THE SIGNIFICANCE OF METAPHOR IN METAPHILOSOPHY:

PHILOSOPHICAL ACTIVITY AS COMBAT, PLAY, AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the importance of metaphors in metaphilosophical discourse. Bringing together a variety of resources, from cognitive linguistics and hermeneutics to Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, it examines three specific metaphors for philosophical activity: combat, play, and aesthetic experience.

Chapter One opens with a series of arguments concerning the role of metaphors in thinking and understanding. Chapter Two explores one of the most dominant metaphors for philosophical activity: the combat metaphor. Situating this metaphor as arising from a specific socio-historical location in ancient Greece, the chapter proceeds to critique the adequacy of this metaphor. Chapter Three draws on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the early Chinese text Zhuangzi in order to build an account of play from which to understand the metaphor of philosophical activity as play. Chapter Four moves from play to aesthetic experience, constructing an account of aesthetic experience using both western and Chinese aesthetics. It focuses on the concepts of experience and distance, as well as the triadic structure of artist-work-participant, mapping these onto philosophical activity. The dissertation argues that the aesthetic experience metaphor is more adequate than either the combat or play metaphors on their own, and concludes by examining the role of oppositionality in philosophical activity, understood through the aesthetic experience metaphor.
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CHAPTER 1: METAPHOR AND METAPhilosophy

We may note one peculiar feature of philosophy. If someone asks the question what is mathematics, we can give him a dictionary definition, let us say the science of number, for the sake of argument. As far as it goes this is an uncontroversial statement...Definitions may be given in this way of any field where a body of definite knowledge exists. But philosophy cannot be so defined. Any definition is controversial and already embodies a philosophic attitude. The only way to find out what philosophy is, is to do philosophy.
—Bertrand Russell

When Bertrand Russell writes that any definition of philosophy “already embodies a philosophic attitude,” he is noting a key feature of philosophy. That feature is the fact that the understanding of what philosophy is and the activity of philosophy are inextricably linked. How we speak of, conceptualize, and understand philosophy is intimately related to how we conduct philosophical activity because it is necessarily self-reflexive. Thinking philosophically involves thinking about thinking, engaging our understanding of what it means to understand ourselves and the world around us.

This self-reflexivity is also turned by philosophers onto their own philosophical activities—thinking about philosophical thinking, or metaphilosophy. Metaphilosophy has traditionally been concerned with investigating the nature, goals, and methods of philosophy. The field usually involves questions such as What is philosophy? What are the borders between philosophy and other disciplines? What methods do philosophers use in different historical and cultural situations? What are the aims and goals of philosophy? The purpose of this dissertation is to suggest that metaphilosophical discourse should also

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2 The term “metaphilosophy” was initially used by Morris Lazerowitz in his 1970 article, “A Note on ‘Metaphilosophy’,” in the first issue of the journal *Metaphilosophy*. In this article, he defines metaphilosophy as the investigation of the nature of philosophy.
question the role of metaphor in metaphilosophy. It argues that thinking involves metaphor, and as a kind of thinking about thinking, philosophical activity must involve metaphor as well. Likewise, thinking about philosophical thinking—metaphilosophy—must also involve metaphor. Not only do these activities involve metaphor, but their metaphors are not simple ornamentation. Metaphor, as is argued in what follows, is a necessary part of how we think, and we cannot understand what philosophy is without it.

As noted in the opening quotation, metaphilosophical inquiries are not independent from assumptions concerning the nature of philosophy. An holistic understanding of philosophy requires metaphor—the components of philosophical activity do not sum up to the whole; there is a remainder that needs integrative, rather than analytic\(^3\) thinking, in order to be understood. However, we can, for the present purposes, identify certain important features and activities of philosophy. This dissertation approaches philosophical activity inclusively, as conceptual clarification, as the process of thinking about thinking, and as an inquiry into how we understand ourselves and our experiences. This activity consists in the use (in varying degrees) of many different resources, including reason, argument, dialogue, analysis, and imagination.\(^4\) In general terms, we might say that philosophy is the critical pursuit of deeper understanding regarding questions, topics, and themes central to human concern. It is often understood as loving and/or pursuing wisdom; both becoming aware of and engaging with questions of who we are and how we make sense of our worlds. This

\(^3\) “Analyze,” c.1600, meaning “to dissect,” from the French analyser.

\(^4\) Philosophers seem to have a more or less explicit agreement to disagree on the precise nature of what it is they do and how they see philosophy. This seems as true across the contemporary academy and Anglo-American/Continental differences as it is across the historical and cultural breadth of philosophers. However, we seem to have at least enough of a “family resemblance” to be able to share certain aims or goals in our activities. It is these shared aims and activities I am attempting to focus in on here.
description is intentionally broad, as it seeks to include philosophical conversations across traditions.⁵

What do the metaphors we use to describe and conduct philosophical activities tell us about our conceptions of philosophy? What is the significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s description of philosophy as “a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language?”⁶ There are many different metaphors for philosophical activity, from combat and play to building⁷, agricultural cultivation⁸, traveling a path⁹, mining¹⁰, midwifery¹¹, therapy¹², and medicine¹³. In this dissertation I examine three metaphors for philosophical activity: combat, play, and aesthetic experience. I chose the combat metaphor to begin with because of its predominance and influence in western narratives (Chapter Two), and because although prevalent it is inadequate in certain ways that have not yet been well explored. The play metaphor, the subject of Chapter Three, is related to the combat metaphor through the conceptual space of games, but while combat is undertaken for the sake of victory, play is done for its own sake. Chapter Four moves from the play metaphor to a metaphor of aesthetic experience for philosophical activity—philosophy understood as the creation of and engagement with works of art. This dissertation argues that aesthetic experience is a more adequate metaphor for philosophical activity than either combat or play.

⁵ Traditions, here, meaning not only cultural traditions such as Chinese philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, or American pragmatism, but also intra-cultural traditions such as Continental and Anglo-American philosophy.
⁷ See Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method, esp. Part II.
⁸ See the Mencius.
⁹ See the Analects, Zhuangzi.
¹⁰ See Descartes, also see Zhu Xi, Zhuxi Yulei.
¹¹ See Plato, Theatetus.
¹³ See the Majjhima Nikaya Sutta No. 63.
I. Three arguments for the importance of metaphor in metaphilosophy

Why do our metaphors for philosophy—how we understand philosophy—matter to doing philosophy? There are (at least) three different sources for arguments concerning why metaphor is part of metaphilosophical inquiries: 1) Cognitive linguistics and the role of metaphor in concept formation; 2) Hermeneutic metaphoricity, and the role of metaphor in understanding understanding; and 3) Metaphor as seen in correlative thinking in early Chinese philosophy. These three arguments are drawn from a pool of sources that would support the claim that thinking necessarily involves metaphor. Many elements of twentieth-century philosophical critique that bridge the classical divide between rhetoric and philosophy—existentialism, phenomenology, American pragmatism, feminism, post-modernism—would also be valuable resources for thinking through these issues. Cognitive linguistics and hermeneutics, drawing from two very different traditions of critique, were chosen because they are exemplars of this argument. The Chinese tradition, as one standing outside of the western tradition for most of its formative period, provides an important balance point to these primarily western arguments.

A. Cognitive Linguistics and conceptual metaphor

*Metaphorical thought is the principal tool that makes philosophical insight possible and that constrains the forms philosophy can take.*

—George Lakoff and Mark Johnson

Cognitive linguistics is “a conglomerate of more or less extensive, more or less active centers of linguistic research that are closely knit together by a shared perspective.”\textsuperscript{15} It arose in the later half of the twentieth century as a result of reaction against syntactic and generative theories of language like those proposed by Noam Chomsky. The shared perspective of cognitive linguistics research is “simply that language is all about meaning.”\textsuperscript{16} Cognitive linguists elaborate four central tenets from this perspective: linguistic meaning is perspectival, dynamic and flexible, encyclopedic and non-autonomous, and based on usage and experience.\textsuperscript{17} Cognitive linguists build their work around both linguistic theory and research into actual language usage, including scientific study into the relationships between language use and brain activity.

One of the main trends in cognitive linguistics research over the last thirty years has been research into conceptual metaphor. George Lakoff, the father of conceptual metaphor, argues that “A conceptual system contains thousands of conventional metaphorical mappings which form a highly structured subsystem of the conceptual system.”\textsuperscript{18} He further explains that

In classical theories of language, metaphor was seen as a matter of language, not thought. Metaphorical expressions were assumed to be mutually exclusive with the realm of ordinary everyday language: everyday language had no metaphor, and metaphor used mechanisms outside the realm of everyday conventional

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 4-5.
language...[However] the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another... metaphor (that is, cross-domain mapping) is absolutely central to ordinary natural language semantics, and... the study of literary metaphor is an extension of the study of everyday metaphor.¹⁹

In other words, although theories of metaphor going all the way back to Aristotle relied on the assumption that metaphor was a special kind of language, Lakoff argues that when we examine closely how language—and so thought—functions, we find that metaphors are an intrinsic part of how we think. Metaphors, on this theory, are not improper naming (à la Aristotle), but rather are “mappings, that is, sets of conceptual correspondences.”²⁰ These mappings are asymmetric and partial, and allow us to “understand a relatively abstract or inherently unstructured subject matter in terms of a more concrete, or at least a more highly structured subject matter.”²¹ Lakoff argues that these mappings, on a conventional level, are not arbitrary, but grounded in the body and in everyday experience and knowledge.”²²

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson are pioneers in bringing together the fields of cognitive linguistics and philosophy. They argue that our conceptual systems are coherent systems of metaphorical concepts²³, where metaphors are the “understanding and experiencing (of) one kind of thing in terms of another.”²⁴ Metaphors, on this account, are prior to the linguistic devices of analogy and simile—the way we think is structured

¹⁹ Ibid, 185-6.
²⁰ Ibid, 191.
²¹ Ibid, 232.
²² Ibid, 232.
²³ For Lakoff and Johnson, concepts are neural structures we use to characterize and reason with our categories, and categories are the structures that differentiate aspects of our experience into discernible kinds. For more on this, see Philosophy in the Flesh, 19.
through metaphors. In their most recent work together, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, they expand on this idea in terms of metaphor as the conceptual mapping between a source and target domain. Examples of metaphors they discuss include “happy is up,” “inflation is an entity,” “time is money,” “labor is a resource,” and “love is a journey.” They are concerned with the most fundamental of metaphors, those that make up our conceptual systems.\(^{25}\) Considering the “love as a journey” metaphor as an example, Lakoff and Johnson argue that one of the most important things to understand about conceptual metaphors is that they are used in reasoning: “[The] mapping allows forms of reasoning about travel to be used in reasoning about love. It functions so as to map inferences about travel onto inferences about love, enriching the concept of love and extending it to love-as-a-journey.”\(^{26}\) On their account, metaphors are inference preserving; they provide a slide for reasoning using one domain to be imposed on the second domain. Conceptual mapping structures the inference pattern of the second domain using that of the first, providing “a generalization over both inference patterns and language.”\(^{27}\) They argue that this process of conceptual mapping has occurred with most of our basic concepts, using results from contemporary cognitive science to ground their findings.\(^{28}\)

In addition, they argue that not only are metaphors the basis of our conceptual system, but that most abstract concepts are made complex and meaningful through a process of conceptual mapping, or metaphorization. Again, considering the concept of “love” they argue,

\(^{25}\) Although they do argue that “novel” metaphors, those that we would normally think of when discussing metaphor, are also cases of this kind of conceptual mapping.

