1. Introduction

However morality ought to be understood, it is a simple fact that cultural perceptions of morality differ. These perceptions determine to a significant extent how morality is approached, pondered and discussed. In other words, the diversity of ethics as it presents itself in various world-philosophies depends largely on the real and actual perceptions of morality.

In the following, an attempt will be made to formulate a general East-Asian vs. Euro-American comparison of such perceptions and the dominant tendencies in ethical thinking ensuing from them. Needless to say, such tendencies are far from absolute, and there are significant overlaps in the ethical approaches of both East and West. One can certainly find important exceptions from the tendencies that otherwise characterize the traditions in question. But exceptions are exceptions precisely because the deviate from a rule, and the aim here is merely to identify the general rule, or, more appropriately, as here is intended a purely descriptive term, 'tendency'. A generalization such as this is not meant to polarize the compared cultural traditions, but merely to identify and thus clarify some of their distinguishing features, to locate the specific cultural traits that keep them together as particular 'traditions'. This requires generalizations. Without them, we merely heap together a collection of individual and disconnected features that are not easily assimilated into a meaningful and coherent whole. As Roger T. Ames has observed, "the only thing more dangerous than striving to make responsible cultural generalizations is failing to make them."[1] To the extent that such an identification is possible, it may facilitate meaningful interaction between the traditions, reduce the possibility of misinterpretation and miscommunication, and help to indicate strengths and weaknesses of both tendencies which should be instructive to those working within either tradition.

The thesis from which this comparison proceeds is that the major differences between the East-Asian and Western ethical traditions emanate from divergent views of the kind of role selfhood or ego should play in social human life. A comparison of these views, it is suggested, will be helpful to flesh out the different perceptions of morality. It will be proposed that Western thinking is characterized by a stronger focus on the self, and that

while Western ethical thinkers and schools certainly seek to reduce self-centeredness, such endeavours generally proceed through an augmentation of the role of human reason and thus a more intense and even tormenting self-consciousness. A clear reflection of this tendency is the ethical approach to moral issues *qua* issues associated with individual action and rational choice. The East-Asian approach differs from this in that it seeks to balance excessive introspection with a cultivated 'sense' of identification with the whole, be it society or the natural realm. While this approach, it seems, largely succeeds in preventing an existential kind of agony, it nevertheless suffers from some other serious weaknessess. Hence both traditions, it is argued, have something to offer one other. The discussion offered here is merely a sketchy outline that may hopefully work as a first step toward that purpose.

2. The Western Road to Egology

Towards the end of her life, around 1882, Emily Dickinson wrote this melancholic but beautiful poem:

How happy is the little stone

That rambles on the road alone,

And doesn't care about careers,

And exigencies never fears;

Whose coat of elemental brown

A passing universe put on;

And independent as the sun,

Associates or glows alone

Fulfilling absolute decree

In casual simplicity.[2]

What could possibly be desirable about being a rambling stone? Dickinson's rambling stone is free from the affliction of self-consciousness, of the reflexive but futile and therefore unending and vicious quest for its true essence and aim. Instead, it rambles without awareness of its own being and direction, free from human cares and worries. It simply goes. Dickinson's poem expresses the pain of selfhood, of consciousness, of self-awareness within a culture in which the individual self has become so paramount that it is stuck in its own self-reflexivity, isolated from communion with others. In Western literature, especially in and after the nineteenth century, this is a peculiarly common theme.

But perhaps it is not so peculiar. At least since the rise of philosophy in ancient Greece, the ego has played a central role in Western thinking. However the Delphic maxim 'know thyself!' ought to be understood, Socrates seems to have understood it as an inquiry into himself for the sake of obtaining the moral wisdom of temperance.[3] The task of 'knowing oneself' has since then been transmitted to Western students of philosophy, though today it rather indicates an endeavour to realize the uniqueness of one's 'true self'. Who am I? What am I? While it is hard to imagine intelligible answers to such questions, at least in their current sense, they have an unmistakably rationalist foundation signifying the priority of epistemology to ethics: one first needs to know before one can act. Plato's primary objective may have been to eliminate relativism, but he did so by locating the source of truth in a unchanging transcendental realm accessible only through mind and reason. This inescapably directs philosophical activity, taking place in the self, to the self itself.

