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### Introduction

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# Introduction

*Peter Jonkers*

The papers in this volume were originally presented at two different meetings on the same theme, viz. self-awareness of life in the new era. The first one was a conference organized by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, taking place in Shanghai in July 2017; the second event was a roundtable during the World Congress of Philosophy, held in Beijing in August 2018.

Self-awareness of life can roughly be defined as the attention for one's internal spiritual as well as external social and political life. Inner and outer human life should not be considered as separate spheres of being, but rather as two aspects of the totality of life. Because of its existential nature self-awareness of life should primarily be approached in a non-theoretical and even non-conceptual way. These conditions constitute a major challenge to philosophy around the world "in the new era." Given the fact that self-awareness of life has been an important theme of reflection in many philosophical traditions, the ongoing dominance of Western philosophy, characterized by a theoretical and conceptual approach and by making all kinds of clear-cut distinctions, is often considered by other or non-Western philosophical traditions as an impediment to approach this theme appropriately.

Based on this general description of self-awareness of life and the different ways to deal with it, the contributors in this volume attempt to examine this idea not only from the angle of various philosophical disciplines, such as philosophical anthropology, ethics, philosophy of religion, (inter)cultural philosophy and social philosophy, but also from a plurality of cultural and philosophical perspectives, in particular, Chinese, Indian, African and Western. This variety of cultural perspectives and philosophical approaches expresses a common concern, which underlies all the papers of this volume, namely, that Western philosophy tends to ignore questions about self-awareness of life and if it does pay attention to these matters, it risks to do so in a reductionist way. Therefore, notwithstanding the perennial value of Western philosophy, it has to be complemented by other approaches, many of which originate, unsurprisingly, in non-Western philosophical and cultural traditions. This volume aims to give a modest contribution to this goal.

The first part introduces the general theme by exploring what the expression "self-awareness of life" means and by examining the role it plays in various philosophical disciplines and cultural traditions. This part

also answers the important question: if and how self-awareness of life is able to move beyond individualism and collectivism. Peter Jonkers in his paper “On the Self-awareness of Life in Western Philosophy,” shows that the theme of self-awareness of life and the non-theoretical approach connected with it are not completely absent in Western philosophy. Contrary to the wide-spread idea that ancient Western philosophy was purely about theoretical systems of thought, Jonkers argues that it was rather seen as a reasoned way of life and as a spiritual exercise aimed at wisdom. Hence, the most important philosophical question was “How should I live?” and the answer to this question consisted in a theoretical examination of the possible answers as well as in the effort of putting them into practice. This approach is also present in contemporary philosophy, for instance, in the philosophy of Charles Taylor as Jonkers mentions in his paper. Taylor criticizes the dominance of theoretical and purely conceptual thinking in the philosophy of the Enlightenment and its separation between the self’s inner (emotional) nature and outer physical existence. He argues that, in our times, there is an aspiration towards a reunification of these oppositions and dualisms and a striving for a harmonious vision of the whole of reality. The self is not a self-sufficient substance or a radically autonomous subject, but only gets meaning against inescapable horizons.

He Xirong in her paper, “The Ethical Turn of Contemporary Philosophy and its Significance,” pleads for a transformation of the current paradigm of theoretical philosophy into an ethical or practical one. In fact, this transformation has been already underway, as new research-questions and methods are emerging in various philosophical disciplines. The focus is on concrete people and their behavior and on the fact that the ultimate goal of human beings is to gain awareness of life. This transformation does not only concern the way of doing philosophy or a specific philosophical discipline, but also has implications for the classification of philosophy, the way of forming philosophical concepts. He Xirong examines the internal and external reasons of this ethical turn and concludes that this turn is the result of the crisis of modernity and the problems of foundational, theoretical philosophy. These transformations have, among others, a deep impact on the relationship between contemporary Western and traditional Chinese philosophy, since the latter has always maintained the unity of metaphysics and ethics. Through such a paradigm shift, philosophy can become more open to a reflection on self-awareness of life from various perspectives.