\(^{26}\) Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 65.

\(^{27}\) Ibid, 66.

\(^{28}\) For more on this, see especially Chapters Four and Six of *Philosophy in the Flesh*. 7
Take away all those metaphorical ways of conceptualizing love, and there’s not a whole lot left. What’s left is a mere literal skeleton...Without the conventional conceptual metaphors for love, we are left with only the skeleton, bereft of the richness of the concept...Without those conventional metaphors, it would be virtually impossible to reason or talk about love.\textsuperscript{29}

Abstract concepts, then, are an especially powerful case of metaphoric structuring. In order to understand an abstract concept we require metaphorical ways of conceptualizing it: “Metaphor is the main mechanism through which we comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning.”\textsuperscript{30} If we consider the “mere literal skeleton” of philosophy, we find activities of definition, argumentation, logic, and textual analysis. But even putting all of these bones together we are still left shy of an entire person—we have just the skeleton. In order to understand what philosophy is as a whole, we need metaphor—we need to be shown philosophy.

Now, what does this mean for metaphors in metaphilosophy? Does this give us reason to think that the metaphors we use to describe, understand, and conduct philosophical activity are significant? Yes, it does. Philosophical activity includes questions of how we conceptualize, think about, and understand our experience. Building on Lakoff and Johnson, we can say that it is the case that our experience is conceptualized to a large degree through metaphor; they argue that most of our conceptual system is built out of metaphors. In addition, our abstract concepts—much of the “stuff” of traditional western philosophical discourse—are largely made understandable and meaningful through metaphor. Because of this, philosophical

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 72.
\textsuperscript{30} Lakoff, 232.
\end{flushright}
thinking must proceed to some extent through the use of metaphor. In other words, if Lakoff and Johnson are correct in arguing that thinking and conceptualization are largely metaphorical, then the project of thinking about thinking—trying to understand what it is to think, reason, and conceptualize—also proceeds through metaphor. Thus, we cannot understand philosophy without inquiring into the metaphors for it.

B. Gadamer and the metaphoricity of language

_Hermeneutics is not the title of a philosophical project that aspires to complete understanding, but the name of vigilance in thought which rests on its absence._

—Jean Grondin

While Lakoff and Johnson’s work is premised on the evidence produced by contemporary cognitive linguistics, it shares certain conceptual parallels with the account of understanding given in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s _Truth and Method_, a defining work in twentieth-century hermeneutics. In this work, Gadamer argues that understanding is a kind of open-ended conversation, a process we engage in when confronted with a live question. In this process, we attempt to integrate the new or foreign material into our already existing conceptual framework. This integration is made possible by the finding of connections and commonalities between the new material and what is already understood—understanding takes place in language, and language is fundamentally metaphorical.32 As Ron Bontekoe explains,

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Understanding occurs only when we recognize the significance of the various items that we notice—which is to say, when we recognize the way in which those items relate to each other. Understanding, then, is an essentially integrative activity... [in which things] we initially encounter as separate objects of perception, are now seen as belonging together.\(^{33}\)

Because on Gadamer’s account the process of concept formation is open-ended, we come to understand our concepts better and better by creating (mostly unconscious and implicit) connections between concepts, by finding similarities and commonalities, using what we already understand to further conceptualize the object of the question at hand.\(^{34}\) The importance of this is also seen in his claim that a common language is necessary for conversation; in order to try to come to agreement with another person, we must negotiate between what we already understand and what the other person understands. As Gadamer writes, we follow our “widening experience, which looks for similarities, whether in the appearance of things or in their significance for us. The genius of verbal consciousness consists in being able to express these similarities. This is its fundamental metaphorical nature.”\(^{35}\) These similarities, however, are not expressed or understood as one thing being like another—alogies and similes are breakdowns of a more fundamental metaphoricity—but rather are expressed or understood as one thing in terms of the other. It is this conceptual sliding or overlap that enriches our concepts and expands our language.


\(^{34}\) Gadamer, 428-9.

\(^{35}\) Ibid, 428.
For Gadamer, our understanding is not just a product of our personal lives, but is historically, culturally, and linguistically situated as an historically effected consciousness. This means that what we have already understood is structured not only by our personal experiences, but by traces of our tradition’s historicity. This further explains why the process of understanding requires a “fusion of horizons,” wherein the landscape of my understanding (the perspective from which I understand) must connect with and integrate the foreign material. As Jean Grondin writes,

For Gadamer, to understand is always to understand yourself as well. Gadamer therefore prefers to speak, with Hegel, of an integration of meaning transmitted by the work of history. In integration, distance is not always eradicated: meaning inevitably comes from the past, and is present and represents its welcoming ground. This is the meaning of the eminently Gadamerian idea of a fusion of horizons in the process of understanding. I always understand the past from the perspective of my own horizon, but the latter has itself been formed by the past as much as by the possibilities of the language of actual understanding. What in understanding really comes from ‘me’, and what is taken up from the ‘past’? Can we really know, with complete assurance? Can understanding be completely transparent to itself? This is why it appears more prudent in Gadamer’s eyes to speak of a melting of horizons, of an encounter which mysteriously succeeds.”

That is, my understanding is shaped not only by me, but by my language and culture and all of those elements that become sedimented in how I understand myself and the world around me. This fusion, then, is not a simple “and”—my horizon and yours—but is a fusion in that I understand my horizon through yours, and yours through mine. Fusion

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36 Grondin, 59. There are many different interpretations of Gadamer’s phrase “fusion of horizons”.
implies change—my horizon must be altered by its encounter with yours, given new shape by understanding itself in terms of something else.

Gadamer argues that as I attempt to understand something, my own “prejudices” (pre-judgments or anticipations of meaning, “Vorurteil”) formed by my horizon are brought into view in such a way that each new process of understanding requires me to engage my prejudices, rejecting some and accepting others. The process of understanding is a process of revision of one’s initial projections, anticipations, and prejudices, as the object in question becomes better understood. Some prejudices prevent the text, for example, from appearing as itself. However, as Jean Grondin explains,

Gadamer is so reluctant to renounce the ideal of a critical elucidation of prejudices that he himself criticizes a Cartesian prejudice: the prejudice against prejudices! The expression, ingenious, presupposes that there are prejudices prejudicial to the understanding and that the prejudices against prejudices is part of it.”

For Gadamer, prejudices are an inherent part of understanding. The great question becomes how to identify those prejudices that are prohibitive and those that are beneficial. The metaphoricity of language is one locus of our prejudices—understanding one thing in terms of another brings with it anticipations. As Grondin explains,

for Gadamer, all understanding emerges entirely in the light of anticipations (which we can call ‘prejudices’) so much and so well that the correction of a prejudice, shown to be illegitimate, is always only made in the light of a new anticipation which replaces the previous one; and secondly, to speak of things themselves is not to speak of ‘things-in-themselves’ such that they could be

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37 Ibid, 84.
understood independently of an effort of understanding...To develop anticipations that are conformable to the thing, is therefore to elaborate pertinent conceptions, which are the nub of the thing to be understood. It equally presupposes that the thing also matters to us, that it concerns us. We cannot develop suitable or fertile anticipations without entering into the debate with the thing itself.”

Again, the meeting of the alien and the familiar in which we use the familiar to understand the alien is the metaphoric nature of language and understanding. It is also how language evolves, and the basis for the common understanding of metaphor as a literary device.

If the activity of philosophy is largely concerned with a pursuit of deeper understanding, then on Gadamer’s account metaphilosophical inquiries cannot ignore metaphor; understanding uses metaphor, and so philosophy as a project of understanding one’s understanding must deal with trying to understand metaphors. Additionally, these inquires cannot ignore “dead” metaphors—those metaphors that are not novel and no longer have the kind of emotional intensity we expect from literary metaphors. Dead metaphors become lodged in the historically effected consciousness as traditional resources for conceptualization. In other words, they become the stuff of our prejudices, for philosophy as for anything else. Just as Lakoff and Johnson argue that the concept “love” is difficult to understand without metaphor, so we can see that the conceptualization of love as a journey is an historical, cultural, and linguistic process, whose recognition is important for appreciating what about love is delimited by the

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38 Ibid, 85.
39 To prevent possible misunderstandings, dead metaphor in Gadamer is not the same as dead metaphor in Lakoff and Johnson. They reserve the term “dead metaphor” specifically for catachresis, and use the term novel metaphor to indicate “live” literary metaphors. Gadamer’s dead metaphors are Lakoff and Johnson’s metaphors in general.
metaphor. If we begin the process of understanding by engaging and revising our prejudices—“for Gadamer, all understanding emerges entirely in the light of anticipations (which we can call ‘prejudices’) so much and so well that the correction of a prejudice, shown to be illegitimate, is always only made in the light of a new anticipation which replaces the previous one”\textsuperscript{40}—then one of the things we need to pay attention to is the influence of dead metaphor on our thinking. The project of letting things themselves show themselves requires working out appropriate projections—putting our prejudices at risk.\textsuperscript{41} There is no blank concept of philosophy not already influenced by metaphor; the project of trying to understand philosophy requires an inquiry into the metaphoric structures already influencing the conceptualization of philosophy.

C. Early Chinese philosophy and correlative thinking

\textit{For the ancient Chinese, time was not an abstract parameter, a succession of homogenous moments, but was divided into concrete separate seasons and their subdivisions. Space was not abstractly uniform and extended in all directions, but was divided into the regions, south, north, east, west, and centre. And they joined together in the tables of correspondences; the east was indissolubly connected with the spring and with wood, the south with summer and fire.} \textsuperscript{42}

—Joseph Needham

The third argument for the claim that metaphor is important to metaphilosophical inquiries can be found when we consider early Chinese philosophy and language. After all, if the question is one of how we conceptualize philosophy, then two further questions emerge: who is the “we” and whose philosophy are we talking about? Looking to an alternate tradition both provides an additional perspective on the presuppositions of

\textsuperscript{40} Grondin, 85.
\textsuperscript{41} Gadamer, 292-3, 267, 428.
western traditions and helps the argument concerning contemporary metaphilosophy to take into account the multiplicity of philosophical sources available to contemporary scholars.

In what ways does the early Chinese philosophical tradition aid in the argument for the importance of metaphor in metaphilosophy? First, we need to consider some of the distinctive features of early Chinese thought. As Nathan Sivin argues, early Chinese philosophers were primarily concerned with the effectiveness of language, and the kind of rhetoric/logic divide found in early Greece “has no counterpart” in early Chinese thinking.  

Angus Graham, in discussing the origins of Chinese philosophy in the Warring States period, notes that Chinese philosophy arose as “a response to the breakdown of the moral and political order...and the crucial question for all of them [Chinese philosophers] is not the Western philosopher’s ‘What is the truth?’ but ‘Where is the Way?’, the way to order the state and conduct personal life.”  