Socrates and Plato set the stage for "a long-developing process whereby an ethic of reason and reflection gains dominance over one of action and glory."[4] The play went on for hundreds of years. And while the dominance of Christian values may have reduced the

introspective tendency during the Middle Ages,[5] the emphasis on the ego was considerably intensified during the modern period. In order to solve the epistemological problem of grounding certainty in his age of growing uncertainty, Descartes had to detach the ego from its 'container' the body, and provide a notion of the two entirely incompatible entities of spirit and matter. This had a number of radical implications. For one, it entrenched even further the dualistic view of body and soul that Plato and Christianity brought to western culture. It further divided the gap between subject and object. The subject took over as prime value, while the mechanistic object became a mere means to reach the aims laid down by the free subject. The mind devoured the body while the human being was given free rein to consume nature.

Thirdly, Cartesian dualism produced an even stronger move to internalization than Plato had proposed with his rationalist turn. As Charles Taylor observes, it was to "place the moral sources within us."[6] The 'I' gradually began to encroach upon itself, culminating, at least symbolically, in the aged Kant's posthumous notes. He had found himself compelled to dismiss his personal servant to many years, Martin Lampe, but it obviously caused him such distress that his memorandum-books contain reminders scattered here and there where Kant has written: "The name Lampe must now be completely forgotten."[7]

The glorification of self and reason, as it developed during the Renaissance and modern period, manifests itself perhaps most clearly in modern individualism as expressed in Enlightenment philosophy. The belief in the autonomy of the rational subject is for instance clear in Utilitarianism according to which the rational self is meant to be able to assess, even 'calculate', the most expedient consequences of one's action to secure the greatest happiness for the greatest number, which is thereby meant to constitute the ultimate standard of right and wrong.[8] This belief in the self's ability to determine in a most accurate manner the goodness or badness of actions was perhaps a logical consequence of the Euro-American's increased self-confidence in the wake of new discoveries and methods in science and the felt power of the individual to be able to interpret, understand and discover things on his own accord.

This, in many ways *positive* step, encouraged by the Protestant movement, seems to have gradually brought us to a position of 'absolute egotism' whereby we decide, as absolute subjects, the criteria at which the world should be handled and the rational defined. Max

Stirner may seem a curious product of German Idealism, but in many ways he brought the ethical and political implications of the school to its most consistent conclusion by locating the world, or at least the conceptual standards at which the world can be recognized and evaluated, in the ego. Stirner says:

Just as I find myself behind things as spirit, I must later also find myself *behind the thoughts*, i.e. as their creator and owner. During the spirit-time my thoughts grew till they overtopped my head, whose offspring they were after all; they hovered about me and convulsed me like fever-phantasies – a formidable power. The thoughts had become *corporeal* for themselves, were ghosts, e. g. God, Emperor, Pope, Fatherland, etc. If I destroy their corporeity, then I take them back into mine, and say: 'I alone am corporeal.' And now I take the world as what it is to me, as *mine*, as my property; I refer all to myself.[9]

While generally considered a marginal and idiosyncratic thinker, Stirner epitomizes the general Western modern approach to the problem of selfhood, which is precisely to increase selfhood, to make us even more conscious of ourselves. The cure consists in spreading and intensifying the disease.

A good case in point is psycho-analysis, in which the object is to transfer as much as possible of the *id* (*das Es*), the irrational, repressed and disturbing unconscious part of the psyche to the *ego* (das Ich), the rational and conscious part.[10] The aim is enhanced control, self-control. Psycho-analysis is, in this sense, a continuation of the Kantian epistemological project of empowering rationality.