Yu Xuanmeng in his paper “On the Issue of the Human Being and the Ground of Philosophy,” highlights the differences between Western and Chinese philosophy regarding the issue of self-awareness of life. For the Western tradition, freedom and equality are the essence of a human being, who experiences these values in her life. This essentialist approach results in a rather static idea of the human being, which is further

strengthened by the predominance of theory over praxis and of rationality over emotion. By contrast, according to the Chinese philosophical tradition, a human being has her destiny bestowed by heaven. The proper way to be a human being is, first of all, a matter of praxis, which means to follow the order of heaven, i.e. to follow the Dao. Yet, because there is no clear definition of what the Dao actually means, it can only be discovered by engaging oneself in life, in short, by learning to be human. These two different views are based on different philosophical assumptions: in terms of Western philosophy, it is an understanding of things where a human being finds her (eternal) essence, whereas for the Chinese, it is knowing the beginning of how human beings live, which is called “knowing the incipency,” i.e. the slight beginning of the movement or the procedure, and the earliest indications of good or evil. This approach of the human being in Chinese philosophy is based on the fundamental conviction that the whole world is a process of production.

Michael Zichy in his paper on “What is a *Menschenbild*? Introducing a Fruitful German Concept,” analyses an important assumption of self-awareness of life, namely, a universal characteristic of individuals and societies. The (German) term “*Menschenbild*” refers to an individual person’s, a group of people’s or a whole society’s understanding of the human being as such, thus it is plausible that every one of us has a “*Menschenbild*.” In particular, this term indicates that every one of us has a set of strong convictions on what it means to be human. These convictions lie at the bottom of the epistemic and moral orders, by which we conceive and sort out the world. They are also powerful, because they mold us. Zichy introduces a differentiation between individual, group-specific and societal “*Menschenbilder*,” and explains how they have important practical functions in our daily life. The characteristic of the societal “*Menschenbild*” in pluralistic societies is that the shared (positive and negative) convictions are abstract and thin with regard to their content, but these convictions are the core of the group-specific and the individual “*Menschenbilder*”; they can be qualified as higher-order typifications.

The second part of this volume is devoted to the question if and how self-awareness of life can be learned. This topic is closely related to the general theme of the World Congress of Philosophy in 2018, “Learning to be Human.” If self-awareness of life requires human beings to pay attention to their inner spiritual and outer social and political life, an important follow-up question could be whether philosophy can provide ideas that help people become (more) self-aware of life. In fact, the answers to this question manifest how philosophy can indeed resume its task as a school of (practical) wisdom, which has been a common vocation of philosophers throughout the ages and in cultures over the globe. In his last

paper, “Learning for Self and Learning for Others: A Postmodern Reflection,” before his sudden passing, Vincent Shen (1949-2018) criticizes the modern conception of human subjectivity by reexamining the Confucian ideas of the relationships between the self and (many) others. According to Shen’s interpretation of Confucius and of Western postmodern philosophy, he thinks that in the process of learning and becoming human many others play a constitutive role. Taking relatedness and responsiveness into account, we have to make a change from the concept of the self as pure and absolute subjectivity to a concept of self-in-the-making, for one achieves one’s subjectivity in the process of being in relation and in response to many others. Another change needed is to make a shift from a predominantly intellectual idea of subjectivity, as in modern Western philosophy, to a moral and artistic subjectivity in the Confucian sense. The latter is able to refer to the ultimate reality in one’s moral experience. The importance of many others in the process of learning to be human can be seen from three levels: human desire as the direction of the good of many (related) others, the formation of virtue, as the ability to step out of one’s self-enclosure and be generous to many others, and the ontological level of the connectivity of a person with other humans and all beings. These can lead to a more balanced relationship between “learning for self” and “learning for (many) others,” which is a prerequisite for a true self-awareness of life.

Yasien Mohamed highlights another aspect of the question how to learn self-awareness of life, namely love and friendship. In his paper, “Relearning to be Human through Love and Friendship: The Contribution of Islam and Christianity,” he compares the contributions of three classical philosophical traditions, viz. Greek, Islamic and Christian. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* distinguishes three kinds of friendship, which correspond to the different object of love. The motives of friendship are either based on love for utility, pleasure, or a person’s character. In Aristotle’s view, only the last kind of love is enduring. An important characteristic of this kind of love is that it is reciprocal, although not necessarily in the same proportion. In sum, Aristotle sees friendship as an essential component of a flourishing life, and the highest true friendship is between two virtuous persons, who love each other because of their goodness. Mohamed then analyzes how Aristotle’s views on love and friendship have influenced Islamic and Christian thinkers, in particular, Miskawayh, an 11th century Islamic philosopher, and Stephen Post, a contemporary Christian thinker. Both have broadened and extended the concept of love and friendship beyond that of families, friends, tribes and classes. According to Miskawayh, specific forms of familiar friendships, such as love between mother and child, friend to friend, and pupil to teacher, could help preparing the person for a wider application of love towards the unfamiliar and the stranger, while Post takes a different

