings ought to act, without leaving room for questioning the basic assumption *that* God exists and *what* properties should be ascribed to him. It is clear why dogmatism so conceived is problematic. In the case that consensus does not exist, which is especially likely

[2] References to Kant's works are given in the Akademie Ausgabe edition. *CPR* denotes the *Critique of Pure Reason*, *CPrR* denotes the *Critique of Practical Reason*, *CPJ* the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and *GMM* the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translations are, unless otherwise noted, Mary Gregor's.

concerning metaphysical questions that cannot be answered by simply pointing to the world of experience – questions about God, but also about meaning in life, whether there is an end to the cosmos, what happens after death etc. – then allowing for dogmatism is likely to lead to *enforcing* consensus. Postulating truth claims on topics on which proof is impossible is a recipe for oppression (or worse) especially in the case of disagreement, and Kant's statement that it is important that peace is brought to the 'battlefield of metaphysics' (*CPR*, Aviii) seems particularly pressing in this context. However, he anticipated that such peace cannot be expected to derive from scepticism; dogmatism's counterpart. Although Kant is sympathetic to scepticism's attitude of suspending judgment in the case of insufficient support for a given claim, he does not consider it a tenable attitude in the structural sense. Scepticism, Kant says, is not a real alternative to dogmatism: although the sceptical suspension of judgment is important because it allows for doubting dogmatic claims, it cannot itself ground an alternative *practical* outlook on life (*CPR*, Aix-Axi; see also Robert Stern 2006). Although a little scepticism can be healthy for the way in which we understand and orient ourselves in the world because it – when developed systematically – points us to the things that we *cannot* know, it does itself provide an epistemic counterweight to dogmatism because it cannot give us a positive account of how the things that we *can* know should impact on the way we live our lives. Thus, when Kant introduces critique as an attempt to offer a tertium between dogmatism on the one hand and scepticism on the other, what he essentially stresses is that it is, for philosophical purposes but also for our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves in the world more broadly, important that we are able to judge in a way that neither simply asserts that something is the case nor suspends judgment altogether.[3]

The crucial question, then, is of course what this methodological orientation of critique then involves: what *is* this critique that is supposed to hold the mean between dogmatism and scepticism? Kant says that it is a propaedeutic or

[3] This is not to suggest that Kant intends to dismiss what he calls 'dogmatic' and 'skeptical' philosophical approaches altogether. On the contrary, he comes back to these in the very last section of the first *Critique*, where he emphasizes that both can dogmatic and skeptical philosophy can be scientific and the 'history of pure reason ... is left open in the system and must be filled in the future' (*CPR* A852; B881). However, he of course still stresses that 'the critical path alone … [can] bring human reason to full satisfaction in that which has always, but until now vainly, occupied its lust for knowledge' (*CPR* A855; B883).

'preparatory' enterprise (*CPR*, Bxxxvi; B25): it aims to lay the 'groundwork' for a positive doctrine of nature, morals, man, *not* to determine all kinds of substantial commitments to e.g. metaphysical entities, moral values, features of subjectivity as such. That means that its analysis does not involve appeals to ontological entities in the attempt to establish what "really" is the case – indeed, Kant's project tries to refrain from making ontological claims in its critical analysis altogether. It involves, rather, an attempt to reconstruct the structural conditions of judgment as approached from the *internal* standpoint of the judging subject: it attempts to reconstruct what the human mind would have to be capable of if human beings are to be able to understand and orient themselves in the world, where 'mind' is taken in the broadest sense, to include e.g. 'sensation, consciousness, imagination, memory, wit, the power to distinguish, pleasure, desire' (*CPR*, A649; B677; cf. also *CPJ*, 20: 206), and the analysis proceeds from a viewpoint internal to its subject matter. Interestingly, Kant's project thus makes what was called the 'problem of perspective' central to its very enterprise: the critical project *starts* from the assumption that philosophy and understanding more broadly are self-reflexive activities, and explores the possibilities of reconstructing the preconditions or 'transcendental' conditions for judgment by critically analysing the power of judgment itself – what judgment would have to be capable of if it is not to contradict itself in ways that we encountered in the oppositional narrative. The critical project, in other words, starts from the assumption that it is important that the practical perspectives through which we interpret the world are internally coherent, but that this, precisely because of the self-reflexivity involved, is not evident and possibly even a challenge. The considerations that follow are thus not meant as assertions that can be empirically (in)validated or otherwise considered from the "outside": they are meant to describe the judgmental structures of actions *we* perform when we judge the world in the attempt to understand and orient ourselves therein, and appeal to our recognition rather than objectivity or truth. What it means to ascribe something transcendental status, then, is to hold that some judgment or perspective is *hermeneutically required*: that it can only be denied at pains of drawing inconsistencies that cripple our abilities to understand and orient ourselves in the world.

The transcendental conditions of judgment

The basic starting point of Kant's critical philosophy says that all knowledge must come in judgments, but that the capacity to judge cannot be reduced to concern only what we can know (*CPR*, A68–9; B93–4). Judgment is, roughly speaking, similar to what was entitled 'thinking' or 'understanding' in the discourses that were discussed in the previous chapter: very loosely considered, also in the Kantian vocabulary 'judgment' denotes the capacity to reflectively grasp something in thought and/or experience. More specifically, judgments are in this context understood to possess two structural features: they must have a subjective dimension, and they must be communicable. Judgments must be *subjective* in the sense that to qualify as judgment there must be a subject who is *doing* the judging: judgments must be considered in their relation to the internal perspective of the judging subject (*CPR*, A97ff; see also Christian Illies 2003, 32–5). It should be noted that 'subjective', in this context, thus does not mean arbitrary, unreliable, or something of the like. It denotes, rather, that judgments are always made by *subjects* and that, because all knowledge must come in judgments, subjectivity is also integral part of knowledge as such. Indeed, precisely because of its grounding in judgment, the Kantian viewpoint at the very get-go excludes the possibility of subject-independent knowledge – there is no place for a God's or bird's eye view, or other appeals to validity without recourse to the human perspective.[4] Judgments must be *communicable*, secondly, in that they have to appear in consciousness as something that can in principle be shared (*CPR*, A347–8/B405–6; A821/B849). That does not mean that all judgments come in propositions, or should at all be articulable in ones – quite the contrary, Kant does not think of judgments in terms of linguistic propositions at all, and even suggests that some of our most important judgments are to an extent ineffable. The point is rather that in order for something to qualify as judgment, even if complex judgments regarding e.g. the beauty of an adagio or the experience of losing a loved one are concerned, there is a sense in which it must appeal to community (*CPJ*, 5: 293–5). The Kantian viewpoint, in

[4] This is not to suggest that there are no so-called 'a priori judgments' – on the contrary, Kant is famous for *extending* the scope of what can be known a priori so that it does not merely concern analytic judgments such as 'triangles have three sides' and 'bachelors are unmarried'. But it is to say that the (in)validity of even these kinds of judgments cannot be considered as if it were independent of the perspective of the subjects making these.

other words, from the very start excludes the possibility of private judgment: it disallows for the idea that "first" there is an I that thinks, and only "subsequently" makes an appeal to others – the appeal to communicability is held to be inherent to the very moment of judgment as such.

Now, in a sense we could say that Kant's critical project then asks what it would mean to integrate these two dimensions of judgment: what would be presupposed for the subjective and communicable dimensions of judgment to appear in one, internally harmonized moment. The possibility of such harmony is important, we could think, because its absence would impede upon our capacities to orient ourselves in the world – or even render this altogether impossible. This does not mean that the Kantian position holds that our judgments must always contain a perfect balance between their subjective and communicable dimensions. Indeed, perhaps there are reasons to think that temporary disharmony between the two is sometimes necessary in order to understand ourselves as finite beings in an ever-changing world.[5] But if we could never experience such harmony, then it becomes challenging to conceive how we could be able to situate ourselves in the world at all. If human beings were per definition incapable of communicating their internal viewpoint to others, to communicate what they think, experience, and feel, then subjectivity and communication would become incomprehensible in the first place – there is a sense in which there is no subjectivity without communication, and no communication without subjectivity. And that means that, however often the two

[5] One could wonder, for instance, whether it is not sometimes important for human beings to encounter the necessity to scrutinize whether certain ideas which they always (performatively) endorsed genuinely correspond to their internal perspectives. Most of us will have had such experiences in our lives; experiences wherein we realize that we had been acting on the basis of prejudices or ideas that in some other regard suddenly appear as judgments that are not really *ours*. One could think of someone growing up in a very devout family in which it was completely self-evident that one lives a religious life, who in the process of becoming an adult begins to realize that these were his parents' reasons and not his own, and that he needs to reflect for himself where he stands on the matter. And inversely, perhaps it is sometimes important to struggle with communicating what we think or experience; to run into limits of our own communicative powers and be forced to reflect on the way in which we express ourselves to other persons – when we feel something, for instance, that we are unable to communicate to others but only recognize in a particular poem. Perhaps selective experiences of disharmony between subjectivity and communicability of judgment, for short, are conducive rather than adverse to human self-understanding.

may appear in tension, we at least have to assume that it is *possible* that subjectivity and communicability appear in harmony if we are comprehend human beings' capacities to understand and orient themselves in the world. But then the question arises what is hermeneutically necessary to assume if we are to account for this possibility.

This is not *one* question. Human beings make various different kinds of judgments; they relate to the world in different ways, via different, as we have previously put it, *epistemic attitudes*. Sometimes they adopt an inquisitive attitude towards the world around them; they e.g. study the clouds overhead in the attempt to understand what they are made of, or observe a herd of animals in an effort to learn how they behave. At other times they direct such an inquisitive attitude towards humanity itself; they wonder what it means to live a virtuous and fulfilling life, and evaluate reasons for treating their social peers in certain ways rather than others. There are also times when they contemplate their surroundings or their own reflections without any particular purpose; when they lose themselves in the ever-changing sameness of a river's flow, or imagine what it would be like to live two hundred years in the future. Kant's critical project assumes that all of these examples of judgments – these were of course but a few – are important ones; and attempts to distinguish between different sorts of such judgments in order to analyse what necessarily must be presupposed if these judgments are to be possible in the first place. On Kant's own view, unsurprisingly[6], judgments come in three general forms: theoretical or empirical, moral, and aesthetic. I discuss each in turn.

[6] Kant is famous, or perhaps rather notorious, for what might be said to be an obsession with tripartite architectonics. It is, admittedly, not unsuspicious to assume that all important things come in threes – at least some indebtedness to the Christian tradition seems at work here. The main reason why Kant assumes a tripartite distinction at this point is that he reconstructs the human reflective faculties into three kinds: understanding (*Verstand*), reason (*Vernunft*), and judgment (*Vermögen zu urteilen*), from which three different forms of judgment are taken to follow. But perhaps there are good reasons to broaden or rather narrow the list – perhaps cosmological judgments or those regarding history deserve their own category, perhaps reason in its quality of *specific* faculty of the human mind (Kant also uses 'reason' and 'understanding' to refer to the faculties of the human mind as a whole) should not be taken to ground an idiosyncratic type of judgment after all. I leave this open; for our purposes it is important to elucidate how Kantian critique goes about analysing judgment, and why we could think that the aesthetic plays a central role in this.

Subjectivity and communicability in empirical judgment

One first and basic form of judgment is what we may call 'theoretical' or 'empirical' judgment.[7] This concerns assertoric judgments about the world as it is perceived by the senses: judgments that assert that something is or is not the case with regard to our surroundings. Such judgments, in their simplest form, include for instance 'this is a cat', 'it's raining', and 'I have a few grey hairs'. On Kant's view, such judgments – like all other judgments – involve a combination between a universal and a particular: a combination between a general form or structure and a particular content or substance. A central characteristic of empirical judgments is that they are *conceptual*: the general form in question concerns a concept, or rule of thought, that is applied to an object of a particular sensible intuition, to an object that appears to us in sensible experience (*CPR*, A50–2/B74–6).[8] These concepts or rules of course are not plucked out of thin air; they are developed by human subjects, on the basis of their worldly experiences.[9] By having come into contact with cats, subjects develop a concept 'cat' that they can subsequently apply when perceiving a fluffy creature that is purring on the windowsill; by having experienced rain, subjects develop a rule of thought that enables them to classify a worldly state characterized by a vast amount of little droplets falling down and wetting their clothes; by having perceived the colour grey in various contexts, subjects can determine that some of the otherwise blonde strings growing from their scalp are now changing their appearance. Of course, these examples of concept application are a bit clumsy and artificial and should not be taken to suggest that every time we make an empirical judgment we deliberately go through all of our conceptual framework before we select which

[7] Strictly speaking, 'theoretical' and 'empirical' judgments are not equivalent: the former concerns all judgments that purport to formulate universally valid knowledge about the way the world *is*, the latter only those that do so on the basis of sensory perception. For purposes of brevity, and because non-empirical theoretical judgments do not play a more than marginal role in what follows, I will use them as interchangeable here.

[8] This should not be taken to suggest that *only* empirical judgments are conceptual; at least many a priori judgments are so as well.

[9] Kant describes the process of concept formation in terms of an act of comparison-reflection-abstraction: a search for commonalities between two or more sensible representations on the basis of an attempt to reflect their similarities and abstract from their dissimilarities. (Kant, *Logic*, 9: 9 4–5) Although a lot more can be said about concept formation in Kant, the details are on this point not directly relevant for our purposes. But see Béatrice Longuenesse 1998, 115ff

concept to apply. Indeed, to the extent that we already have the relevant concept our recognition will most of the time appear to be instantaneous, and involve not the determination of *one* concept through an object given in experience but rather the situating of this object in the broader holistically structured framework of concepts through which we judge the world for what it is. But the point is that, on the Kantian view, empirical judgment is understood in terms of *general rules* that establish meaning relations between *objects* in experience: empirical judgments allow us, as Rudolf Makkreel put it, to 'read the events of nature as a meaningful linear text' (Makkreel 2015, 106; see also *CPR*, A314/B370), and to communicate those readings on the basis of the rule-determined nature of the meaning relations between objects.

Now, in light of the way in which we have reconstructed the constituents of judgment in the above, the key question with regards to empirical judgment is how to account for the possibility of subjectivity in judgment without infringing upon the latter's objectivity. The basic issue here, and the potential problem, can be brought out by asking how human beings come to *first learn* to judge empirically: how they come to first learn how to apply rules of thought to experience.[10] The at hand example concerns the learning of children, who somewhere in the years of early infancy make the miraculous leap from possessing no concepts at all to starting to determine that object x is a bus and object y is a dog. Obviously, they cannot learn this on the basis of prior or further rules; children do not learn how to apply 'bus' or 'dog' by being explained the rules for applying rules – specifically *human* learning cannot function through the development of rules for the application of rules. As British philosopher David Bell argues in his insightful article:

> If we are to avoid the incoherence of a regressive infinity of acts of judgment, or identification, interpretation, understanding, or thought, then at some point we must judge immediately, spontaneously – and

[10] Kant is, it should be emphasized, not interested in this as a question of empirical anthropology: he is interested, rather, in the transcendental preconditions for the possibility of empirical judgment as such. That is a question, we could perhaps rather say, that belongs to 'a priori anthropology', rather than its empirical sibling. But the two are, of course, closely related. (See also Wayne Waxman 2014)

> this means without having already judged, identified, understood, or grasped a thought on the basis of any prior such act. (David Bell 1987, 226; my italics, DKD)

Learning how to determine concepts in the first place, in other words, can only follow upon an act of spontaneous and immediate – un-mediated – judgment. Learning how to apply rules of thought at all presupposes a moment wherein judgment is enacted spontaneously: wherein the subject immediately judges the world as it appears in experience in a way that enables subsequent conceptual judgment, but is not itself rule-bound. And although Kant proceeds to call this spontaneous judgment a 'blind though indispensable function of the soul' (*CPR*, A78/B103)[11] and concludes that 'the power of judgment is a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced' (*CPR*, A134/B174), we must be able to elucidate at least *something* about this seemingly paradoxical situation of a spontaneous non-conceptual judgment being the ground of conceptual judgment if we are to understand how empirical judgment is possible. Where does this primordial act that is the expression of spontaneous subjectivity come from? And how can it ground a rule-bound form of judgment that establishes meaning relations between objects? How can empirical judgment be constituted by a primordial articulation of subjectivity without infringing upon the very objectivity that makes such judgment communicable?

It is here that we find the first appearance of the *aesthetic*.[12] In addressing the question under which conditions objects can be given in harmony with human subjectivity, Kant posits the 'schema' as mediating factor. The schema in some senses resembles the empirical concept in that it is an image: a form of thought created by the imagination. But it is crucially different from the latter in that it is not a reflection of the intuition of an object but a pre-conceptual creation of the

[11] He calls this 'blind' in the sense of not cognitively accessible to rules of thought. Cf. also 'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind' (*CPR*, A51/B76).

[12] It should be recalled that what follows is – like almost everything that can be said on Kant – controversial. Although it is clear, especially from the introductions to the third *Critique*, that Kant thought the first *Critique* had not quite solved a problem regarding judgment, I am doubtful whether many interpreters of Kantian philosophy would be prepared to ascribe aesthetic status to the schemata. I think that they should, though, but it is not the time and place to explicitly argue for this – elaborating the basic structure of this reading will have to do.

productive imagination: the schema is an image created in response to the world that 'pre-figures', as Makkreel says, our conceptually mediated experience of it (*CPR*, A137–42/B176–81; Rudolf Makkreel 2015, 106–8).[13] This suggests that consciousness does not enter at the stage only when the capacity for conceptual judgment is developed, but is prior to the appearance of the 'I-think' that is said to accompany all of our representations: human beings, insofar as they are judging beings, must already have some form of conscious perception of their surroundings before they are able to develop and apply rules of thought. (*CPR*, B132) Kant suggests that this consciousness does not, as will be the case insofar as conceptual judgment is concerned, regard singular intuitions, but rather regards 'the unity of *all* the manifold of intuition' (*CPR*, A145/B185; my italics, DKD)[14]: pre-reflective consciousness is suggested to concern our immediate and indeterminate surroundings indistinctly as a whole. Now, in such a pre-reflective stage our surroundings can obviously still appear in various ways; they can appear as threatening and chaotic, as safe and reliable – either way, their appearance will be *felt* rather than thought. But Kant's idea here seems to be that the productive imagination can only develop schemata when the subject, in the stage of pre-reflective consciousness, feels the world in terms of *harmony*: when the human being 'finds' his own subjectivity in nature, so to speak (*CPJ*, 5: 192–3). In such cases the imagination is prompted to creatively develop images that can bridge between the consciousness of one's own subjectivity and that of one's worldly surroundings in a way that does not subordinate one to the other but is, rather, dependent on their appearing in felt harmony. It does not, thereby, commit to any cognitive or conceptual judgment about the relation between subjectivity and nature: the productive imagination merely prefigures the judgmental structure that has to be in place before it is possible to make any cognitive and conceptual judgments about such relations. Indeed, the productive imagination prefigures the judgmental structure that has to be in place to make any cognitive and conceptual judgments at all – without the spontaneously developed schemata, concepts, rules, and objects could not appear in consciousness in the first place. For Kant, as Bell concludes, 'to discover in the diversity of sensory experience a felt unity,

[13] It should be noted that I focus here on the schemata of pure *sensible* concepts, and not those of the pure concepts of the understanding.

[14] Indeed, the thought here is of course that it is only with conceptual judgment that our surroundings can appear in a mediated way, and are determined as distinct parts.

coherence, or order, which is non-cognitive and non-conceptual, […] is a necessary condition for the possibility of all rule-governed thought and judgment' (Bell 1987, 239). And as such it is the imagination in its specifically *aesthetic* employment that can manage to bridge the 'incalculable gulf' that would otherwise separate subjectivity from objectivity (*CPJ*, 5: 176–6).[15]

Now, although a lot more can be said about this, this brief sketch of the role of the aesthetic in empirical judgment suffices to reconstruct what Kant awaits us to transcendentally recognize insofar as this first form of judgment is concerned. What Kant considers hermeneutically crucial here is, first of all, that insofar as human beings make assertoric judgments about the world as they perceive it via the senses, they make *conceptual* judgments. They judge, that is, by subsuming a particular object in experience under a general rule of thought. Indeed, it is because of the conceptual nature of this form of judgment that our surroundings can appear in terms of distinct objects in the first place; and it is thus the rule-determined nature of empirical judgment that allows us to communicate those objects in perception to others. Objectivity, to Kant, thus simply means pertaining to the sensible world insofar as it is conceptually judged. However, what Kant also deems to be transcendental is the condition of possibility for such judgment: the pre-reflective consciousness of our immediate surroundings in which the latter are felt, rather than thought. Only such primordial awareness of the world in terms of feeling, it was suggested, can ground the kind of spontaneous judgment in which the imagination prefigures the judgmental structures of conceptual thought. Subjective feeling and productive imagination, therewith, become the necessary conditions for empirical judgment; and insofar as 'aesthetic' denotes precisely this dialectic between feeling and imagination, the aesthetic judgment of nature becomes the precondition for objectivity as such.

Subjectivity and communicability in moral judgment

A second form of judgment is the moral judgment. Moral judgments, so Kant, are different from empirical judgments in that they are practical or normative rather than theoretical or empirical: insofar as we judge morally we prescribe a course of action rather than state that something is (or is not) the case. Examples of simple

[15] Or better: render both as such impossible.

practical judgments are 'I should not forget to buy noodles', 'you should eat less meat', and 'we should do things that we enjoy doing' – precepts that formulate practical 'imperatives' (*GMM*, 4: 413–14). However, not all of our practical judgments are moral ones; some, or even most of our everyday practical judgments are prudential rather than moral in nature. What distinguishes one from the other, so Kant, is the *intention* that these imperatives articulate: the idea of the general purpose or end that functions as the 'universal' in the practical judgment, and determines the specific course of action that plays the role of the 'particular' (*GMM*, 4: 393–6). This intention or purpose is not always explicit; in the above-mentioned examples of practical judgments, these are for instance lacking. Full versions of these examples could read 'I should not forget to buy noodles *if I want to make noodle soup*', 'you should eat less meat *if you want to adopt a healthier lifestyle*', and 'we should do things that we enjoy doing *if we want to become happy*', where the parts that are added in italics now specify the intention or purpose towards which the imperatives are oriented and from which they derive their practical necessity. However (provided that these addenda indeed accurately describe the practical ends in question) on Kant's view all of these judgments are of an *instrumental* rather than moral nature: all of these ends, namely, 'represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a *means* to attain something else that one wills' (*GMM*, 4: 414). Making noodle soup, being healthy, and even living a happy life are to Kant still hypothetical or conditional ends: these are normative only to the extent that subjects happen to ascribe value to them.[16] If genuinely moral judgment is possible, Kant thinks, then it has to come in the form of a categorical imperative: in the form of a judgment that prescribes or prohibits a specific course of action because, and only because, it is morally right or wrong (*GMM*, 4: 415–22; 4: 433–435).

Now, the categories of the unconditionally right and wrong are thus no concepts: they cannot be inferred from experience, nor can they be applied to objects in intuition. Kant rather considers the moral categories as being *purely formal*:

[16] It should be noted that Kant thinks that happiness is of a different kind than other conditional ends: he thinks that happiness is something that *every* human being strives for, and is thus not conditional in the same sense as making noodle soup is. Still, Kant thinks that happiness can only give rise to hypothetical imperatives. For a detailed analysis of the nature and status of happiness in Kant's practical philosophy see Klaus Steigleder 2002, esp. 8–45

morality is on the principled level the *pure idea* of the morally right and wrong. Indeed, the first formulation of the categorical imperative, 'act only in accordance with that [subjective principle for action] through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law' (*GMM*, 4: 421)[17], is de facto a formulation of the very notion of a practical universalizability in the form of a prescript: it is a more detailed explication of the structure of judging that something is unconditionally right or wrong, which does not yet elaborate the substantive normative commitments that these give rise to. Kant thinks that human beings need to have the capacity to judge in terms of such practical universality, in terms of the unconditionally right and wrong, because this allows them to *systematize* the various purposes that they set. If practical judgment would be limited to instrumental judgment, then subjects would be incapable of developing a practical perspective in which their various hypothetical or conditional ends are internally related and ordered in hierarchies of relevance and normativity. Of course, part of such ordering will already be accomplished by the higher-order hypothetical judgments related to happiness: by judgments that identify a smaller set of purposes that subjects find most important, and rank the others accordingly. However, Kant's idea seems to be that they cannot account for practical understanding and orientation in its entirety; this is only possible when subjects are additionally capable of structuring their instrumental judgments in terms of categorical right and wrong, in terms of practical universalizability (*CPrR*, 5: 30; see also Dascha Düring & Marcus Düwell 2015, 52). This point has been heavily criticised in especially 20th century ethics, but Kant seems to be saying here is that moral judgment is important for the way in which people can understand and orient themselves in the world, because in so judging they transcend what they as particular human beings want and desire and try to consider their place in the world from the perspective of others. This is a basic hermeneutic point – that we can only develop a coherent practical perspective on the world when we also try to judge it through the eyes of others – and one that I find very plausible. But in any case, it is clear that moral judgment, on Kant's view, is thus in a sense considered a precondition for practical *understanding*: judging in terms of the formal categories of unconditionally right and wrong is considered as necessary

[17] Kant considers 'subjective principles for action' or 'maxims' as the subjective representations of intended actions, which in the form of full versions of practical judgments are subject to moral judgment and evaluation. (Cf. also *GMM* 4: 401)

for subjects to be able to orient themselves in light of their various instrumental purposes in the first place.

