



**Marthe Chandler & Ronnie Littlejohn, eds., *Polishing the Chinese Mirror: Essays in Honor of Henry Rosemont, Jr.* New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2008. viii + 432 pages.**

This festschrift in honor of the distinguished American philosophical interpreter of traditional Chinese thought, Henry Rosemont Jr., offers something for nearly everyone who has an interest in the many fields with which Rosemont has shared his considerable intellectual gifts: comparative philosophy, East Asian studies, linguistics, political theory, and religious studies, to name only the most prominent of these. What is most striking about this volume is not the extent to which its contributors either agree or disagree with Rosemont's work. In fact, even when the contributors disagree with Rosemont, they tend to do so less in a corrective manner and more in a way that completes or complements Rosemont's own arguments. Rather, what distinguishes *Polishing the Chinese Mirror* is the extent to which Rosemont's scholarly contributions have created the conditions and context for a comparative philosophical and religious discourse of truly rich dimensions and depth. While contributors certainly indulge in laudatory hyperbole—Michael Nylan (University of California at Berkeley) says that Rosemont “is more like the Mencius of my imagination than anyone else” (p. 267)—in the end, the volume transcends the usual merely congratulatory tone of festschriften to attain a genuine spirit of intellectual give-and-take between a beloved teacher and his many gifted students. This spirit is evident throughout the collection, both within each chapter and in Rosemont's responses at the volume's conclusion.

In Rosemont's *A Chinese Mirror: Moral Reflections on Political Economy and Society* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991), he writes that “the more openly and deeply we look through a window into another culture the more it becomes a mirror of our own. . . . [I] hope that the American Dream will one day be replaced by a more universal dream, one that can be shared by all peoples, holding their humanity in common” (p. 7). By providing an alternative way of being human, traditional East Asian thought and practice can thus provide a way for North Americans to attain critical perspective on their own thought and practice and to work toward a more inclusively human future. Rosemont claims, in *Polishing the Chinese Mirror*, that “given that one of [his] major goals . . . has been to bring about greater philosophical dialogue . . . [his] work can be seen to be pretty much a failure,” insofar as the number of doctoral programs in the United States where students can study Chinese philosophy can still be counted on “only one hand . . . [with] fingers left over” (p. 361). Yet the twenty essays collected in this volume represent philosophical voices both Asian and Western, old and young, and go some distance toward assuaging Rosemont's sense of “failure.”

The contents of this volume are too many, too deep, and too varied to lend themselves to quick summary in this review, but a few highlights must be mentioned. Erin M. Cline (University of Oregon) contrasts Rosemont's account of Confucian personhood with that of John Rawls, "placing him somewhere between the Confucian and Western positions" (p. 87) outlined in Rosemont's work, which performs the important service of pointing out commonalities between Chinese and Western philosophical anthropology and political theory. Both Ni Peimin (Grand Valley State University) and Eric Hutton (University of Utah) take up Rosemont's concern for Confucian thought as a resource for those who cherish liberty. Ni argues that Confucianism "denies the freedom of indifference, and . . . endorses the freedom of spontaneity" (p. 105), by which he means that "Confucian democracy" requires passionate commitment on the basis of deep human feelings and experiences of inter-relatedness with other human beings, out of which one may act spontaneously in ways that strengthen those relationships. While Hutton flatly calls the Confucianism of Xunzi 荀子 "un-democratic," he shows how Xunzi is less "un-democratic" than Plato, insofar as Xunzi (like Plato) doubts the intellectual and moral qualifications of common people but (unlike Plato) "insists that 'Anyone on the streets can become a Yu [i.e., a sage]'" (p. 318), and that this commonality between the masses and the rulers presumed by Xunzi renders him less vulnerable to the accusations made by Karl Popper against Plato. Michael Nylan and Harrison Huang (University of California at Berkeley) demonstrate how what David Wong (Duke University) calls "an enduring theme of Rosemont's work . . . that we are not by ourselves, that we are not strangers, and that we enter into each other's identities" (p. 331) is evident in Mencius' little-noticed claim that pleasure is central to the good life—that "doing good requires little more than the capacity for enjoyment—delighting in . . . a frank acknowledgement that we are all human" (pp. 263–64). Finally, Harold D. Roth (Brown University) shows how Rosemont's emphasis on "the natural tendencies of human beings and the political organizations that can best be developed to harness and direct them" (p. 290) can help us understand the often-hidden moralistic and political aspects of the Daoist tradition, as found in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子.

Occasionally, one wonders at why a particular contribution was made. Tu Weiming's (Harvard University) essay, while cogent and learned, seems to be, at most, indirectly or implicitly connected to Rosemont's work. Even Rosemont himself sometimes seems puzzled. Regarding Jeffrey Dippmann's (Central Washington University) essay on "Daoist civility" and "polite Daoists," Rosemont wonders, "what could Lao Tan, Zhuangzi, Liu An or Liezi have to do with these?" (p. 389). There are other examples of this kind of gap or void between Rosemont's work and the contributions of those who wish to honor him. Personally, however, the most interesting

disagreement—civil though it may be—is between Rosemont and one of this volume’s editors, Ronnie Littlejohn (Belmont University). Littlejohn argues for the early Confucian concept of *tian* 天 (heaven) as one that entails extrahuman intentionality as well as agency. Rosemont, while accepting that “all early Confucians linked *tian* with agency” (p. 385), argues that the nature of *tian*’s agency is “causal much more than . . . intentional-causal” and thus claims that “we will better understand Confucius, his disciples, and the contexts of the numerous specific passages in which *tian* appears if we do not attribute conscious intention to ‘it’” (p. 385). Rosemont’s resistance to the quasi-theistic reading of *tian* arises from his goal of “describ[ing] authentic religious experience in ways fully consonant with all that we must accept in the way of modern science . . . and in such a way as to not denigrate those experiences even if they do not transcend the human realm” (p. 388). Such disagreements in the volume are instructive insofar as they underscore the constant tensions between commensurability and incommensurability, on the one hand, and intelligibility and unintelligibility, on the other, that underlie all meaningful efforts in comparative philosophy.

It is fitting, perhaps, that some of the strongest and last words in the volume are Rosemont’s, even though the words are borrowed in part from another: “If asked, ‘When will all philosophers take Asian thought seriously?’ I can only reply by quoting Max Planck, who, when asked when all physicists would accept Einstein’s theories replied ‘when all those who don’t have died off’” (p. 362).

JEFFREY L. RICHEY  
*Berea College*