approach to analyze the nature of love. He explores the intersection of science, human experience and the underlying metaphysics of divine love. He tries to build a scientific basis for unselfish and unlimited love rooted in the Christian ethical tradition of *agape*. Similar to Miskawayh, but not to Aristotle, Post stresses the extensivity of love to all people. This universality of love has its biological foundation in the almost instinctive love of parents for their children, and can be elevated by *agape*, where love is ennobled through the love for God. Post enriches his argument in favor of unlimited love with social scientific findings to show a correlation between intrinsic religiousness and altruistic behavior.

The third part is devoted to the value of self-awareness of life. As a preliminary question, Bo Meinertsen in his paper “In Search of ‘Universal’ Values to Live By” examines whether this value, as many other values we live by can legitimately be qualified as “universal.” Although controversial, this question is especially important in today’s increasingly globalized world. Meinertsen identifies three problems concerning the understanding of universal values: 1) how to restrict the number of universal values against the backdrop of the great diversity of values in cultures across the world; 2) how to deal with their – apparent – incompatibility; and 3) how to guarantee an unbiased idea of values of other cultures or civilizations given our limited or even non-existent familiarity with them. Meinertsen proposes to search for “universal” values by using insights of social sciences, in particular, cross-cultural psychology. Based on this empirical research he concludes that there are ten types of specific universal values: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security; and six core virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence. Meinertsen then singles out the four most important ethical, rather than political or socio-economic values, and supplements them with two values that are correlated with a reduction of conflicts between different civilizations. This results in a list of six universal values: wisdom and knowledge, respect for the uniqueness of individuals, communities and nature, tolerance, benevolence, gratitude, appreciation of beauty.

Li Qin in her paper “Reflections on and Implications of Hofstede’s Individualism and Collectivism Dimension” takes a similar empirical approach as Meinertsen’s regarding a particular value, which inherently belongs to self-awareness of life, namely, the individualism/collectivism divide. She examines the impact of this divide on the feeling of loneliness by using Hofstede’s Cultural Dimension theory to define five dimensions to understand differences in national cultures. The Individualism/Collectivism index, the most influential of these dimensions, provides visual scores of various degrees of individualism in different societies. Empirical

studies from different European societies have demonstrated that the individualism and collectivism divide can, indeed, shed light on the understanding of loneliness. Since loneliness is a prevalent social issue across the world nowadays, it is important to recognize the consequences of physical and mental health. Hofstede's research on the individualism/collectivism divide helps us understand a counterintuitive research-result that people in collectivistic societies are more likely to feel lonely compared with individualistic ones. This finding enables us to answer an important practical question that is directly relevant to self-awareness of life: what kind of social support (emotional or instrumental) and interaction (with families or friends) can serve as a buffer against loneliness in different, i.e. individualist or collective societies?

Balaganapathi Devarakonda in his paper on "Relearning to be at Peace: Exploring Alternative Conceptions" examines peace as a value. Peace is an excellent exemplification of self-awareness of life, since it is a necessary condition for inner spiritual as well as outer social and political life, for individuated as well as all forms of life. Devarakonda approaches the value of peace through a comparison between Western and Eastern, in particular Indian, perspectives. Mapping contemporary discussions on the concept of peace provides an understanding of peace from both external and internal, and from both individual and group perspectives. The latter one as the dominant stresses that the individual can live in peace only when there is social or political peace. This view assumes that peace is a state of tranquility or quietness facilitated by a homogenous state without any divergence and difference. It also distinguishes between negative peace or the absence of structural violence and positive peace or social justice. Yet this dominant view is limited because of its binary conception of peace (peace is the absence of war), its obsession with external peace alone (peace between two groups, societies, states, etc.), and its understanding of the group-level peace as the precondition for individual peace. In contrast to this dominant assumption, the other approach of peace re-verses the relationship between the group and the individual, and emphasizes that individual peace contributes to peace of the (social or political) group. Devarakonda develops this alternative conception of peace in more detail with the help of the Buddhist conception of *brahma-vihārās*. According to this view, the cause of suffering lies in our craving for outward objects and in our misplaced presumption that achieving them would lead us to happiness and peace. Hence, the issue of suffering and life devoid of peace is to be addressed primarily at the individual level and from an inward perspective. It is only by practicing the inner culture of peace of the individual that the external peace of institutions is possible. To realize this inner peace, Buddhism prescribes four cardinal virtues or *brahma-vihārās*: *metta* (benevolence, friendly feeling), *karuna* (compassion),

*mudita* (empathetic joy) and *upekkha* (equanimity). All social relationships are based on one of these moral attitudes (*vihārās*), which represent the highest (*brahma*) conditions of social well-being.