That is, the early Chinese thinkers were not particularly concerned with truth or argument for its own sake, or issues that split theoretical from practical concerns. Rather, their focus centered on finding, traveling along, and extending the dao, for their own time and place, finding optimal patterns and rhythms of conduct and experience to lead oneself and one’s community to harmony. The descriptions of this activity—philosophy—gather around metaphors of finding and building roads or paths, channeling rivers, agricultural

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cultivation and biological metaphors such as birth and growth, and common activities of
the noble persons of the time such as archery and charioteering.\textsuperscript{45}

While early western philosophers were concerned (among other things) with
questions of what is most real or true and how to know it for sure, early Chinese thinkers
assumed that there was nothing more real than the constant cycles of change and
persistence in the world around them. In discussing early Chinese ontological
commitments, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames write that the early Chinese
philosophical worldview “entails an ontology of events, not one of substances...[and]
every element in the world is relative to every other; all elements are correlative.”\textsuperscript{46}
Chinese thinkers understood themselves and the world around them in terms of
relationships of association and significant convergence—in terms of correlative
thinking.

Sinologists and Chinese philosophers from Marcel Granet and Angus Graham to
Roger Ames and Joseph Needham all discuss the importance of correlative thinking for
understanding early Chinese philosophy.\textsuperscript{47} Correlative thinking is an aesthetic way of
making sense and meaning of the world around one by means of metaphorical
associations:

\textsuperscript{45} For more information on metaphors for Chinese philosophy, see Hall and Ames, \textit{Anticipating China};
Graham, \textit{Disputers of the Tao}.
\textsuperscript{46} David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, \textit{Thinking Through Confucius}, (New York: State University of New
\textsuperscript{47} These scholars also carefully note that correlative thinking is not exclusive to China, but rather that it
plays a key and determining factor in Chinese narratives, while its role in western narratives tends to be
diminished and/or overshadowed by analytic modes of reasoning. However, there is disagreement among
contemporary scholars as to how far back in Chinese intellectual history correlative thinking can be
usefully identified—whether or not correlative thinking rises to prominence in the Han or was
meaningfully present as an intellectual and cultural reservoir in pre-Han times. For a more in-depth
discussion of correlative cosmology, see the special issue of the \textit{Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern
From the perspective of correlative thinking, to explain an item or event is, first, to place it within a scheme organized in terms of analogical relations among the items selected for the scheme, and then to reflect, and act in terms of, the suggestiveness of these relations. Correlative thinking involves the association of image- or concept-clusters related by meaningful disposition...[it] is a species of imagination grounded in necessarily informal and hence ad hoc analogical procedures presupposing both association and differentiation.\textsuperscript{48}

Although Hall and Ames here use the idea of “analogical relations” or “analogical procedures,” in light of the reversal of priority between metaphor and analogy evidenced in both cognitive linguistics and hermeneutics, we might rather understand their point as one of metaphoricity—the understanding of one in terms of another, the finding of meaningful similarities and connections—instead of the more formal structure of analogy or simile: A is to B as C is to D, or A is like B in way C. Correlative thinking is operating at a deeper level than these formal analogical structures. Examples of correlative thinking include the vast tables of correlations discussed by the \textit{Yinyang} and Five Phases \textit{(wuxing)} schools, as well as the more concrete notion of \textit{xin}, usually translated as heart-and-mind. Understanding the heart-and-mind is understanding its function as a locus of activity—it is correlated as both the lord of the body and the host of thinking—that is inseparable from its context and its relations with other loci of activity in the body (organs and physiological systems), as well as the intrinsic connection between its activities of feeling and thinking. Joseph Needham argues that for the early Chinese philosophers, “The sum of wisdom consisted in adding to the number of

intuited...correspondences in the repertory of correlations." That is, correspondences—metaphors—were the repository of meaning, and thinking metaphorically in new and creative ways was the demonstration of wisdom.

An additional important example of the central role of correlative thinking in Chinese philosophy is the *Yijing* 易經, the *Book or Classic of Changes*. The text is composed of several different parts, some dating back to as early as Bronze Age China (Zhou dynasty). The older section of the text (the *Zhouyi* 周易) is “a collection of oracular material for use when divining with yarrow wands.” It has sixty-four chapters, each with three parts: a hexagram, a hexagram statement, and six line statements. Each hexagram has six lines, each of which is either divided or whole, and an associated image or figure. Additionally, the text contains the *Dazhuan* 大專, the *Great Treatise or Commentary*, written much later than the *Zhouyi*, but greatly influential in shaping the early Chinese worldview: “the Great Treatise became the fundamental text for *Yijing* philosophy, a document whose principles came to permeate every field of Chinese thought for two millennia.” Richard Rutt explains:

The fundamental principle employed by the Treatise is analogy, seen not as a mere device in logic or exposition, but as a metaphysical principle. Again and again the relationship between heaven, earth, man and the hexagrams is described as a continuum of macrocosmic-microcosmic parallels, intimately and essentially

49 Needham, 290.
50 For more on the details of provenance of the different parts of the text, see Richard Rutt’s *Zhouyi: The Book of Changes*, chapters one and two.
52 Ibid, 406.
interrelated, so that knowing a model in one plane enables a sage to know the corresponding model in the other planes.\textsuperscript{53}

That is, this text, which became a repository for Chinese ways of understanding and relating to the world, is based to a large extent on what Rutt calls analogy, but what we might broadly construe as correlation or metaphor: “metaphoric activity has dominated the Chinese mode of correlativity.”\textsuperscript{54} This activity of correlation is metaphoric in that it is a way of making sense of the world in terms of associations—one event understood in terms of another.

The relationship between significance, image/figure, and text—in Wang Bi’s terms, meaning, image, and words\textsuperscript{55}—is a relationship of correlation, of metaphor, that is used as a heuristic for making one’s life, situation, and experience significant and intelligible. Hall and Ames note that “Imaging involves analogy in the sense that it requires a movement between a generalized situation made intelligible in a word and image, and the detail of one’s own particular circumstances. And imaging has performative force. Meaning is not simply given; it is reflexively appropriated.”\textsuperscript{56} They further argue that the activity of Chinese philosophy hinges on this metaphorical role of images—the thick image of Confucius created by the text the \textit{Lunyu 論語} (\textit{Analects}), for example—and how these images are taken up productively in the life of the philosopher.

Metaphor, in the extended sense found in sections A and B, is a central organizing component of correlative thinking, of making productive associations, and of the activity

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 406, my italics. Again, although Rutt uses the term “analogy,” it is clear that he is not speaking of the linguistic device, but of a more fundamental metaphoricity of thinking.
\textsuperscript{54} Hall and Ames, \textit{Anticipating China}, 135.
\textsuperscript{55} For more on this, see the discussion of Wang Bi’s text in Hall and Ames, \textit{Anticipating China}, or Richard Lynn’s \textit{The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi}.
\textsuperscript{56} Hall and Ames, 220.
of philosophy in early China. However, this notion of metaphor is in some ways distinct from the notion of metaphor in sections A and B. Because the early Chinese thinkers saw their world primarily in terms of events, not things, and processes of change rather than stability, the interrelation of all events was an important assumption for these thinkers. This means that metaphor—correlative thinking—is not associating previously unrelated realms. As Bryan Van Norden notes in discussing metaphors in Chinese philosophy and western philosophy, there is

a fundamental difference between Chinese and Western metaphors. Western metaphors typically draw a correspondence between two ontologically distinct domains...Chinese thinkers often assume what has been called a "correlative cosmology," according to which superficially diverse phenomena manifest the same qualitative patterns. Thus, ‘the Chinese metaphor does not try to establish a parallelism between two domains, but rather wants to show that there is a convergence between them’...(136).

In other words, because this way of understanding the world is premised on the interconnection of all events and processes, the practice of finding and creating significant associations—metaphors—is that much more important in order for thinkers to make sense of their world.

Chinese philosophy, then, supports the claim that thinking involves metaphor and that philosophical activity proceeds through metaphor. Because the primary way of understanding anything, including philosophy, is through correlative thinking, which is at its heart metaphorical, both thinking about the world and philosophical thinking engage

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and require metaphor. Since the activity of philosophy, as seen from the *Yijing*, proceeds through metaphor, the inquiry into this activity must examine and assess the associations formed in it. In addition, as noted earlier, Chinese philosophers used and emphasized different metaphors for the activity of philosophy from their western counterparts. This indicates both a different understanding of the activity of philosophy and the socio-historical contingency of specific metaphors for philosophical activity. The fact that different metaphors are used to understand philosophy indicates the importance of metaphor for metaphilosophy, the fact that no single metaphor is necessary in itself, and that metaphors arise from a particular time and place.

II. Project Overview

A. Chapter Two: The Combat Metaphor

This chapter begins with a discussion of combat as a metaphor for philosophy—I defend my argument and attack yours, I look for weaknesses as points of attack, try to shore up my argument against counterattacks, and seek victory over my opponents. When we use combat to understand philosophical activity, we shape it in specific ways. On a combat metaphor:

1. Philosophers become adversaries or combatants.

2. The structure of the philosophical activity becomes one of strategic maneuvering, where the movement is conceived in terms of attack, defense, retreat, counterattack, stalemate, surrender, and victory.
3. The purpose of the dialogue becomes *victory*—to win and defeat the opponent.\(^58\)

The chapter looks to the roots of this metaphor in ancient Greece, arguing that a specific set of socio-historical conditions led to the prominence of combat as a way of understanding philosophical activity. The next section of the chapter looks briefly at early Chinese philosophy, where combat metaphors are not prevalent, and examines the one school that did use combat metaphors—the Mohists.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of several ways in which combat is inadequate for understanding philosophical activity: it leads to an internalization of violence, a narrowing of the possibilities of discussion, a covering over of power relations, and certain difficulties concerning meta-level critique.

B. Chapter Three: The Play Metaphor

Combat is not the only metaphor for philosophy—philosophical activity is also often understood as a kind of play. This chapter begins by briefly providing some conceptual boundaries between the realms of combat, games, and play. It then proceeds to explore the philosophical concept of play, using Gadamer’s account of play to consider the play metaphor. Given certain problems with this account, however, the chapter moves on to consider an account of play drawn from the *Zhuangzi* (莊子), and how these two accounts together can provide a domain from which to build the play metaphor.

Understood as play, philosophical activity takes on the following appearance:

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\(^58\) Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 80-81. This is also born out by Lloyd and Sivin’s work on how the adversarial nature of Greek society impacted the practice of philosophers.
1. Philosophers become play-mates or players.

2. The structure of the activity becomes one of play, a to-and-fro renewing repetition, where possibilities are always underdetermined.

3. The purpose of the activity becomes the activity itself: the medial sense of play takes priority.

However, there is also a sense in which play structures philosophy in a direction that is not entirely adequate. While it is desirable for one to be fully absorbed in play, to the point of forgetting oneself, philosophical activity requires a degree of self-reflexivity that needs both absorption in and distance from the activity.