Kant, in fact, explicitly says that we must subdue our natural side by subordinate it under the dominance of reason: "Human nature does not of itself harmonize with [the moral] good; it [can be made to harmonize with it] only through the dominance [*Gewalt*] that reason exerts over sensibility."[11] According to this view, reason, ostensibly leading to clear consciousness and self-understanding, is the exclusive key to civilized human living, and the more we have of it, the more civilized, more human, we become. Curiously, however, the more we are aware of ourselves, Kant seems to say, the more capable we are of submitting ourselves to a generalized and *impersonal* law. So in this sense the possibility of ethics appears to be contingent upon the overcoming or indeed bursting of self as a consequence

of its progressive expansion. Egotism is eliminated by enlarging the ego. Perhaps this apparent contradiction is among the causes for the agony that Western thinkers relate to increased self-awareness. Kant acknowledges this quite explicitly, but he sees it as a necessary evil associated with progress:

To feel one's life, to enjoy oneself, is merely to feel oneself continually being agitated to step out of the present situation (which must therefore to be an equally recurrent pain). This further explains the afflicting, distressing hardship of boredom for all those who are mindful of their life and of time (cultivated people).[12]

In a footnote to this passage, Kant adds:

Because of his innate lifelessness, the Carribbean is free from this hardship. He can sit with his fishing-rod for hours without catching anything; thoughtlessness is a lack of spur to activity, which always brings pain with itself, but from which he is free.

The ability to savour the moment in peace, quiet and thoughtlessness is therefore not an ability, but on the contrary a sign of primitiveness. But not everyone has considered the human being's surge to conscious awareness of self and world as a sign of progress. Max Scheler, for instance, says that thinking and human intelligence is in fact a response to the human being's handicap of not knowing instinctually what to do:

'Cogito ergo sum' *says the proud and self-confident Descartes. But Descartes – why do you think; why do you want? You think, because neither instinct nor some kind of skill based on your natural tendencies whispers to you directly what you are or are not to do! And you don't think – as you yourself believe – in order to elevate yourself above the animals onto new levels of existence or value, but in order to become 'more animalistic than other animals'! And what do you mean by 'free choice'? This is what you call the fact that you live in constant uncertainty, i.e. you don't know where to and what for – which the animal*

always knows directly and instantly, which, in other words, it knows much better than you! [13]

Scheler considers human intelligence to be a response to the human being‘s “biological weakness and feebleness”.[14]

From this point of view, the hyper-conscious human being, with all his intelligence and self-awareness, appears as a kind of sickness, sickness unto death, as Søren Kierkegaard so famously put it. And as a matter of fact, consciousness has often been tackled as a kind of sickness. The modern affliction of selfhood is a common theme among Western authors. We find it virtually everywhere in modern philosophy and literature, in Hegel‘s ‘unhappy consciousness’, in Giacomo Leopardi‘s *noia* or ‘boredom’[15], in the Romantic *Weltschmerz*, in Schopenhauer‘s and Nietzsche‘s nihilism, in Robert Musil‘s ‘man without qualities’, in Baudelaire‘s *ennui*, in Freud‘s psycho-analysis, in Emil Cioran who speaks of consciousness as “nature‘s nightmare”,[16] in the existentialist critique of the bourgeois way of life, in surrealism, and in countless other Western philosophies, psychologies, novels, poems and artworks from the modern period onwards until the present.[17]

The torture of the ‘I’, locked inside itself, seeking some kind of salvation or release from itself to become something else or even become nothing at all is a conspicuous characteristic of Euro-American and by now globalized modernity. The seemingly ever-increasing attention given to celebrities and the super-rich may be an aspect of this complex, implying a popular desire to identify with them instead of oneself. Other layers of contemporary culture, however, approach the issue in the customary paradoxical manner by suggesting that one can only escape oneself by *becoming* oneself, i.e. one’s *true* and *authentic* self, a common theme in popular self-help manuals.[18]

3. East-Asian Egophobia

Throughout history, Asian philosophy has often been dismissed by Western thinkers as unproductive introspection. This view, possibly influenced by misconceptions of meditation, is particularly ironic considering that this tendency turns out, in fact, to be much more typical of Western thought. Ethical considerations largely revolve around the ego, both as the main cause and the solution of moral predicaments. In this particular sense, and perhaps in some others, we have been, and still are, quite self-obsessed.