The last two papers of this part discuss the relationship between self-awareness of life with the most fundamental human value, namely, humanism or human dignity. William Barbieri in his paper “Human Dignity and Intercultural Dialogue: Problems and Prospects” starts with a brief introduction to the notion of human dignity and its current importance in contemporary global law, politics and morality. Barbieri argues that human dignity is the preeminent ethico-political value operating on the international stage at present. It is universally considered as both egalitarian and inherent in human personhood. Insofar as self-awareness of life is a truly intercultural notion, it is essential to examine to what extent its fundamental underlying value, viz. human dignity, can be employed in different cultural settings. Barbieri sketches some of the principal problems in attempt of developing a notion of intercultural understandings in the Western history of ideas. First, there is the internal challenge, which takes the form of contending invocations of human dignity rooted in assumptions of conflicting cultures within the broad tradition of dignitarian thought in the West. Second, there is the interreligious challenge, which revolves around the question of how well human dignity, rooted in Greco-Roman, Christian and Enlightenment thought, can be translated into, or find rough equivalents within, the idioms and intellectual structures of other religious systems. Finally, there is the cross-cultural challenge, which is presented by the broad civilizational divergences with respect to the mores and normative patterns of contemporary societies (e.g. the potentially incompatible differences among dignity cultures, honor cultures and face cultures). The author offers some important observations about promising opportunities to develop helpful intercultural dialogue in terms of human dignity and its cultivation and protection. First, although different cultural formations are expected to have internal differentiations, their internally anchored understandings of human dignity can be constructed. Second, shared intercultural learning about dignity is an undertaking, which brings many benefits, not least among them that the process itself enhances human dignity. Finally, the emerging scholarly field of visual ethics may provide a sort of lingua franca for unearthing commonalities associated with human dignity while helping to remedy our under-developed appreciation of its aesthetic and bodily dimensions.

Seema Bose in her paper “Humanism Revisited” discusses a comparison between two historical representatives of humanism, namely, Giuseppe Mazzini and Peter Kropotkin. Both have a humanist tinge in so far as they treat the theme of human beings and their nature. Mazzini criticizes the individualism of the so-called freedom rights and emphasizes the importance of association and harmony between self-choosing,



right-acting and self-rule. He prioritizes duties over rights. He considers education as the first duty, because it helps human beings rightly choose between good and evil. Finally, Mazzini was hailed for combining nationalism with humanism, since he considers a nation as a living task and embraces universal brotherhood. For Kropotkin mutual aid rather than competition in the struggle for existence has been the chief factor of evolution and the basis for a just society. He gives a vision of a world where humanity would reign supremely and there would be no divide between haves and have-nots, as justice is impossible without equality. Kropotkin thinks that human beings may act sinfully, but at the same time, they have the ability to transcend evil because human beings are innately good. Both Mazzini and Kropotkin's total oeuvre project an image of a social order in which injustice, slavery and inhumanity will be abolished.

The final part of this volume discusses a number of specific historical and systematic questions regarding self-awareness of life. In line with the plea for a non-theoretical approach of this self-awareness (see above) Dan Chitoiu shows the limits of objective knowledge in his paper, "Reality, Life and the Limits of Objective Knowledge." He analyzes the great shift from the Aristotelian, predominantly a qualitative paradigm for the investigation of reality to the Cartesian-Galilean, predominantly a quantitative one, based on mathematics. Such a shift was an important step forward, since the new paradigm provided an explanation of nature/reality and enabled the emergence of modern technology. It was also a step backward because this paradigm implied a straying from the understanding of *life* and the concrete phenomenon. Augustine developed an alternative, quite influential way of describing reality, namely, to observe the whole of reality based on an intellectual, blissful view of God in this life. In fact, these two paradigms existed simultaneously until the 19th century; both shared an epistemological optimism regarding the capacities of the intellect to reach truth unequivocally, which lasted until the mid of the 20th century. The author argues that the Cartesian-Galilean, distanced view of reality is problematic in the case of (self-)awareness of life, since life is present everywhere and surrounds us in many forms. We, as human beings, are embedded in life as living organisms. In conclusion, Chitoiu pleads for an enlarged paradigm for the understanding of reality, namely a broader and deeper understanding of life. This broader perspective is offered by spiritual and cultural traditions, which have accumulated many observations and reflections on life, and form an inexhaustible resource for understanding life philosophically.