C. Chapter Four: The Aesthetic Experience Metaphor

This chapter is broadly organized around the question: what would it mean to use aesthetic experience as a metaphor for philosophical activity? Like the previous chapters, it is divided into two parts: an exploration of aesthetic experience and an articulation of the philosophical activity as aesthetic experience metaphor.

The first section begins by exploring the nature of “experience” in aesthetic experience, drawing on Gadamer’s notion of the negativity of experience. It then proceeds to a discussion of the role of aesthetic distance as a condition for the possibility of aesthetic experience. It first develops Edward Bullough’s notion of aesthetic distance, and then builds on this using the ideas of guan 觀, he 和, and ying 應 from early Chinese aesthetics. Finally, the first section of this chapter articulates the triadic structure of
aesthetic experience in terms of the necessary relationships between artists, works of art, and participants.

The second section of this chapter begins by thinking through the implications of aesthetic experience as a structuring field for philosophical activity—what does it mean to talk about the negativity of experience in terms of philosophy? What is productive about suggesting distance as a condition for philosophical activity? And what would it mean to suggest that philosophy also has a triadic structure: philosophical artists, works, and participants? Understanding philosophical activity as aesthetic experience shapes it in the following ways:

1. Philosophers become artists and/or participants with works of art.

2. The structure of the activity becomes one of artistic creation and engagement.

3. The purpose of the activity becomes understanding and appreciation.

The chapter then proceeds to discuss how the aesthetic experience metaphor responds to the criticisms offered in the previous chapters of the combat and play metaphors, and what is distinctive and unique about this metaphor in terms of the way it structures how we understand the key philosophical activity of coming to an understanding or solving a problem. Finally, the chapter concludes by looking at certain twentieth century critiques of aesthetic experience such as those articulated by John Dewey and Berthold Brecht, and offers some suggestions for how the aesthetic experience metaphor might respond to these critiques.
D. Chapter Five: Conclusion

Chapter Five concludes this dissertation with a discussion of practices of difference, disagreement, and critique—broadly understood as oppositionality—in philosophical activity. Using the aesthetic experience metaphor, this chapter sets forth an aesthetic, rather than combative, sense of oppositionality. It turns first to the understanding of combat found in the early Chinese tradition, and then to the Tibetan and Linji Chan Buddhist practices of dharma combat as providing different ways for appreciating oppositionality. Finally, it looks at oppositionality through the lens of the play and aesthetic experience metaphors, building an account of loving oppositionality. This further demonstrates the capaciousness of the aesthetic experience metaphor, as it is able to include positive contributions from both the combat and play metaphors.
I. What is the combat metaphor?

Charles Dickens once wrote that “Philosophers are only men in armor after all.” The metaphor of philosophers as soldiers or combatants waging war against one another is one that has deep roots in many western philosophical narratives. This broad metaphor—philosophical activity as combat—shows itself in a wide range of expressions and practices: I attack your position and defend my claim, you’ve won the argument, I destroyed my opponent’s foundation, weaknesses are points of attack, philosophers are practicing mental jiujitsu, sparring over ideas, grappling with an intricate argument, jousting with theories, and trying to capture the truth. The language in and around the practice of philosophy is saturated with transference from the combat domain to the philosophical domain. Consider the following examples:

- “Socrates: ‘So if anyone attributes such unwise doctrines to Simonides, or to other revered and intelligent men like Bias and Pittacus, will you be my

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60 Charles Dickens, Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club Vol 1, 185.
comrade in arms and combat the heresy?’ Polemarchus: ‘I’ll be your comrade and do battle at your side’” (Plato’s Republic)

- “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.” (Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations)

- “We are all in the habit of directing the inquiry to our opponent in argument, rather than to the subject matter in question.” (Aristotle, On the Heavens)

- “First-year undergraduates are initiated into the discipline of philosophy by being taught to gun down the arguments of the great philosophers, as if in a sideshow shooting gallery.” (Solomon, The Joy of Philosophy)

- “To understand it [philosophy] at the deepest level, the reader must adopt the stance of the intelligent and perceptive opponent, thus coming to understand the case the philosopher is trying to make. This is what we mean by reading aggressively.” (Oxford Introduction to Philosophy text)

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What do we mean by war or combat? One of the most influential discussions of the nature of warfare is in the treatise *On War*, written by Carl Phillip Gottfried von Clausewitz (1780—1831). Clausewitz was a Prussian soldier and intellectual, and his work on war remains at the heart of our understanding of combat. He writes that “The most important thing in war will always be the art of defeating our opponent in combat.”

Victory, for Clausewitz, is defeating the enemy: "What do we mean by the defeat of the enemy? Simply the destruction of his forces, whether by death, injury, or any other means—either completely or enough to make him stop fighting.” He argues that defeating the enemy involves three objectives: destroying the enemy’s armed forces, occupying his territory, and breaking his will to continue to fight. Clausewitz is also famous for arguing that policy and politics are what drive war: “Policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa.”

Building on an understanding of combat similar to Clausewitz’s, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in their early work *Metaphors We Live By*, explore what they call the argument as war metaphor, and how the mapping of war onto argument restructures our thought about philosophy. They argue that when mapped by combat, philosophical activity is understood in the following ways:

1. Participants in philosophical activity become adversaries.
2. The structure of the activity becomes one of strategic maneuvering, where the movement is conceived in terms of attack, defense, retreat, counterattack,

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stalemate, surrender, and victory.

3. The purpose of the activity becomes *victory*—to win and defeat the opponent. In other words, when philosophical activity is understood as a kind of combat, the relationships between participants and the nature and structure of the activity takes on features of combat. Whatever their relationship might have been, on a combat metaphor participants are pitted against one another, adversaries or soldiers for different camps. They seek to think strategically, to outwit or outmaneuver their opponent(s), with the ultimate aim of securing victory. Winning the battle and defeating one’s enemy is the point of engaging in the activity; philosophy, on this metaphor, is about victory for one’s own position.

A. The Historical Situation

This metaphor is not a metaphor from nowhere—its roots in western narratives stretch back to at least ancient Greece, where a convergence of social, historical, and philosophical factors led to the prominence of this way of understanding philosophy. The realms of philosophy and of combat, both so prevalent in Greek culture at the time, came to be associated with one another. After all, in a city-state such as Athens there was no distinct soldier-class—in addition to their trade or craft (including statecraft), citizens all went through compulsory military service. This is perhaps the reason for the long association between military and civic virtues in Greek thinking; consider for example

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69 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 80-81. This is also born out by Lloyd and Sivin’s work on how the adversarial nature of Greek society impacted the practice of philosophers.
the important role bravery and cowardice play as exemplars in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Val Plumwood, in her work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, argues for the relevance of “war, militarism and the values of militarism for Plato’s thought and their strong connection with both reason and the master society of the Greek *polis*.”\(^{70}\) Greek society was in many ways built around the practice of war and the honor given to those who acquitted themselves well in battle. The association, then, between the war hero and the philosophical hero, between going to war and doing philosophy, between weapons of war and instruments of philosophy, becomes increasingly dominant: “Reason is the new weapon in the context of combat, the new basis of power.”\(^{71}\)

Historians Nathan Sivin and Geoffrey Lloyd, in their work *The Way and the Word*, argue that a particular socio-historical situation in ancient Greece led to the “combative” nature of good thinking.\(^{72}\) To succeed as a philosopher depended on one’s ability to be orally convincing, as philosophical activity was primarily a performance: “most intellectual exchange was in the oral mode.”\(^{73}\) One’s livelihood rested on one’s fame, which was decided in the public forum. Most Greek philosophers and philosophical schools, they argue, were supported almost entirely based on fees from students and from those attending public lectures and performances. To win a debate was to gain in fame, leading not only to personal and professional fame but also to additional students, and so additional funding: “Argument and debate were...essential to the activity of the Greek schools in their competitions with one another both for pupils and for prestige...all sects

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\(^{71}\) Plumwood, 100.

\(^{72}\) Lloyd and Sivin are both very careful scholars, and as such, although they do want to talk about general socio-historic features of Greece and China and their relation to modes of inquiry, they also acknowledge the presence of diversity within these traditions.

acted as...alliances for defensive and offensive argument.” Lloyd and Sivin further argue that

The chief preoccupation of the up-and-coming philosopher or scientist, in all periods of Greco-Roman antiquity, was not to find a rich patron but to make a reputation among colleagues, often by confronting them directly in argument. It is this that stimulated, even if it did not dictate, much of the strident adversariality that is such a feature of Greek intellectual exchanges. One made a name for oneself, to a large extent, by taking on other philosophers, whether they be of one’s own school or not. There was very little concern with not attacking one’s own lineage; indeed, one often made a bigger name for oneself by publically defeating an elder member of one’s own school.

The general adversariality of philosophical discourse is, at least in some way, a socially and historically located feature—a by-product, as it were, of the situation of the Greeks and the importance of Greek philosophy in western narratives. Lloyd and Sivin argue that “No one who has a philosophical or scientific idea to propose in any culture can fail to want to make the most of it. But a distinctive Greek feature was the need to win, against all comers, even in science, a zero-sum game in which your winning entails the opposition losing.” This predominance of adversariality made sense to the Greeks, not only because of their socio-historical situation but also because they saw combative reason as leading to the realm of certainty, a highly desirable goal for philosophy and one

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74 Ibid, 111.
75 Ibid, 103.
76 Ibid, 138.
of the reasons this metaphor is so appealing. After all, in a combat situation the person left standing at the end should clearly be the victor, and should be victorious because she is better than the opponent. Lloyd and Sivin quote from On the Nature of Man, an early fourth century BCE text on public debates, which states that “it is right for a man who says he has correct knowledge about things to be victorious in the presentation of his argument every time—if he really knows the truth and sets it out correctly.”

The idea that the truth will win out in the end, that the success of the victor is due to her being better than the defeated, translates in the context of the combat metaphor to the idea that a philosopher who can best another in philosophical combat is better than her opponent, and has the truth or a grasp on the truth in a way her opponent did not. The philosopher who could defeat all her opponents, then, would be certain she had the truth—her truth would be unassailable and she would be, in Marcel Detienne’s words, a “Master of Truth.” As such, a central organizing aim of philosophers was the pursuit of truth. Understanding philosophical activity as leading to certainty about who had the truth and what it was—victory in combat—was deeply compelling. As Lloyd and Sivin write, “Masters of Truth, in their endlessly confrontational milieu, had reason to make an issue of truth and defend their claims against all comers,” and even Plato’s reinterpretation of

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77 Lloyd and Sivin, among others, point out the “math envy” of philosophers at this time; philosophers aspired toward the kind of certainty mathematics could claim. The relationship between truth and certainty as goals for philosophical activity and victory as the goal of combat is an interesting one for contemporary thinkers. There are several possible ways that victory is cashed out in terms of truth or certainty. Considering truth as a great weapon, a philosopher who has the truth should be certain of her victory—victory guarantees certainty. Or, consider truth as the cup won at the end of the fight—the method of fighting demonstrates the worthier position, and so truth is won by the philosopher through victory. While truth and certainty may be distinguishable goals today, for the early Greeks there was a necessary relationship between truth and certainty.