The issue that Kant seems to have struggled with, and which seems to have formed the origin of his worry whether moral judgment is at all possible, is, again, how we can comprehend that human beings first learn how to judge morally: 'from what our cognition of the unconditionally practical *starts*', as he frames it (*CPrR*, 5: 29). In some senses this problem seems similar to the issue we discussed with regards to empirical judgment: since morality, on Kant's view, is in first instance a purely formal idea, this has to be an idea that the subject gives *himself*[18] – morality cannot be taught, but only be practised.[19] But that makes that also moral judgment seems to require a miraculous leap: a leap from relating to morality as structuring principle for practical understanding to a requirement that effectively guides our subjective considerations about what to do. It seems to require, in other words, a subjective act of spontaneity by which the idea of an *unconditional* end appears in consciousness as effectively *conditional* upon the subject's own maxims. And since this judgment should now engage an idea in foro interno rather than our external surroundings (as it did with regards to the pre-reflective

[18] This is, then, also why Kant thinks that morality is grounded in autonomy – or better, that morality and autonomy in fact mean the same: autonomy or self-legislation is understood precisely as the activity of giving oneself the idea of a practical universality in the form of an imperative. (Cf. Kant, *GMM*, 4: 434–6)

[19] The two cases may at first glance appear as dissimilar: surely insofar as morality is concerned it is possible to explain what is morally right and wrong to those who appear not to possess the appropriate concepts yet? And is the moral judgment not thereby crucially different from the empirical judgment? This may indeed at first glance seem to be the case, and this is of course indeed how adults try to teach children moral character: provided that little Arya possesses concepts at all and is no longer dumb, she can be told that it is bad to steal her brother Bran's toys or hit him over the head with a heavy object. And if the penalties and/or rewards involved are sufficiently attractive to her, she might just as well listen; and as such it may *appear* that she has been taught the concepts of the morally right and wrong. However, this is in fact *not* what she has been taught. What we taught her was that certain behaviour is considered bad by certain other people, and that if she wants to avoid being punished / to be rewarded she should refrain from acting so. We have, in other words, only given her *instrumental* reasons to stop bullying her brother that compel "from the outside", and can only *hope* that she will at some point realize that there are "internal" reasons why pestering poor Bran is wrong, that compel regardless of the possible punishment and/or rewards. The latter consciousness is something that Arya cannot be taught, but can only develop herself. And that suggests that the pedagogy of empirical and moral judgment is similar after all.

consciousness that we said to be preparatory for empirical judgment) an ulterior story needs to be told that explains at least something about this enigmatic leap towards the moral.

Kant introduces his explorations on how we could understand this leap to be possible quite literally by way of a story. Suppose, he says, there is a man who is commanded by the ruler to give false testimony against an honourable person, where, if the testimony be provided, the virtuous man is executed; but where, if the man refuses to lie in order to save his own life, he himself is slain. In such a case, Kant says:

> [The man] would consider it possible to overcome his love of life, however great it may be. He would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it… (*CPrR*, 5:30; my italics, DKD)

What I take this story to illustrate is how we can understand the possibility of effective moral judgment to arise from a primordial moral consciousness.[20] Moral judgment is not plucked out of thin air; its possibility is prompted by concrete

[20] This point is usually discussed in light of the question of the notorious 'fact of reason' (*Faktum der Vernunft*) that Kant introduces in *CPrR* 5: 31, which is intended to explain how human beings can be expected to entertain the idea of morality in the first place. What I want to discuss is a related, but slightly different matter: the question of how subjects can be expected to integrate the formal idea of morality *as it is given* into their own, subjective and particular practical perspective. In light of these purposes, it should suffice to say that I here follow Pauline Kleingeld's reading of the fact of reason and proceed to discuss the issue of how consciousness of morality as such a general requirement can be made into subjective guidelines for action. That is, I accept that 'to read "*Factum*" as a fact… is to take moral consciousness as something that exists – but not as an alien fact that reason happens to be confronted with, such as the existence of a contingent parochial set of values. Rather it is to take moral consciousness as a fact that is the result of reason's [own] activity' (Pauline Kleingeld 2010, 65), and proceed to ask under which conditions such consciousness can become subjectively practical. Of course there is a sense in which these questions concern merely two moments of the same activity, and the aesthetic answer that I ascribe to the second question thus trickles down to that to the first. But to refrain from making more bold claims than strictly necessary I will not explicate possible commitments that follow from the latter idea here. (Makkreel seems to entertain a similar idea, see Rudolf Makkreel 1990, 126)

situations wherein subjects are confronted with the question of how to act.[21] These need not be as radically tragic as the situation with which our poor protagonist is confronted; any context wherein subjects are brought to reflect upon what to do in light of maxims that possibly impact on others can fulfil this role. What should happen, Kant proceeds to argue, is that these situations trigger a *feeling* in the human subject: a feeling 'that we can cognize completely a priori and the necessity of which we can have insight into' (*CPrR*, 5: 73). Confronted with the question of what to do in concrete circumstances, the idea of morality should trigger an affective response in the subject: a feeling that is related to the understanding of the possible impact that his own actions have on other people – a feeling of responsibility, we could perhaps say. This feeling can obviously appear in various forms; it can feel empowering to understand that one's actions impact on the lives of others, but it can also be intimidating, disorienting, and downright terrifying. But however we may experience this, it is clear that the way in which the consciousness of responsibility for our actions is *felt*, additional to how it is thought, will have constitutive impact on how we orient ourselves in practical contexts. Now, Kant suggests that a certain sense of *harmony* is necessary for subjects to be able to orient themselves morally: that they need to be able to experience some form of harmony between their own subjectivity and the idea of the unconditionally right and wrong in order to make the latter effectively conditional upon their maxims. They need, as Kant puts it, to experience a 'feeling of respect', of 'reverence', or 'admiration' with regards to the idea of morality before they can orient *themselves* as the bearer of moral obligation (*CPrR*, 5: 72–6). Judging that one *can do* something because he is aware that he *ought to do* it requires some form of prior confidence in one's own moral powers – and that confidence, Kant thinks, regardless of the particular affective, phenomenological states with which it is associated, is a feeling of respect that we can a priori comprehend.[22] Indeed, this confidence cannot derive from an empirical judgment;

[21] The moment wherein they 'draw up maxims of the will' to be precise. (Kant, *CPrR*, 5: 29) This, again, is *not* to suggest that Kant makes the validity of moral judgment dependent on concrete situations – on the contrary, Kant is precisely trying to ground morality in reason, not circumstance. What I mean here, rather, is that subjects' possibilities of *developing* their capacity for moral judgment in the first place *is* situationally dependent; that it is dependent on their being confronted with situations that prompt them to reflect upon the question of how to act.

[22] It is of course notoriously difficult to develop a perspective on what this at the very least presupposes. In the case of the example of Arya bullying Bran, we could at the very least say that in

since moral categories are not concepts, one can never "know" whether a certain has been in accordance with morality, or whether one has "really" developed moral character[23] – perhaps Kant here rather thinks in line with Confucius' suggestion that developing moral character is a lifelong activity.[24] That raises the question of what kind of judgment this feeling then grounds; how subjects should then judge their own sense of agency to be able to take the idea of an unconditional end as effectively conditional upon their own maxims. And that, I would suggest, can again only be possible through recourse to the *productive imagination*: through recourse to the power to imaginatively give shape to their sense of moral possibility that, not unlike its preparatory function vis-à-vis empirical judgment, could be thought to prefigure the judgmental structure that has to be in place for subjects to take morality as guideline in deliberating on how to act. But if this is so, then the imagination in its specifically *aesthetic* employment is again needed to bridge the gap between morality and subjectivity; and, more generally, the aesthetic becomes conditional on the Kantian take on moral judgment as such.

Although, again, much more can be said about this, this brief introduction of the role of the aesthetic in moral judgment suffices to understand their claims to transcendental status. What Kant deems hermeneutically required is, first, that insofar as human beings make moral judgments they make practical judgments: they make judgments that prescribe a course of action, rather than assert that

---

order for Arya to be able to consider herself under the obligation not to take a brick to Bran's head she needs to feel basically confident in her agential powers such that she is capable of choosing either to hit him or not to in relation to the anticipated consequences of her actions (e.g. Bran suffering a concussion and her conscience responding to this). But perhaps much more is required. Perhaps Arya needs to be brought up in a familial context wherein she given the feeling that her actions matter, and will continue to do so in the rest of her life – perhaps even in the similar sense that Bran's do. Perhaps if Bran and Arya are brought up in a hierarchical and patriarchal household where they are continuously reminded that Bran will grow up to become an agent whereas Arya will grow into someone whose basic responsibility is to obey, Arya can never learn the concepts of morally right and wrong. These are interesting issues; I will however not pursue them any further here – for our purposes it is especially relevant that feeling or confidence of *some* kind is needed for subjects to make the leap to the moral.

[23] 'No intuition can be put under the law of freedom', Kant says. (*CPrR*, 5: 69)

[24] Cf. 'The master said: "At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I know the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right".' (*Lunyu* 1955, II: IV)

something is (or is not) the case. And when moral rather than prudential practical judgment is concerned, the representation of a particular course of action is subsumed under the general idea of an unconditional end: under the idea of the unconditionally right or wrong. These ideas, to Kant, are purely formal: they are principles that structure practical reasoning, rather than substantial codes of conduct. But their formality also raises the question of how they can come to become *subjectively* action-guiding – again, a gap between the subjective and communicable aspects of judgment appears as the potential threat to its possibility. And what Kant thus deemed hermeneutically necessary with regards to the moral judgment, secondly, is that human beings are capable of bridging this gap: human beings need to be able to consider *themselves* as possible bearers of moral duties before they can be expected to condition their actions on the basis of a notion of the unconditionally required. But for the latter to be possible, we suggested, it is additionally necessary that they can experience a felt harmony between their own subjectivity and the representation of morality; a harmony, moreover, that the productive imagination shapes into visions on their own agency that can prefigure the structures of moral judgment. And therewith, again, the aesthetic becomes transcendentally necessary for the possibility of moral judgment per se.

Subjectivity and communicability in aesthetic judgment

In the above discussions of empirical and moral judgment we have seen that the aesthetic in Kant's critical project appeared as a propaedeutic moment: it appeared as preparatory in that it prefigures the structures that need to be in place for respectively the theoretical-empirical and practical-moral judgment to be effectively possible. However, in these appearances, although we found the role of the aesthetic to be crucial, its transcendental status remained in some sense derivative: the aesthetic was said to be necessary as precondition for *other* forms of judgment, not to directly contribute to human beings' capacities to understand and orient themselves in the world *itself*. The most explicit and elaborate appearance of the aesthetic in the critical project, however, puts it forward in precisely the latter quality: in the third of the *Critiques*, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant develops the nature and contribution of the aesthetic form of judgment in its own right. And as we shall see in the following chapter, it is especially also aesthetic judgment in its 'pure' employment that will be crucial for

our purposes of further developing an account of the aesthetic that unlocks its critical and constructive potential.

At first sight, it may appear as if aesthetic judgments, perhaps much more than empirical and moral judgments, are clear and distinct kinds of things. Aesthetic judgments, we could think, are (reducible to) judgments of the form 'x is beautiful'. However, what do we precisely mean when we make such judgments? What kind of category is 'beauty', and what do we precisely do when we ascribe it to something? Kant has a very specific understanding of aesthetic judgment or 'taste', of which judgments of beauty are indeed examples but that also includes others (*CPJ*, 5: 203–4). Other than the empirical and moral judgments that are said to be 'determining', *bestimmend*, in nature, Kant describes purely aesthetic judgments as '*reflective*', *reflektierend* (*CPJ*, 5: 208). In judging something aesthetically, subjects do not subordinate an intuition or representation of an action under a general concept or an idea; their judgments do not assert that something is the case or should be done – they do not assert *anything*, strictly speaking. In judging aesthetically, Kant says, subjects rather adopt a 'disinterested' epistemic attitude (*CPJ*, 5: 205; 208; 211): they adopt an imaginative attitude towards a phenomenon in intuition wherein they engage how the latter makes them *feel* rather than on what it is or should be, whereby the universal and the particular aspects of the judgment appear in a relation of harmony rather than subordination (*CPJ*, 5: 287). The specifically Kantian understanding of judging aesthetically, consequently, includes a very broad set of possible judgments: it can include lingering on the skyline view from a rooftop of a 50-storey building and losing oneself in the slow crescendo of Purcell's *Cold Genius* aria, but also watching the leaves blow in the park on a windy afternoon, experiencing a moment of intimacy with a person we care about, to being struck by the appearance of an everyday object that transcends its functionality. Indeed, on Kant's view it is not the nature of the *phenomenon* that makes a judgment aesthetic: it is the 'artistic proceeding' of the power of judgment as such (*CPJ*, 20: 214). And that proceeding can orient itself to whatever object in representation or intuition that the imagination is prompted to artistically engage.

To a certain extent we had already encountered this kind of aesthetic judgment in the above. The harmony central to the *pure* aesthetic judgment, however, is slightly different from its prefigurative appearance that we said to be preparatory

to moral and empirical judgment: the pure aesthetic judgment establishes a relation between our own subjectivity and worldly *phenomena* (and not a formal idea), where this relation belongs to *reflective* (rather than pre-reflective) consciousness. Indeed, the peculiarity of pure aesthetic judgment is precisely that it is disinterested but simultaneously fully conscious and focused: it expresses a disinterested state of mind in a way that presupposes already cultivated powers for empirical and moral judgment, but where the latter are present only in a backgrounded way. When we contemplate the skyline or linger on the sound of approaching thunder, it is *we ourselves* that are doing the contemplating and lingering, and in that regard our beliefs, desires, and other commitments will be in some sense present in the way we play with the phenomenon and our response to it. Simultaneously, insofar as we judge our surroundings reflectively, an *aesthetic distance* to precisely those theoretical and practical commitments is implied that gives pride of place to how the skyline and the aria affect us, and only makes this imaginative play in first instance possible (see also Dascha Düring & Marcus Düwell 2017, 64–70). The purely aesthetic judgment, in other words, is grounded in a peculiar combination of disinterested engagement; in an affective engagement with the world that is informed by the broader framework of empirical and moral judgments but is simultaneously free from everyday theoretical or practical purposes. This, then, also grounds the peculiar nature of the category that is in aesthetic judgment reflectively harmonized with a phenomenon in intuition. When we judge that something is beautiful or otherwise aesthetically impressive, so Kant, we judge that it is 'purposive without a specific purpose' (*CPJ*, 5: 226): our judgment expresses that the phenomenon strikes us as internally ordered or unified in a way, however, that we cannot determine or pin down. Indeed, when we harmonize an aesthetic category with a phenomenon in intuition, we seem to ascribe the latter a peculiar form of *indeterminacy*: we judge that the phenomenon "speaks to us" in a certain way – perhaps we even feel that it is as if it was "meant" to be apperceived by us – but where part of this judgment emphasizes that the meaning or significance of this "message" on principled grounds cannot be determined (see also Makkreel 1990, 63–5). This, Kant thinks, is ultimately what we do when we are struck by the beauty of a sunrise or the flocking behaviour of a group of birds[25]; and this is also precisely what makes our

[25] Against this background it also becomes understandable why Kant ascribes more importance to aesthetic judgments of nature than he does to the aesthetic judging of art. The latter objects, after all,

capacity for aesthetic judgment crucial to human beings' possibilities to understand and orient themselves in the world.

What such experiences of harmony between worldly phenomena and our own subjectivity can do, Kant suggests, is trigger our reflective powers to engage in a hermeneutic 'play' (*CPJ*, 5: 217): it triggers our reflective powers to judge the world as it appears to us as *open*. When we judge the world from an epistemic attitude of disinterested engagement wherein some phenomenon in intuition appears as meaningful to us, however in an indeterminate way, our reflective capacities are prompted to engage the phenomenon and the way that it affects us for no ulterior purpose than engagement itself. We are prompted to explore the quality the phenomenon has for us for no other purpose than exploration as such, to play with our powers of judgment for the sheer pleasure of it, to interpret the meaning of our experience free from any epistemic constraints other than pure imaginability. When we reflect upon something aesthetically, in other words, we *reflect* upon some worldly phenomenon with no intention whatsoever to proceed to *determine* it – judging aesthetically inspires a hermeneutic play in the sense of an open-ended interpretation. And although the power to engage the world in the latter sense is already important when it comes to the judgment of singular phenomena, it is all the more so because, Kant suggests, the hermeneutic play that is grounded in aesthetic judgment has the potential to transcend the singular context: aesthetic judgment can encourage us to establish links between different contexts of meaning and orientation. Subtle forms of being affected by the aesthetic quality of a phenomenon we apperceive may lead our mind to recall memories of times lost, imagine visions of a future that is yet to be, or picture alternative ways of relating to the present; more radical aesthetic experiences can even be held to have the power to shock us out of our everydayness and force us to rethink the way we live our lives.[26] What happens in such cases, Kant suggests, is that our *broader judgmental framework* as such appears as open to

are explicitly created with the purpose to be aesthetically experienced and judged by us; the former are not (or are they...?), which makes it all the more miraculous that they would appear in such a way.

[26] Obviously it is not merely the aesthetic experience of beauty, or even harmony in the broader sense that could have such animating effects – perhaps there are even reasons to think that the experience of ugliness, alienation, or some other form of disharmony play a more important role in prompting our hermeneutic capacities. (cf. also Martin Seel 1996)

interpretation: we are able to adopt a critical distance to our empirical beliefs and moral convictions, situate and evaluate the implications and requirements of various commitments in the context of our personal lifeworld, and 'symbolically transfer' the meaning and significance of one experience to another domain (*CPJ*, 5: 252). We are, in other words, enabled to harmonize the various dimensions and contexts of our understanding of the world and our own role therein in an open-ended way: in a way that does not pretend to have thereby established cognition, but rather affirms that harmony is always preliminary, temporary, open for reinterpretation. And the latter capacity, to beings with the capacity to reflect upon their own finitude at least, is considered crucial for the possibility to orient themselves in the world as such.[27] But if that is so, then the aesthetic judgment does not merely prefigure judgmental contexts; then it also has an indispensable role in how human beings 'configure' the different dimensions of interpretation, understanding, and orientation that in judgment appear as initially distinct (Makkreel 2015, 106).

The question that Kant at this point is left with is whether aesthetic judgment, as well as the capacity for open-ended interpretation that it grounds, can be *communicable*. And at least at first sight, it seems that we can expect Kant to be more hesitant here than he even was with the moral judgment. If aesthetic judgments, after all, are open-ended attempts to interpret the quality of meaning that phenomena have *for us* – how a thunderstorm makes us feel, what meaning a musical performance seems to articulate, or why the sea breeze smells like freedom – then it may seem at first sight rather unlikely that subjects should be able to convey these to others in the first place. Because of their complete lack of determinacy, we could wonder whether aesthetic judgments are not subjective to the extent that they lack communicability at all. Kant, however, not only thinks that they must be capable of being communicated. He even thinks that this capacity constitutes 'communal sense' as such. In the crucially important 40th paragraph of the third *Critique* he argues:

> By 'sensus communis' … must be understood the idea of a communal sense, i.e. a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes

[27] For a more detailed elaboration for the hermeneutical import of the aesthetic judgment vis-à-vis the empirical and moral judgment see Rudolf Makkreel 1990, 58–66; 125–9.

> account (a priori) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order, as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment… I say that taste can be called sensus communis with greater justice than the healthy understanding, and that the aesthetic power of judgment rather than the intellectual can bear the name of a communal sense… One could even define taste as the faculty for judging that which makes our feeling of a given representation universally communicable without the mediation by a concept. (*CPJ*, 5: 293–6; my italics, DKD)[28]

Aesthetic judgments, on Kant's view, not only lay claim to universal communicability: they claim universal communicability in the *purest* sense, in a sense that is unmediated by any concept or idea. Precisely when we try to share our interpretations of the world, or our own role therein, he explains, we communicate 'our inmost self' (*CPJ*, 5: 356): we communicate how we experience what it is like to be the particular subject that we are in the world of which we are part. And although what we thereby communicate necessarily exhibits a radical particularity[29], Kant suggests that *in* the act of interpretation we already affirm that it can be shared (*CPJ*, 20: 225; 5: 217–8; 237; 281; 294). This does not mean that we judge that something is beautiful, tragic, intimate, or a symbol for something else we necessarily judge that others will agree; we judge that they *can*, and in some indeterminate but fundamental sense also *should* – not in a moral, but in a hermeneutical sense. When we articulate in judgment what quality or meaning a phenomenon has for us, we do not interpret the phenomenon and "subsequently" ascribe universality to this judgment. Rather, just as with the empirical and moral judgment, when we make an aesthetic judgment 'we will acknowledge that one of its *essential* aspects is the claim we make upon others to share it with us' (Béatrice Longuenesse 2010, 151; my italics, DKD). Indeed,

[28] Translation by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews in the 2000 English edition published by Cambridge University Press.

[29] Other than with empirical and moral judgments whose categories both lay claim to generality – the former in the sense that it claims objectivity, the latter in the sense that it claims formality – there is a sense in which aesthetic judgments are radically particular: *you* can never have *my* feelings, not even when we use apparently similar symbolic categories to denote these.

Kant's suggestion is that there is a social or communal dimension to the way human beings reflect upon, the way they hermeneutically play with, what it feels like to be them in the world of which they are part. And if that is so, then aesthetic judgments in a very pure sense make appeal to universal communicability: they appeal to community not only to people who share our conceptual frameworks, nor to those who understand the demands of morality in comparable ways – aesthetic judgments appeal to the entire community of interpretation. And the latter, Kant suggests, is nothing less than the human community as a whole (*CPJ*, 5: 356).

Again, much more can be said about this, and it is hard not to further dwell upon the various questions that these issues raise; but for our purposes, it will have to do. In our last discussion, we saw that Kant does not consider the aesthetic merely in prefigurative terms: he ascribes aesthetic judgment transcendental status also in its configurative role. In the latter quality, the aesthetic judgment is still a form of judgment defined by the free interrelation, the free *play* of the productive imagination and the faculty of feeling. However, other than with its preparatory employment, the configurative type of aesthetic judgment presupposes an already developed framework of theoretical and practical understanding – indeed, its peculiarity and significance appear precisely in relation to the latter. The aesthetic distance to our everyday judgmental framework was said to enable us to adopt an interpretative attitude towards the latter as such: to question, challenge, personalize, and harmonize the various dimensions of interpretation and understanding into one perspective that allows us to orient ourselves in the world. The disinterested engagement and peculiar indeterminacy that we found to characterize the interplay between the faculties of feeling and productive imagination in the pure aesthetic judgment thereby form the model for open-ended interpretation as such. And since Kant thinks that the latter, although radically subjective, is communicable – universally communicable even – aesthetic judgment can lay claim to hermeneutic necessity also in its own right.

Speaking of seven mile boots: this was of course quite the speedy ride through Kant's critical project, and it probably raises more questions than I will be able to answer here. But I hope to have reconstructed a general perspective on Kant's systematic philosophy and the role of the aesthetic therein, that has maybe even shown sufficient sensitivity to technical detail such that it has become clear that

the narrative that was told on Kantian philosophy in the previous chapters is not the only possible story. In fact, I hope to have reconstructed Kant's position such that it has over the course of these considerations become clear why his approach could be worthwhile to consider in the attempt to develop an understanding of the nature, and especially also the role of the aesthetic, that could be taken as a hermeneutic model in which to ground a perspective from which we might critically and constructively engage the modernity that was in the previous chapters portrayed as problematic. Let me now try, after briefly rehearsing the main points that I want to take up from the considerations above, to bring these considerations together and sketch more concretely how we could understand the import of these reflections on the nature and the role of the aesthetic such that we may consider its possible critical and constructive potential in context of the overarching question into cross-cultural hermeneutics in the modern world.

The critical import of Kantian aesthetics

We have seen that Kant understands the aesthetic in the context of a 'dialectic within reason': aesthetic judgment was portrayed in dialectical interaction with other, 'assertoric' or 'determining' forms of judgment that were said to constitute our theoretical-empirical judgments about the way the world *is*, and our practical-normative judgments about things that *should be done*. The aesthetic was held to appear in two distinct "moments" in this dialectic. In its *prefigurative* quality, the aesthetic judgment appears as normatively prior to the determining judgment; regardless of whether the latter is considered in its theoretical or practical employment. In this appearance, the aesthetic was described as a judgmental or epistemic state of felt harmony: a state wherein our worldly surroundings and our own subjectivity appear as internally unified, where this latter unity is not the intended result of the employment of our judgmental faculties but is rather spontaneously presented by our faculty of imagination. Indeed, felt harmony denotes the awareness of a harmony in which nature or morality appears to "naturally" align itself with our own subjectivity. As an aesthetic judgment, and a pre-reflective one for that, such harmony cannot be determined and thus cannot be cognitively asserted: the unity between our own subjectivity and the natural or moral world respectively cannot be known, but only be felt. But precisely in the latter quality, the prefigurative aesthetic judgment appears as precondition for both the theoretical and the practical determining judgment – almost as if it gives

us the confidence or faith that we need to presume that the world corresponds to our human-all-too-human epistemic capacities to judge it, such that we become inspired to develop these latter capacities in the first place. Additionally, in the context that is informed by and aware of our broader framework of theoretical-empirical and practical-normative judgments, the power to judge aesthetically was described to appear as reflective rather than pre-reflective: it was described to appear in its *configurative* quality. Indeed, the feeling of harmony between worldly phenomena and our own subjectivity at this stage appears as significant precisely in its contrast with the theoretical and practical purposes that determine our everyday epistemic attitudes. At the reflective stage, the experience of aesthetic harmony appears as 'disinterested engagement': as a type of reflective engagement with the world that is peculiar because it is not guided by a specific purpose but presents itself as indeterminate or *open*. Thus, the aesthetic judgment can inspire us to engage our broader judgmental framework at large in an open-ended play: it renders accessible an epistemic position from which we can openly or freely – free from any ulterior purpose – judge the world, as well as the way we judge it as such. And in this latter quality, the aesthetic judgment thus has a configuring or reconfiguring rather than prefiguring function vis-à-vis the determining effort of conceptual thought: the power to judge aesthetically at the reflective stage allows us to question, challenge, play with the various determining judgments that constitute our conceptual framework, to establish symbolic links between different domains of understanding, and to organize and reorganize these into a meaningful and normative whole. The power to judge aesthetically, in other words, appears in its harmonizing function both prior and posterior to the power to make theoretical or practical judgments – it appears in play with the latter, we could perhaps say.