In the Chinese philosophical traditions, which are taken as representative of East-Asian cultures in this discussion,[19] selfhood is certainly regarded as problematic, but it is not accompanied with any kind of agony. This is an intriguing fact as such, and indicative of a more positive existential attitude to the relationship between human beings and their life-world, but a discussion of this aspect is beyond the parameters of this paper.

In the following, a sketchy outline will be provided of the classical Chinese approach to selfhood with regard to morality. While we can of course find a plethora of similarities between the Chinese and Western approaches (after all, both Chinese and Westerners are human), the focus here will be on differences. In short, while Western philosophy generally tends to inflate the self, the general aim of Chinese philosophy is to diminish or overcome the self. The self is considered problematic in two senses that also reflect the different emphases of Confucianism and Daoism.

First, the ego‘s dominance symbolizes a primitive state, as it is virtually or literally the sole concern of the individual in his or her initial circumstances after birth. As the infant grows up, it develops a natural kind of affection for the people in its surroundings, usually the parents and other next of kin. This is the first step towards reducing the scope of the ego in the sense that one‘s concern embraces others as well. The Confucians call it ‘personal cultivation’ (*xiu shen* ??), indicating that becoming a genuine person means to become a social kind of being. Successful personal cultivation or indeed *transformation* means successful expansion of our natural affection, certainly graded affection according to the closeness of relations. One treats one‘s grandmother differently from one‘s insurance agent,

and so one should, but, believe it or not, a cultivated person will still have some affection for her insurance agent. For the Confucians, a petty person, *xiao ren* ??, is someone who fails to overcome his infantile egocentrism. An exemplary person, a *jun zi* ??, is one who succeeds.[20]

The other problem of self, notably represented by Daoism, is that self-consciousness obstructs the relationship with our surroundings or our tasks at hand. Many Daoist writings encourage us to let go of our self while proceeding in our daily activities as a most desirable achievement that will facilitate creative and efficacious engagement with our social and natural surroundings. It is creative and efficacious in the sense that it produces something of value, something that contributes to harmonious relations between those involved. It is therefore a *moral* achievement as well.

In the Daoist 4th century BCE classic *Zhuangzi*, it is said that "the highest man is without self".[21] The term is *wu ji* ?? or 'non-self' as it literally means. But *wu* ?, indicating a negation, does not mean that what is being negated has thereby ceased to be. This is more of a deconstruction, or *Aufhebung*, to speak in a Hegelian manner. It is not simply selflessness, but rather a temporary letting-go of the self while one tends to the world and one's tasks. It has been referred to as the "death of the ego"[22] and it certainly is death in the Daoist sense of the ego immersing itself with the entire and incessant process of existence.

Zhuangzi continues by saying that "the spiritual person is without accomplishments, the sagely person is without name."[23] But does this mean that they are good for nothing? Not at all. In the *Daodejing*, there is a clearer indication of what the negative *wu*-forms imply. In the *Daodejing*, *wu wei* ??, literally 'non-action', is often endorsed. However, it also makes clear that 'non-action' is not simply not doing anything: "By doing non-action, there is nothing that will not be ordered." (*wei wu wei, ze wu bu zhi* ???????)[24] So *wu wei*, non-action, is in fact *wei wu wei* ???: it is *active* non action. In this case, to *do* non-action will bring about that everything will be well-ordered. Thus, instead of meaning that we do absolutely nothing, it means that we do it non-coercively, let things go without forcing them, follow the natural inclinations. This comes through clearer in a later section: "Dao (the world-process) never does anything (coercively), and yet nothing is left undone" (*dao chang wu wei er wu bu wei* ????????).[25]

So we can produce a more refined translation of the non-self passage in the *Zhuangzi* on the basis of this word play from the *Daodejing*: "The highest man is without self, and yet there is nothing of himself that is not there" (*wu ji er wu bu ji* ??????). He is entirely focussed on his task. No self is full self. Similarly, the spiritual person does not act out of a wish to effect great accomplishments, and yet this is precisely what he does; and the sagely person does not act out of consideration of achieving fame, and yet she acquires fame. The conjunctive *er* ?, which I have translated as 'and yet', could also be understood semi-causally so that it is precisely because of their selfless motivations that they are so effective in their actions.