78 Hippocrates, On the Nature of Man, quoted in Lloyd and Sivin, 124.

rivalry as rivalry for Truth is a rivalry for a truth that “could claim to defeat all rivals.”

This goal of certainty, of unassailable truth, was a reflection of philosophers’ desire to seek the certainty of truth found in mathematics: “In mathematics, the aim was strict demonstration, yielding certainty, incontrovertibility.” Lloyd and Sivin argue that this mathematical goal bled into other fields and arenas, and that proofs *moro geometrico*, which require both deductive arguments and self-evident truths, were seen as necessary for decisive victory. They further argue that “the way Greek philosophers and scientists formulated their focal problems reflected their perception of what would secure victory in that competition.” That is, the mapping of combat onto philosophy not only alters the languaging around philosophical activities, but also alters the very structures and strategies of the activity to correspond with combative strategies for victory.

B. Combat Metaphors in Chinese Philosophy

The importance of Classical Greece as the location for many of the roots of western philosophical narratives can make it seem as though philosophy is Greek in some important ways. While there are many reasons to take seriously the predominant place and influence of Greek thinking in western narratives, it is equally important not to let the predominance of Greece imply that the Greek way is the only way. In fact, one way to proceed is to identify important areas in which other traditions fruitfully diverge from the direction of Greek thought. When thinking about early Greece, one of the key features of

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80 Lloyd and Sivin, 139.
81 Ibid, 155.
82 Ibid, 155.
philosophical inheritance (post Aristotle) is the importance of logic as the vehicle for attaining demonstrable truth, for getting at what is real behind the illusory world of appearances. One of the consequences of this was the devaluation of the rhetorical arts, which were seen to be persuasive rather than truth-seeking. However, as Nathan Sivin argues, this divide between logic as the method of gaining truth and rhetoric as “has no counterpart” in early Chinese thinking. The processual cosmology favored by the early Chinese thinkers inclined them to privilege semantics over logic and to consider language as provisional but effective: “rather than in truth for truth’s sake, the focus of these texts lay in the best way (道) to lead one’s person, family, and state to order.” Instead of the model of philosophy as intellectual combat, “in China the emphasis remained on consensus,” and on continual (re)negotiation.

While metaphors of combat for philosophical activity made sense to the early Greeks for a number of reasons, philosophical narratives in China were not particularly inclined toward combat metaphors. Lloyd and Sivin note that “Although plenty of criticism in Chinese texts is directed both at individual thinkers and at lineages...there was generally a strong disapproval of open disputation.” In his study of Xunzi’s moral epistemology, A. S. Cua notes that “Argumentation [in early Chinese philosophy] is thus conducted in a context of common concern. It is a cooperative

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85 Sivin, 8. This is why we see doctrines of zhengming 正名, proper naming, having such an important place in early Chinese discourses. For more on this, see my article, “On ‘Rectifying’ Rectification: Reconsidering Zhengming in Light of Confucian Role Ethics,” in Asian Philosophy, November 2010.
86 For the period under discussion (roughly Warring States and early Han China), there was very little influential contact with the west. Thus, the differences in metaphors between China and the west are indicative of the socio-historicity of ways of understanding philosophical activity, and serve as a reminder of the contingency of individual metaphors.
87 Ibid, 116.
enterprise...Contentiousness betrays the lack of concern with a matter of common interest. Were contentiousness an appropriate attitude, argumentation would be more like a debate or an adversary proceeding rather than a serious undertaking among concerned and responsible participants.”88 As noted in Chapter One, Chinese metaphors for philosophical activity tend toward those associated with traveling, agriculture, and the natural world. Sarah Allen, in her work on metaphors in early Chinese philosophy, argues that “the ancient Chinese turned directly to the natural world—to water and the plant life that it nourishes—for the root metaphors of their philosophical concepts.”89

There is one notable exception to this general preference for non-combative metaphors: the Mohists. Mohism is a school of thought that rose to some prominence during the latter part of the Warring States period. Its founder, Mo Di 墨翟 (also known as Mozi 墨子, Master Mo), most likely lived in the latter half of the fifth century BCE, and after his death the school split into three branches of organized Mohist schools that had some popularity in the fourth and third centuries BCE, but which did not survive the Qin Dynasty purges.90 The Mohists were famous for their tenet of inclusive care (jian ai 兼愛, often translated as “universal love”), their denouncement of aggressive warfare, and their skill as defensive war contractors, among other things. Unlike the other philosophers of their time, they came mainly from backgrounds of craftsmen and tradesmen, not nobility, and their work evidences certain concerns not found in most other early philosophical schools; their texts (what remains of them) were “deliberately

90 For more on the early history of Mozi and his followers, see Burton Watson’s Introduction to Mozi: Basic Writings or Chapter One of A. C. Graham’s Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science.
theoretical,” and focused on logic and language and the role of certainty or necessity:

“They [the Mohists] discover in disputation a certainty (bi 必) invulnerable to time, the logical necessity of which is eternal.”91 Disputation, the mode of philosophical activity for the Mohists, “is concerned...with deciding whether something ‘is-this’ or ‘is not’ (shi fei)...and its judgments follow by strict necessity from the definitions of names.”92

Although there are many fascinating issues within Mohist philosophy, for our purposes we can focus on how the Mohists understood disputation. Section A 74 of the Later Mohist Canon defines disputation as “Contending over opposing statements. Victory in disputation is plumb fitting to the facts.”93 Section B 35 states that “Saying disputation has no victor doesn’t fit.”94 For the Mohists, the key term for the combative metaphor is sheng 勝, and its primary meanings are to win a battle, be victorious, or dominate.95 Disputation, for the Mohists, was seen as a kind of battle in which there was necessarily a winner and a loser. In a similar way to the early Greeks, for the Mohist to secure victory in disputation was to have a claim on certainty or necessity for one’s position.96

An interesting problem in the history of ideas presents itself here. The Mohists, although prominent for some time during the Warring States period, were not particularly...
important in the internal history of Chinese philosophy—there was not even one commentary on the *Mozi* or the *Later Canons*, and the texts themselves barely survived the various dynasties. There are many speculations as to why the Mohists virtually disappeared from Chinese intellectual history, but the interesting question is why they reappeared. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought with them renewed interest in the Mohist texts, especially with the scholarship of Sun Yirang and his attempts to respond to western philosophy. Graham even goes so far as to suggest that the Mohists were “the most sophisticated of all the ancient Chinese thinkers.” He identifies their sophistication with their Greek-like qualities: an interest in disputation for its own sake, the importance of ratiocination and the belief that “like their contemporaries in Greece, they think that only logic can solve...problems definitively.” Many thinkers have suggested that the reason the Mohist canon reappeared with such interest is the subject matter it shares with western traditions—the focus on logic and necessary definitions, for example. However, I would like to pose an alternate (and perhaps complimentary) suggestion: what the Mohists were doing was recognizable to and meaningful for nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers not only in terms of subject but in terms of metaphorical structure. The Mohists were clearly doing philosophy—in the eyes of some western philosophers at the time—because they structured their philosophical activity through combat metaphors.

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97 Graham, 15.
98 Ibid, 21.
99 Graham and other scholars have also suggested that many of the Mohist doctrines were taken up by Xunzi and integrated into the later Confucian ideology.
100 This suggestion is meant to account in some ways for the interest of western and Chinese apologetic philosophers in the Mohists, not in any way to suggest that the combat metaphor is in fact a defining feature of philosophical discourse. Instead, it points to an ethnocentric vision of philosophy as centered in and requiring the standards of Greek philosophy, where other traditions are more easily accessible the more
It should be shocking that Graham, a giant in the field of Chinese philosophy, would suggest that the Mohists were the most sophisticated of all pre-Qin Chinese thinkers. This reminds us that the question “what is philosophy” and its related component “who has philosophy” are still very much active questions. Graham, in praising the ways in which he sees the Mohists approximating their Greek counterparts, is falling prey to what I have elsewhere described as “the philosophical double bind.”

The philosophical double bind occurs in judging what is or who has philosophy; when judged from the perspective of Greece or western philosophy, either the work of the other is so similar as to be uninteresting, or so different as to not count as philosophy. For example, on this logic we might say that Confucius was a virtue ethicist—understanding the other by reference to something similar in the west—but that he probably was not as good a virtue ethicist as Aristotle. On the other side, we might say that the *Dao De Jing* is wisdom literature, but is too different from philosophy in the west to count as philosophy at all. The double bind is a way of devaluing the philosophy of others by reference to Greece or the west as the golden standard. When Graham calls the Mohists “sophisticated,” and identifies their sophistication with the ways in which they approximate Greek thinking, he is devaluing what is significant about their work.

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101 “Rethinking Combative Dialogue,” in *Paideusis*, 2010. The phrase “philosophical double bind” comes from Robert Bernasconi, who uses it to describe the political situation of denying that there is African philosophy.

102 I am by no means suggesting either that Confucius be understood as a virtue ethicist or that the *Dao De Jing* is not philosophy. Rather, by using these common examples, I want to suggest that we pay very careful attention to how we judge and evaluate philosophical activity.

103 Xunzi is also an interesting example, because he is very attractive to many western thinkers. His text is considered a work of “great logical interest,” because “in this essay, one finds a remarkably modern concern” for contemporary philosophy of language and logic issues (Cua, 1). However, even Xunzi has a doctrine of *jianshu* 蒫術, the art of accommodation. Cua writes: “More crucial to proper conduct in discourse is the maintenance of an attitude of respect for others. In particular, one must be circumspect in one’s words so that others’ self-respect will not be injured (*fei-hsiang*, L86). Self-respect and respect for
combat metaphor, as an important part of Greek philosophy, has a central role to play in this evaluation of the philosophy of other cultures. However, it is one among many metaphors for philosophical activity, and as such should itself be evaluated for inadequacies.

II. Inadequacies of the Combat Metaphor

Combat metaphors are situated deep within western philosophical narratives. However, as discussed in Section I.A, these metaphors arose in early Greece as a result of specific socio-historic factors, and gained prominence and influence throughout the tradition because of the place of Greece in philosophical origin narratives. Given the contingent nature of these metaphors, we must ask after their adequacy in contemporary times for understanding philosophical activity.

Consider the following image given by J.M. Keynes of G. E. Moore, one of the twentieth-century’s philosophical masters:

Victory was with those who could speak with the greatest appearance of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility. [G.E.]

Moore...was a great master of this method—greeting one's remarks with a gasp of incredulity—Do you really think that, an expression of face as if to hear such a thing said reduced him to a state of wonder verging on imbecility, with his mouth wide open and wagging his head in the negative so violently that his hair shook.

'Oh!' he would say, goggling at you as if either you or he must be mad; and no others are complementary qualities in argumentative performance. They are valuable in promoting mutual accommodation of individual differences” (10).
reply was possible...*In practice it was a kind of combat in which strength of
caracter was really much more valuable than subtlety of mind.*

Even G. E. Moore, who we might hold up as a philosopher par excellence, a bastion of
rationality, fell to the temptation of victory through intimidation and sophistical flourish.
The vision Keynes gives us of Moore is not one of reason triumphing over its opponents,
or the certainty of a victor with truth on her side, but of the close connection between the
combat metaphor and domination, of exerting inappropriate power over others in the
service of victory. However, Moore is just one man, and the problems with the combat
metaphor extend beyond his tendency toward showmanship and intimidation.