Prakriti Mukherjee in her paper, "The Concept of Education in Tagore and Confucius: A Comparative Analysis," argues that, since both authors failed to come to terms with their contemporary ideologies of education, they had to start to employ their respective wisdom traditions

to create alternatives. Tagore developed a system of education based on his own interpretation of ancient Indian wisdom. It aims at developing human creativity and a harmonious relationship with Nature. According to Tagore, the ultimate essence of the human being is harmony and an ever widening consciousness based on the surplus already present in the human being. For Tagore the purpose of education is to create an ethics and other social concerns, because education is a path of self-discovery and in so doing the pupil discovers the harmony in the world. Similar to Tagore, Confucius initiated in China a novel educational system with a rather pragmatic outlook, in which he tried to emphasize perfection, rituals and ultimately Heaven. Education for Confucius involves cultivating one's character, just as crafting something fine from raw materials. Both teachers developed a view for the student to understand the concept of being a disciple; that is, we learn to be human and remain students throughout our life, for this enables us to practice what we have learned throughout our life.

Chen Changshen in his paper, "Wittgenstein on Taste and Genius," illustrates that Wittgenstein explored the concepts of "taste" and "genius" from the perspective of aesthetic appreciation and artistic creation respectively. The early Wittgenstein denied the existence of aesthetic judgments presented by propositions, but affirmed the artistic features of "expression." The later Wittgenstein emphasized the regulatory characteristics of aesthetic judgments, structural characteristics and genius. For him genius means originality and requires excellent character; courage, followed by perseverance, attention and sincerity, is the primary characteristic of the genius.

Bao Wenxin in his paper, "The Transcendent Sphere and Revolutionary Morality: A Problem of Fung Yu-lan's Theory of Sphere," discusses the question of political radicalism, which Fung Yu-lan of the Modern New Confucianism often associates with self-awareness of life. The main aim of this paper is to examine the complicated relationship between political radicalism and its philosophical system by means of an analysis of the work of Fung, especially his theory of the transcendent sphere. Fung describes this sphere as a serene and peaceful spiritual state, which seems to be incompatible with political activism. Bao Wenxin argues that if we go through the logics of New Rationalistic Confucianism, we find that a person in the transcendent sphere might be a Confucian Sage in the traditional sense or a revolutionary hero in the modern sense. However, the concept of revolutionary morality is inconsistent with Fung's definition of morality, which is the inherent problem of New Rationalistic Confucianism. Against the backdrop of the abuse of instrumental rationality and the decline of the humanistic spirit in modern times, Bao Wenxin sees the importance of discussing self-awareness of life. However, the example of Fung reminds us that the possible relationship

between the superb sphere of living and political radicalism is an aspect to which we need pay attention when discussing self-awareness of life.

The final paper by Yan Jing, "On Manuel Castells' Identity Theory," discusses various new conceptions of identity in the context of the global network society. The identity theory includes legitimizing identity, resistance identity and project identity. The legitimizing identity is formed by the elites, but the fading away of the sovereignty of nation states has caused the disintegration of this kind of identity. The repelled people have formed the resistance identity around traditional cultural resources, while resisting the network society and global capitalism. Their actions have spilt society from the inside. Meanwhile the networking of society and power relationships has provided the conditions for the resistance identity to evolve into project identity, which facilitates the reconstruction of society. What happens now is that during the process of disintegration of legitimizing identity, the ability of the resistance identity to reintegrate society has facilitated the process of this kind of identity to transform into project identity. Castells considers the fading away of the sovereignty of nation states to be the presupposition of the rise of other identity types. However, as the strengthening of the logic of nation states in the process of anti-globalization is trending, Yan Jing thinks that identity theory should be put under the framework of nation states and the reconstruction of human society.