So reconstructed, the Kantian view on the aesthetic does seem to maintain many of the – on my view important – insights of the oppositional narrative. Like in the oppositional narrative, the aesthetic was here associated with spontaneity, symbolism, a communicable form of immediacy: it was portrayed as disinterested engagement, as a type of spontaneous engagement with the world as it appears in immediate experience that cannot be conceptually determined but only ever symbolically mediated and articulated. Moreover, the aesthetic attitude or stance was also here portrayed as one in which a certain harmony between our own subjectivity and our natural and lifeworldly surroundings is foregrounded, which

allows the latter to appear as valuable in ways that remain foreclosed insofar as they are considered from other, purposive epistemic attitudes. And precisely to this latter quality both approaches appear to attribute the particular critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic: the aesthetic is presented as possible locus of critique in the contrast that its reflective, harmonious engagement with the world poses to other attitudes or stances that may be the root causes of lifeworldly pathologies. The oppositional and the Kantian narrative, insofar as their views on the *nature and importance* of the aesthetic is concerned, therein, appear to showcase remarkable commonality.

Simultaneously, the Kantian view appears to elaborate its view on the *status and role* of the aesthetic in a way that dodges the hermeneutic difficulties that the oppositional narrative entangled itself in. Indeed, Kant develops the aesthetic in a way that is not only consistent with, but indeed explains how developing a critical perspective can at all be *possible*. If we understand critique essentially as a form of judgment that neither tends towards dogmatism nor scepticism, as Kant does, then critique involves a form of judgment that is neither determining or assertoric, nor a suspension of judgment altogether – then critique presupposes a third, and alternative form of judgment. And if we then proceed, with Kant, to examine the possibility of such judgment from how human beings should be able to judge if they are to have the *hermeneutic* ability to understand and orient themselves in the world in the first place, then the aesthetic appears as precisely this tertium. Alongside the basic assertoric epistemic attitudes that we can adopt with respect to the world, attitudes oriented towards determining that the world *is* or *should be* in a certain way, and the similarly basic sceptical attitude in which we rather aim to *suspend* our judgment altogether, the aesthetic attitude appears as an epistemic alternative: as an attitude in which we neither assert something nor defer judgment, but rather consider the world for what it *can* be. In judging aesthetically, we adopt a reflexive distance to the world as we know it as well as to ourselves insofar as we approach that world as cognizing beings. We disinterestedly reflect on our experience, on what it feels like to be the particular human being that we are in the concrete lifeworldly context in which we find ourselves, wherein our imagination freely plays with perspectives on and interpretations of that lifeworld: wherein it plays with recollections of the past and anticipations of the future, and develops images of how things may be otherwise than they are – wherein we consider the world as well as our own role therein for what it *may become*.

Therewith, it is especially the aesthetic judgment that discloses the hermeneutic possibilities for subjecting the way the world is organized now to critical and constructive interpretation in the first place: what our discussion of Kant has shown is that there may be good reasons to think that the *openness* of aesthetic judgment is crucial for our abilities to develop a reflexive perspective on the world and our own therein, as well as for the possibility of critique as such. Insofar as critique presupposes the ability to judge the world in a way that neither asserts that it is or should be in a certain way, nor suspends judgment altogether, critique presupposes the ability to the judge the world aesthetically: in a way that is conscious but *open*, free from any determinate purpose – indeed, then critique presupposes the ability to judge the world in a way that is limited only by the boundaries of what we can imagine.

In so reconstructing the status and role of the aesthetic, the Kantian approach dodges the various hermeneutic hurdles that troubled the oppositional narrative. Although Kant also contrasts conceptual, determining and the aesthetic, reflective form of judgment, these are not portrayed as two opposed, let alone separate forms of thinking: they are rather portrayed as epistemic attitudes that appear as dialectically interrelated within *one and the same* hermeneutic perspective – as dialectically interrelated 'within reason itself'. The aesthetic, as well as the conceptual-determining mode with which it is contrasted, appear as different epistemic stances that human beings can adopt towards the world: they do not describe predetermined hermeneutic perspectives in which subjects simply "find themselves", but different stances that one and the same subject can adopt. This is important, first of all, because it avoids what was called the 'problem of perspective'. The above-reconstructed narrative simply proposed a self-reflexive analysis of the status and role of aesthetic judgment, as considered from the requirements that need to be met if subjects are avoid inconsistencies that cripple their hermeneutic abilities. That may be a mouthful, but it is hardly mysterious. It is just to propose that, since there appear to be different ways in which human beings can judge the world and their own status therein, it may be worthwhile to direct these forms of judgment to one another: that it may be worthwhile to consider the implications of applying conceptual analysis to the power to judge aesthetically, and the significance of directing our ability of aesthetic judgment back to our (sets of) theoretical and practical judgments. But understanding the aesthetic as one among different epistemic attitudes is crucially important,

secondly, because it allows for the possibility of *agency*. It allows for the possibility that subjects can be assigned *responsibility* for the epistemic stance that they adopt towards the world, because it emphasizes that the way in which they judge the world is *up to them*. That is, of course, not to say that the way in which we judge the world is a matter of simple choice – on the contrary, the presumption that interpretation, understanding, and orientation have a central self-reflexive dimension emphasizes that it is hard for human beings to interpret the world such that they are able to practically understand and orient themselves therein. But it is to say that it cannot be the case that subjects are predetermined or 'predestined' to judge the world in certain ways: it says that we must assume that subjects themselves carry some form of responsibility for the way in which they judge the world if we are to assign the aesthetic any critical and constructive potential. And that also excludes the possibility that the aesthetic epistemic attitude is a radically 'immanent' one. As an attitude that enables us to critically and constructively reflect upon other, and thus also upon strategically-rational ways of judging the world, aesthetic judgment must necessarily be reflective: it must be able to ground the possibility of *consciously* engaging in an open-ended hermeneutic play if it is to positively impact on our abilities to develop a practical perspective on the world. And to the extent that we want to employ the aesthetic in the context of modernity as a problem that we are trying to develop a normative viewpoint on, some such link to agency – both in our attitude towards the aesthetic, and from within the aesthetic perspective as such – must be allowed for.

Therewith, the Kantian narrative effectively *endorses* what I said was the general conviction of the oppositional narrative: the conviction that the aesthetic is crucially important for human beings' capacities to interpret the world and understand and orient themselves therein, and that elaborating the aesthetic and its conditions of possibility in context of the question of modernity could help us develop critical and constructive perspectives on latter considered as a normative project. It, however, simultaneously emphasizes that the aesthetic should *not* be elaborated if it is an independent form of thought or understanding, that can by itself be seen to constitute a normative outlook on the world and humanity's role therein and that stands opposed to other forms of understanding that have radically opposed such normative commitments. The critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic, rather, comes into view precisely when it is *released* from the spell of radical immanence and considered as a form of judgment that contrasts with

other epistemic attitudes to which it is dialectically related.[30] Especially in its reflective quality, it seems, does the openness of the aesthetic judgment acquire its ability to configure and reconfigure our judgments about the way the world is and about the things that should be done; and especially the latter, then, is crucial for our abilities to develop a coherent, practical perspective on the lifeworld that presents it as open to change.

Chapter conclusion

The aesthetic may not to all readers have appeared as the most obvious resource when looking for ways to develop a critical perspective on modernity, and the works of Immanuel Kant may neither have appeared as the most obvious source of inspiration when looking to develop the aesthetic reflections of previously discussed narrative further. Life, however, is full of surprises, and it turned out that neither is as far-fetched as at first sight may have appeared. If the above-reconstructed perspective has some plausibility, then there appear to be rather firm grounds to hold that the aesthetic has rich critical and constructive potential. This critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic seemed especially to reside in its configurative quality: in the ability to break through, question, play with, contextualize, organize and reorganize the sets of theoretical and practical judgments that make up the perspectives through which we interpret the world and understand and orient ourselves therein. Indeed, in a certain regard the ability to judge aesthetically appeared as the locus of critique par excellence: as a point of reflexive distance to the world which from which we may confront the way we think things are and should be with imaginations of alternative ways in which our world could be organized – and that, ultimately, seems precisely what we intend to do when we subject something to critique.

What these reflections have therewith pointed out is that the critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic need not – as the oppositional narrative seemed to assume – be thought in terms of its capacities to "produce a better world". On the contrary, there are, as we have seen, significant hermeneutic problems with the latter kind of thesis. This potential can also, and

[30] In one sense, Theodor Adorno's aesthetic theory could be considered as an attempt to develop in detail the various forms that such a dialectic could take (Adorno 1997).

hermeneutically favourably, be considered to lie in its power to provide *human subjects* with the abilities to critically and constructively engage that world – in judgment, and possibly also in action. The latter does not, as the former perhaps does, provide a determinate picture of a better world that derives its critical and/or constructive potential from the contrast that it sketches; but the latter, unlike the former, does justice to the openness associated with the aesthetic. It shows hermeneutic sensitivity to the possibility that it may be impossible to determine what "the" aesthetic perspective looks like, but that the latter is inherently open to the interpretation of subjects themselves – and that this is precisely the point.

What these considerations, however, have not as yet shown is how we can understand this supposed critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic to function in practice. The above-reconstructed perspective, despite its systematic clarity and – at least to my view – compelling analysis of the nature and role that the aesthetic can adopt in the broader framework of the way in which human beings interpret the world and understand and orient themselves therein, remained rather abstract. Considered from Kant's own presuppositions, this is of course precisely what it meant to do. For our purposes of examining the possibilities of developing the critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic in an internally coherent *practical* perspective on the question of modernity and Chinese and Western takes thereon, a perspective that helps us understand its pathologies but also discloses roadmaps for imagining alternative ways of life under modern conditions, some further steps need to be taken. I shall try to do so in the next chapter, that as indicated will draw upon the works of Friedrich Nietzsche in developing what it could entail to rally the aesthetic against perceived pathologies in our concrete lifeworld.

Aesthetic openness as champion of life

In the previous chapter, I took up the oppositional narrative's general conviction that the aesthetic is crucial to human beings' capacities to interpret the world and to understand and orient themselves therein, and developed (what I consider to be) a potentially fruitful epistemic framework for understanding the aesthetic in this role through recourse to the works of Immanuel Kant. What was especially gained in this enterprise, aside from the merits of having at our disposal a more systematically elaborated view on the nature of aesthetic judgment and the reasons why this form of judgment could be so important to us, was an account of how the *critical* import of the aesthetic can be understood. Other than the oppositional narrative, which considered the aesthetic as a radically immanent form of thinking that "produces" a radically immanent world, the Kantian approach considered the aesthetic as part of a dialectic within reason: as part of a dialectic in which the power to judge aesthetically appears in hermeneutic play with the power to make empirical or normative assertions, and that as a whole enables subjects to understand, orient, and also reorient themselves in the world. In so doing, the Kantian approach to the aesthetic explicitly emphasizes, rather than undercuts, its hermeneutic significance: the aesthetic was held to be important precisely because it provides human subjects with the capacities to critically and constructively relate to their world – and thus to interpret it as something that can be(come) otherwise, as something that they can *change*. As such, Kant – at least as I read him – may not as unambiguously be the archenemy of Chinese modes of thought as he is sometimes presented: as least insofar as his reflections on the nature and the role of the aesthetic are concerned, the Kantian view seems to support the oppositional narrative's convictions about the centrality of the aesthetic – and it, moreover, develops these without entangling itself in the hermeneutic difficulties that the latter's fixation on setting up Chinese and Western philosophical traditions as oppositions produced. However, although the recourse to the Kantian perspective has therewith helped us to develop a systematic view on what may be called the 'epistemic foundation' of the project of employing the aesthetic as a lens through which we can critically analyse modernity, it has not yet disclosed the kinds of things that this could be expected to entail in practice. What kind of practical implications follow from ascribing the aesthetic a centrality of this kind

with regards to the ways in which we understand and orient ourselves as agents? Assuming that the aesthetic can indeed plausibly be ascribed the kind of critical and constructive potential that the Kantian view ascribes to it, what does this entail vis-à-vis the manners in which subjects should direct this constructive criticism to particular lifeworldly phenomena? Before we are in the position to explore possibilities of rallying the aesthetic against modernity, as well as those of (re)considering the relation between Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives in this light, we need to have a firmer grip on the kinds of implications we can expect to follow from assigning the aesthetic a central place in the hermeneutic frame through which we interpret the world.

There are, again, various ways in which one could go about this. What I will do here, as said, is approach these issues through recourse to the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. As previously indicated, my primary reason for doing so is that I think that the way in which Nietzsche builds further upon Kant's aesthetics can provide a particularly effective guiding thread in construing a perspective on the aesthetic as a source of critical engagement with modernity. The German philosopher – whom Paul Ricoeur aptly called a 'master of suspicion' (Ricoeur 2008, 30–5) – provides one of the most fundamental and radical examples of how one can operationalize the aesthetic as a source of constructive criticism vis-à-vis perceived threats and problems in the concrete human lifeworld. On my view at least, Nietzsche has developed *the* most fundamental, radical, and therewith insightful example of how to channel the power of aesthetic openness, conceived along more or less Kantian lines, such that it becomes a vantage point for precisely the kind of fundamental and radical critique that the oppositional narrative seemed to want to utilize it for. Of course, Nietzsche employed the aesthetic in the context of societal challenges that are substantially speaking not the same as ours. The modernity that Nietzsche tried to rally the aesthetic against was the modernity of late 19th century Northern Europe, in which God, and especially the "death" of the latter, was seen as a looming hermeneutic threat. This is obviously different from modernity considered as the urbanizing, globalizing, and technologizing world of the 21st century, in which instrumental rationality was said to run rampant and cause all sorts of infringements upon our possibilities of living a genuinely human life. Structurally speaking, however, the challenges are not so dissimilar. Indeed, also Nietzsche's narrative suspects that many of the pathologies that can characterize the human lifeworld originate from the hermeneutic schemes through

which human beings interpret the world, such that those who employ them are injured or even incapacitated to practically – or in Nietzsche's terms: 'affirmatively' – understand and orient themselves therein. As such, it seems worthwhile to consider Nietzsche also in context of "our" modernity: since Nietzsche shares both the structural diagnosis of the problem and the aesthetic orientation in mitigating it, his reflections may very well provide a fruitful blueprint for making the aesthetic *practically* effective in a hermeneutically solid perspective on modernity.

My purposes in reading Nietzsche, therein, are again not in the strict sense exegetical. There may be reasons for thinking that it is impossible to read Nietzsche specifically in a strictly exegetical manner – the philosopher himself recurrently stressed that 'one repays a teacher badly if one remains but a pupil' (Nietzsche, *TSZ* 4: 101)[1], and there is a sense in which his works only really start to disclose their content if one reads them in light of one's own hermeneutic purposes. But in any case, the viewpoint that emerges will provide a specific reading of Nietzsche, and one that attempts to systematically reconstruct his philosophical project insofar as it radicalizes the critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic as it was mapped out by Kant: insofar as it *operationalizes* the aesthetic as a hermeneutic frame through which we can look at our lifeworld and possible alternative ways of organizing it.

What I will more concretely do in the following, is to show how Nietzsche develops the aesthetic in an attempt to combat what he considers a concrete threat to the human lifeworld: to show how Nietzsche deploys the openness of the aesthetic as counterfoil to what he considers the primary way in which the human lifeworld threatens to become petrified. This latter threat, as we shall see, appears primordially as a *historical* one: the fundamental reason why humanity needs the aesthetic, Nietzsche thinks, is because it empowers us in preventing history – which for Nietzsche always denotes the way man *interprets* history – from

[1]References to Nietzsche's works will be given in the *Kritische Studienaufgabe in 15 Banden* (*KSA*) edited by Colli and Montinari, specified in terms of book, where applicable: essay, volume (Bd.), and page number. *BT* stands for *Birth of the Tragedy*, *UAH* for *The Use and Abuse of History for Life* (in *Untimely Meditations*), *TL* for *On Truth and Lies in a non-moral Sense* (in *Posthumous Publications*), *Homer's Wettkampf* (in *Posthumous Publications*), TSZ to *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *EH* to *Ecce Homo*. Translations are, unless otherwise noted, mine.

becoming hostile to life. On Nietzsche's view, man has a tendency to make history tyrannical: man tends to preserve, polish, worship history to the extent that the memory of the ways of our ancestors determines the manner we consider the present, and possibly even robs us of a future that could have been ours for the making. History, he suggests, can only become a life-affirming force when we are able to deal with it in a hermeneutically open way – and that is what the aesthetic enables us to do. The aesthetic, considered by Nietzsche not so much as the possibility of a certain form of judgment but also as an epistemic and normative model for life, enters the stage as a counterfoil for tyrannical history: as a model for dealing with the past in a way that serves life in the present and especially also the future. And although this enterprise of modelling life after art is radical or even militant, and at some points possibly dangerously so, it is precisely its militancy that makes Nietzsche's attempts to develop the critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic in a hermeneutic perspective insightful – not as interpretative scheme to blindly appropriate, but as example that discloses the kinds of commitments that practically follow if we assign the aesthetic a central role in a hermeneutic scheme for looking at modernity. What Nietzsche gives us insight into, is what it would practically entail to interpret the world and understand and orient ourselves therein through a hermeneutic frame in which the aesthetic is central: what kind of phenomena appear as threats insofar as we take aesthetic openness as central, and how the critical and constructive potential of the latter can be expected to provide a counterweight to these. And that, I will try to show, is precisely what we still need before we can link these considerations on the critical potential of the aesthetic back to the way we may productively think the relation between China and the West in context of modernity as a problem.

Let me now turn to Nietzsche's works. Before turning to the aesthetic specifically, I must say a few words on how I understand his project at large – a project that, like Kant's, is essentially *critical*.

Nietzsche's critical project: history as a problem

Nietzsche's project is not on all counts that different from Kant's. Like Kant, Nietzsche's critique is targeted at dogmatism; like Kant, Nietzsche had in mind especially dogmatism about God; and like Kant, Nietzsche considers such dogmatism to be problematic because it threatens man's sense of *agency*. Indeed,

dogmatism or 'tyranny', as we have already seen in the second chapter, for Nietzsche means the 'failure to remember that we live in worlds that have been made: tyranny, one might say, is thus a forgetting of human agency' (Tracy Strong 2013, 354). Critique, therein, also for Nietzsche concerns an activity that is essentially oriented towards gaining a point of view from which the world can be made to appear as something that we can change: as something that is open to the influence of our actions. Unlike Kant, however, Nietzsche does not employ critique in any transcendental sense: for Nietzsche, it is not enough to understand the epistemic conditions of adopting a reflexive distance to the world from which it may be judged for what it is, should, and can be. Nietzsche's critical project wants to effectively drag the lifeworldly threats to human agency before our internal court of judgment, and to sentence them when they infringe upon human beings' abilities to understand and orient themselves practically. Critique, in other words, is here thus no longer considered a strictly preparatory exercise: it is meant as an execution, also in the somewhat macabre sense of the word. And it is *history*, or rather: the consequences that particular ways of *dealing* with history have for human self-understanding, whose head is then placed on the chopping block.

Nietzsche considers history a Janus-faced beast. On the one hand, he sees history as one of the most important – if not *the* most important – dimensions of the way human beings interpret the world and their own role therein. On the other hand, he considers the way in which they tend to deal with history as deeply problematic. In the first passage of the essay 'On the Use and Abuse of History for Life', one of the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche introduces this thought in his usual, somewhat sardonically witty style:

> Observe the herd which is grazing beside you. It does not know what yesterday or today is. It springs around, eats, rests, digests, jumps up again, and so from morning to night and from day to day, with its likes and dislikes closely tied to the peg of the moment, and thus neither melancholy nor weary. To witness this is hard for man, because he boasts to himself that his human race is better than the beast and yet looks with jealousy at its happiness. For he wishes only to live like the beast, neither weary nor amid pains, and he wants it in vain, because he does not will it as the animal does. One day the man demands of the beast: "Why do you not talk to me about your

> happiness and only gaze at me?" The beast wants to answer, too, and say: "That comes about because I always immediately forget what I wanted to say". But by then the beast has already forgotten this reply and remains silent, so that the man wonders on once more. (*UAH*, 1: 248)[2]

The human being, to Nietzsche, is a historical animal. Unlike the beast, whose existence is radically immanent, man *remembers* things: he understands and orients himself in the present through recourse to interpretations of the past. This is not something that we choose to do, and can thus choose to do no longer: it is a crucial and constitutive feature of our agency and agential self-understanding. 'We are now the products of earlier generations', Nietzsche proceeds, 'we are also the products of their aberrations, passions, mistakes, and even crimes. It is impossible to loose oneself from this chain entirely' (*UAH*, 1: 270). He therewith does not mean to suggest that present generations blindly accept everything that was handed down to them, and that future ones will do the same with our forms of life. What he means, rather, is that the ways of our ancestors are written into the very structures through which we interpret, understand, and orient ourselves in the world: that the hermeneutic schemes through which we look at the world are not made by us, but are, at least in part, handed down to us by our forebears (see also Tracy Strong 2000, 20–87). Our perspectives, our truths, *we* are in an important sense the products of earlier generations, and the past, therein, lives on in the present – the past lives on in *us*. And it is important that it does: without history, we would lack the schemes or lenses through which to interpret the world as well as our own status therein in the first place. Indeed, Nietzsche suggests, historical consciousness is that which enables man to live a human life at all: historical horizons give meaning and normativity to his existence, and if man is 'incapable of drawing a horizon around himself and too egotistical to enclose his own view within an alien one, then he wastes away there, pale or weary, to an early death' (*UAH*, 1: 251). The human being is an animal that can only live a healthy life within the boundaries of historical horizons.

[2] Translation of *The Use and Abuse of History for Life* by Ian Johnston, from the 2010 English edition of the essay published by Richer Resources Publications (Arlington).

Simultaneously, and hence the grim and ominous undertone in the above-cited passage, Nietzsche thus does not think that man is necessarily very good at being a historical being. On the contrary, he describes man as being jealous of the blissful ignorance of the beast, who can roam the earth unburdened by memories. Man, on Nietzsche's view, is often weighed down by the 'huge crowd of indigestible rocks of knowledge' that history presents to him (*UAH*, 1: 272): he often perceives history as a burden rather than a blessing. There can be different reasons for this. One obvious way in which history can appear as a burden is when the specific, substantial horizons it hands down to us undercut our hermeneutic abilities: when it drops an interpretative scheme or lens into our lap that threatens rather than supports our abilities to develop a coherent practical perspective on the world. The axe that Nietzsche had to grind with Christianity, for instance, has partly to do with this: he felt that the Christian tradition exhibited a myopic fixation on eternal life in the Hereafter, negated life in *this* world, and was thus essentially 'unhealthy' as a hermeneutic framework. Those who were born and raised within Christian horizons, on Nietzsche's view, would thus be severely impeded in their abilities to develop a practical perspective on the world and their place therein, that would allow them to lead a good, a healthy life. However, another way in which history can appear as a burden – and one that is more interesting for our purposes – is when it is not the specific, substantial features of what is handed down that appear as problematic, but rather human beings' *ways of interpreting history as such*. The latter problem is of a structural kind, and is not applicable merely to 19th century Western civilization: there exists a tendency to make history tyrannical, Nietzsche suggests, which may be endemic to humanity as such. And that he considers a fundamental problem. Nietzsche explains:

> History, conceived as pure knowledge, once it becomes sovereign, would be a kind of conclusion to living and a final reckoning for humanity. Only when historical culture is ruled and led by a higher force and does not itself govern and lead does it bring with it a powerful new stream of life, a developing culture for example, something healthy with future promise. (*UAH*, 1: 257)

The structural problem with history, Nietzsche thinks, is that man has a tendency to let the past determine the present. The reason why history often appears as a

threat to agency, as something that weighs us down, is because we let it dictate how we think and act: because we assume that since things have long been and been done in a certain way, this must mean that they *ought* to be so and be done so. And that, Nietzsche thinks, is a fundamental problem indeed. Often the past that we inherit will, like (he thinks) the Christian one, have some tricky features that may have better been left where they are – in the past. But even in the hypothetical case of a perfectly healthy historical framework, Nietzsche thinks, blindly taking it as normative is a problem: life is active, the world *changes*, and that means that the perspectives through which we look at the world have to change too if they are not to quickly become 'worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins' (*TL*, 1: 881). Nietzsche thinks that looking at life from the perspective of the past alone, however worthy of reverence the latter may be, will inevitably impede our abilities to understand and orient ourselves in the present. And if Nietzsche is right to think that man – not only Western man but mankind more broadly – has a tendency towards precisely the latter, then man may have good reason to be jealous of beast indeed.