A. Janice Moulton on the Adversary Method

A landmark critique of certain elements of the combat metaphor was published in
the early 1980’s. Janice Moulton, in “A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary
Method,” provides one of the first sustained critiques against the practice of philosophy
as adversarial, which we can see as part of the larger combat metaphor for understanding
philosophy. She begins from a position in feminist epistemology, arguing that aggression
is often conflated with success in certain realms, including professional philosophy, and
that when it comes to aggression, “males have an advantage over females,” because male
aggression is seen as natural. The conflation of aggression with success and

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masculinity is seen as problematic by Moulton, who argues that aggressive behavior should not be linked to effective or successful behavior.

In the philosophical realm, she argues that this aggression plays out as a paradigm for philosophical activity that she terms the Adversary Paradigm. Moulton argue that contemporary philosophy—the Adversary Paradigm—is characterized by the following premises:

1. Philosophical reasoning ought to be value-free.
2. Philosophical reasoning should be deductive.
3. The job of philosophical research is to find counterexamples.
4. The philosophical enterprise is seen as an unimpassioned debate between adversaries.
5. The best way to evaluate philosophical work is to subject it to the most extreme opposition.
6. The Adversary Method leads to objectivity, which is the most desirable value for philosophy.  

Moulton argues that there is a convergence between early twentieth century positivistic science and the nature and goals of contemporary philosophical practice; philosophy as a discipline sees itself as value-free, deductive, unimpassioned, and objective.

Although Moulton notes that the adversarial method would be less problematic if it were one among many strategies for philosophical practice, she sees it as defining the paradigm of contemporary philosophy, and identifies three main problems. First, she argues that the adversary method leads to misinterpretations of the history of philosophy. It encourages us to read earlier philosophers as if they were addressing adversaries, even

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106 Ibid, 152-3.
if they weren’t, and “Philosophers who cannot be recast into an adversarial mold are likely to be ignored.” Second, she argues that the adversarial method restricts philosophical issues, giving undue attention to extreme or controversial positions and relying on the certainty of deduction. Third, she suggests that the adversarial method in fact leads to bad reasoning; the emphasis on counterexamples (Premise 3) belies the fact that counterexample reasoning is not effective in dealing with complex issues. Moulton suggests that contemporary philosophical practice inclines toward building theories that simplify problems so that they are not vulnerable to counterexamples. But, from her perspective, this covers over important complexities in problems for the sake of avoiding combat. Another way for us to think through the issue with counterexamples is that counterexamples are only torpedoes for theories that aspire to universality, where one counterexample sinks the theory entirely. Generalities, on the other hand, become more useful and rich when asked to accommodate counterexamples. So the problem is not counterexample reasoning, but the work counterexamples are expected to do.

While Moulton’s work has much to offer, it prompts certain questions as well. First, is Moulton building a straw man? That is, given her narrow conception of what philosophy is under the adversary paradigm, toward whom is her critique directed? It seems her critique is directed primarily at a small subset of Anglo-American or analytic philosophers who hold, in her terms, a positivistic or scientific view of philosophy. Perhaps her critique is accurate of the logical positivists, but there are many philosophers who would not accept some of premises (1)—(6) above, and yet are still operating with a combative understanding of philosophy. In other words, the combat metaphor is more prevalent than Moulton’s work would suggest.

107 Ibid, 155.
Second, Moulton begins her argument with a discussion of the conflation of aggression with success and gestures toward some feminist implications of this conflation. Although Moulton’s work was groundbreaking when it was published, contemporary critiques of second-wave feminism suggest that her focus on women and the “naturalness” of male aggression might be more fruitfully cast in terms of the multiple vectors of identity that can be sites of exclusion and oppression. And, given a less biologically determined starting point, might her argument focus less on the link between aggression and adversariality, and more on the consequences of, as Lorraine Code describes them, discourses of mastery? Mary Tiles writes that “the war metaphor generates a tolerance for violence and a generally aggressive, adversarial response to problems.”108 Adversariality is a symptom of a larger issue—understanding philosophical activity, and so reasoning itself, as combat. Moulton’s critique, then, can be resituated in terms of a more comprehensive critique of the combat metaphor.

B. Additional critiques of the combat metaphor

Beginning from the combat metaphor, rather than adversariality, we can build on Moulton’s work to suggest several additional areas in which the combat metaphor is inadequate or undesirable as a metaphor for philosophical activity. There are four general problems with understanding philosophical activity as combat: the internalization of combat, the narrowing and limiting of possibilities for inquiry, the covering over of power relations, and the need for meta-level critique.

1. Internalization of Combat

Going back to Plato, in western narratives there is a strong tradition that holds that thinking is the dialogue of the soul with itself: “the soundless solitary dialogue we call ‘thinking’.” This tradition maintains that thinking—our dialogue with ourselves—is a result of dialogue with others—we learn to think, to dialogue with ourselves, by dialoguing with others. Hannah Arendt argues that “I first talk with others before I talk with myself.” In a similar vein, Joanne Waugh, in discussing Socratic philosophy, writes that

Socrates’ injunction to ‘know thyself’ requires a questioning of oneself, and Socrates characterizes thinking (dianoeisthai) in the Theaetetus as a talk (logon) that the soul has with itself (189e—190b). This suggests that thinking is being modeled on external dialogue and not the other way around. One learns this sort of thinking by listening to those who are engaged in such conversations and then by engaging in them oneself. Philosophy must be public discourse, i.e., speech, before it can become private."

That is, philosophical activity is first an engagement between persons, and then is internalized into the solitary philosophical activity we call thinking. How we think and

110 This is also found in the work of twentieth-century psychologist Lev Vygotsky, especially in his text Thinking and Speech (1932/1962). He argues that thought is a kind of internalized speech; although qualitatively different from external speech, thought nonetheless arises from our development in a linguistic world. What we hear spoken around us and the verbal encounters we have with others directly influence our internal speech—our thinking, or our dialogue with ourselves (Vygotsky is careful to note that this may or may not contain sentences, words, fragments, etc.).
111 Ibid, 189.
conduct this internal dialogue depends to a large degree on how we actually talk with others, on our language, culture, and style of engagement. If this is the case, even to some degree, then the combat metaphor, as a way of understanding and conducting philosophical activity, becomes internalized into how we philosophize with ourselves. Consider Arendt’s further comments:

The only criterion of Socratic thinking is agreement, to be consistent with oneself, *homologein autos heauto*: its opposite, to be in contradiction with oneself, *enantia legein autos heauto*, actually means becoming one’s own adversary. Hence Aristotle, in his earliest formulation of the famous axiom of contradiction, says explicitly that this is axiomatic: ‘we must necessarily believe it because... it is addressed not to the outward word...but to the discourse within the soul, and though we can always raise objections to the outward word, to the inward discourse we cannot always object,’ because here the partner is oneself, and I cannot possibly want to become my own adversary.”

On a combat metaphor, the partners in philosophical activity become adversaries, enemies, intent on the defeat of the other for the purpose of victory. The goal of victory trumps the means of achieving it: violence toward others. If dialogue with others is how we come to dialogue with ourselves—to think—then participating in philosophical activity understood as combat internalizes the process of combat; I dialogue with myself as my own adversary.

Arendt writes that “the dialogue of thought can be carried out only among friends, and its basic criterion, its supreme law...says: Do not contradict yourself.” However,

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113 Arendt, 186.
114 Arendt, 189.
this does not mean that she is advocating a self that is not multiple, tumultuous, or discordant. When she says that I cannot possibly be my own adversary, and should rather seek to dialogue with myself as a friend, she is relying on “friend” as a relationship, not only of love and respect, but of challenge, disagreement, and frustration; and, she is relying on it as a relationship I can never escape, and thus should approach with a sense of awareness.

Consistency as a criterion of thinking is not about agreement, in the sense of a lack of contrary voices, but is about those (potentially contrary) voices working together. I don’t want to be my own adversary, for her, because I don’t want to work against myself, to try and destroy a part of me that is deemed “enemy”. On a combat metaphor, victory is about defeat of the enemy, but internalized into thought, this becomes about a kind of self-destruction that is unhealthy and unproductive. It encourages one either not to think, to avoid the field of battle all together, or to seek univocity (victory) before all other goals of thinking.

In addition, internalizing the combat metaphor also internalizes violence toward oneself—the part of oneself that is the adversary—and a desire to defeat, to kill oneself or remove oneself from the field of battle. This puts into question the psychological health of someone who does think this way. After all, violence toward oneself is generally considered a sign of mental dis-ease. Psychological violence is considered a form of abuse, with effects ranging from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder to avoidance and dissociation.\textsuperscript{115} From this, internalizing even symbolic violence toward

\textsuperscript{115} The research on psychological violence and abuse is quite vast, ranging from studies of emotional violence between intimate partners to the effects of psychological violence on childhood development and the role of psychological violence in training combat troops. Across these different areas, however, there is consensus regarding the serious damage psychological violence does to its victims.
oneself would seem to lead either to seriously unhealthy minds or to avoiding the project of thinking altogether.

2. Narrowing and limiting of possibilities

As Moulton points out, when we understand philosophical activity adversarially, everyone we encounter begins to look like an opponent. This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, as Aristotle wrote, “We are all in the habit of directing the inquiry to our opponent in argument, rather than to the subject matter in question.” That is, seeing other participants in philosophical activity as opponents encourages the other philosopher to be the focus of the activity, rather than the topic of the inquiry.

Second, as discussed previously, the combat metaphor structures the aim or goal of philosophical activity as one of victory. While victory may be an attractive goal in that it has certain parallels with certainty, understanding the point of philosophical activity as victory, even victory of or for truth, is problematic in (at least) two ways. First, as Moulton notes, it encourages us to view the history of philosophy as a series of battles, and to see the participants in each historical episode as combatants—and to understand them as having seen each other in the same way. The example she uses of this is the Socratic *elenchus*: “We have taken the *elenchus* to be a duel, a debate between adversaries, but this interpretation is not consistent with the evidence in the dialogues.” She argues that in the dialogues, the success of the *elenchus* depends on convincing the other person to question her cherished beliefs, not showing that the other person is wrong.

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117 This is the classic problem of the sophist—one who argues for the sake of enjoying the combat, rather than for the sake of the truth. However, even those who are “warriors for Truth” are still operating under the combat metaphor.
118 Moulton, 157.
This distortion of the history of philosophy is also seen by philosophers such as Richard Popkin, who argues that much of our understanding of seventeenth century thinkers is skewed based on contemporary concerns, and that for example Descartes’s *Meditations* and Spinoza’s *Ethics* “are really journeys of the mind to God,” not volleys in some great epistemological battle. In addition, cultures whose philosophical activity is not primarily combative are forced by those who understand philosophy as combat to account for why their wisdom should count as philosophy. On a combat metaphor, the structure of combat and the goal of victory are standards by which philosophy is understood, and so judged.