An intriguing model of this self-forgetting for Zhuangzi is the drunk person:

If a drunk falls from a carriage, even if it is going very fast, he will not die. His bones and joints are the same as those of other people, but the injuries he receives are different. It's because his spirit is whole. He was not aware of getting into the carriage, nor was he aware of falling out of it. Life and death, alarm and fear do not enter his breast. Therefore, he confronts things without apprehension. If someone who has gotten his wholeness from wine is like this, how much more so would one be who gets his wholeness from heaven![26]

The integrity, fullness or completeness of his spirit prevents the drunk from suffering serious harm. Consciousness, on the other hand, splits us up and distracts us. Zhuangzi is not suggesting a kind of Dionysian lifestyle of constant drunkenness, however tempting it may be to interpret him as such. The drunk is merely an indicative model. The Daoist classics are full of stories about skillful individuals, butchers, bell-makers and carpenters whose art consists in letting go of their self, though only after having received sufficient training. The ability to do something well depends significantly on the degree to which one can keep one's mind together, focus on the task at hand and forget about everything else, not least about others and their judgment.

For the skill of fluency, of fulfilling the task, is also inhibited by concerns about the assessment of the audience, of the others, of something outside of us. As it says in the *Liezi*, a work dating back to about 3rd century BCE:

Gamble for tiles, and you play skilfully; for the clasp of your belt, and you lose confidence; for gold, and you get flustered. You have not lost your skill; but if you hold yourself back, you give weight to something outside you; and whoever does that is inwardly clumsy.[27]

The inhibiting factor is consciousness. As A.C. Graham says in his introductory remarks in the *Liezi*, "it is especially dangerous to be conscious of oneself … One whose mind is a pure mirror of his situation, unaware of himself and therefore making no distinction between advantage and danger, will act with absolute assurance, and nothing will stand in his way."[28]

The *Liezi* often speaks of a sage who has broken through the conventional analytical means of assessing the world: "his eyes became like his ears, his ears like his nose, his nose like his mouth". The strict use of the various senses is bypassed, implying some kind of instinctual wisdom, perhaps a sixth sense, whose communication appears incommensurable to conventional logic.

Other models of emulation are animals, the infant or even the fool, as described in the *Daodejing*:

The multitude are happy, happy … I alone am impassive, revealing nothing at all, like a baby that has not yet learned to smile, so listless, as though nowhere to go; the multitude all have more than enough, I alone seem to be in want; I have the heart-and-mind of a fool – so vacant and dull.[29]

Even Confucianism regards the highest cultivation as characterized by the absence of conscious thinking and the ability to respond spontaneously to circumstances in an appropriate manner. Selfhood with all the concentration it requires is overcome, as expressed for instance by Confucius himself:

The Master said: 'When I was fifteen, my heart was set on learning; at thirty, I took my

stance; at forty, I was no longer perplexed; at fifty, I had realized the heavenly forces of circumstance; at sixty, my ear was attuned; at seventy, I could give my thoughts and feelings free rein without overstepping the boundaries.'[30]

At the highest point of his personal development, Confucius could let go of his thoughts and feelings without any rational calculation. He simply knew instinctually, as it were, and not unlike animals, what is the best thing to do.

4. Concluding Remarks

The point made by the Chinese thinkers is that a true self is most efficient in its absence. The more it has been overcome, the better it functions in the moral realm. In this sense the ancient Chinese approach to morality is comparable to Chinese medicine: the aim is to secure a harmonious situation for the whole, a situation that is precisely destroyed by egocentrism. Consider this traditional Chinese story of Bian Que, a doctor in the Warring States period (5^{th}-3^{rd} c. BCE) who was renowned for his ability to heal even the most deadly disease. He was asked by the King of Wei why he was so much better than his two brothers who also happened to be doctors. He responded as follows:

My first brother heals sickness before it even develops, so his methods appear hidden, his science art and he is known only within our village.

My second brother deals with illnesses while they are minor, preventing sickness from getting worse and returning the body to health.