History is thus thought to pose a fundamental challenge to life, historical self-understanding to agential self-understanding: Nietzsche thinks that there is an essential tension between the historically inherited horizons from which we interpret the world and our abilities to understand and orient ourselves as active, creative beings – as agents. And he, moreover, thinks that man has traditionally shown a tendency to "solve" this tension in the wrong way: that he has shown a tendency of prioritizing history over life, of letting the past determine the present. Nietzsche's question, then, is how we may learn to otherwise respond to this challenge: how we may *change* the way in which we consider history. But the question of change, obviously, by itself presents a historical problem. After all, if, on the one hand, human beings have had a tendency of making history tyrannical and thus hostile to life, and if, on the other, this tendency is historically handed down, then how can change at all be possible? How would it be possible to rid ourselves of a pathological way of dealing with the past, if the latter is itself inscribed into the very hermeneutic schemes through which we understand and orient ourselves in the world? It seems that this could only be possible in a grand, oedipal attempt of cutting out our own eyes. But even then: if we wipe away our historical horizons completely, if we try to cleanse our memories of history, would

we then still be able to see *anything*? Nietzsche thinks not. And that raises the question of how the challenge of history may then be mitigated.[3]

Nietzsche, as said, will advance a rather radical proposal: he will try, in his own words, to 'gain a past a posteriori from which we *might* spring, as against that from which we *do* spring' (*UAH*, 1: 270) – he will try to unearth examples of lifeworlds in which people affirmed life, that may help us to *replace* the memories of the historical past that now weigh us down with ones that could have empowering effects. The method Nietzsche therein employs, he calls 'genealogy': genealogical inquiry is an attempt at investigating history, the horizons of particular forms of life, for images that may enable us to situate ourselves in the world in alternative, affirmative ways. It is, in other words, an attempt to orient ourselves towards the future by trying to remember one past in order to forget another: to 'cultivate a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature that withers the first' (*UAH*, 1: 270). And although this will remain a dangerous enterprise – since history is part of us, cutting away at it can only be done by taking the knife to our own flesh – from the viewpoint of suspicion, this is all that is open for us. Nietzsche's critical project, qua genealogical project, is thus of a radical sort. It is an attempt at reconciling history and life, historical and agential self-understanding, by trying to provide us with an image of a world in which they *were* reconciled, that we may learn to remember as if it were our *own* past – and thus rework a new past, a posteriori given to us, into a second nature that might drive out the pathological way of dealing with history that we have become accustomed to. Only thus, Nietzsche suspects, can we 'prevent the dead from burying the living' (*UAH*, 1: 264). And, as indicated, according to Nietzsche we can only do so when we learn how to deal with history in an *aesthetically open* manner.

[3] It is thus evident that history poses, to Nietzsche, a challenge with a prominent *self-reflexive* dimension. History poses a problem because mankind tends to make it tyrannical. The underlying difficulty is that this cannot "just" be fixed because the way we deal with history is part of the hermeneutic perspective that has been handed down by our forebears – it is part of our inheritance that we cannot simply discard. That suggests that it may only be possible to change the *way* we interpret history if we are able to change the way we remember the past *itself*. In a sense, this is precisely what Nietzsche proceeds to do.

The aesthetic, therewith, is also by Nietzsche advanced as prerequisite for critique. But because Nietzsche considers critique as an activity aimed to defend the possibility of human agency against concrete lifeworldly threats, and especially the threat posed by a detrimental way of dealing with something as quintessential as history, Nietzsche's way of deploying the aesthetic is different from that of Kant. Nietzsche's critical project, in which he tries to map out how we may deal with history in a life-affirming manner, is at attempt to elaborate how the latter may be possible by *showing* how it's done. Nietzsche, as we will see, will try to sketch us a "memory" of a way of life on aesthetic terms: he will try to develop an image of what life, what our lifeworld, could have been like if it were modelled after art. And he does so by approaching a certain period in Western history – that of the ancient Greeks – in a manner that is perhaps best described in terms of 'aesthetic historiography': not only does Nietzsche try to sketch us memories of a world wherein life was aesthetically oriented, the very way in which he approaches history in doing so is itself what may be called 'aesthetically open'. The Greeks that Nietzsche engages, that is, in all probability did not – at least not on all counts – *actually* live in the way in which the philosopher presents them; there is a certain artistic freedom in the way in which Nietzsche discusses the Greeks. But that is precisely the point that he, at least on my view, wants to make: that dealing with history in a way that serves life is only possible when we are prepared to take the liberty of subjecting the past to critical and creative scrutiny. This is of course a radical (some would say 'crazy') idea, but Nietzsche is dead serious about it.

In what follows I try to show how this could be taken to work, to subsequently zoom out and discuss what we may learn from Nietzsche's explorations in the project of making the aesthetic practically effective vis-à-vis modernity conceived as a problem.

Nietzsche and the Greeks: openness and truth

As is usually the case in his attempts at unearthing examples of healthier ways of life, Nietzsche turns to the ancient Greeks – or thus rather: an aesthetic-genealogical interpretation of the kind of lifeworld that they inhabited. For our purposes, two specific topics of conversation are relevant: his considerations on the aesthetically oriented epistemology in *The Birth of the Tragedy*, and his ideas

on the 'agonal' concept of agency as sketched in *Homer's Contest*. I discuss these in turn, where I attempt to make plausible that the two should be understood as entwined: that the punch of Nietzsche's engagement with the Greeks lies precisely in the idea that the openness that he connects so strongly with aesthetics is also central to the hermeneutic scheme on life that he tries to develop more generally.

The *Birth of the Tragedy*[4], Nietzsche's book on the nature and role of art in times of the ancient Greeks, is reframed by the author in the later added foreword as being a book about *pessimism*. Nietzsche asks:

> Greeks and the tragedy? Greeks and the pessimistic work of art? The finest, most beautiful, most envied race of men ever known, the people who made life seem most seductive, the Greeks – they of all people needed tragedy? Or even: art? Wherefore – Greek art?... Is pessimism necessarily a sign of decline, decay, malformation, of tired and debilitated instincts...? Is there a pessimism of strength? An intellectual preference for the hard, gruesome, malevolent, and problematic aspects of existence which comes from a feeling of well-being, from overflowing health, from an abundance of existence? … What does the tragic myth mean, particularly amongst the Greeks of the best, strongest, and bravest period? And the monstrous phenomenon of the Dionysian? And tragedy, born from the Dionysian? (*BT*, 1: 12)

Nietzsche here thus starts from the assumption that the Greeks were *healthy*: they affirmed life – 'made life most seductive' – in opposition to man who suffers from history. Why would such people, so superfluous in vitality, develop, out of all

[4] The first edition of Nietzsche's dissertation appeared in 1872 as *The Birth of the Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*; a new edition was published in 1886. The latter edition carried the somewhat modified title *The Birth of the Tragedy, or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, and contains a new foreword in the form of an 'attempt at self-criticism': a short introduction in which the later Nietzsche looks back on his first proper work, notes what he still endorses, and gives clues as to the matters on which he has now changed his views. It is especially Schopenhauerian metaphysics and Wagnerian romanticism of which Nietzsche says he regrets having allowed them to 'obscure Dionysian intimations' (*BT*, 1: 20), and for that reason in what follows I attempt to steer clear from Nietzsche's flirts with both.

possible forms of artistic expression, the tragedy? The Greek, or more specifically the Attic tragedy, recounted a story of pessimism: not the 'happily ever after' kind of tale, but rather one that recasts hope for happiness as idle.[5] Stories about the tragic fate of an Antigone or Cassandra are stories about *suffering*; they recount the undoing of a heroine who, for no fault of her own or even in spite of her heroic attempts to act virtuously, is destined to perish in way so horrible that it would have been better had she never been born (*BT*, 1: 36). Nietzsche seems fascinated by the question why a people who did not suffer but affirmed life would in their art assign pride of place to suffering, ugliness, cruelty, disharmony – 'wherefore, Greek art?' The Greeks, Nietzsche suspects, must have had some need for tragic art that explains why a people as healthy as they would be so drawn to artistic depictions of suffering.

In order to be able to address these questions Nietzsche elaborates the concepts of 'Apollonian' ('*Apollinisch*') and 'Dionysian' ('*Dionysisch*').[6] These are presented as drives, creative forces, 'artistic drives of nature' that together account for all that is, becomes, and perishes (*BT*, 1: 31) – Dionysian and Apollonian together account for the circle of life, we might say, and are also considered to drive us as we play our parts therein. I will in what follows elaborate in some detail how Nietzsche considers these drives to interact, to flesh out his idea that *art* has the unique ability to give us insight into the creative forces that drive our world.

Apollonian is described as the drive to order, to distinguish, to *limit*: it is named the 'individuating principle' that makes it possible for phenomena to at all appear

[5] On Nietzsche's view, the period of the Attic tragedy runs up until Euripides, whose realism in Nietzsche's eyes dismantled the tragedy as aesthetic phenomenon and therewith also its positive contributions to the Greeks' epistemic and ethical orientations. Since this is not directly relevant for our purposes of exploring possibilities of developing the critical potential of the aesthetic further, I will not dwell on this here.

[6] In ordinary language usage 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' would be adjectives, not nouns; not only in English but also in German. Nietzsche thus uses the terms in an idiosyncratic way, and the English language literature follows him in using these as being either adjectives or nouns (an exception is Ronald Speirs in his 1999 Cambridge University Press translation: he has 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' as adjectives and 'Apollonian' and '*Dionysiac*' as nouns. I find that the points that this might gain in clarity are immediately lost in aesthetics, and will therefore not take up Speirs' suggestion.) In what follows, I will also use 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' as denoting either a noun or an adjective.

to us, and for us to understand ourselves as subjects. Everything that appears in consciousness, Nietzsche writes, can only appear through Apollonian order: Apollo is the god of day, the lord of light who makes the world visible in the first place. This does not concern merely the world of the present: Apollo is also the fortune teller, the god of prophesy who 'governs the lovely semblance produced by the inner world of fantasy' and therewith enables us to retain memories of the past as well as develop images of the future (*BT*, 1: 27). Apollonian, for short, is presented as the drive that creates structure, harmony, order in chaos, and makes it possible for appearances to at all enter consciousness. That, however, is all that they are and will remain – *appearances*, semblance, a reality as real as the one that appears in our dreams. Such is emphasized by *Dionysian*, the opposite drive that is hostile towards all order and strives to destroy what has been created. Nietzsche describes Dionysian as a craving to 'tear apart Maya's veil' and to look the horror of chaos and contingency in the eye (*BT*, 1: 33–4). Dionysus roars that all order is but a dream, and that non-sense, darkness, *excess* stand at the cradle of things: that the order we make is *made*, and that it is just a thin epistemic line that separates the dream world from the abyss that lurks below, an abyss of 'transience, destruction … opposition and war, *becoming*, of a radical rejection of even the concept of being' (*EH*, 6: 313). An abyss that, however terrifying, exerts a pull on us: it promises an uncanny *ecstasy* in the experience of the disintegration of order, of excess, in the breaking down of even our own consciousness into primitive but powerful forces of life (*BT*, 1: 28–30). There is, Nietzsche suggests, ecstatic pleasure in the transgression; in the moment wherein all limits are eradicated and the subconscious, the intuitive takes over. And that pleasure is Dionysian.

Apollonian and Dionysian are, then, hostile and counteracting principles: where Apollo brings light, order, limit, Dionysus opens up darkness, chaos, excess – absolute unboundedness. The latter is dangerous, Nietzsche says, and in most cultures unleashes 'the very wildest of nature's beasts ... up to and including that repulsive mixture of lust and cruelty which has always struck me as the true witches' brew' (*BT*, 1: 32). As a European, it is hard not to think of carnival and agree. When unlimited, Dionysian can drive man to all kinds of horrid deeds; to vulgarity, barbarism, carnage. No stable culture can worship only Dionysus – complete and immediate disintegration are sure to befall any who try. However, Nietzsche's stresses (and continues to stress over the course of his works), that this should not lead one to the opposite conclusion that Dionysus is not worthy of

worship, that Dionysian drives should be purged, and if impossible suppressed. Dionysian is, in all its dark and unpredictable majesty, just as much part of human existence as Apollonian: chaos and order, being and becoming, darkness and light, destruction and creation, limit and excess, the conscious and the intuitive – on Nietzsche's view, both forces are equally and irreducibly part of life. But since they are essentially hostile principles, it is not self-evident how they can be accommodated in the same lifeworld. It seems that *either* Apollonian *or* Dionysian prevails: that there is either order, or the complete absence thereof – with all of the horrors that this may entail.

The Greeks, Nietzsche hypothesizes, nevertheless found a way to appease the two. Indeed, Nietzsche states that the most important moment in the Greek cult is that wherein Apollo shatters the weapons of the violent and unlimited Dionysus in a rightly timed reconciliation: in a reconciliation in and through *art* (*BT*, 1: 33). In the tragedy, he writes, order and chaos, creation and destruction appear in a brotherly union. Apollonian is the performance: the story, the act, the poetry, the dialogue – the 'Homeric' aspects of the tragedy, the form or image (*BT*, 1: 64–5). It is, as said, dreamlike: the performance creates a world of appearances, however one that it different from the one that we call actual. The Apollonian part of the tragedy presents us with an image of a different reality, a different dream: it presents us with a myth of a possible world that resembles the actual one but is on one point crucially different – it includes, even revolves around, the phenomenon of the Dionysian. In the tragedy, Dionysian is the music, the choir, the keynote, the basic tenor: it is the soul and the origin of art. Indeed, Nietzsche argues that:

> It is a matter of indisputable historical record that the only subject-matter of Greek tragedy, in its earliest form, was the sufferings of Dionysus, and that for a long time the only hero present on the stage was, accordingly, Dionysus. But one may also say with equal certainty that … Dionysus never ceased to be the tragic hero, and that all the famous figures of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus, etc., are merely masks of that original hero, Dionysus… In the way that he now speaks and acts, the god who resembles an erring, striving, suffering individual; and the fact that he appears at all with such epic definiteness and clarity, is the effect of Apollo, the interpreter of

> dreams, who interprets to the chorus its Dionysian condition by means of this symbolic appearance (*BT*, 1: 71–2).

Nietzsche considers the tragedy, and possibly art more broadly, as an internally ordered "depiction" of chaos, destruction, excess itself: art is suggested to have the capacity to give form or image to Dionysian without violating its very substance in doing so (*BT*, 1: 141–2). In actuality this is, as said, impossible; limited excess, ordered chaos, enlightened darkness, creative destruction, being and becoming – "intellectual intuition" – cannot *actually* appear since the two drives are irreducibly hostile. Human beings, tragically, cannot see life in all of its possible manifestations: they cannot see the world for what it is *and* for what it could have been – actuality always means that other possibilities are for ever closed off, and remain hidden from sight. In art, however, different rules obtain: by stating that (Greek) art is constituted by a reconciliation between Apollonian and Dionysian, Nietzsche suggests that precisely such conflicts make up the essence of the aesthetic. Art makes apparent what outside of the aesthetic sphere cannot be consciously perceived, but only experienced in the moment of transgression: it makes apparent those drives of nature that we can "normally" only access at the expense of our conscious subjectivity. Of course, also in art there is a sense in which we transgress these boundaries: we *identify* with the chorus, Nietzsche says, and therein mirror ourselves in the representation of the suffering Dionysus – the audience shares the ordeals of the cursed hero, it is in a relevant sense *present* in the acts on stage (*BT*, 1: 141–2). The aesthetic experience is, just like the experience of transgression, *ecstatic* in that it dwells on the boundaries of our own subjectivity. But since the former concerns only a limited, temporary and not a *real* identification with Dionysian, we have not thereby destroyed those boundaries altogether; we have merely temporarily unveiled them. And Nietzsche's suggestion is that exactly this aesthetic kind of ecstatically accessing the 'monstrous phenomenon of the Dionysian' made the tragedy of indispensable importance to the Greeks.

I do not mean this as if Nietzsche shares a contention that is sometimes associated with Aristotle: the contention that the tragedy was relevant to the Greeks because it produces 'katharsis' or anything of the like, because it 'purges' us of morally

problematic emotions.[7] Nietzsche explicitly distances himself from the Greek philosopher at this point, and states that the tragedy was not instrumentally relevant to making Greek sensibilities receptive to the demands of morals. Indeed, he orates, to the extent that art appears as ancilla to morality it is no longer an aesthetic phenomenon: art can only appear *as* art when it does not contribute to some ulterior morality but is '*merely* aesthetic play' (*BT*, 1: 55–6). The reason why the aesthetic access to the Dionysian was so important to the Greeks, Nietzsche says, is rather because it provided them with a source of insight or *truth* – a kind of truth that the world as it actually appears could never be able to provide. It is the unique ability of art, Nietzsche thinks, to present images of the *world of becoming* in actuality: art and only art can represent images of what-is-no-more or what-is-not-yet, of the past or the future, in the present without infringing upon their imaginative status. Art, in other words, has the unique ability to present possibilities in actuality without actualizing them, and therein to reconcile Dionysian and Apollonian drives. And because Nietzsche held that the former is just as much part of life as the latter is, there is a sense in which art becomes epistemically prior to actuality: art can interpret life, can interpret humanity, in *all* of its dimensions – and therewith becomes not merely richer and fuller than actuality can ever be, but in Nietzsche's idiosyncratic sense also *truer* (*EH*, 6: 312). The Greeks, on Nietzsche's view, ascribed such centrality to art for precisely this reason: they needed the tragedy in the first place *because* it gave them truth. Because of their 'feeling of well-being, overflowing health, abundance of existence' merely Apollonian actuality to them would have appeared as insufficient: Apollonian order by itself would have provided an altogether too *limited* representation of life to live up to their standards. The Greeks, abundant with health and life, rather, needed a world that matched their strength: a world wherein acknowledge all of the destructive, chaotic, excessive dimensions of human existence without thereby becoming overrun by the severity of the

[7] Aristotle, some interpreters say, held the idea that watching a tragic play could be morally beneficial because it allowed people to feel and experience emotions in a 'contained' environment; in a way that would not allow these to hamper their ordinary lives. So, for example, in the tragedy they could tremble with fear when the hero would suddenly be faced with a giant tiger – emotions that would not be very handy if the fate were their own; then a fight-or-flight response might be better suited. But since it is the *hero's* fate and not that of the spectator himself, Aristotle thinks it may be a good thing that he feels this emotion: this way he may 'purge' himself of the emotion of fear, without it crippling him in a real-life situation. (Aristotle 1997, 1449b21ff).

experience (*BT*, 1: 72–3). The Greeks, in other words, needed a world wherein they could see beyond actuality into the infinite abyss of sheer possibility. And that world, Nietzsche hypothesizes, was – *not* the world as it appears in ever-limited actuality – but the world of tragic art.

It is clear then, that on Nietzsche's genealogical reminiscences the tragedy, or art more generally, is not considered an indulgence: to Nietzsche's Greeks, art was basic to the way they lived their lives. Art, after all, was a source of truth: it, in Nietzsche's own terms, 'justified life' (*BT*, 1: 47) – *art* gave the Greeks a *horizon* in which to live it in the first place. This does not imply that art is a medicine to life: something to make us feel good despite all of the horrors of existence.[8] On the contrary, art was empowering *because* it showed the horrors of existence: because it showed that creation is always destructive, that order is always temporary, that harmony always pregnant with chaos – and oppositely, what wherever there is destruction, disorder, and chaos, possibilities for creation, for new forms of order and harmony are opened up. Art was empowering, in other words, because it presented Dionysus as the Janus-faced God that he is: as 'both a cruel, savage demon, and a mild, gentle ruler' (*BT*, 1: 72). Why did the Greeks, the healthiest of peoples, need the tragedy? Because it presented them the complete, spontaneous *openness* of life and all of the Dionysian horrors that this may entail, without destroying the boundaries of their subjectivity in the process.

By reconstructing art as a source of truth, as horizon, Nietzsche suggests that art will have been part and parcel of the Greek lifeworld: that it will have been constitutive for what was considered high and low, great and small, above and beyond. Aesthetic phenomena will have been just as *real* in the Greek lifeworld as the theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus was part of the Acropolis. This may be hard to imagine for us, tainted as we may be by the assumption that what is real is what happens to be actual, but this is precisely what Nietzsche is asking us to do.

[8] This is not uncontroversial: there are influential readings that hold precisely that Nietzsche understands art as such medicine. Walter Kaufmann, German-American translator and key figure in the admission of Nietzsche's thought to the American audience, for instance states that 'Tragic art was the *comfort* which the Greeks created for themselves' (Kaufmann 1974, 131; my italics DKD). For above-mentioned reasons, I think that this reading is mistaken. Cf. also Strong: 'Dionysian appears to be identified not [just] with the chaos, but with knowledge, true knowledge…' (Strong 2000, 140ff)

He is asking us to contemplate what an aesthetic horizon could mean for life: what an *epistemic* orientation towards art could entail for agency. And there, the concept of the 'agon' enters Nietzsche's stage.

Nietzsche and the Greeks: openness and agency

Nietzsche elaborates the concept of the agon (ἀγών) and the agonal society in his early essay *Homer's Contest* (*Homers Wettkampf*).[9] The first paragraph builds the hermeneutic stage along the same Dionysian lines that were discussed above. He says: 'When one speaks of "humanity" one presupposes that humanity is that which separates and distinguishes man from nature. But such a distinction does not in reality exist: the "natural" qualities and those properly called "human" ones are indissolubly entwined. Man, in his highest and noblest capacities, is but nature and bears in himself her awful twofold character' (*HC*, 1: 783). Just as in the context of art, also in context of agency Nietzsche affirms our natural instincts just as much as part of humanity as our "enlightened" Apollonian drives. And just like in the context of art, also in the context of agency he proceeds to develop the implications of this thought in genealogical dialogue with the ancient Greeks. The questions that he poses are somewhat different this time. Nietzsche asks:

> Why had the Greek sculptor to represent again and again *war and fights* in innumerable repetitions, extended human bodies whose sinews are tightened through hatred or through the recklessness of triumph, fighters wounded and writhing with pain, or the dying with the last rattle in their throat? Why did the whole Greek world exult in the fighting scenes of the Iliad? … [W]hat does a life of *fighting* and of *victory* mean? (*HC*, 1: 784–5; my italics, DKD)

Why would the abundant Greeks exhibit such a remarkable fascination with strife and war? Is this simply another depiction of the problematic aspects of existence, of Dionysian unchained, that they needed in order to affirmatively understand and

[9] I am deeply indebted to Herman Siemens and Lawrence Hatab, with whom I had the privilege to study during my research masters, in my thinking about Nietzsche's agon. I hope that my thoughts pluck at your laurels sufficiently to show my gratitude for having had such wonderful teachers.

orient themselves in the world? Or are there reasons why the struggle, the fight specifically exerted such a pull on the Greeks?

Nietzsche, of course, will suggest the latter, and in developing his position starts from a peculiar view on Greek anthropology. 'The Greek', Nietzsche says, 'is *envious* and conceives of this quality not as a blemish, but as the effect of a beneficent deity'. Indeed, 'the greater and more sublime a Greek is, the brighter in him appears the ambitious flame, devouring everybody who runs with him on the same track' (*HC*, 1: 787–8). Envy, the consuming feeling of lack or need in the face of another man's greatness, and strife, the drive to antagonistically confront this other in the attempt to take over his superiority, are said to be the Greeks' primary driving forces. This anthropological starting point is of course not unique to the Greeks; various philosophical traditions that reflected on ethics and politics have reasoned from the assumption that man has a natural proclivity to relate to his peers in antagonistic ways. Specific to the Greeks, however, is that they did not consider such antagonism to be a threat – at least, not merely a threat. Nietzsche suggests that the Greeks considered envy and strife as sources of *inspiration*: that they considered participating in relations of antagonism as enabling condition for developing their powers to the maximum of their abilities – the horseman rides faster when he is racing against an enemy, the archer shoots further when he will perish when he misses his mark. Indeed, 'Every capacity must develop through contestation' (*HC*, 1: 789) is said to be the motto of Hellenic pedagogy; and the fiercer the fight, the stronger the victor.

Envy and strife, however, can easily turn destructive – there are good reasons why thinkers in the Legalist tradition in China or the Hobbesian tradition in the West sought to find a way to neutralize these instincts. Nietzsche, of course, is aware of this. Indeed, in a sense the very question that he is eager to explore is how it may be possible to accommodate envy, strife, and related antagonistic instincts as sources of stimulation and inspiration without thereby risking the disintegration of society: how it may be possible to transform man's 'tiger-like pleasure in destruction' (*HC*, 1: 783) into a productive, creative force. Or in terms of the godly masks that Nietzsche likes to put on the stage: how to designate 'as an evil one that Eris who leads men against one another to a hostile war of annihilation, and [praise] another Eris as the good one, who as jealousy, spite, envy, incites men to

activity…'[10] And what separates the one from the other, what distinguishes the unlimited lust for destruction from the 'odium figulinum', the potter's envy, Nietzsche proceeds to argue, is the public commitment to the *agon* as the basic normative commitment of the Greek perspective on life.