Next, philosophers who are striving for victory choose means that are appropriate to this end—victory. This means that the structure of the activity is first and foremost determined by what is expedient in gaining victory and defeating the opponent, not by what means might be most appropriate to the subject of the inquiry. Valuable paths of thought may be ignored because they do not lead to victory, and controversial positions taken because they lend themselves well to a combative structure. What is worthy of attention in terms of philosophical questions and what kind of answers are acceptable to these questions is shaped and limited by the combat metaphor.

If we return to Clausewitz’s understanding of combat as for the purpose of defeating the enemy, driving him off the battlefield, and breaking his will to continue fighting, we can see two additional consequences of the combat metaphor for philosophical activity. First, although the combat metaphor would have us see victory and understanding as the same moment, understanding requires significant integration, while

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victory requires defeat and/or retreat of the enemy. Furthermore, understanding philosophical activity as combat privileges a view of philosophy that looks for a single right answer or one correct position. The combat metaphor does not tolerate well battles that end in stalemates or draws. On this metaphor, there should be a single victor, one position left standing at the end of the battle. As the Spartan mothers would say, “come home with your shield or on it.” This drive for the one right answer has been the subject of many twentieth-century critiques, from post-modernism and feminism to phenomenology, post-structuralism, and pragmatism. The desire for one right answer or one correct position ignores the potential efficacy and fruitfulness of multiplicity.

Second, the combat metaphor raises questions as to the moral consideration due our adversaries. In contemporary terms, we may be obligated to feed, clothe, and shelter our enemies, and to not torture them, but these are very limited moral obligations. In addition, soldiers are often advised to depersonalize their enemies, to specifically not think of them as persons. While this practice may be justified in actual combat situation when one’s life and the lives of one’s comrades are in real danger, the metaphor of combat tells us precisely that no one’s life is really at risk. Where, then, is the justification for treating others as enemy combatants?

In addition to those points mentioned above, there is another arena in which the combat metaphor is problematic. The combat metaphor supports the construction of hierarchical dualisms. Susan Bordo, in her article “Feminist Skepticism and the ‘Maleness’ of Philosophy,” argues that the characteristic form of Western philosophy is that of the hierarchical opposition (or ‘dualism,’ as Anglo-American philosophers would call it): the
bifurcation of reality into mutually opposed elements, one of which is privileged and identified with ‘self,’ the other of which is disdained and designated as ‘other.’

The Aristotelian reconstruction of the Pythagorean table of opposites is one example of this kind of hierarchical opposition. Other examples include culture/nature, reason/nature, male/female, mind/body, master/slave, reason/matter, rationality/animality, reason/emotion, mind/nature, freedom/necessity, universal/particular, human/nature, civilized/primitive, production/reproduction, public/private, subject/object, self/other.

Why does the combat metaphor support this kind of construction? Combat not only desires but requires an opponent, an other to be fought and whose defeat brings victory. This is a dualistic construction, but what makes it hierarchical—the privileging of one member of a dualistic pair over the other—is that even in philosophical combat philosophers want their own position to succeed. If the point is to be victorious, then one naturally wants one’s own side to win, and believes it should win. The pair of opponents is split into an opposition between me/my position and you/the other position. This is precisely the nature of the hierarchical opposition Bordo sees as the organizing feature of the history of western philosophy.

Why is this a problem? Bordo is not alone in arguing that this structure—hierarchical opposition—and the dualisms it creates are undesirable. Val Plumwood argues that “these dualisms are key ones for western thought, and reflect the major forms of oppression in western culture.” Various thinkers from feminists and post-modernists

122 Ibid, 43.
to Nietzsche scholars and pragmatists have argued that “The hierarchical dualisms of Western culture did not descend from an androgynous heaven; they are the historical product of a white, Western male imagination of reality.”¹²³ That is, this kind of structure arises from the center, not the margins, and is exclusionary at a multitude of levels, including race, gender, class, and sexuality. Plumwood identifies this exclusionary structure as one of mastery and dominance. Focusing on gender, many feminists have argued that “There is no ‘view from nowhere,’...all thought is socially located.”¹²⁴ That is, the construction of an abstract, universal reason requires hierarchical opposition; it requires the exclusion and othering of bodies and emotions, for example. However, as these critiques have demonstrated, these kinds of hierarchical oppositions are socio-historically located as means of oppression and exclusion, and as such should be avoided. This is not to say that the practice of making distinctions or identifying differences should be avoided, but rather that the systematic privileging of one over the other is undesirable. Given this, a metaphor like combat that is structurally drawn to hierarchical oppositions should also be avoided, as it also takes part in the oppression and exclusion of the structures it helps to create. It causes philosophers to skew the kinds of questions they ask and the answers they give in ways that privilege these problematic dualisms.

3. Covering over of power relations

Rules of combat begin with the assumption that all of the persons involved are combatants—that is, soldiers are supposed to fight other soldiers, not children. This assumption of a level playing field, when transferred to the realm of philosophical

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¹²³ Bordo, 628.
¹²⁴ Bordo, 628.
activity, manifests in the belief that any reasonable person is a fair adversary, and all adversaries are alike in being reasonable—the only feature of other persons that matters is their ability to enter into combat. Discussing the general discourses of mastery (of which the combat metaphor is one), Lorraine Code writes, “the discourses of mastery derive from and underwrite a reductive imaginary in which epistemic and moral agents are represented as isolated units on an indifferent landscape, to which their relation, too, is one of disengaged indifference.” But philosophers are more than just soldiers, and philosophical activity takes place in rich contexts where social locations matter. The identity of the participants and the power relations between them are not irrelevant to the unfolding of the inquiry.

The need for recognizing the social location—gender, race, class, sexuality, among other intersections of identity—is found in many twentieth-century epistemological movements, including social epistemology and feminist epistemologies, which are critical of the idea of an abstract, de-personalized knower. They argue instead for the knower to be situated in the richness of her context, because “experiential differences lead to differences in perspective...[and] there are a vast range of experiences differentiated along the lines of social location.” One’s perspective both shapes and limits how one understands herself and the world, and according to these critiques identifying social location is epistemologically significant—better understanding comes with appreciating one’s own boundaries and engaging those with different boundaries.

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Not only is it important to recognize the social locations of participants in philosophical activity, because this shapes and limits what and how they know, into what they inquire, on what resources they draw, and how they argue and reason, but it is also important to recognize how participants are situated in terms of power relations. Each participant—every person—stands in relation to other persons in terms of power (among other things)—who does she have power over? Who has power over her? Of what is she capable, what does she have the power to do? Feminists and critical theorists have argued that not only should we describe and recognize these power relations (à la Foucault), but that we have ethical responsibilities regarding situations of domination and oppression.

The combat metaphor requires the exercise of power over others: “War is...an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.”\textsuperscript{127} To be victorious is to dominate, to exercise one’s power over the other combatant. The combat metaphor actively promotes a kind of power-over dominance that is undesirable. This is not to say that power is in itself a problem but that an emphasis on power and on ignoring power relations privileges those in power, and should make us question the veracity of our results. What is true for those in power may not be true for everyone.

4. Difficulty of meta-critique

Philosophical activity is often understood as containing an important meta-component; to be philosophical is not only to think well but to think well about thinking, to engage one’s own self-understanding. This meta-level critique—examining, assessing, and altering one’s practices and standards for practice—is a defining feature of

\textsuperscript{127} Clausewitz, 75-89.
philosophical activity. This is the question of not just what should we do, but why do we think this is what we should do, and could/should it be altered. As noted in Chapter One, the question of what philosophy is is inextricably linked to the question of how to do philosophy—meta-critique is part of philosophical activity.

The combat metaphor does not have a place for this meta-level reflexivity. Imagine a battle situation in which soldiers are preparing to fight one another. Their weapons are cleaned and primed, their minds calm and focused on the task at hand—securing victory and preventing their own defeat. They enter the fray, strategizing how to keep themselves and their allies safe while inflicting the maximum damage on their opponent. Adversaries, even in a one-on-one fight, must focus on the fight, on how to win and how to stay safe. There is no time in battle for reflecting on the standards and practices of combat, on what it means to win, which criteria are in place to decide success. In a combat situation, soldiers to a large extent cannot and should not question what they are doing or why they are doing it. There is no place for self-reflexivity in the heat of battle. The combat metaphor as such is not hospitable to the necessary place of meta-level critique in philosophical activity.

Consider the following excerpt from Joseph Heller’s classic novel *Catch-22*:

‘Sure there’s a catch,’ Doc Daneeka replied. ‘Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn’t really crazy.’

There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have
to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he were sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle.\(^\text{128}\)

If we take the combat metaphor seriously, there is no real place for meta-critique. Orr’s situation reveals one of the difficulties in engaging in meta-critique as a soldier—a good combatant engages in battle willingly, following the rules set forth by the nature of warfare in her situation. The battle is precisely not the time to question what she is doing. Orr is forced into a paradoxical situation in which he realizes the dangers inherent in his vocation and wants to leave, but cannot because his realization is proof of his suitability for it. The dilemma here compels the soldier to not proceed to a meta-level analysis, because even if they do the results are the same—they must return to combat. As Clausewitz noted, it is policy and politics that governs war, and there is a real disjunction between soldiers—those fighting—and politicians—those operating at a meta-level regarding the battle. The structure of combat prevents meta-level critique, and as such is inadequate for understanding the necessarily metaphilosophical elements of philosophical activity.

III. Conclusion

The discussion at the heart of this chapter has been the combat metaphor—its origins, its contemporary influence and prominence, and some of its inadequacies. I would like to conclude this chapter with another way in which the combat metaphor is problematic, even harmful, for philosophical activity. Clausewitz states that “The object of fighting is the destruction or defeat of the enemy.”¹²⁹ This has a consequence for philosophical activity that has not yet been addressed. If the purpose of combat is victory, which means defeat of the enemy—defeat of military force, occupation of land, and broken will—then an important step in achieving that goal is getting rid of the enemy and bringing the battle to a stop. The purpose is ending the conflict (by winning). In terms of philosophical activity, this would mean that the purpose of doing philosophy would be to stop doing it, and any philosophical engagement with another would be an attempt to force them off the field of combat, to break their will to fight; that is, to break their will to reason. But philosophical activity does not have this self-annihilistic drive to it. In fact, philosophical activity aims in part to continue itself, to spark others to engage in it. While any way of understanding philosophical activity, any metaphor for it, shapes and limits how reasoning is conducted and evaluated, we need a metaphor for philosophical activity that is sensitive to the self-perpetuating aspect of philosophical activity—a metaphor that requires the activity be seen as one that is for itself. A natural place to look for such a metaphor is the realm of play, the subject of the next chapter.