I deal with sicknesses when they have reached the level of disease and threaten to destroy the organism of which they are a part. This requires numerous medicines, and skill and knowledge in their use. For this reason my name has become famous throughout the

kingdom and I have been asked to be physician to the king, yet my first brother has the knowledge to deal with sicknesses before they arise and my second brother is able to treat them at an early stage and prevent them getting worse. Though my fame has spread throughout the land, their knowledge is greater.[31]

In like manner, the most efficient 'ethicist' in classical Chinese thought is one who does what she does without anyone noticing. She aims at securing harmony within a group, at the prevention of moral problems, and when she excels in her performance she manages to prevent difficulties before they even develop, and no one ever knows that they could have arisen:

It is easy to maintain a situation while it is still secure;

It is easy to deal with a situation before symptoms develop;

It is easy to break a thing when it is yet brittle;

It is easy to dissolve a thing when it is yet minute.

Deal with a thing while it is still nothing;

Keep a thing in order before disorder sets in.[32]

By the same token, the best generals, according to Sunzi, are those who "subdue the enemy's army without fighting at all".[33] But these excellent generals may be quite unknown, as they have never engaged in battle.

Western ethics, on the other hand, is parallel to Western medicine in the sense that it tends to wait until problems emerge, and only then aims at eliminating them. The strengths of Western surgical medicine is the ability to isolate the issue in question and carry out the rational, methodological procedure necessary to cut through it. Western ethics essentially

does the same by focussing first and foremost on particular moral dilemmas and the correct or just resolution of them. It is an individualist rights-based approach to morality taking for granted an unequivocally 'true' outcome of the issue, virtually as if it were a mathematical, or indeed, a physiological problem. In order for such an approach to be viable, self-consciousness, the enhancement of rational evaluation and in some cases calculation, is inescapable and necessary. Western ethics is not satisfied with merely 'sensing' the situation, but demands rational articulation of the moral issues in question, and their rigorous, logical and conscious resolution.[34] "The focus is on the principles, or injunctions, or standards which guide *action*, while visions of the good are altogether neglected."[35] Thus, it may miss the big picture, so that when it cuts off one head, two may grow in its stead. And this cultural requirement of enhanced focus on one's ego comes with a price and may be something of a vicious circle, for it also produces psychological pain and existential issues that may in fact lead to increased 'immorality', for harm done to others is not seldom due to the agent's own affliction and distress.

The strength of Western ethics, however, should certainly not be understated. It presides over the ability to identify in a reasonably 'objective' manner who is in the wrong and who in the right in each case, and hence adept in protecting the rights and interests of an individual who is, at least in principle, regarded as being on equal footing with everyone else. Certainly, cultural, political and personal factors can and often do cloud the issue, but in this respect it is undeniably superior to the East-Asian approach, which tends to be rather poor at protecting the particular interests of the individual and may even be disposed to sacrifice them for the sake of social stability or, as it is often euphemistically called, 'harmony'.

Another weakness of the East-Asian model regards the main issue of this paper: the tendency to selflessness. In certain circumstances such a disposition may be quite unhelpful, even harmful, and could be compared with Hannah Arendt's well-known notion of the 'banality of evil'. Adolf Eichmann was, one could argue, a 'selfless' individual. He simply followed orders. But his 'selflessness' involved a lack of thinking, empathy, of humanness. Perhaps the same applies to the Japanese occupying forces in China, Korea and other Asian countries during World War II who treated the peoples of these areas with inhumane brutality. And perhaps it applies to Mao Zedong's provincial cadres during the Great Leap Forward in 1958-1960 who did nothing to prevent a famine in which up to 30 million people

died. And it may even apply to those who assisted the genocidal Khmere Rouge regime in Cambodia during the 1970s. We may also turn the issue around, as Arendt did in her time, and find fault with the 'selflessness' of all these victims themselves, who arguably could have done more to resist the injustice brought against them.[36]

Nevertheless, while a more analytical focus on the self and individual actions may be needed in the East-Asian model, the Western approach could also do with more holistic and preventive considerations that would serve to expand the rather myopic individual vision still dominant today. Considering the spread of Western ethical approaches in East-Asian academia, it seems that the former process is already taking place, perhaps even going too far. The question, however, is whether contemporary Euro-Americans are ready to take a step towards the latter. If they are, I fear that those in the forefront will not be academics.