By saying that the Greeks understood their lifeworld in agonal terms, Nietzsche suggests that they understood their very framework of action and interaction as structured around the idea of *victory*. The agon denotes a struggle, competition, or contest (*Wettkampf*), and by forwarding it as the basic practical principle of the Greek lifeworld Nietzsche denotes that, to the Greeks, action and agency were things in which they could and should *excel* – there is a sense in which, to Nietzsche, one can *win* at being an agent. Indeed, one wins by engaging in the play of forces of the agonal socio-political practices, and by ranking the highest as measured against publicly shared standards of judgment. Agonal interaction is in that regard not unlike a sports game. The publicly shared standards of judgment that determine what is to count as victorious or excellent will obviously differ per practice, just as they will per sport: becoming the greatest potter will require something altogether different from becoming the greatest poet, just as winning a football game requires quite different skills from winning a game of chess. The basic structure, however, is the same: understanding the lifeworld in terms of an

[10] Nietzsche describes Eris, the goddess of envy and strife, in a way that is crucially similar to the way in which Dionysus was reconstructed. Like Dionysus, Eris is taken to represent the intuitive, instinctual of the human drives: she is associated with malevolence, cruelty, hate, destruction. And like Dionysus, Eris is reconstructed as Janus-faced: as a god who, when left unlimited, wreaks utter havoc, but as a god who, when appropriately worshipped, is an altogether kind ruler. Quite unlike what we are used to, Nietzsche actually supports his claim about the Greek worship of Eris as a two-faced goddess with historical evidence. He quotes a large part of the first passage of Hesiod's *Works and Days*: 'Two Eris goddesses are on earth. One would like to praise the one Eris, just as much as to blame the other, if one uses one's reason. For these two goddesses have quite different dispositions. For the one, the cruel one, furthers evil war and feud! No mortal likes her, but under the yoke of need one pays honour to the burdensome Eris, according to the decree of the immortals. She, as the elder, gave birth to black night. Zeus the high-ruling one, however, placed the other Eris upon the roots of the earth and among men as a much better goddess. She urges even the unskilled man to work, and if one who lacks property beholds another who is rich, then he hastens to sow in similar fashion and to plant and put his house in order; the neighbour vies with the neighbour who strives after fortune. Good is this Eris to men. The potter also has a grudge against the potter, and the carpenter against the carpenter; the beggar envies the beggar, and the singer the singer'. (*HC*, 1: 786)

agonal play of forces means that, like a sports competition, it is seen as structured around shared *standards of judgment* that determine who excels – shared ideas on what it entails to be virtuous, excellent, victorious, that can be formulated in informal but also formal institutions.[11] To Nietzsche's Greeks, indeed, social and political life was a competition oriented towards excellence. There is, however, a crucial difference between the two. Unlike with a sports game, the standards on the basis of which agonal interaction is measured are described as being *themselves* open to contestation: unlike in sports, an antagonist can, after becoming victorious, change the rules of the game. By ways of an illustration Nietzsche describes the position of Plato, who engaged in competition with orators, sophists, and dramatists of his time, and after surpassing them claimed an entirely new standard of greatness that exceeds that of his predecessors. Nietzsche reconstructs Plato as saying:

> Behold, I can also do what my great rivals can; I can do it even better than they. No Protagoras has composed such beautiful myths as I, no dramatist such a spirited and fascinating whole as the Symposion, no orator penned such an oration as I put up in the Gorgias – and now I reject all that together and condemn all imitative art! (*HC*, 1: 790)

The victor, in other words, can set the standard of what is to count as good, as great, as excellent; what it means to be a great potter, a great philosopher, and ultimately a great agent, is something that is itself open to contestation. As such, agonal interaction never simply takes place *within* established socio-political practices and the various ideas on good and bad, action and agency that constitute them; it is always simultaneously *about* the normative framework in the first place. By saying that the Greeks understood their lifeworld in terms of an agon, Nietzsche is saying that the standards of judgment that constitute this lifeworld were themselves the subject of an agonal play of forces. As Dutch Nietzsche scholar Herman Siemens explains: 'What counts as victory is not predetermined or fixed outside, but *immanent* to each contest; it needs to be re-determined, defined anew in response to the dynamic course taken by each agon. ... In each

[11] Formal institutions for example are the rules and regulations of a football match, or the codes of conduct that politicians must respect; informal institutions would rather include standards of sportsmanship, or ideas on what does and does not count as dignified behaviour in political debate.

contest it is the very definition of victory that is at issue, so that each bout puts the question: "What constitutes victory?" into play'. (Herman Siemens 1998, 341)

However, as is obvious, such a lifeworld will be very fragile. It will be vulnerable especially to tyranny: to a particular standard of judgment that is becoming fixed, becoming "the" standard on the basis of which action is judged, the agon thereby facing certain death.[12] This need not necessarily be due to a specific victor claiming sovereignty and explicitly choosing to eliminate potential challengers (although this is likely to be so); it can also transpire because a specific victor is naturally so much more powerful than his peers that challenging him appears as pointless from the very start. Both can occur; and that is the reason, Nietzsche says, that the Greeks assigned such importance to the normative concept of *ostracism* – the mechanism of expelling someone from the polis in the anticipation that he might become tyrannical. Nietzsche quotes the Ephesians: "Among us no-one should be the best; if someone is, then let him be elsewhere and among others". For why should no-one be the best? Because the contest would fail, and the eternal life-ground of the Hellenic state would be jeopardized'. And he continues:

> The original sense of this peculiar institution [of ostracism] however is not that of an escape-valve but that of a stimulant. The all-excelling individual was to be removed in order that the competition of forces might re-awaken, a thought which is hostile to the "exclusiveness" of genius in the modern sense, but assumes that in the natural order of things there are always several geniuses which incite one another to action, as much also as they hold one another within the bounds of measure. That is the kernel of the Hellenic concept of competition: it abominates tyranny, and fears its dangers; it desires as a safeguard against the genius – a second genius. (*HC*, 1: 789)

The agon requires, not effective equality, but a basic *counterbalance* (*Gleichgewicht*) for its continued existence: it requires that the victor, and importantly also the standards of judgment that he has the power to set, can always in principle be challenged (see also Volker Gerhardt 1983). It requires ostracism,

[12] Competition, after all, is pointless when it is certain who will be victorious from the outset.

in other words, as institutionalized reminder that the lifeworld is *made*, not given; and that the subversion of agonal interaction by standards becoming sovereign, tyrannical, is always also a subversion of human agency.

Taken together then, Nietzsche's thoughts on the Greek ethical lifeworld as agonally structured converge upon the supposition that the former does paramount justice to (his understanding of) the requirements of agency. It does so because it appears as an essentially *open* realm of action and interaction: because its very aim lies in the institutionalization and protection of openness as a normative ideal. This shows, as we have seen, first of all in its openness to Dionysian instincts. By acknowledging man's dark and tiger-like instincts as legitimate motives for action and explicitly assigning them a place within the agon, Nietzsche thinks, these can be transformed from destructive forces into creative drives (*HC*, 1: 787). As opposed to Freudian man who suppresses his instincts such that these descend into the underground, where they chafe and fester until they poison his mind and his relations to others, Nietzsche portrays Greek man as acknowledging his antagonistic drives and thereby making them productive. But, as noted, it is not merely *within* the bounds of agonally structured socio-political practices that Nietzsche praises the openness of the Greek lifeworld. The latter importantly also shows in its institutionalization of the possibility of contesting its standards as such: in the normative commitment to institutional structures that ensure that, not only *who* is excellent, but also *what* is excellent is only ever the function of a play of forces. 'What does a life of fighting and of victory mean?' – *not* that the Greek form of living was militant in the Hobbesian sense.[13] Rather, the Greek fascination with the struggle, the fight, is suggested to have its ground in the *agential model* that it represents: in the model of action and interaction in which the standards of judgment – the standards determining what it means to win – are not predetermined or fixed, but open. Open to question, to contestation, to change: the Greeks, on Nietzsche's view, considered views on right and wrong, on excellence, on the good life, as the products of (human-all-too) human creation. And what has been created can, of course, be destroyed and built anew.

[13] That is, as a life of war that may simply be described as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. (Cf. Thomas Hobbes 1998, XIII: 9, 84)

As indicated above, there seem to me good reasons for holding that Nietzsche's ideas on the Greek epistemic orientation towards art and their normative commitment to the agon are deeply entwined.[14] We have read Nietzsche to argue that the Greeks assigned to tragedy, or even to art more broadly, epistemic priority over actuality: because art had the possibility to imagine Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of existence as reconciled, it was in Nietzsche's peculiar sense held to be *truer* than actuality could ever be. Actuality, after all, was said to present always only a partial point of view: the world as it *is*, is always merely one version of what it *could have been*, and is therewith fundamentally limited in a way that art is not. That means that, to Nietzsche, actuality appears as something that we have good reason to be suspicious of – or as the 20th century French philosopher Michel Foucault would later put it: that is 'dangerous' per definition.[15] Our practical lives, however, cannot but be situated in the actual: although it may be heavily informed by the past and oriented towards the future, in their agency and agential self-understanding subjects necessarily situate themselves in the present. To the extent that they understand and orient themselves in the world as agents, they cannot escape their commitments to the here and now – however suspicious of the latter they may be. And it is especially also for that reason that Nietzsche considers the agon to be an important model for action and interaction. As an attempt to institutionalize openness, Nietzsche's agon appears as a direct response to the conjecture that actuality is as dangerous as it is practically inevitable: openness, the possibility to contest even the standards of judgment that constitute the lifeworld itself, is the direct antidote against the inherent partiality of life as it is presented in actuality. The agon, after all, places next to one perspective – another, and competing view on life. And although that obviously can never make actuality less partial, it can prevent particular "actualities" from becoming tyrannical. The Greek epistemic orientation towards art, then, appears as closely

[14] Indeed, Nietzsche exclaims: 'What a problem unfolds itself there before us, if we ask about the relationship between the competition and the conception of the work of art!' (*HC*, 1: 790–1) He does not, however, proceed to elaborate further how he conceives of the relation.

[15] Foucault's full statement reads: 'My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism'. (Foucault 1984, 343)

entwined with their normative commitment to the agon – life can only imitate art, it seems, when the standards of living are ever open to contestation.[16]

Now, I have said in the introduction that Nietzsche's reflections on the nature and role of the aesthetic and its openness have a militant dimension, and possibly dangerously so. I assume that it has by now become clear what I meant by this. There is often something scary about Nietzsche and especially his fascination with the cruel and destructive sides of the Dionysian drive: something that suggests that he deliberately goes beyond what we must be open to if we want to think through what a form of life on aesthetic terms would entail, and that he is more fascinated with belligerence and bloodlust than would have been strictly necessary. Notwithstanding, and in part because of its radicalism, I think that there is a set of interesting lessons to be learnt from Nietzsche's way of developing the aesthetic; I will, however, in what I take up from his works in what follows not pursue further what I consider to be overly destructive dimensions of conceptualizing the nature and role of aesthetic openness.

[16] It may be that the story could equally well be told the other way around: that not only is it so that an epistemic orientation towards art needs the agon, but also that an ethical commitment to the agon needs art. This would be a way of reading Nietzsche that draws the latter's thought quite close to that of Oscar Wilde (cf. Wilde 2000, 215–41), and there seem, at least prima facie, good reasons for doing so. However, if this is indeed plausible and requires a proper *Nietzschean* commitment to art – one that considers art as a genuine source of knowledge, of truth, that is – then this may provide grounds for a fundamental critique of the strand of contemporary philosophy that attempts to develop a Nietzsche's agon as an alternative to liberal democracy. Most of these approaches seem to assume, namely, that one can understand and possibly even implement agonal ethical structures in the socio-political sphere without having to fundamentally rethink and possibly revise the epistemic context of modernity – the modern 'epistème' as Foucault would have it. (cf. e.g. Chantal Mouffe 2000; Christa Davis Acampora 2003; David Owen 2005) To the extent that it is plausible to hold that on Nietzsche's viewpoint it is impossible to develop the agon as an ethical model without simultaneously committing to openness on an ulterior epistemic level, it is questionable to what extent these so-called 'agonistic' approaches can claim to have apprehended the core of Nietzsche's genealogical reflections here. And not only that: to the extent that Nietzsche was *right* in holding that the agon is dependent on ulterior epistemic commitments, it may be very dangerous to propose agonism as an alternative way of structuring socio-political practices. Agonism, after all, is ultimately a form of antagonism made productive – and if it is unclear whether the necessary structures really are in place to sufficiently limit the latter, inviting antagonism in the public sphere may be a very bad idea indeed.

So let me now try to reconstruct the implications that these reflections on art as a model for truth and agency have for the issue of history, and subsequently zoom out and relate these considerations back to our more general purposes of understanding how the aesthetic could be made practically effective in a hermeneutic perspective on modernity and its pathologies.

Aesthetic openness as a sense of possibility

I situated Nietzsche's explorations of the aesthetic in the context of history as a problem: in context of his idea that history tends to pose a challenge to life, that historical self-understanding poses a challenge to agential self-understanding. Mankind, let me quickly rehearse, according to Nietzsche has a tendency to let history become tyrannical: to let the past determine the future. And, to make matters worse, since man is not in the position to simply design his own hermeneutic schemes but must work with and upon the ones that he inherits, the possibility of change – radical change, the kind change needed to find a healthy way of dealing with history – hangs in the balance. I explained Nietzsche's genealogical method as an experimental attempt to find a way around this problem: his musings on art and agency in ancient Greece are part of the enterprise of unearthing examples of a way of life in which people were healthy, which could serve to replace the memories of the historical past that now weigh us down with ones that have empowering effects – with ones that could empower us in interpreting history such that it allows us to understand and orient ourselves in life in an affirmative manner. Let me now try to take stock of the way in which Nietzsche's musings could be seen to have done so.

What should be emphasized, first of all, is that Nietzsche's Greeks should *not* be understood to represent a normative ideal: the way their world was organized – or at least, how Nietzsche held it was organized – is not something that we should now adopt for ourselves. This would, namely, come down to precisely the kind of blind acceptance of history that he was trying to develop an alternative for. If we take his own suggestions at face value, and consider his reflections on the Greeks thus in light of the attempt of 'gaining a past a posteriori from which we might spring' in order to 'cultivate a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature that withers the first', then we rather seem to be examining the images of the Greek lifeworld for memories that may provide productive *counterfoil* to the things that

we apparently do wrong. Many things could of course be said in this light, but what stands out especially is the recurrent idea that aesthetic openness involves a prioritizing – both epistemically and normatively – of *possibility* over actuality. Art can be seen as a locus of truth, Nietzsche suggested, because there is a sense in which it is epistemically richer than actuality can ever be: the world as it appears in actuality always presents merely *one* form of being – *one* way in which the multiverse of possibilities could have been actualized. Art, on the other hand, can show much more than actuality can: it can present the world of becoming, the multiverse of possibilities, in actuality while preserving its imaginative status – without in fact actualizing the latter, and thus while preserving the distinction between what is actual and what is possible.[17] As such, it is suggested, art gives us access to two worlds at the same time: to the world of actuality, to which the formal and Apollonian characteristics of the artwork belong, and to the world of sheer possibility, to which especially Dionysian music gives us access. And art's openness, then, also exists precisely in this ability of transcending what is merely actual and disclosing the world of sheer possibility – in all of its riches, and all of its horrors. Insofar as the agon is concerned, we found Nietzsche to develop a similar train of thought. Actuality, here more specifically in quality of the standards of judgment that lie at the foundation of our societal institutions, appeared as suspicious because it represents just *one* perspective on virtue, excellence, victory. And although it is inevitable that it does, at least the tyranny of actuality can be mediated; and that is what the agon was portrayed to do. The agon was presented as a way of preventing actuality from becoming tyrannical by making it subject of contestation: it represents a model of action and interaction in which the constitutive features of the lifeworld – the publicly shared standards of judgment – are not determined of fixed but open to contestation and change. Effectively, Nietzsche thereby makes a similar move as he did with art: he tries to find a way to represent the world of possibility *in* that of actuality. The agon, namely, places next to the way in which our society is actually organized, other possible ways of institutionalizing the standards of action and interaction. And

[17] The distinction must be kept up, it should be emphasized, because without it we would again run into the kinds of hermeneutic difficulties that were discussed in light of the issue of radical immanence in the second chapter. For possibility to appear as an epistemically as well as normatively significant modality in the first place, it must be limited by something that it is *not* – a wholly aestheticized world is not a very attractive one.

also the openness of the agon, therewith, exists in its ability to transcend what is merely actual and establish links to the world of possibilities – while, again, preserving the distinction between both.

What could these images of a world in which openness reigns, in which possibility holds epistemic and normative priority over actuality, mean for the way in which we understand ourselves as historical beings? How could the image of Nietzsche's Greeks, treated as a new memory and as counterfoil to the tyrannical way of dealing with history that we purportedly remember, help us deal in alternative manners with the past? Nietzsche's suggestion is quite clear: we have reasons, hermeneutic as well as practical reasons, for dealing with history from a radical and open '*sense of possibility*' (Robert Musil 1978, 16–17). Not necessarily in the radical sense in which the Greeks did: the Greek world is counterfoil, not a normative ideal. But in a way that assigns possibility a central place in the framework in which human beings interpret their world and their own place therein. Of course much can be said about this, but in general terms this could entail the following.

We inherit the hermeneutic frames through which we interpret the world and understand and orient ourselves therein from our forebears. This is inevitable, and it is also important – these frames are as important to our ability of sight as our eyes are. They are, however, not things that we should blindly take for granted: we should not automatically proceed to preserve, polish, worship the past – history, as Nietzsche puts it, should always also be 'critical' (*UAH*, 1: 269ff). This means, as Strong emphasizes, that 'the questions one asks of history must correspond to the historical position of the *questioner*' (Tracy Strong 2000, 38; my italics, DKD). It means that history should serve life, should serve *us*: that what we remember of history and how we remember it should be guided by *our* wants and needs. History, on Nietzsche's view, does not deserve to be remembered simply because it "happened", nor does it command respect merely because it produced the actuality that we now happen to live – the point is precisely that our abilities to affirm life, to interpret the world and understand and orient ourselves practically therein, are dependent on *more* than the relation between the past and the present. No, he suggests, the past must be dragged before our own court of justice and judged especially also on its potential to serve the *future*. Understanding and orienting ourselves in life seems to involve a

complicated balancing act of triangulating the past, present, and future, where the latter carries at least as much hermeneutic weight as the others. The past gives us historical material on the basis of which we interpret the world, the present provides the concrete circumstances in which we understand ourselves as agents, but the future discloses a world of open possibilities on which our hopes and fears, our dreams and despairs, our utopian and apocalyptic fantasies are projected – the future discloses a world of the imagination without which neither the present nor the past could appear as normatively significant in the first place. And it seems then precisely the future that needs to be present if man is to mitigate the challenge of history; if man is to mediate the described tension between history and life, historical self-understanding and agential self-understanding. We can only prevent the past from determining the present if we learn to ascribe hermeneutic weight also to the future: if we learn how to integrate the future, and not merely the past, into the horizons through which we interpret the world. Or in other words: if we are to prevent history from becoming tyrannical, we need the idea that the future discloses a world of open possibilities as a new memory to be able to recall that we live in worlds that have been made – and can thus be changed. Insofar as the challenge of history is concerned, this, I think, is the critical and constructive import of Nietzsche's genealogical reflections on the Greek art and agon: the insight that man is in need of a sense of possibility if he is to remember his own agency. And although the precise hermeneutic weight that is to be assigned to the future over past and present will be dependent on the "hermeneutic health" of specific societies and societal groups[18], Nietzsche herewith makes a structural point that purports to pertain to the practical self-understanding of human beings in general.

What this more concretely means vis-à-vis the way we deal with history could be thought along the following lines. History, on this view, forms of our basket of memories, the set of horizons, that provides the *material* from which and on which we have a responsibility to work, such that it empowers and enriches our abilities to judge the future as open: as a set of open possibilities, upon which our

[18] One could think, for instance, that peoples who are particularly unhealthy in this regard, as Nietzsche thinks the inheritors of Christianity must be, need a higher "dose" of future sense than those who have not been weighed down so much by historical horizons that downplay or even negate life.

imaginative and agential powers are beseeched to work. This implies that although we cannot, and should not want to do without history; it should be subjected to radical and constructive criticism on our part. In dealing with the past, Nietzsche suggests, we should always ask whether it is *worth remembering*. And whether it really happened, on his proposal, does not matter all that much – what matters is whether our memories of the past *serve life*. Often, of course, they will. Our memories, for example, of the ways of the ancient Greeks or the classical Confucians will provide tremendous sources of inspiration, and material upon which we can further build, in imagining the future and shaping the present in accordance with ideas of the kind of world we think is worthy of human life (or ideas of the kind of human life that is worthy of this world, for that matter). But also in these cases, it is suggested, we should not try to repeat the ways of the past: we should, at the very least, *interpret* what we find valuable in context of life in the present with an eye to the future. We should work on the ways of the past and the historical horizons that they provide us with; as artists, imagining ever-changing ways of giving shape to the spirit of truths and practices of times past. But maybe also as antagonists, trying to surpass the figures in the historical past that we consider as heroes. Also when history proves worth remembering, on Nietzsche's view, this can only be done in a hermeneutically sound manner if we critically and constructively interpret the past in light of its contributions to our present and future.

But sometimes, of course, the court before which we drag history will reach the verdict that a particular part of the past is better forgotten: it will judge that certain traditional ways have become tyrannical, undercut our possibilities to affirm life, take away our open future, and threaten to trap us in the same ever-recurring actuality. In such a case, Nietzsche says, we must 'grasp with a knife at [history's] roots and go cruelly beyond all reverence' (*UAH*, 1: 270). As said before, this is a dangerous enterprise because it involves taking the knife to our own flesh. However, in the case that history has become tyrannical, Nietzsche sees no other option than ostracism: than banning this particular past from memory and trying to replace the gap it left with another past, that we must ourselves imagine. In the case that history has really become tyrannical, he suggests, ostracism is the only way in which a people may protect its possibility of life, of agency – the only way in which it may retrieve its future. Regardless of whether history or a particular part thereof is affirmatively or critically evaluated, thus, Nietzsche emphasizes

that the relation between the past and the future should be seen as *mutually* constitutive: not only is the future partly constituted by the past, but the past should also be partly constituted by the future – it is the future that should determine whether the past retains its place in memory. Thus, between these two counteracting and sometimes hostile forces must man balance himself in the ever-changing present; as if on a 'threshold' perhaps, on a point or doorway – an aesthesis – from which different worlds become accessible, but on which no secure or truly stable stance can be acquired (Paul Ziche 2007).

It is in this direction that I would also seek the broader systematic import of Nietzsche's reflections on the aesthetic. It is clear that Nietzsche, to a certain extent, shares the Kantian idea that the relevance of the aesthetic lies in its influence on human subjects and their abilities to critically and constructively consider the world and their own place therein. Simultaneously, Nietzsche goes much further than Kant did – or rather, emphasizes that, if we really want to take at face value the idea of aesthetic openness as a vantage point of critique vis-à-vis the worlds in which we live, *we* must be willing to go much further than our reflections of the previous chapter may have indicated. If we want to truly develop a practical perspective on the aesthetic as a lens through which human beings can interpret their world and understand and orient themselves therein, then we must ourselves be open to the possibility that this will require a radical revision not only of the ways in which the modern world is organized, but also of the ways that we as subjects relate ourselves thereto. Indeed, what Nietzsche's reflections on history have emphasized is that aesthetic openness, when assigned a central role in the hermeneutic scheme through which we interpret the world, essentially involves an epistemic and normative commitment to the human lifeworld as something that has been *made*: as a world that is the product of human action, and thus not only can but also *should* be open to change. As such, dimensions of that world as well as the world in which we ourselves judge that have (a tendency to) become tyrannical appear as hermeneutic impediments; as challenges that call upon us – as artists, agonists, and perhaps sometimes even as antagonists – to work towards overcoming them. In Nietzsche's case, it was especially history that was presented as tyrannical; it was the human tendency to reify our memories of the ways of the past that was presented as the primary threat to the modern world. However, and especially with Nietzsche's Greek sense of possibility in recollection, it is clear that that not *only* history will have to be subjected to radical

critique when we take the idea of aesthetic openness as guiding: the epistemic and normative attitude of constructive criticism that is central to the hermeneutic viewpoint so developed will demand that no dimension of our world nor ourselves be spared, that everything must be critically judged on its potential to serve the future, and if found an impediment to agency, to change, be subjected to a process of careful destruction. This is a radical proposal, for sure, but it is one that thinks through to the very end what it could mean to take aesthetic openness as guiding thread in developing an internally coherent practical perspective on the human lifeworld. And if we are able to take to heart the Dionysian conviction that destruction in favour of life and future is always also creative, then there may be a queer beauty to Nietzsche's proposal, too.

Chapter conclusion

In the previous chapter, the aesthetic was developed in terms of its ability to create a reflexive distance to the world from which we may confront the way we think things are and should be with imaginations of what they can become; in this chapter this latter reflexive viewpoint was 'historicized', and therein radicalized, in the form of a hermeneutic perspective that can be effectively rallied against the world and ways in which we tend to judge it. In context of the challenge of historical self-understanding, the challenge of dealing with history in a way that prevents it from becoming hostile to agency, Nietzsche developed the idea of aesthetic openness in terms of a radical sense of possibility: interpreting history in a way that serves life, he proposed, entails judging the past on the basis of its hermeneutic contributions to the future – and, Nietzsche suggested, that required relating to the past as artists, agonists, and sometimes even antagonists.

If we now take this as a blueprint for thinking the critical and constructive potential of the aesthetic more generally, then it is clear that assigning the aesthetic a central place in the hermeneutic frame through which we interpret the world has radical implications indeed. Doing so, to be sure, will not provide us with a vantage point that is stable to the extent that adopting it in order to develop a critical, practical perspective on modernity will be an easy matter. Because the domain of constructive criticism thus involves a central self-reflexive dimension – it centrally involves the way we judge the world as such – the vantage point of critique has the character of a threshold between different worlds: standing there,

as critical beings, involves a complicated balancing act wherein we try to keep a stable pose whilst judging how the worlds of the past and the future, the world of possibility and actuality, interrelate to each other. But although it is unstable and essentially insecure, perhaps *because* it is unstable and insecure, the vantage point of the threshold discloses a unique hermeneutic perspective: on wherein we can see the world as something that was made, can be made anew, and thus has a future for which we are responsible.

This, then, seems to be the outcome of assigning the aesthetic and its characteristic openness a central place in the practical perspective through which we interpret the world and our own role therein: a commitment to constructive criticism that is relentless in that there is nothing that it acknowledges as untouchable – that does not leave a place for 'holiness', as Nietzsche would perhaps rather say. Even the judges of our proverbial court of justice can be put on the stand and, if found hostile to life and future, ostracized. That is a radical proposal, indeed. But it may be what we have to accept to the extent that we want to make the aesthetic decisive for the way in which we interpret the world and understand and orient ourselves therein. In a world where aesthetic openness reigns, *everything* is a possible subject of change: a possible subject of artistic (re)configuration and contestation.

Towards an open future

There is a short rumination by the early 20th century German literary critic Walter Benjamin that resonates with much of what has been said so far. It interprets a painting by Paul Klee called 'Angelus Novus', which is now in the collection of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Benjamin writes:

> The painting depicts an angel, who looks as if he is about to distance himself from what he is staring at. His eyes and mouth are opened wide, his wings outstretched. The angel of history must look like this. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, that unceasingly piles wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it before the angel's feet. He would like to stay awhile, to awaken the dead and piece together what has been broken. But a storm blows from paradise, which has caught his wings and is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him unremittingly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of wreckage before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress is this storm. (Walter Benjamin 1974, IX)

The image described by Benjamin expresses the same kind of deep disillusionment with the modern world that we found in our discussions of the assumed opposition between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews. Modernity, on both images, appears as a humanitarian catastrophe: it appears in the form of a broken world that lacks humanity where it should have been central. And perhaps the problem that Benjamin envisaged was also not altogether that dissimilar from the one that was discussed as the Chinese critique of the modern West. Of course, Benjamin's reflections, which were written down early in 1940[1],

[1] Walter Benjamin was a German-Jewish literary critic and essayist. He committed suicide later in 1940, when he anticipated that his escape from the Nazi regime to the USA was thwarted. The 'Theses on History' were his last work. Benjamin had given a copy to Hannah Arendt in Marseille which she carried to New York, where Benjamin's friends and colleagues Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno – who were at the time working on the previously mentioned *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – ultimately arranged the publication of the piece.

will not have primarily concerned erosions of politics associated with liberalism or infringements on morality liaised to individual rights. But, ultimately, neither did China's critique of Western modernity as it was examined here: also the latter, as we have seen, at the end of the day considers the fundamental problem with modernity to reside in the hegemony of its instrumentally-rational form of relating to the world and humanity's place therein – in the triumph or even tyranny of a form of thinking that reduces everything to which it is directed, even the human being as such, into a mere means to whatever (self-interested) ends man happens to set. The latter, we found, seems to inform the Chinese critique of the modern West insofar as its socio-political institutions are concerned; and the latter, moreover, may not be so far removed from what Benjamin had in mind when he imagined human history as an ever-growing stockpile of violations of humanity. And perhaps it is also natural, in the face of perceived threats let alone lived experiences of such a kind, to develop visions of another way of life; visions in which man lives in harmony with nature and with his fellow human beings, and in which the strategic rationality that is perceived or experienced as harmful is not only normatively but also epistemically shunned and replaced by a non-purposive, playful, aesthetic outlook on life. At least it is striking that, in the history of both the Chinese and Western traditions, thinkers have often developed visions of the latter kind. Famous Chinese examples can be found, for instance, in the works of Tao Qian (or T'ao Ch'ien) a poet who lived during the Eastern Jin and Liu Song dynasties (approx.. 365 – 427 C.E.). Consider the piece 'Home again among Gardens and Fields':

Nothing like the others, even as a child,
rooted in a love for hills and mountains,
I fell into their net of dust, that one
departure a blunder lasting thirteen years.
But a tethered bird longs for its forest,
and a pond fish its deep waters. So now,
my land on the south edge cleared, I
nurture simplicity among gardens and fields,
home again. I've got nearly ten acres here,
and four or five rooms in this thatch hut,
elms and willows shade the eaves out back,

and in front, peach and plum spread wide.
Distant – village people lost in distant,
haze, kitchen smoke hangs above wide-open
country. Here, dogs bark deep in back roads,
and roosters crow from mulberry treetops.
No confusion within the gate, no dust,
my empty home harbours idleness to spare.
Back again: after so long caged in that trap,
I've returned to all that comes of itself.
(Tao Qian 1993, 19)

Opposite the 'blunder lasting thirteen years', which historical sources tell us was the blunder of entering government services, we find the image of a simple life, far from the hustle and bustle of the city, its politics, and perhaps especially the strategic and military sides thereof. A life among gardens and fields, that is on the one hand distinctly human – 'kitchen smoke hangs' – and simultaneously in accordance with nature – 'above the wide-open country'.

A similar kind of contrasting image, however in inverse tone, is found in a poem by the poet Friedrich Hölderlin, who lived his troubled life in 18th and 19th century Germany. The poem, entitled 'Half of life', reads as follows:

The land with yellow pears,
and full of wild roses,
hangs into the lake.
Oh gracious swans,
and drunk with kisses,
you plunge your heads,
into the holy, the sober water.
Alas, for where in winter
Shall I come by flowers and where
the sunlight and
and shade of the earth?
The walls stand
speechless and cold, in storm

the wind vanes clatter.
(Friedrich Hölderlin 1990, 72)[2]

We find a similar contrast here. City life appears as unkind and lonely, where resolute walls express a feeling of being encaged and the clattering of the wind vanes even a sense of violence, which stands in stark contrast with the harmony – 'land hangs into the lake' – and perhaps a sanctity – 'into the holy water' – that is associated with life with nature.

These are of course but two examples; both Chinese and Western traditions know a wealth of visions that contrast artificial, expedient, and self-interested forms of living with those that are presented as natural, harmonious, and aesthetic in nature. And such contrasts often paint very powerful pictures: they can communicate their elusive meaning in ways that seem to surpass our discursive powers and speak immediately to what could be called our heart, 'heart-mind' – or in more technical Kantian terms our 'sensus communis aestheticus'. But there are various ways in which such visions of an aesthetic outlook may be developed as counterfoil to what is perceived as the pathological modern way of living, and not all of these are directly conducive to our hermeneutic abilities. Visions of an aesthetic outlook on life do not per definition enable, let alone encourage, interpretations of the supposedly problematic world to which they are contrasted in a manner that empowers our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves therein. It is, of course, not in all instances "bad" when they don't. As the previously mentioned early 20th century Chinese literary critic, writer, and influential political thinker Lu Xun somberly reflected in the essay 'What happens after Nora leaves home?': 'If no way out can be seen, it is important not to awaken the sleepers'. When there are good reasons to think that nothing can be done to change the pathological predicament of the present, then presenting an alternative view on life in a way that arouses a sense of possibility is nothing but cruel; 'for the sake of such hope', namely, 'people are made more sensitive to the intensity of their misery, and are awakened in spirit only to see their own putrid corpses… [I]f we can find no way out, what we need are dreams; but not dreams of the future, just dreams of the

[2] The translation is David Constantine's, apart from small aesthetic alterations by author (DKD) in the last two sentences. I thank Paul Ziche and Marcus Düwell for their elaborate discussions on the possibilities and limits to translating the poem into English.

present'. (Lu Xun 1980, Vol. II: 87) When the world is broken beyond repair, then it may be kinder to sing people to sleep with a song of aesthetic utopia than it is to inspire them to fight for a better future by developing the aesthetic as a locus of critique.

However, assuming that it is not unquestionably so that our modern world *is* irreparably broken, that it is not evident that we ourselves *are* rotten to the core, there remain reasons to strive for making the aesthetic practically effective in a hermeneutically solid practical perspective on the modern world in which we live. And we are now in a position to sketch the general contours of ways in which such a project can, and ways in which it cannot be successfully undertaken. What has appeared as an *un*favourable way of trying to release the critical potential of the aesthetic was the attempt at presenting the latter as independent and "self-sufficient" worldview: as a separate and self-contained outlook on life, to be forwarded as counterfoil in this quality to the strategically-rational view that was said to stand at the cradle of many specifically modern lifeworldly pathologies. Such an approach would, as we have for instance encountered in our discussion of the image of the radically immanent and possibly even 'magical' traditional Chinese world as developed by the oppositional narrative, describe the aesthetic viewpoint without any recourse to life in the here and now or to the perspectives of the human beings that live it – indeed, it would present the aesthetic view precisely as one whose *lack* of correspondence to the modern world makes up its allure. The approach to the aesthetic that presents it as a self-sufficient or self-contained viewpoint tries to make the latter reflect critically upon the modernity to which it is contrasted precisely by emphasizing that it is incomparable to the latter; by emphasizing that the aesthetic presents a truly different way of thinking, a truly different way of living. This, however, is a dubious philosophical strategy because it greatly underestimates the hermeneutic conditions that have to be met if critique, let alone critique of the radical kind that addressing the problem of modernity seems to require, is at all to appear as a practical possibility. The problem here is not merely pragmatic in nature: it is not merely that taking steps to transform our urbanized and technology-driven modern world in the direction of one that could correspond to, for example, the natural, harmonious, aesthetic image of life as sketched by Tao and Hölderlin – in the direction, perhaps, of what Tu Weiming tends to call a 'global village' (Tu Weiming 2001). Obviously, this would also require an enormous collective effort of which it is unlikely that it

could come about under conditions of global capitalism; but that is not the only, not even the primary problem. The possibility of conceiving such an effort on an empirical-institutional level already presupposes, namely, that we are capable of taking the aesthetic, so considered, as a source of critique in the *hermeneutic* sense. And it is highly doubtful whether that can be possible so long as it is presented as a self-sufficient or self-contained viewpoint. Critique, after all, at the very least presupposes that we are capable of considering *one* thing under *multiple* aspects: that we are capable of considering *this* world both for what it is, and for what it can and should be. And that is precisely what the idea of the aesthetic as a self-sufficient or self-contained perspective rules out. By presenting the aesthetic as separate and self-contained, after all, it is made to appear as an image of a *different* world, not a different vision of *this* one, and thereby as one that lacks any possible links to contexts of agency and agential self-understanding. Indeed, by presenting the aesthetic counterfoil as an image of a different world whose decisive features rest precisely in its lack of correspondence to ours, the former comes dangerously close to what Lu Xun described as a dream of an alternative present: as an imaginary, utopian world in which we may seek asylum when the actual one in which we live becomes too much to handle. When the aesthetic appears only as a vision of an alternative present, then it cannot bring our present, our world into view as subject of critique. It can present aesthetic utopia as a dream of an alternative reality that can temporarily – for as long as it is dreamed – replace our own, to be sure, but it cannot bring our *own* world into view as something that can and should become other than it is. Aesthetic utopia, in other words, presents our world as something that can be *escaped*, not changed; and those are crucially different things. As such, the approach that develops the aesthetic as a self-sufficient or self-contained viewpoint cannot be expected to give us a hermeneutic frame through which we may interpret the world – our world – in a way that empowers our abilities to practically understand and orient ourselves therein. It may give us an image that lulls us to sleep, that lets us temporarily forget the horrors of life; and aesthetic utopias in their self-contained immanence may be very important in this regard. But what they cannot be expected to do, so considered, is disclose an outlook on life that is practically empowering: that presents the world in which we live as an assignment rather than a given, and could inspire us to try and change it for the better. And the latter is needed if critique of a radical kind, the kind of critique that we would need to be capable of

if we are to address modernity as a problem, is at all to appear as a hermeneutic, and thus also a practical possibility.

At first sight, this could be taken as a reason to think that the aesthetic is unsuitable as a locus of critique. Indeed, at first sight, this may seem to suggest that aesthetic images and imaginations are the business of tender-hearted dreamers, who should be kept far away from the "real world" let alone its governance. This conclusion, however, would be both misguided and dangerous. As our discussion of Kant had shown, the aesthetic need not necessarily be considered as a separate, self-sufficient outlook on life. It may also, and productively so, be thought as a *form of judgment*: as one particular epistemic attitude among others, which as a whole appear as dialectically related within the perspective of the judging subject himself. As such, the aesthetic retains the primary features that were associated with it in the Chinese critique of (Western) modernity as it was here discussed: it still denotes a stance that is characterized by spontaneity and immediacy, in which one's subjectivity and the natural or lifeworldly surroundings appear in a particular form of harmony, and in which the world and possibly also our own role therein is enabled to appear as valuable in ways that otherwise remain foreclosed.

These features, however, are here understood in *self-reflexive* terms: as denoting the hermeneutic abilities of *subjects themselves*, where the 'artistic proceeding' of the power of judgment denotes the specifically aesthetic way of interpreting the world and situating oneself therein. As such, the aesthetic also here appears as fundamentally antithetical to the attitude of expediency and instrumentalism that the Chinese criticism of the modern West identified as the root of the pathologies of the latter. But it appears as such *within* the hermeneutic perspective of the human subject. It is *subjects* who can adopt an aesthetic attitude towards the world; and it is subjects who can allow that attitude, as well as the images they entertain therein, to become practically significant by making these question, challenge, and reconfigure their views on the world insofar as they consider it in purposive ways. And that means that the aesthetic, in this appearance, need not necessarily concern a different world, an alternative present: what it means to adopt an aesthetic point of view is not just that we replace our consciousness of life in the present with a dream of another world, which has nothing to do with our own. It *can* be, of course, and as was said above: this can also be important to

us – everyone needs to dream, not just those who live miserable lives. But the point would be that people who still 'have a way out', as Lu Xun put it, would do well to *use* those dreams in manners that relate back to life in the here and now, to the practical contexts of their agency and agential self-understanding. To consider, for example, what we find attractive or valuable in the image that Tao Qian sketches, to play with possibilities of redesigning the world of the present such that it could accommodate the latter, and from that viewpoint to critically question which aspects of the modern and its organization appear as obstacles to what we judge the world can become.

In this way, the aesthetic can open up alternative viewpoints on *this* world: views that consider the present, the world in which we live, for what it may and should be. And precisely therein, moreover, appears the critical potential of the aesthetic: in its ability to enable us to take reflexive distance to the world, one that allows us to consider this world, *our* world, as open to a multiplicity of viewpoints and interpretations – as open to become, to be made, other than it is. An aesthetically oriented critique, then, does not entail criticising the pathological present by pointing out what it lacks. It emphasizes, rather, that critique must always be constructive: that developing a critical perspective presupposes considering something simultaneously for what it is and for the various things that it could become in a manner that has *practical* implications – that impacts on the way in which we understand and orient ourselves as agents. In this latter quality, the ability for aesthetic imagination and judgment appears in no sense as significant only for tender-hearted dreamers; it is not just a way to enable those who do not feel at home in this world anymore with an escape to an alternative reality. The aesthetic, and the openness that lies at the core of its epistemic attitude, appears rather as an ability that is of quintessential importance to the activity of rigorous critique as such: subjects who can imagine and judge aesthetically, who can consider the world not only for what it is but also for the various things that it could yet become, will be those who have the hermeneutic ability to conceive radical change. And although, tragically, Lu Xun was probably right to suggest that those who are in such a way 'awakened in spirit' will be those who suffer the most from an artificial, expedient, instrumentalist world, they will also be the ones gifted with the hermeneutic flexibility to conceive what is needed to change it – with the power to mobilize images and imaginations that they aesthetically entertain as hope for an open future.

In its "Kantian" appearance, thus, it is clearer why and under what conditions the aesthetic can appear as a locus of critique: not as utopian image that presents us with an alternative reality in which we can seek asylum, but as a hermeneutic ability that empowers us in understanding this reality, this world, as something that we can change. It should be emphasized that the latter, however, implies neither that that it is completely up to individual subjects whether they develop and employ their aesthetic abilities, nor that the way in which they may do so is independent of the concrete aesthetic images that are present in their natural and lifeworldly environment. On the contrary, on both counts there will be a crucial relation between form and substance. *First* of all, the ability to adopt an aesthetic epistemic attitude will, just as most other abilities, have to be learned and cultivated; and some contexts will be conducive to this process of learning whereas others will rather diminish subjects' abilities to practice their abilities to playfully and imaginatively judge the world. If children never hear classical music, they will not learn how it may appear as aesthetically pleasing, if they never read a book, they will not discover their abilities to imaginatively access literary meaning, if they never leave their urban environments, they will not learn how to "recognize" themselves in nature – and if they never learn *any* of these things, then, insofar as Kant's ideas on the role of the aesthetic are sound, there may be grounds for questioning to what extent the similar may not hold for their hermeneutic and practical powers in the broader sense. If to a person for whatever reason, his surroundings appear as totally devoid of aesthetic significance, there may be grounds to question whether he could be capable of feeling himself at home in the world in the first place – beauty, in the sense of aesthetic significance, may be much more important for our capacities of understanding and self-understanding than we tend to think.

And of course, *secondly*, the *kinds* of objects, images, and environments through and with which we practice our aesthetic abilities will also substantially influence the way in which we interpret the world and humanity's role therein. It will matter whether we imagine the relation between man and nature through recourse to poems by Tao Qian or Friedrich Hölderlin, whether our ideas about love are influenced by Cuo Xueqin's *Dream of a Red Chamber* or F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*, whether our anticipations of the future are shaped by Nghiem-Minh Nguyen-Vo's *2030* or Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. And again, insofar as Kant's ideas on the role of the aesthetic are well-founded, differences

and similarities in the experience and interpretation of such forms of aesthetic expression are also important to our philosophical understanding of hermeneutics, critique, and agency. Our particular natural and lifeworldly environment will have decisive influence on the specific directions in which our aesthetic imagination takes us; when we live in the city of Tokyo reading Haruki Murakami we will have different images of what the world can be than when we spend our days in rural Scotland reading J.R.R. Tolkien. There are a lot of interesting philosophical questions here, and especially also from the viewpoint of cross-cultural inquiry here could lie a wealth of insights that might enormously contribute to our understanding of differences in the perspectives of subjects East and West. Notwithstanding, considering such differences as relevant for the way in which subjects interpret the world and their own role therein already presupposes similarity on an ulterior level: it already presupposes that the aesthetically perceived environment appears in reflexive relation to their understanding and self-understanding. It presupposes, in other words, that the ability to relate to the world in an aesthetically open manner is vital to subjects, regardless of when and where they live. And that is the point of structural importance here.

Taken together, the Kantian proposal suggests a more favourable way of trying to release the critical potential of the aesthetic in context of modernity: a way that emphasizes that aesthetic imagination and judgment reflects back on our understanding of the world in which we live, and does so in a way that is crucial to our hermeneutic, critical, and practical abilities more broadly – in a way, moreover, that assigns differences in our aesthetic images and imaginations, for example cultural ones, a clear and important role. However, if we want indeed to develop a full-fledged hermeneutic perspective around the aesthetic as an epistemic attitude – if we want indeed to develop an internally coherent practical perspective through on the world and our own role therein that assigns aesthetic judgment a central role – then we may have to accept a commitment to radically rethink not only the way the modern world is organized but also the way in which we ourselves relate ourselves to that world. As our explorations of Nietzsche's thought emphasized, ascribing priority to aesthetic openness in the way we interpret the world and understand and orient ourselves therein will not entail merely practicing mindfulness on Saturdays and making one's children attend world music class. Indeed, it will not merely entail, in light of the considerations above, that we ensure that people grow up and spend their days in aesthetically

inviting surroundings. The latter is important and, as said, inescapably part of the story, but the proposal to make the aesthetic central to the hermeneutic perspective from which we can criticize, challenge, and possibly even antagonize modernity and its institutions has much more pervasive implications.

What we must be prepared to do, Nietzsche suggested, is let the way we understand and orient ourselves in actuality be guided by the *future*: ascribing priority to aesthetic openness entails assigning priority to possibility over history and actuality, and thus take what may yet become – what is still open – rather than merely what has been or actually is as guideline for thought and action. This, we should recall, can*not* involve an attempt at "dissolving" the significance of actuality, the world of the present, altogether – life is not simply whatever we wish it to be, however many US presidents may hold otherwise. This move of completely denying the epistemic or normative significance of actuality amounts to precisely the utopian escapism that Lu Xun tried to warn us for; and as previously cited Hong Kong scholar Zhang Longxi has emphasized, it is also precisely such a denial that, when advanced by those in power, can give rise to a form of governance that is prepared to sacrifice even its own citizens in order to achieve its utopian end. (Zhang Longxi 2002, 18) Actuality poses an epistemic and normative limit to the kinds of possibilities that we can justifiably take as guiding, and especially when politics is concerned, we have good reasons to be very sceptical of visions that fail to acknowledge this – there is a crucial distinction between future-oriented aesthetic openness and utopian escapism.

And indeed, Nietzsche's point was precisely that making the aesthetic central to the hermeneutic perspective through which we judge the world requires that we learn how to represent what was called the 'world of possibility' in actuality while *preserving* the distinction between the two. It requires, in words that echo Ralph Waldo Emerson, that we learn to consider future possibilities to be just as 'vascular and alive' as the world as it appears in our present experience, in a way, however, that simultaneously retains awareness that they are not alive in quite the same sense – of course, future possibilities do not literally bleed when they are cut. But Nietzsche suggested that we must, in some way, be hermeneutically capable of making the future present if we are to remember our own agency: if we cannot consider what we imagine the world can become to be just as *real* as what we know that it is, then we will not be able to remember that we live in worlds

that have been made, and can thus be – radically – changed. We need, somehow, to find a way of making the future epistemically and normatively present without losing sight of the distinction between actuality and possibility, between the real and the ideal. This will not be easy – a story from the *Zhuangzi* comes to mind here:

> Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know that he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up, and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he were Zhuang Zhou who had dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and a butterfly, there must be some distinction! (Zhuangzi 2013, 18)

When we are asked to forget the priority that we tend to ascribe to actuality and try to present imagined possibilities in the present, then we must call into question very basic presuppositions of the hermeneutic frameworks through which tend to approach the world. That cannot but be disorienting, and it is not accidental that Nietzsche envisaged healthy hermeneutics as a balancing act on a threshold between different worlds, nor that he recurrently represents his prophetic madman Zarathustra as a tightrope artist. But if we try to imagine the kind of radical change that a critique of (Western) modernity on aesthetic terms seems to require – the kind of change needed to take the wind from the angel of history's wings and allow him to face the future – then this should come as no surprise. If the Chinese criticism of modernity has a point in suggesting that the latter's pathologies run deep, that they are the outgrowth of an instrumentalist form of thinking that is so ingrained in modern interpretative schemes and frameworks that we are likely to have become oblivious to its presence, then it seems obvious that change or even counteraction will be extremely challenging. Desperate diseases will require desperate remedies.

This is, of course, not to say that we should buy into everything that Nietzsche proposes. I have already said that there is a sense in which Nietzsche's way of rallying aesthetic openness against the world seems almost to glorify the destructive dimension of creativity; there is a sense in which he seems to go beyond what would be strictly necessary to accommodate the possibility of radical

change in contexts of thought and action. The suggestion that relating to the world in an aesthetically open manner should be thought in terms of the recurring destruction of the worlds that we have in order to open up the artistic and agonal space necessary to build them anew, at least, proposes a particular hermeneutic frame on the issue of which we could wonder whether it may not be otherwise – less militantly – construed. We could wonder, for instance, whether the aesthetic model developed by Li Zehou, the prominent Chinese thinker, could not provide an alternative, and less excessive and belligerent way of understanding the issue. Li develops an account of human subjectivity – or 'subjectality', a term which he introduces to capture also the embodied dimension of subjectivity – that centres around the idea of the 'humanization of nature'. Subjectality, Li suggests, is a continuous development towards spiritual freedom, in which we engage by harmonizing the different, and sometimes diverging aspects of our being-in-the-world (e.g. rationality and sensuality, sociality and individuality, historicity and the intuitive) such that our humanity slowly comes to be 'sedimented' in our natural existence – nature thereby becoming humanized, and humanity at the same time becoming naturalized. And 'the highest achievement of this humanization', says Li, 'lies in the realm of aesthetics' (Li Zehou 1999, 177; 1986, 148). In relating to their natural and lifeworldly surroundings in an aesthetic way, human beings are enabled to understand and orient themselves as harmonious and spiritually free beings: as beings that are, in the fullest sense of the word, *human*. Li's model, so considered, develops the aesthetic in what he himself calls a 'non-Dionysian' direction (Li Zehou 2010, 10): in a direction that lacks the excessive, militant dimensions that were foregrounded by Nietzsche. As such, relating to the world in an aesthetically open way is not essentially framed around the idea that we should be prepared to destroy what we hold dear in order to keep open the possibility of change; Li's understanding of aesthetic openness emphasizes 'construction and reconstruction' rather than 'destruction and deconstruction' (Li Zehou 1999, 181) to protect the possibility of agency, and as such proposes a more moderate and regulated hermeneutic frame around the idea of the aesthetic as a as a source of critical and constructive engagement with the modern world. This is, of course, but one alternative to Nietzsche's antagonistic way of challenging the world from the vantage point of the aesthetic; there are many others, and a thorough investigation of how a fundamental critique of modernity can be developed would do well to explore the various hermeneutic possibilities here. And this could also, again, turn out to be an issue on which substantial cross-

cultural differentiation exists; there seem prima facie good reasons to think so, and this would also be a good thing – the more diverse possible sources of inspiration, the better. But the structural point remains, which our (all-too) brief discussion of Li Zehou's view on aesthetic subjectivity has effectively only confirmed, that *if* we want to develop the aesthetic as a locus of critique, *then* we are committed to an understanding of the human subject as a being for whom it is crucial that he can approach the world in a way that is hermeneutically and practically open. And that also implies a commitment to clearing our modern world from the circumstances that *infringe* upon subjects' abilities of doing so.