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[1] Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics. A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), p. 23.

[2] Thomas H. Johnson (ed.), *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, vol. III (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963).

[3] Cf. e.g. Plato's *Charmides*, 166c-e.

[4] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 117.

[5] Though this is not altogether certain. As applies to probably all religions (and ethical philosophies), the Christian teaching certainly seeks to reduce self-centered behaviour. But this is not the point. The practical effects of worship and the strict emphasis on personal sin are quite capable of 'internalizing' the believer's vision in such a way that later cultural

manifestations display an intensified accentuation on self-interest and even egotism. This is for instance argued by Friedrich Nietzsche in many of his writings, perhaps most notably in *The Geneology of Morality*, and by Max Weber in his classic and compelling analysis of the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. These complex cases of civilizational analysis cannot be addressed here, but one may also point to Charles Taylor's compelling thesis that the combination of Christian thinking and modern rational scientific approaches actually served to underscore the (European) human being's self-love. Cf. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 234ff.

[6] Ibid, p. 143.

[7] Wilhelm Köller, *Perspektivität und Sprache. Zur Struktur von Objektivierungsformen in Bildern, im Denken und in der Sprache* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), p. 584.

[8] Cf. John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism", in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 10 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2006), p. 213. It is true that Mill criticized his predecessor and founder of Utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham, for a simplified view of nature and for "supposing that the business part of human affairs was the whole of them; all at least that the legislator and the moralist had to do with." Mill, "Bentham", *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 100. Mill himself had a more complex and pluralist view. However, the approach of Mill's Utilitarianism is still one in which the subject's rational calculation is first and foremost intended to establish the goodness and badness of isolated, individual actions. Cf. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 83-86.

[9] Max Stirner. *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (Leipzig: Zenith Verlag/Erich Stolpe, 1927), p. 8.

[10] Cf. Sigmund Freud, "Das Ich und das Es", *Gesammelte Werke* XIII (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1940), pp. 252ff.

[11] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, *Akademie Textausgabe*, vol. V (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), §29, p. 271.

[12] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, *Akademie Textausgabe*, vol.

VII (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), §61, p. 233.

[13] Max Scheler, *Philosophische Weltanschauung* (München: Lehnen Verlag, 1954), p. 80.

[14] Ibid. An intriguingly similar view is expressed in the Daoist classic *Liezi*: "Yang Zhu said: Man resembles the other species between heaven and earth, and like them owes his nature to the Five Elements. He is the most intelligent of living things. But in man, nails and teeth are not strong enough to provide defence, skin and flesh are too soft for protection; he cannot run fast enough to escape danger, and he lacks fur and feathers to ward off heat and cold. He must depend on other things in order to tend his nature, must trust in knowledge and not rely on force. Hence the most valuable use of knowledge is for self-preservation, while the most ignoble use of force is to attack others." Lieh-Tzu [Liezi], *The Book of Lieh-Tzu. A Classic of Tao*, transl. A.C. Graham (London: Mandala, 1991), book 7, p. 153.

[15] Cf. Geir Sigurðsson, "In Praise of Illusions. Giacomo Leopardi's Ultraphilosophy", *Nordicum-Meditteraneum*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2010).

[16] Emil Cioran, *Tears and Saints*, transl. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 102.

[17] Thus, the rationalizing focus on self with all its agonly is largely a modern manifestation. In ancient Greek thought, notably in Aristotle's social philosophy, it is mostly absent. However, a strong indication of the Platonic heritage is quite present in Aristotle's ambivalence as to whether the good life ought to be pursued in social activities or in individual contemplation.