The question is, now, what all this entails for the matter that we had set out with: for the tendency to approach issues in cross-cultural philosophy in terms of a hermeneutics of contrast. Of course, we had already concluded the second chapter with the observation that such an approach should be careful not to overplay its hand. Radical opposition cannot on all topics be coherently assumed – at *some* points at least, overlap between East and West is hermeneutically necessary in order to bring difference insightfully into the picture at all. But that, of course, left many possibilities still open, including the possibility that the hermeneutics of contrast, in a form that is released from its overly myopic focus on opposition, could provide a critical yet empowering practical perspective on modernity. We can, however, now come to see that this is not so evident. Also if we reconstruct the hermeneutics of contrast around the more modest presumption that the enterprise of construing a critical perspective on the modern world must be undertaken from a methodological orientation towards developing the differences between historically and linguistically embedded 'cultural programs', then it is not self-evident that the narrative can tell a hermeneutically sound story – especially not insofar as it simultaneously tries to advance aesthetic openness as a central virtue in judgment. The latter, as we have seen, essentially revolves around the idea that it is important for subjects to be able to adopt an imaginative stance towards the world in which they can play with mere possibilities of interpretation: in which they are free from the various constraints that come hand in hand with other, purposive epistemic attitudes, and can judge the world as well as their own role therein for what it may become. This hermeneutic flexibility gave aesthetic openness, so considered, its critical and practical significance: this ability to consider one thing from multiple perspectives appeared as what enables subjects to see it as open to the influence of their actions, that enables subjects to see this

world for what it may become, and thus as open to change. But also precisely this hermeneutic flexibility seems to be at odds with an attempted critique of modernity that emphasizes the differences between historically and linguistically embedded cultural programs. The latter approach, after all, assumes that the relevant things that we need to know or understand about the modern world in order to be able to change it, are those things that concern culture as the product of historical developments within a particular, linguistically conjoined community: that concern culture as inherited set of memories, practices, norms, and values to which members of that community have privileged access and from which they derive their identity – an identity, moreover, that clearly and invariably separates the members of one cultural community from those of another. And that, especially in light of a commitment to aesthetic openness, is questionable. Of course, inheritance is inevitably as well as importantly *part* of culture. Cultural patterns, like historical ones, are things that we inherit rather than simply choose; and without such inheritance, as Nietzsche explained, we would be blind as bats. But it seems questionable to assume that culture, *qua* inherited phenomenon, is what we should focus on if we are to be empowered in our abilities to understand and orient ourselves in the present as practical beings. Considered qua inheritance, namely, culture appears as something that does not touch the way in which subjects relate to their world as *agents*: it appears as something is handed down to them as the mere recipients of prefabricated set of norms and rituals, and *limits* rather than empowers their abilities to see the world in a way that is open to interpretation and change. Considered qua inheritance, in other words, culture appears not unlike Benjamin's angel did; as disclosing a view on the present that sees it as a repetition of the past. And that, from a commitment to aesthetic openness and thus to an understanding of the human subject as a being for whom it is crucial that he can approach the world in a way that is hermeneutically and practically open, is precisely where our focus should *not* lie. If we want to take at face value the idea that there is something rotten in the modern world and that it is thus important that we are able to formulate a fundamental but constructive critique thereof – a critique that does not just point to things that are bad but always simultaneously opens up possibilities for understanding how these may be changed – then culture considered as mere heritage is precisely what we do *not* need. Insofar as we take the idea of the aesthetic at face value as locus for critique, rather, culture must be able to appear as an assignment: as a practical

responsibility or even a vocation, as material upon which we are called to work – as interpreters, artists, and agonists, but maybe sometimes also as antagonists.

That means, in other words, that an aesthetically oriented understanding of culture must always also be *future-oriented*. Culture, insofar as it corresponds to a commitment to aesthetic openness, must appear as more than the mere heritage that we happen to receive from our predecessors: it must appear as the kind of heritage upon which we are called to work as active, creative beings – as beings bestowed with a sense for the future, with a sense of possibility. It means, as Heiner Roetz explains, that:

> Culture is not just what has already been, but also what people are yet to accomplish. It is not simply "given", but just as well something that we ourselves continuously create – also when we philosophically reflect upon its nature and role. Indeed, culture is always also the anticipation of a future moral achievement that encompasses, not just cultural institutions as we find them now, but all possible forms of human life (Heiner Roetz 2008, 84).[3]

Culture, insofar as it appears as aesthetically oriented and thus as committed to an idea of human subjectivity that emphasizes the ability to approach the world in an open manner, must be able to face the future: it must be able to disclose a view on the present that does not merely see it as a repetition of the past, but always also as a window on the world of future possibilities. And this understanding of culture, ultimately, is incompatible with the hermeneutics of contrast, even in its more moderate form. If culture, insofar as it is aesthetically significant, is a future-oriented assignment rather than a historically inherited given, then the very enterprise of developing a critical viewpoint on the modern world by mapping out the differences between cultural programs is hermeneutically problematic. If culture is an assignment rather than a given, then it is problematic to think in terms of separate and self-contained cultural programs: then culture, rather than

[3] This was a loose translation from the German. The original reads: 'Kultur is nicht nur das, was Menschen bereits erbracht haben, sondern auch das, was *noch sein soll*… Kultur ist etwas, was uns nicht einfach "prägt", sondern was wir ebenso sehr fortlaufend generieren – auch durch Argumente über sie… Kultur ist vielmehr eine alle mögliche menschlichen Lebensformen übergreifende, in der jeweiligen *Zukunft* liegende Moralisierungsleistung'.

parcelling subjects out into separate groups, appears as a lifeworldly circumstance that emphasizes humanity as a shared normative project. Indeed, if culture is an assignment rather than a given, then it may be time to stop thinking as if it forms the exclusive "property" of certain social groups, and embrace what Lu Xun in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner called 'grabbism' (*nalai zhuyi*): the practice of 'grabbing' from other cultures what we are lacking in the one we inherited, thereby opening up new windows in the world, and becoming new men ourselves (cited from from Zhang Longxi 1992). Of course, such grabbing should be a careful, reflected, and respectful activity; it should interpret what it – gently – grabs in the new context wherein it is introduced, as well as reconfigure the already present cultural patterns of interpretation such that they resonate positively with the newly presented element. But if culture is to appear as a future-oriented assignment rather than a historically inherited given, then Lu Xun seems to have it right: then it is important to think about culture, *not* in terms of programs the access to which is restricted to particular groups, but as sources of inspiration that should be open to humanity at large. Indeed, if culture is to add rather than subtract from our hermeneutic flexibility, our flexibility to develop a critical perspective on the world that empowers our abilities to try and change it, then it may be time to start thinking of the relation between Chinese and Western traditions and worldviews in terms of accommodation rather than contrast.

This is, of course, not so say that cross-cultural philosophy should focus primarily on similarity: differences are crucial, they are precisely the rich material upon which we can work. But it does well to focus, as the Chinese bioethicist Nie JingBao has simply and elegantly put it, on the 'similarities in differences and the differences in similarities' (Nie JingBao 2000, 254). And in so doing, which would be the self-reflexive point here, it does well to realize that subjects, in approaching the kinds of questions that address the modern world that we all inhabit, take up a similar hermeneutic perspective: one that is neither radically immanent nor radically transcendent, but is expressive of a reflexive turn towards a 'transcendent immanence' or 'immanent transcendence' (Heiner Roetz 2016). A perspective, that Benjamin Schwartz has described in terms of a 'standing back and looking beyond – a kind of critical, reflective questioning of the actual and a new vision of what lies beyond' (Benjamin Schwartz 1975, 3). And from such a perspective, especially insofar as it advances the aesthetic as a locus of critique of modernity, contrasts will of course remain crucial. But these contrasts should not

concern those between culturally quarantined philosophical traditions. And nor should they concern those between a multiplicity of separate and self-contained modernities. We have but *one* world, and in order to take good care of it in our actions we should avoid thinking as if we can hermeneutically, perhaps even aesthetically, escape it – let alone should we allow such escapism, however utopian it may be, guide ideas and ideologies in political governance. The kinds of contrasts that matter, to us as subjects as well as to us as philosophers, are the contrasts between the way we perceive that the world *is* and the way we image that it *can and should become*. If the Chinese critique of the modern world had a point, which it may very well have, and if Walter Benjamin had a point, which he may very well had, then our modern world is one that calls for radical change – change in the ways in which we act, but primordially change in the ways in which we think. And this is also, perhaps especially also a philosophical challenge. Hegel once expressed the fear that 'the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only when the shades of night are gathering' (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel 1952, 12), wherewith he meant that philosophical wisdom tends only to reflect upon problems in the historical lifeworld when they have already occurred – that philosophy tends to work in retrospective ways. This may very well be so, but if it is, then we have something to do. And what we must do, we will be able to do best if we are willing to look across cultural boundaries and take inspiration from the wealth of intellectual and aesthetic traditions that our lifeworld has to offer. If we is willing, that is, to think not in terms of a multiplicity of modernities, but in terms of a multiplicity of cross-culturally inspired philosophical narratives of *this* modernity, and then ones that do not consider merely its past or its presence, but especially also the openness of its future.

This will not be easy. It will probably be as disorienting as Zhuang Zhou's confrontation with the butterfly must have been (or the butterfly's confrontation with Zhuang Zhou, that is). But sometimes the possibility of change is hard to detect precisely because it is so obvious. There is a short rumination by Lu Xun that resonates with much that has been said so far. In the anecdote, written down in 1924, Lu reflects on his moustache as a matter of cross-cultural contestation. It starts by recounting an incident in the Confucius temple in Xi'an. Looking at various portraits of emperors of different dynasties, Lu finds himself stood next to a scholar exclaiming disdainfully that the portraits must have been faked – 'Look at the moustaches – Japanese style!' Lu concedes that it is a fact that

Japanese moustaches point upward whereas Chinese ones droop, and that these depictions indeed seem oddly in discordance with the laws of gravity. He entertains some doubts regarding the chances of the Japanese having really invested their time and energy in faking portraits of Chinese rulers, but keeps that thought wisely to himself, and so avoids what could have become an unpleasant conflict. Years before, he further reminisces, he was not so lucky. Just after he had returned home from his studies in Japan, he was taken by surprise when the boatman of the small vessel on which he travelled articulated his admiration for Lu's ability to speak in the Chinese tongue. 'But I *am* Chinese', Lu responded. 'In fact I come from the same district as you do!' – a response to which the boatman laughed and praised Lu for his sense of humour. No self-respecting Chinese man would even *think* of wearing his moustache in the Japanese style, obviously. This is the moment that Lu first becomes conscious of the enormous cultural obstacle that is posed by the matter of his moustache. In the following years he explores different ways of dealing with it. First, and stubborn, he refuses to give in, but then continues to be chasised for a supposed lack of patriotism. Later, and when the pomade with which he used to groom his facial pride becomes impossible to get in China, he decides to let nature take its course – but is then scolded by the opposite group: the reformers. The matter of the moustache appears a difficult nut to crack indeed. Until, years later while lamenting his moustache's unhappy fate, he sees the light: 'the root of the trouble lay with the two tips!' Lu takes out his mirror and scissors and cuts the moustache, so that now it points neither up nor down, but is absolutely straight. 'Then they would say no more', he describes the consequences. 'I don't know whether this was because in the absence of two tips they had nothing on which to base an argument, or because now that my moustache was like this I was no longer responsible for China's fate. At all events, I have had no trouble since then. The one nuisance is having to clip it from time to time' (Lu Xun 1980, Vol. II, 103–8).

We all have moustaches like this, whether we are Chinese or Dutch, male or female. And perhaps we would all do well to clip them, from time to time.

Bibliography

Acampora, Christa Davis

2003, 'Demos Agonistes Redux: reflections on the Streit of political agonism', *Nietzsche-Studien* (32), 374–90

Adorno, Theodor

1997, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp

Ames, Roger

1988, Rites as Rights: The Confucian Alternative, in: (Rouner ed.) *Human Rights and the World's Religions*, Notre Dame University Press, 199–217

1994, 'The Focus-Field Self in Classical Confucianism', *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice* (Ames, Dissanayake, Kasulis eds.), State University of New York Press, 187–213

1997, 'Continuing the Conversation on Chinese Human Rights', *Ethics and International Affairs* (11), 183–94

2016, 'Getting Past Transcendence: determinacy, indeterminacy, and emergence in Chinese natural cosmology', in: (Brown & Franke eds.), *Transcendence, Immanence, and Intercultural Philosophy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 3–33

Angle, Steven

2003, *Human Rights and Chinese Thought: a cross-cultural inquiry*, Cambridge University Press

Aristotle

1997, (Whalley trans.) *Poetics*, McGill-Queens University Press

Bai, Tongdong

2008, 'A Mencian Version of Limited Democracy', *Res Publica* (14), 19–34

2008, ‘Back to Confucius: a comment on the debate on the Confucian idea of consanguinous affection’, *Dao* (7:1), 27–33
2014, ‘Early Confucian Political Philosophy and Its Contemporary Relevance’, in: (Shen ed.) *Dao Companion to Classical Confucian Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Springer, 335–61

De Bary, Wm, Theodor
1988, ‘Neo-Confucianism and Human Rights’, in: (Rouner ed.) *Human Rights and the World’s Religions*, University of Notre Dame Press, 183–4
1996, *The Trouble with Confucianism*, Harvard University Press
1998, *Human Rights and Asian Values: a Confucian communitarian perspective*, Harvard University Press

Beattie, John
1965, *Other Cultures*, London: Cohen & West

Bell, Daniel A.
2005, ‘A Communitarian Critique of Liberalism’, *Analyse & Kritik* (27:2), 215– 38
2015, *The China Model: political meritocracy and the limits of democracy*, Princeton University Press

Bell, Daniel A. and Jayasuriya, Kanishka
1995, ‘Understanding Illiberal Democracy’, in: (Bell, Brown, Jayasuriya et.al. eds.) *Towards Illiberal Democracy in Pacific Asia*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1–16

Bell, David
1987, ‘The Art of Judgment’, *Mind* (96: 382), 221–44

Benjamin, Walter
1974, ‘Uber den Begriff der Geschichte’, in: *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. I: Vol. II*, Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp

Berlin, Isaiah

1971, *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford University Press

Bockover, Mary

2007, 'The Virtue of Freedom', in: *Polishing the Chinese Mirror: essays in honor of Henry Rosemont Jr.* (Chandler and Littlejohn eds.), New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 127–46

Borges, Jose Luis

'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins', http://entish.org/essays/Wilkins.html

Chan, Joseph

1999, 'A Confucian perspective on human rights for contemporary China', in: (Bauer and Bell eds.) *The East Asian challenge for human rights*, Cambridge University Press, 212–41

2002, 'Moral Autonomy, Civic Liberty, and Confucianism', *Philosophy East and* West (52:3), 281–310

2007, 'Democracy and Meritocracy: towards a Confucian perspective', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (34:2), 179–93

Chen, Albert Y.

2003, 'Mediation, Litigation, and Justice: Confucian reflections in a modern, liberal society', in: *Confucianism for the Modern World*, Cambridge University Press, 257–88

Chinn, Ewing Y.

2007, 'The Good is Prior to the Right: Rosemont on human rights', in: (Chandler & Littlejohn eds.) *Polishing the Chinese Mirror: essays in honor of Henry Rosemont Jr.*, New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 68–77

Confucius

1955, (Legge trans.) *Confucian Analects*, Sjanghai: The International Publication Society

Deutsch, Eliot
1982, *Personhood, Creativity, Freedom*, University of Hawaii Press

Düring, Dascha and Düwell, Marcus
2015, 'Towards a Kantian Theory of Judgment: the power of judgment in its practical and aesthetic employment', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 943–56
2017, 'Hope, Agency, and Aesthetic Sensibility: a response to Beyleveld's Account of Kantian Hope', in: (Capps & Pattinson eds.), *Ethical Rationalism and the Law*, Oxford: Hart, 55–72

Eisenstadt, Shmuel
2000, 'Multiple Modernities', *Daedalus* (29:1), 1–29

Fairbank, J.K., and Teng, S.Y.
1941, 'On the Qh'ing Tributary System', *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* (6:2), 135–246

Fan, Ruiping
2008, 'Consanguinism, Corruption, and Humane Love: remembering why Confucian morality is not Western morality', *Dao* (7:1), 21–6
2010, *Reconstructionist Confucianism: rethinking morality after the West*, Dordrecht: Springer

Fingarette, Herbert
1972, *Confucius: the secular as sacred*, Long Grove: Waveland
2007, 'Getting Rights Right', in: (Chandler & Littlejohn eds.) *Polishing the Chinese Mirror: essays in honor of Henry Rosemont Jr.*, New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 110–27

Foucault, Michel
1970, *The Order of Things*, New York: Pantheon
1984, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: an overview of a work in progress', in: (Rabinow eds.) *The Foucault Reader*, London: Penguin Books

Fox, Russell Arben
1997, 'Confucian and Communitarian Responses to Liberal Democracy', *The Review of Politics* (59:3), 561–92

Fukuyama, Francis
1989, 'The End of History?', *National Interest* (16)

Fung, Yiu-Ming
2010, 'On the Very Idea of Correlative Thinking', *Philosophy Compass* (5:4), 296–306

Gerhardt, Volker
1983, 'Das Princip des Gleichgewichts: zum Verhältnis von Recht und Macht bei Nietzsche', *Nietzsche-Studien* (12: 1), 111–133

Gewirth, Alan
1978, *Reason and Morality*, Chicago University Press

Graeber, David
2011, *Debt: the first 5000 years*, New York: Melville

Graham, Angus
1989, *Disputers of the Tao: philosophical argument in ancient China*, Peru: Open Court Publishing Company

Granet, Marcel
1920, 'Quelques particularités de la langue et de la pensée Chinoises', *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* (89), 161–95
1968, *La Pensée Chinoise*, Paris: Michel

Hall, David and Ames, Roger
1995, *Anticipating China: thinking through the narrative of Chinese and Western Culture*, State University of New York Press
1987, *Thinking Through Confucius*, State University of New York Press

Hansen, Chad

1983, *Language and Logic in Ancient China*, University of Michigan Press

1985, 'Chinese language, Chinese philosophy, and "Truth"', *Journal of Asian Studies* (4:3), 491–519

Hart, H.L.A

1955. 'Are There Any Natural Rights?', *Philosophical Review* (64: 2), 175–91

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich

1952, (Knox. trans.) *Philosophy of* Right, Oxford: Clarendon Press

1975, (Nisbet trans.) *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: introduction, reason in history*, Cambridge University Press

Hobbes, Thomas

1998, *Leviathan*, Oxford University Press

Hölderlin, Friedrich

1990, 'Hälfte des Lebens', in: (Constantine trans.) *Friedrich Hölderlin: collected poems*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Blackaxe Books

Martin Hollis

1985, 'Of Masks and Men', in: (Carrithers, Collins, Lukes eds.) *The Category of the Person*, Cambridge University Press, 217–33

Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno

1997, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp

Hui, Edwin

2002 'A Confucian Ethic of Medical Futility', in: (Fan ed.) *Confucian Bioethics*, New York: Kluwer Academic, 127–63

Illies, Christian

2003, *The Grounds of Ethical Judgment*, Oxford University Press

Jaspers, Karl
1983, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, München: R. Piper & Co.

Jullien, François
2004, *A Treatise on Efficacy: between Chinese and Western thinking*, University of Hawaii Press

Kant, Immanuel
1995, *Gesammelte Schriften: Akademieausgabe*, Berlin: De Gruyter
Kritik der Reinen Vernunft, Bd. III
Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten, Bd. IV
Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft, Bd. V
Kritik der Urteilskraft, Bd. V

Kaufmann, Walter
1974, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton University Press

Kleingeld, Pauline
2007, 'Kant's Second Thoughts on Race', *The Philosophical Quarterly* (57: 229), 573–92
2010, 'Moral Consciousness and the Fact of Reason', in: (Reath & Timmermans eds.), *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason: a critical guide*, Cambridge University Press, 55–72

Köster, Hermann
1958, *Symbolik des Chinesischen Universismus*, Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann

Lee, Seung-Hwan
1991, *Virtues and Rights: reconstruction of Confucianism as rational communitarianism*, doctoral dissertation University of Hawaii
1996, 'Liberal rights and/or Confucian Virtues?', *Philosophy East and West* (46:3), 367–79

2002, ‘A Dialogue between Confucianism and Liberalism’, *Korea Journal* (winter 2002), 5–26

Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien

1948, *La Mentalité Primitive*, Paris: P.U.F

Li, Chenyang

2010, ‘Confucian Moral Cultivation, Longevity, and Public Policy’, *Dao* (9:1), 25–36

2014, ‘The Confucian Conception of Freedom’, *Philosophy East and West* (64:4), 902–19

Li, Lianjiang

2010, ‘Rights Consciousness and Rules Consciousness in Contemporary China’, *The China Journal* (64), 47–68

Li, Ma and Tsui, Anne

2015, ‘Traditional Chinese philosophies and contemporary leadership’, *The Leadership Quarterly* (26:1), 13–24

Li, Zehou

1986, ‘The Philosophy of Kant and a Theory of Subjectivity’, in: (Tymieniecka ed.), *The Phenomenology of Man and of the Human Condition II: the meeting point between occidental and oriental philosophies*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 135–51

1999, ‘Subjectivity and Subjectality: a response’, *Philosophy East and West* (49: 2), 174–83

2010, (Samei trans.) *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*, University of Hawaii Press

Longuenesse, Béatrice

1998, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge: sensibility and discursivity in the transcendental analytic of the* Critique of Pure Reason, Princeton University Press

2010, ‘Kant’s Theory of Judgment, and Judgements of Taste: on Henry Allison’s “Kant’s Theory of Taste”’, *Inquiry* (46), 143–63

Lukács, Georg

1968, (Livingstone trans.) 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in: *History and Class Consciousness: studies in Marxist Dialectics*, the MIT Press

Lu Xun

1980, (Yang Xiangfi & Gladys Yang trans.), *Lu Xun: Selected Works*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press

Lyotard, Jean-François

1984, *The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge*, Manchester University Press

Makkreel, Rudolf

1990, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: the hermeneutical import of the Critique of Judgment*, University of Chicago Press

2015, *Orientation and Judgment in Hermeneutics*, Chicago University Press

Markus, Hazel and Kitayama, Shinobu

1994, 'A collective fear of the collective: Implications for selves and theories of selves', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (20:5), 568–79

Marx, Karl

1977, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow: Progress Publishers

2012, 'On the Jewish Question', in: *Selected Essays*, The Floating Press: 25–62

Mei, Y.P.

1967, 'The Status of the Individual in Chinese Thought and Practice', in: (Moore ed.) *The Chinese Mind: essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, University Press of Hawaii, 149–67

Mencius
1955, (Legge trans.) *Mencius*, Sjanghai: The International Publication Society

Mouffe, Chantal
2000, *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso

Munro, Donald
1969, *The Concept of Man in Ancient China*, Stanford University Press

Musil, Robert
1978, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Rowohlt: Reinbek

Nagel, Thomas
1986, *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford University Press

Nathan, Andrew J.
1986, *Chinese Democracy*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co

Needham, Joseph
1969a, *The Grand Titration: Science and Society in East and West*, University of Toronto Press
1969b, *Science and Civilization in* China, Cambridge University Press, volume II

Neville, Robert Cummings
2000, *Boston Confucianism: portable tradition in the late-modern world*, State University of New York Press

Nie, JingBao
2000, 'The plurality of Chinese and American Medical Moralities', *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* (10: 3), 239–60

Nietzsche, Friedrich
1967, (Colli & Montinari eds.) *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Berlin: De Gruyter

Die Geburt der Tragödie, Bd. 1
Nachgelassene Schriften, Bd. 1
Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen, Bd. 1
Also Sprach Zarathustra, Bd. 4
Ecce Homo, Bd. 6

Van Norden, Bryan
2007, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press
2017, *Taking Back Philosophy: a multicultural manifesto*, Columbia University Press

Northrop, Filmer Stuart Cockow
1948, *The Logic of the Sciences and Humanities*, New York: the Macmillan Company

Nylan, Michael
1996, 'Confucian Piety and Individualism in Han China', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (116:1), 1–27

Obenchain, Diane
1994, 'Spiritual Quests of Twentieth-Century Women: a theory of self-discovery and a Japanese case study', in: (Ames, Dissanayake, Kasulis eds.) *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, 125–71

Owen, David
2005, *Nietzsche, Politics & Modernity*, London: Sage

Peerenboom, Randall
1990, 'Confucian Justice: achieving a humane society', *International Philosophical Quarterly* (30:1), 17–32
1993, 'What's Wrong with Chinese Rights? Towards a Theory of Rights with Chinese Characteristics', *Harvard Human Rights Journal* (6:29), 29–57
1995, 'Rights, Interests, and the Interest in Rights in China', *Stanford Journal of International Law* (31), 359–86

Rawls, John

1988, 'Priority of the Right and Ideas of the Good', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (17:4), 251–76

Ricoeur, Paul

2008, *Freud and Philosophy: an essay on interpretation*, Yale University Press

Roetz, Heiner

2003, *Die Chinesische Ethik der Achsenzeit: eine Rekonstruktion unter dem Aspekt des Durchbruchs zu postkonventionellen Denken*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp

2005, 'Philosophy in China? Notes on a debate', *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* (27), 49–65

2008, 'Zur Grammatik des Begriffs "Kultur" in einer "kulturübergreifenden Bioethik', in: (Roetz ed.), *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* (32), 71–91

2012, 'Human Rights in China: an alien element in a non-Western culture?', in: (W. Schweidler ed.) *Human Rights and Natural Law: an intercultural philosophical perspective*, Akademia Verlag: Sankt Augustin, 296–314

2013, 'The Influence of Foreign Knowledge on Eighteenth Century European Secularism', in: (Eggert & Hölscher eds.) *Religion and Secularity: transformations and transfers of religious discourses in Europe and Asia*, Leiden: Brill, 9–35

2016, 'Who in Engaged in the "Complicity with Power"? On the difficulties that sinology has with dissent and transcendence', in: (Brown & Franke eds.), *Transcendence, Immanence, and Intercultural Philosophy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 283–319

2017, 'Ein Problem der Politik und nicht der Kultur: Menschenrechte in China', in: (Seelmann ed.) *Menschenrechte: Begründung, Universalisierbarkeit, Genese*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 102–26

Rosemont, Henry Jr.