[18] Some recent titles suffice to illustrate this: *In the Meantime: Finding Yourself and the Love You Want* (1999), *Bliss: Writing to Find Your True Self* (1999), *Something More: Excavating Your Authentic Self* (2000), *The Courage to Be Yourself: A Woman's Guide to Emotional Strength and Self-Esteem* (2001), *Heal Your Wounds and Find Your True Self: Finally a Book that Explains Why it's so Hard Being Yourself* (2002), *Self Matters: Creating Your Life from the Inside Out* (2003), *Know Thyself: The Stress Release Programme* (2006), *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self* (2006), *A Weekend to Change Your Life: Find Your Authentic Self after a Lifetime of Being All Things to All People*

(2007), *Heal Your Self – A Journey to Find YOU* (2008), *Open the Door: A Journey to the True Self* (2008), *Coming Home to Your True Self: Leaving the Emptiness of False Attractions* (2008), *True Self* (2010), *The Shadow Effect: Illuminating the Hidden Power of Your True Self* (2011), *Soul Coaching: 28 Days to Discover Your Authentic Self* (2011), *Know Thyself* (2011), *Know Thyself – A Guided Journey to Self and Unlocking the Powers Within* (2012), *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self* (2013).

[19] This is not meant to imply that the Chinese philosophical traditions, let alone Chinese culture, is identical or even interchangable in this or any other respect with the traditions found in, say, Korea and Japan. But while both Korean and Japanese societies certainly have their own particular national and cultural character, they received considerable philosophical, religious and cultural influence from China, in many cases developing the original sources of these influences much further than was ever to take place in China. It can be reasonably taken for granted that the classical Chinese philosophical insights presented in this discussion are to a greater or lesser extent shared by both Korean and Japanese cultures.

[20] Cf. *The Analects of Confucius. A Philosophical Translation*, transl. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), e.g. 4.11 and 4.16.

[21] Chuang Tzu [Zhuangzi], *Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, transl. Victor H. Mair (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 1.1, p. 5. For the convenience of readers, all references to Chinese philosophical classics are to available and authoritative English translations.

[22] Cf. Günter Wohlfart, *Die Kunst des Lebens und andere Künste. Skurrile Skizzen zu einem euro-daoistischen Ethos ohne Moral* (Berlin: Parerga, 2005), pp. 214f.

[23] Chuang Tzu [Zhuangzi], 1.1, p. 6.

[24] *Tao Te Ching* [*Daodejing*], transl. D.C. Lau (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1989), ch. 3, p. 7.

[25] Ibid, ch. 37, p. 55.

[26] Chuang Tzu [Zhuangzi], 19.2, p. 176. The same reflection appears in Lieh-Tzu [*Liezi*], book 2, p. 38.

[27] Lieh-Tzu [Liezi], book 2, pp. 43-4.

[28] A.C. Graham's introduction in Lieh-Tzu [Liezi], p. 32.

[29] *Tao Te Ching* [*Daodejing*], ch. 20, p. 31.

[30] *The Analects of Confucius*, 2.4.

[31] Cf. Johan Galtung, Carl G. Jacobsen and Kai Frithjof Brand Jacobsen, *Searching for Peace: The Road to TRANSCEND* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 84.

[32] *Tao Te Ching* [*Daodejing*], ch. 64, pp. 93f.

[33] Sun-tzu [Sunzi], *The Art of Warfare*, transl. Roger T. Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), ch. 3, p. 111.

[34] This may be changing. Some recent strands of Western ethics, such as ethics of care, emphasize the use of emotions and feeling rather than rationality and logical analysis. And it is of course true that through the ages many Western thinkers have proposed a more 'feeling-based' alternative to the classic rational orientation. But as throughout this paper, I am here describing the mainstream tendency.

[35] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 84.

[36] While Arendt's coinage of the 'banality of evil' is without doubt the most significant legacy of her analysis of the Holocaust, her most controversial claim at the time was that the widespread cooperation of Jewish leadership with the Nazis in the occupied areas of Europe may have aggravated the situation and served to increase the Jewish death toll. She makes no attempt to explain why this was the case, and simply states briefly that it took place "in one way or another, for one reason or another". Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 61. However,

she combines this issue with the question, which she claims (ibid, p. 7) is of “greater import”: “Why did [the Jews] go to their death like lambs to the slaughter?“ Though nowhere said explicitly, Arendt seems to indicate that a ‘selfless’ tendency to make the best of the (miserable) situation instead of overturning it may have been involved. The same could probably be said of many of the horrors experienced by East- and Southeast-Asians in the twentieth century and beyond.