1988, 'Why Take Rights Seriously? A Confucian critique', in: (Rouner ed.) *Human Rights and the World's Religions*, University of Notre Dame Press, 167–82

1991, 'Rights-bearing Individuals and Role-bearing Persons', in: (Bockover ed.) *Rules, Rituals, and Responsibility: essays dedicated to Herbert Fingarette*, LaSalle: Open Court, 71–103

2015, *Against Individualism: a Confucian rethinking of the foundations of morality, politics, family, and religion*, Lanham: Lexington

Said, Edward

1978, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

Schwartz, Benjamin

1989, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, Harvard University Press

1975, 'The Age of Transcendence', *Daedalus* (104: 2), 1–8

Seel, Martin

1996, *Eine Ästhetik der Natur*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp

Sen, Amartya

1997, 'Human Rights and Asian Values', *The New Republic* (14 – 21 July)

Siemens, Herman

1998, 'Nietzsche's Hammer: philosophy, destruction, or the art of limited warfare', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* (2), 321–47

Smid, Robert

2009, *Methodologies of Comparative Philosophy: the pragmatist and process traditions*, State University of New York Press

Solomon, Robert C.

1988, Continental Philosophy since 1750: the rise and fall of the self, Oxford University Press

Steigleder, Klaus

2002, *Kants Moralphilosophie: Die Selbstbezüglichkeit der reiner praktischer Vernunft*, Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler

Stern, Robert

2006, 'Metaphysical Dogmatism, Humean Skepticism, Kantian Criticism', *Kantian Review* (11), 102–16

Strong, Tracy

2000, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, University of Illinois Press

2013, 'Tyranny and Tragedy in Nietzsche's Understanding of the Greek Polis', in: (Arnason, Raaflaub et. al. eds.) *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy: a political-cultural transformation and its interpretations*, Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 351–71

Tang, James T.H. (ed)

1995, *Human Rights and International Relations in the Asia Pacific*, London: Pinter

Tao, Qian

1993, (Hinton trans.) 'Home again among Fields and Gardens' in: *The Selected Poems of T'ao Ch'ien*, Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press

De Tocqueville, Alexis

2010, *Democracy in America* vol. III, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund

Waxman, Wayne

2014, *Kant's Anatomy of the Intelligent Mind*, Oxford University Press

Tu, Weiming

1994, 'Embodying the Universe: a note on Confucian self-realization', in: (Ames, Dissanayake, Kasulis eds.) *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, 177–87

1998, ‘Beyond Enlightenment Mentality’, in: (Tucker and Berthrong eds.) *Confucianism and Ecology: the interrelation between heaven, earth, and humans*, 3–21
2000, ‘Implications of the Rise of “Confucian” East Asia’, *Daedalus* (29:1), 195–218
2001, ‘The Ecological Turn in New Confucian Humanism: Implications for China and the World’, *Daedalus* (130:4), 243–64
2012, ‘A Confucian Perspective on Human Rights’, in: (Sin Kiong Wong ed.), *Confucianism, Chinese History, and Society*, New Jersey: World Scientific Publishers, 1–22

Tu, Weiming & De Bary, Theodor (eds)
1998, *Confucianism and Human Rights*, Columbia University Press

Wallace-Wells, David
2017, ‘The Uninhabitable Earth’, *New York Times*, first published July 9th 2017

Whitehead, Alfred North
1978, *Process and Reality: an essay in cosmology*, New York: The Free Press

Weber, Max
1919, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, München: Duncker und Humblot

Wilde, Oscar
2000, ‘The Decay of Lying’ in: *Oscar Wilde: the major works*, Oxford University Press, 215–41
2005, *An Ideal Husband*, San Diego: Icon Classics

Wong, David
2004, ‘Rights and Community in Confucianism’, in: (Shun and Wong eds.) *Confucian Ethics: a comparative study of self, autonomy, and community*, 31–49

2007, ‘If We are not by Ourselves, If We are not Strangers’, in: (Chandler and Littlejohn eds.) *Polishing the Chinese Mirror: essays in honor of Henry Rosemont Jr.*, New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 332–52

Ziche, Paul

2007, ‘Thresholds, Transcendence, and Transgression: “thresholds” in the philosophico-scientific thought of the 19th century’, public lecture, Utrecht Philosophy Department

Zhang, Longxi

1992, ‘Western Theory and Chinese Reality’, *Critical Inquiry* (19: 1), 105–30

1998, *Mighty Opposites: from dichotomies to differences in the comparative study of China*, Stanford University Press

Zhuangzi

2013, (Burton trans.) *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, Columbia University Press

Samenvatting in het Nederlands

Er wordt vaak gedacht dat Chinese en Westerse tradities en wereldbeelden radicaal van elkaar verschillen. Maar klopt dat wel? Zijn er gedegen filosofische gronden om aan te nemen dat Oost en West inderdaad contrasterende, misschien zelfs onverenigbare opvattingen hanteren over de cosmologische orde en rol van de mens daarin? In dit proefschrift reconstrueer ik de narratieven die ten grondslag liggen aan de veronderstelling dat China en het Westen radicaal verschillend zijn, en onderzoek ik in hoeverre deze bijdragen aan onze vermogens onszelf te begrijpen en oriënteren in de moderne, globaliserende wereld.

In het eerste hoofdstuk bespreek ik de tegenstellingen tussen China en het Westen zoals die in huidige filosofische discussies vaak worden genoemd. Ik laat zien dat deze tegenstellingen op drie verschillende niveaus functioneren. Ten eerste wordt vaak gesteld dat Chinese en Westerse ideeën over *politiek* radicaal verschillen: waar China een communitaristisch perspectief voorstaat, zo wordt gezegd, is het Westen eerder gecommitteerd aan een liberaal gedachtegoed. Ten tweede worden China en het Westen veelal in een *morele* tegenstelling geplaatst: waar het Westen moraal primair in termen van rechten begrijpt, is de suggestie, legt China eerder de nadruk op ritueel en rite. Ten derde, en meest fundamenteel, wordt vaak genoemd dat waar het Westen de mens als individu beschouwt, China het *subject* eerder als bundel van sociale relaties ziet. Ik analyseer de contrasten op alledrie de niveaus, en probeer te laten zien dat noch op politiek noch op moreel niveau, noch op dat van subjectiviteit eigenlijk redenen gegeven worden om in termen van dichotomieën te denken. Het is evident dat er verschillen zijn in de gezichtspunten van China en het Westen, maar om te spreken over tegenstellingen is méér nodig. En dat "meer", interessant genoeg, is niet terug te vinden in dit – meest populaire – segment van de interculturele discussies.

Waar wél redenen worden gegeven voor de gedachte dat Chinese en Westerse tradities en wereldbeelden radicaal van elkaar verschillen is op een onderliggend niveau, en dat bespreek ik in het tweede hoofdstuk. Ik laat zien dat de kern van de veronderstelde tegenstelling tussen China en het Westen ligt in het idee dat Chinese en Westerse vormen van denken *als zodanig* radicaal verschillend zijn:

dat waar het Chinese denken esthetisch van aard is en een immanent, holistisch, en waardegeladen wereldbeeld produceert, haar Westerse tegenhanger als rationeel verschijnt en een transcendent, atomistisch en onttoverd perspectief op de wereld voortbrengt. Hoewel zo'n contrast een kritisch licht werpt op bepaalde dimensies van de moderniteit, beargumenteer ik dat ze hermeneutisch onhoudbaar is: op een niveau dat zodanig fundamenteel is voor ons zelfbegrip als dat van het denken zelf is het problematisch om radicale tegenstellingen te postuleren. Er zijn simpelweg grenzen aan hoeveel verschil je tussen tradities en wereldbeelden kunt veronderstellen – en denken dat er radicaal tegenovergestelde vormen van denken zijn is een duidelijke onverschrijding daarvan.

Dat wil niet zeggen dat een basale intuïtie van het narratief dat China en het Westen als tegenhangers neerzet, namelijk de intuïtie dat esthetische vormen van begrip en zelfbegrip centraal zijn voor de mogelijkheid ons als mensen in de wereld te oriënteren, niet kan kloppen. Sterker nog, ik probeer in de rest van mijn proefschrift te laten zien dat er hele goede redenen zijn om te denken dat deze intuïtie wél klopt, en dat deze bovendien ook systematisch uitgewerkt en normatief gefundeerd kan worden.

In het derde hoofdstuk zet ik daarin enkele eerste stappen. In dialoog met Immanuel Kant, een van de eerste Westerse denkers die omvattend de natuur en de rol van het esthetische in de bredere context van de menselijke rede heeft uitgewerkt, ontwikkel ik een perspectief op de esthetische ervaring en het esthetisch oordeelsvermogen dat haar als noodzakelijke voorwaarde voor *kritiek* beschouwt. Dat wil zeggen, als wij iets esthetisch ervaren en beoordelen – zo laat Kant overtuigend zien – dan nemen wij een specifieke 'epistemische houding' aan: een *open* houding, waarin onze hermeneutische vermogens spontaan en imaginatief 'spelen' met het het muziekstuk waar we naar luisteren, met de zeewind die we inademen, met het stadslandschap waar we naar kijken, etc.. Als we op zo'n open wijze de wereld tegemoet treden, suggereert Kant, zijn wij niet geënt de wereld te begrijpen zoals die *is*, noch zoals wij vinden dat die *moet* zijn – wij zijn aan het spelen, aan het verbeelden, aan het interpreteren hoe die zou *kunnen* zijn. En precies dit laatste vermogen, probeer ik te laten zien, is cruciaal voor de mogelijkheid van kritiek. Kritiek, wat ze verder ook moge inhouden, vereist dat we een bepaalde zaak niet als vaststaand beschouwen maar ons juist tot de mogelijkheid verhouden dat deze anders zou kunnen zijn of anders begrepen

zou kunnen worden dan ze nu is. En voor dat laatste zijn juist ook *esthetische* vormen van begrip en zelfbegrip cruciaal.

In het vierde hoofdstuk werk ik deze lijn verder uit. Op basis van enkele werken van Friedrich Nietzsche, een denker die veelal als nemesis van Kant wordt begrepen maar juist als het om het esthetische gaat opvallende correspondentie met de laatste vertoont, probeer ik te concretiseren wat voor implicaties het centraal stellen van esthetische openheid zou hebben voor de manier waarop mensen zich in de wereld oriënteren. Nietzsche, zo reconstrueer ik, laat dit primair zien aan de hand van de vraag naar de geschiedenis: de vraag hoe het mogelijk zou zijn het verleden te herinneren op een manier die inspireert en niet tyranniseert – op een manier die benadrukt dat het heden niet door het verleden bepaald wordt, maar dat onze levenswereld door mensen gemaakt is en dus ook door mensen veranderd kan worden. Als wij überhaupt over de mogelijkheid willen beschikken iets te kunnen doen aan bijvoorbeeld de uitwassen van het kapitalisme / het kapitalisme als uitwas, is zo'n open omgangsvorm met de geschiedenis natuurlijk noodzakelijk. En volgens Nietzsche speelt het esthetische juist hier een cruciale rol. Door ons op een esthetische manier tot de wereld te verhouden, zo meent hij, kunnen we een soort *mogelijkheidszin* ontwikkelen: de capaciteit om de wereld als het ware als kunstenaar te kunnen bekijken, en dan specifiek als een werk dat nog niet af is maar nog door onze handelingen gevormd kan worden. Maar, waarschuwt hij, dat werkt alléén als wij bereid zijn soms ons verleden, maar ook aspecten van het heden 'weg te snijden' – er is geen creatie zonder destructie, en dat is met name voor onze omgang met onze geschiedenis belangrijk.

In het vijfde, en laatste hoofdstuk koppel ik deze Kantiaanse en Nietzscheaanse reflecties terug naar de vraag hoe wij op een hermeneutisch gedegen manier na kunnen denken over de relatie tussen China en het Westen. En daarin is mijn boodschap uiteindelijk heel simpel: *als* wij de intuïtie dat esthetische vormen van begrip en zelfbegrip centraal zijn voor de mogelijkheid ons als mensen in de wereld te oriënteren serieus willen nemen, *dan* moeten wij ook ophouden culturen te zien als privé-eigendom van specifieke sociale groepen. Dan moeten we de verschillende filosofische tradities die China en het Westen rijk zijn eerder begrijpen als *open* bronnen van inspiratie die het mogelijk maken op dynamische wijze na te denken over een gedeelde toekomst.

Curriculum Vitae

Dascha Düring was born on April 28th 1987 in Amsterdam. She took her bachelor's and research master's in philosophy at Utrecht University, and graduated cum laude with a thesis on conceptions of duty in Kantianism and classical Confucianism. From 2013 to 2017 she was a PhD researcher at Utrecht University, from 2016 onwards on Marcus Düwell's research project 'Human Dignity as the Foundation of Human Rights?' which was funded by NWO. She was the coordinator of a four-year KNAW-sponsored research exchange program on human dignity between Utrecht University and Beijing Normal University, China Agricultural University, Renmin University, and Tsinghua University in Beijing, and is the chief editor of an edited bundle on the same theme which will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2019. She spent several semesters as a visiting scholar at the Durham Law School, and gave various talks on various topics in Chinese and Western philosophy in Europe, China, and the USA. She has taught courses on topics in ethics, applied ethics, and political philosophy.

When she is not doing philosophy, Dascha likes to read good books, watch bad films, practise sports, and talk sense and nonsense with her friends. She happily lives in Utrecht opposite her favourite bar, Springhaver.

Quaestiones Infinitae

PUBLICATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

VOLUME 21. D. VAN DALEN, *Torens en Fundamenten* (valedictory lecture), 1997.

VOLUME 22. J.A. BERGSTRA, W.J. FOKKINK, W.M.T. MENNEN, S.F.M. VAN VLIJMEN, *Spoorweglogica via EURIS*, 1997.

VOLUME 23. I.M. CROESE, *Simplicius on Continuous and Instantaneous Change* (dissertation), 1998.

VOLUME 24. M.J. HOLLENBERG, *Logic and Bisimulation* (dissertation), 1998.

VOLUME 25. C.H. LEIJENHORST, *Hobbes and the Aristotelians* (dissertation), 1998.

VOLUME 26. S.F.M. VAN VLIJMEN, *Algebraic Specification in Action* (dissertation), 1998.

VOLUME 27. M.F. VERWEIJ, *Preventive Medicine Between Obligation and Aspiration* (dissertation), 1998.

VOLUME 28. J.A. BERGSTRA, S.F.M. VAN VLIJMEN, *Theoretische Software-Engineering: kenmerken, faseringen en classificaties*, 1998.

VOLUME 29. A.G. WOUTERS, *Explanation Without A Cause* (dissertation), 1999.

VOLUME 30. M.M.S.K. SIE, *Responsibility, Blameworthy Action & Normative Disagreements* (dissertation), 1999.

VOLUME 31. M.S.P.R. VAN ATTEN, *Phenomenology of choice sequences* (dissertation), 1999.

VOLUME 32. V.N. STEBLETSOVA, *Algebras, Relations and Geometries (an equational perspective)* (dissertation), 2000.

VOLUME 33. A. VISSER, *Het Tekst Continuüm* (inaugural lecture), 2000.

VOLUME 34. H. ISHIGURO, *Can we speak about what cannot be said?* (public lecture), 2000.

VOLUME 35. W. HAAS, *Haltlosigkeit; Zwischen Sprache und Erfahrung* (dissertation), 2001.

VOLUME 36. R. POLI, *ALWIS: Ontology for knowledge engineers* (dissertation), 2001.

VOLUME 37. J. MANSFELD, *Platonische Briefschrijverij* (valedictory lecture), 2001.

VOLUME 37A. E.J. BOS, *The Correspondence between Descartes and Henricus Regius* (dissertation), 2002.

VOLUME 38. M. VAN OTEGEM, *A Bibliography of the Works of Descartes (1637-1704)* (dissertation), 2002.

VOLUME 39. B.E.K.J. GOOSSENS, *Edmund Husserl: Einleitung in die Philosophie: Vorlesungen 1922/23* (dissertation), 2003.

VOLUME 40. H.J.M. BROEKHUIJSE, *Het einde van de sociaaldemocratie* (dissertation), 2002.

VOLUME 41. P. RAVALLI, *Husserls Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität in den Göttinger Jahren: Eine kritisch-historische Darstellung* (dissertation), 2003.

VOLUME 42. B. ALMOND, *The Midas Touch: Ethics, Science and our Human Future* (inaugural lecture), 2003.

VOLUME 43. M. DÜWELL, *Morele kennis: over de mogelijkheden van toegepaste ethiek* (inaugural lecture), 2003.

VOLUME 44. R.D.A. HENDRIKS, *Metamathematics in Coq* (dissertation), 2003.

VOLUME 45. TH. VERBEEK, E.J. BOS, J.M.M. VAN DE VEN, *The Correspondence of René Descartes: 1643*, 2003.

VOLUME 46. J.J.C. KUIPER, *Ideas and Explorations: Brouwer's Road to Intuitionism* (dissertation), 2004.

VOLUME 47. C.M. BEKKER, *Rechtvaardigheid, Onpartijdigheid, Gender en Sociale Diversiteit; Feministische filosofen over recht doen aan vrouwen en hun onderlinge verschillen* (dissertation), 2004.

VOLUME 48. A.A. LONG, *Epictetus on understanding and managing emotions* (public lecture), 2004.

VOLUME 49. J.J. JOOSTEN, *Interpretability formalized* (dissertation), 2004.

VOLUME 50. J.G. SIJMONS, *Phänomenologie und Idealismus: Analyse der Struktur und Methode der Philosophie Rudolf Steiners* (dissertation), 2005.

VOLUME 51. J.H. HOOGSTAD, *Time tracks* (dissertation), 2005.

VOLUME 52. M.A. VAN DEN HOVEN, *A Claim for Reasonable Morality* (dissertation), 2006.

VOLUME 53. C. VERMEULEN, *René Descartes, Specimina philosophiae: Introduction and Critical Edition* (dissertation), 2007.

VOLUME 54. R.G. MILLIKAN, *Learning Language without having a theory of mind* (inaugural lecture), 2007.

VOLUME 55. R.J.G. CLAASSEN, *The Market's Place in the Provision of Goods* (dissertation), 2008.

VOLUME 56. H.J.S. BRUGGINK, *Equivalence of Reductions in Higher-Order Rewriting* (dissertation), 2008.

VOLUME 57. A. KALIS, *Failures of agency* (dissertation), 2009.

VOLUME 58. S. GRAUMANN, *Assistierte Freiheit* (dissertation), 2009.

VOLUME 59. M. AALDERINK, *Philosophy, Scientific Knowledge, and Concept Formation in Geulincx and Descartes* (dissertation), 2010.

VOLUME 60. I.M. CONRADIE, *Seneca in his cultural and literary context: Selected moral letters on the body* (dissertation), 2010.

VOLUME 61. C. VAN SIJL, *Stoic Philosophy and the Exegesis of Myth* (dissertation), 2010.

VOLUME 62. J.M.I.M. LEO, *The Logical Structure of Relations* (dissertation), 2010.

VOLUME 63 M.S.A. VAN HOUTE, *Seneca's theology in its philosophical context* (dissertation), 2010.

VOLUME 64 F.A. BAKKER, *Three Studies in Epicurean Cosmology* (dissertation), 2010.

VOLUME 65 T. FOSSEN, *Political legitimacy and the pragmatic turn* (dissertation), 2011.

VOLUME 66 T. VISAK, *Killing happy animals. Explorations in utilitarian ethics.* (dissertation), 2011.

VOLUME 67 A. JOOSSE, *Why we need others: Platonic and Stoic models of friendship and self-understanding* (dissertation), 2011.

VOLUME 68 N. M. NIJSINGH, *Expanding newborn screening programmes and strengthening informed consent* (dissertation), 2012.

VOLUME 69 R. PEELS, *Believing Responsibly: Intellectual Obligations and Doxastic Excuses* (dissertation), 2012.

VOLUME 70 S. LUTZ, *Criteria of Empirical Significance* (dissertation), 2012

VOLUME 70A G.H. BOS, *Agential Self-consciousness, beyond conscious agency* (dissertation), 2013.

VOLUME 71 F.E. KALDEWAIJ, *The animal in morality: Justifying duties to animals in Kantian moral philosophy* (dissertation), 2013.

VOLUME 72 R.O. BUNING, *Henricus Reneri (1593-1639): Descartes' Quartermaster in Aristotelian Territory* (dissertation), 2013.

VOLUME 73 I.S. LÖWISCH, *Genealogy Composition in Response to Trauma: Gender and Memory in 1 Chronicles 1-9 and the Documentary Film 'My Life Part 2'* (dissertation), 2013.

VOLUME 74 A. EL KHAIRAT, *Contesting Boundaries: Satire in Contemporary Morocco* (dissertation), 2013.

VOLUME 75 A. KROM, *Not to be sneezed at. On the possibility of justifying infectious disease control by appealing to a mid-level harm principle* (dissertation), 2014.

VOLUME 76 Z. PALL, *Salafism in Lebanon: local and transnational resources* (dissertation), 2014.

VOLUME 77 D. WAHID, *Nurturing the Salafi Manhaj: A Study of Salafi Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia* (dissertation), 2014.

VOLUME 78 B.W.P VAN DEN BERG, *Speelruimte voor dialoog en verbeelding. Basisschoolleerlingen maken kennis met religieuze verhalen* (dissertation), 2014.

VOLUME 79 J.T. BERGHUIJS, *New Spirituality and Social Engagement* (dissertation), 2014.

VOLUME 80 A. WETTER, *Judging By Her. Reconfiguring Israel in Ruth, Esther and Judith* (dissertation), 2014.

VOLUME 81 J.M. MULDER, *Conceptual Realism. The Structure of Metaphysical Thought* (dissertation), 2014.

VOLUME 82 L.W.C. VAN LIT, *Eschatology and the World of Image in Suhrawardī and His Commentators* (dissertation), 2014.

VOLUME 83 P.L. LAMBERTZ, *Divisive matters. Aesthetic difference and authority in a Congolese spiritual movement 'from Japan'* (dissertation), 2015.

VOLUME 84 J.P. GOUDSMIT, *Intuitionistic Rules: Admissible Rules of Intermediate Logics* (dissertation), 2015.

VOLUME 85 E.T. FEIKEMA, *Still not at Ease: Corruption and Conflict of Interest in Hybrid Political Orders* (dissertation), 2015.

VOLUME 86 N. VAN MILTENBURG, *Freedom in Action* (dissertation), 2015.

VOLUME 86A P. COPPENS, *Seeing God in This world and the Otherworld: Crossing Boundaries in Sufi Commentaries on the Qurʾān* (dissertation), 2015.

VOLUME 87 D.H.J. JETHRO, *Aesthetics of Power: Heritage Formation and the Senses in Post-apartheid South Africa* (dissertation), 2015.

VOLUME 88 C.E. HARNACKE, *From Human Nature to Moral Judgement: Reframing Debates about Disability and Enhancement* (dissertation), 2015.

VOLUME 89 X. WANG, *Human Rights and Internet Access: A Philosophical Investigation* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 90 R. VAN BROEKHOVEN, *De Bewakers Bewaakt: Journalistiek en leiderschap in een gemediatiseerde democratie* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 91 A. SCHLATMANN, *Shi'i Muslim youth in the Netherlands: Negotiating Shi'i fatwas and rituals in the Dutch context* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 92 M.L. VAN WIJNGAARDEN, *Schitterende getuigen. Nederlands luthers avondmaalsgerei als indenteitsdrager van een godsdienstige minderheid* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 93 S. COENRADIE, *Vicarious substitution in the literary work of Shūsaku Endō. On fools, animals, objects and doubles* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 94 J. RAJAIAH, *Dalit Humanization. A quest based on M.M. Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 95 D.L.A. OMETTO, *Freedom & Self-knowledge* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 96 Y. YALDIZ, *The Afterlife in Mind: Piety and Renunciatory Practice in the 2nd/8th- and early 3rd/9th-Century Books of Renunciation (Kutub al-Zuhd)* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 97 M.F. BYSKOV, *Between experts and locals. Towards an inclusive framework for a development agenda* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 98 A. RUMBERG, *Transitions toward a Semantics for Real Possibility* (dissertation), 2016.

VOLUME 99 S. DE MAAGT, *Constructing Morality: Transcendental Arguments in Ethics* (dissertation), 2017.

VOLUME 100 S. BINDER, *Total Atheism* (dissertation), 2017.

VOLUME 101 T. GIESBERS, *The Wall or the Door: German Realism around 1800,* (dissertation), 2017.

VOLUME 102 P. SPERBER, *Kantian Psychologism* (dissertation), 2017.

VOLUME 103 J.M. HAMER, *Agential Pluralism: A Philosophy of Fundamental*

Rights (dissertation), 2017.

VOLUME 104 M. IBRAHIM, *Sensational Piety: Practices of Mediation in Christ Embassy and Nasfat* (dissertation), 2017.

VOLUME 105 R.A.J. MEES, *Sustainable Action, Perspectives for Individuals, Institutions, and Humanity* (dissertation), 2017.

VOLUME 106 A.A.J. POST, *The Journey of a Taymiyyan Sufi: Sufism Through the Eyes of ʿImād al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311)* (dissertation), 2017.

VOLUME 107 F.A. FOGUE KUATE, *Médias et coexistence entre Musulmans et Chrétiens au Nord-Cameroun: de la période coloniale Française au début du XXIème siècle* (dissertation), 2017.

VOLUME 108 J. KROESBERGEN-KAMPS, *Speaking of Satan in Zambia. The persuasiveness of contemporary narratives about Satanism* (dissertation), 2018.

VOLUME 109 F. TENG, *Moral Responsibilities to Future Generations. A Comparative Study on Human Rights Theory and Confucianism* (dissertation), 2018.

VOLUME 110 H.W.A. DUIJF, *Let's Do It! Collective Responsibility, Joint Action, and Participation* (dissertation), 2018.

VOLUME 111 R.A. CALVERT, *Pilgrims in the port. Migrant Christian communities in Rotterdam* (dissertation), 2018.

VOLUME 112 W.P.J.L. VAN SAANE, *Protestant Mission Partnerships: The Concept of Partnership in the History of the Netherlands Missionary Council in the Twentieth Century* (dissertation), 2018.

VOLUME 113 D.K. DÜRING, *Of Dragons and Owls. Rethinking Chinese and Western narratives of modernity* (dissertation), 2018.