¹²⁹ Clausewitz, 226-9.
CHAPTER 3: PHILOSOPHY AS PLAY

I would rather have it [my philosophy] read as ‘just playing around with (serious) ideas.’ That (dare I say?) is what philosophy is. Not serious, just having fun with ideas, ideas that really mean something. —Robert Solomon

I. What is the play metaphor?

As Lakoff and Johnson point out, most of our complex concepts are structured by more than one metaphor, and philosophical activity is no exception. Philosophy is also often understood as a kind of play: philosophers play with ideas, play with language, and play with thought. Philosophy is understood as a play of ideas, a play of words, or a play of concepts. Consider the following examples:

• Referring to Zhuangzi, Wu Kuangming writes, “To the question, ‘What is your point?’ he would merely smile and point at us. For the answer is in how evocation comes off. Presentation is all there is; what is presented is yet to come, in the playful freedom of the reader.”131 (Wu Kuangming, *Chuang-tzu: World Philosopher at Play*)

• [These texts are] also themselves forms of philosophical play, ‘moves’ in the great game of philosophical reflection.132 (Robert Innis, “Philosophy and the Play of Life”)

• If he [Plato] and Aristotle deemed the fallacious arguments and quibbles of the 
sophists worthy of so serious and so elaborate a refutation, it could only be 
because their own philosophic thought had not yet broken loose from the archaic 
sphere of play. But, we may ask, can philosophy ever do this?133 (Johan Huizinga, 
Homo Ludens)

• Almost like the ball in a tennis match, the ideas of the ancients (which had 
achieved an almost sacred status) and those introduced by the new discoveries of 
science were bantered about. Almost like a derby, the philosophers ‘rode’ their 
ideas, using all of their semantical and rhetorical skill, jockeying for position 
before their excited audiences. The philosophers were the players, and the ideas 
their playthings.134 (Charles Byrum, “Philosophy as Play”)

But what do we mean by play? Play itself is a broad and somewhat amorphous 
concept, and one that we need to give some careful attention to in order to appreciate it as 
a metaphor for philosophical activity. As mentioned in the end of the last chapter, play 
differs sharply from combat in being an activity that is for itself, that has as its purpose its 
own self-continuation. Whereas combat seeks to defeat the enemy and so end the battle, 
the activity of play seeks nothing other than its own enjoyable continuation. However, the 
realms of combat and play are not so far apart as one might initially suspect. They are 
connected to one another through the realm of games.

133 Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture, (Beacon Press, 
A. Combat, Games, and Play

Ludwig Wittgenstein uses games as his paradigmatic example of family resemblance: “I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. And I shall say: 'games' form a family.” That is, rather than seeking to provide a definition of “game”—a single thing shared by all games, Wittgenstein argues that they all resemble one another, but that there is no one resemblance shared by all. He points out that games are multiple, lack fixed definitions, contain some element of the unexpected, and are part of an activity. Key to understanding games, he argues, is appreciating that they are rule-based and technique-driven. This is not to say that they share any one rule or that all games have the same kinds of rules, but that all games are bound by some kind of rules.

Building on this understanding of games as fundamentally rule-bound, we can use James Carse’s helpful distinction between finite and infinite games to begin to make some tentative conceptual boundaries. Carse argues that “There are at least two kinds of games. One could be called finite, the other infinite. A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play.” Considered on a spectrum, finite games fall closest to the realm of combat, where victory

136 Wittgenstein uses games as a metaphor for language and how language works. Understanding language as a game points to a more dynamic, diversified, and use-oriented view of language (as contrasted with Augustine’s philosophy of language).
is the ultimate goal, “players make every move in a game in order to win it,” and the
game “must come to a definitive end.”¹³⁸ Finite games “take place among competitors
who have agreed upon rules that will allow them to determine who has won.”¹³⁹ Finite
games include games like Monopoly, chess, baseball, golf, and capture the flag.¹⁴⁰

Infinite games, on the other hand, are games where “the only purpose of the game
is to prevent it from coming to an end, to keep everyone in play.”¹⁴¹ Players recognize
their interdependence and that in an infinite game, “if there are any losers, we are all
losers.”¹⁴² Examples of infinite games include parenting and friendship. In an infinite
game, there is direction but not destination, cooperation rather than competition, and
strength rather than power.¹⁴³ Infinite games are played for the sole purpose of continuing
the game, of finding new opportunities and new players with whom to play. Carse writes
that “The rules of an infinite game must change in the course of play. The rules are
changed when the players of an infinite game agree that the play is imperiled by a finite
outcome.”¹⁴⁴ Whereas the rules of a finite game are agreed upon ahead of time and
cannot change during play, the rules of an infinite game are continually up for
renegotiation. That is, the more one moves toward infinite games and away from finite

¹³⁸ Ibid, 13, 3.
¹⁴⁰ Carse also wants to include war in the category of finite games. While it may be clear that there are very
close relations between war and finite games, calling war a game is a metaphorical usage. It is important to
note that in a very real sense, combat is not a game. One may “play” war, but when one goes to war one is
not playing anymore. Combat may metaphorically be understood as a kind of game, but the deadly
consequences of it require some conceptual separation from the realm of games, although war and finite
games clearly border one another.
¹⁴¹ Carse, 8.
¹⁴² Hershock, 138.
¹⁴³ Ibid, 139.
¹⁴⁴ Carse, 11.
games, the more indefinite the rules for the activity become, and the more for-itself the activity becomes.  

While we may say that one “plays” both finite and infinite games, it is infinite games that point us to some features we may use to distinguish play from combat and games. For our purposes, in order to make some distinctions between combat, game, and play, we will in this chapter reserve the term “game” for Carse’s finite games—more specifically rule-bound and goal-oriented—and the term “play” for that which falls closest to the realm of infinite games. Because games (finite games) share many similarities with combat, we can consider them to fall within the bounds of the combat metaphor previously discussed. We can begin here from the play of infinite games and suggest that play is for itself and has no external purpose other than its own continuation. We can look for play as an activity that is less rule-bound than games and moving toward greater and greater indeterminacy in terms of its rules—possibly to the point of not needing rules at all.

145 Carse notes that finite and infinite games are alike in that one must choose to play them, one cannot be forced into playing them. However, this is not as helpful as it first appears, as there are many choices we can be forced or coerced into making. A more helpful distinction might be between finite and infinite games on this issue. Perhaps one can be coerced into playing a finite game, but one cannot be coerced into playing an infinite game. For more on the issue of coercion (and its relation to war) see Marilyn Frye’s explication of coercion in her essay, “In and Out of Harm’s Way: Arrogance and Love,” in The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory, especially pgs. 54—57.

146 Consider for example going to the beach and playing in the water. You are not playing a game in the water, just playing. The “just” here indicates that you are not involved in another activity—the play is its own purpose. You splash about, enjoying the feel of the sun on your face and the water on your skin. You move with and against the waves, perhaps laughing aloud at the freedom of the activity. Nowhere in this play are there rules you are consciously following, save perhaps the avoidance of drowning.
B. The Sociological Account

In common parlance, play connotes diversion, leisure, amusement, recreation, fun, pretend, or jest. Play is often connected to games, gambling, performance, and is popularly opposed to seriousness, responsibility, and genuineness—these are seen in the expressions “don’t play with me” or “she’s just playing.” The word “play” comes from the Old English words “pleg/plega” and the Middle English “pleye/pleyen,” meaning to leap for joy, dance, rejoice, or be glad.¹ The canonical text on play is Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*. In this text he argues that play is

a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious,’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner.¹⁴⁷

Huizinga gives a sociological account of play, seeing it as an activity separate from daily life, one that is deeply absorbing but not serious. One gains nothing by playing, although he also argues that play is a primordial activity for human beings. Note also that Huizinga sees play as having fixed rules—here it is clear that Huizinga is not interested in drawing any kind of conceptual boundaries between games (finite games) and play, as he does not even consider the possibility that play might either not be rule bound in the same way as games or might not be rule bound at all. He finds the “ludic function to be inherent in the *agon,*” and writes that there is an “underlying identity” between contest (*agon*) and

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¹⁴⁷ Huizinga, 13.
play.\textsuperscript{148} That is, Huizinga sees play as a subcategory of combat. As such, his analysis of play is not particularly helpful for thinking about play as an activity that can be distinguished from combat, or from games.

Huizinga is criticized by French philosopher Roger Caillois, who suggests that Huizinga does not take into account many other forms of play, especially gambling and games of chance. Caillois defines play as “an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, and often of money...play is essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life.”\textsuperscript{149} He does go on to argue that play is a necessary and distinctive cultural feature, but maintains that the heart of play is this “pure waste.” While Caillois’s account of play is more broad than Huizinga’s, he makes no effort to distinguish play from games—for Caillois, play is simply one of four kinds of games: agon, alea, mimicry, and ilinx.\textsuperscript{150} In games of ilinx, or vertigo, Caillois comes closest to identifying the play of Carse’s infinite game, the play of play for itself. However, he never discusses play without games; he fails to distinguish between the realms of game and play.

The features of play common to both Huizinga and Caillois’s accounts of play are non-seriousness, absorption, waste or purposelessness, separation from daily life, and chance. If we were to use these accounts, and the common connotations of play, to construct a metaphor of philosophy as play, we would be left with an undesirable understanding of philosophy. The metaphor would suggest that philosophy is frivolous, a waste of time, neither serious nor responsible. It would suggest that philosophers are

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 90, 31.
\textsuperscript{150} See Caillois, pg. 12. Games of agon are games of competition; games of alea are games of chance; games of mimicry are games of simulation; and games of ilinx are games of vertigo.
doing something separate from the rest of life, “just playing,” not doing anything meaningful, or even engaging in pretense. In terms of structuring philosophical activity, a certain sense of depth and care for the issue in question is important; philosophical activity should not be light or frivolous, as it aims to address issues of real human concern. Philosophical activity should not stand outside of ordinary life, can be extremely serious, and is not a “pure waste”. This vision of play would elide the boundaries between games and play—it does not allow for any conceptual space between games (finite games) and play. Play is still heavily determined by fixed rules on this account. It also opposes play and seriousness, while still maintaining that play is socially and culturally important. On this account, play would be a necessary waste. But, as Charles Byrum notes, “To juxtapose...playfulness and seriousness is fundamentally fallacious.”¹ A more philosophically grounded understanding of play will be able to address these concerns, and so provide a more adequate metaphor than the above sketch.

C. Gadamer and Play

Although heavily influenced by Huizinga, Gadamer nevertheless manages to construct an account of play that is philosophical, rather than sociological. His account seeks to articulate play as an activity in itself, not in terms of cultural exegesis (à la Huizinga or Caillois). He situates his discussion of play in terms of a larger account of the relationship between language and understanding, and does not oppose play and seriousness, which is crucial for the success of the metaphor of philosophy as play.
In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer begins his analysis with the metaphorical usage of play: the play of light, of waves, of limbs, and of words.\(^{151}\) Play, in Gadamer’s analysis, is a “to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end...it renews itself in constant repetition.”\(^{152}\) Central to the concept of play, argues Gadamer, is dance—movement back and forth, around and around, a “constant self-renewal.”\(^{153}\) This to-and-fro movement is also the locus for the responsiveness at the heart of play: “the cat at play chooses the ball of wool because it responds to play.”\(^{154}\) That is, even when one plays by oneself, one does not play alone, but always plays something, or plays with something—the movement of play is a movement of response and responding.

Additionally, play is not something the players do, but has its primal locus in playing, in the play itself. Throughout *Truth and Method*, Gadamer is concerned with rescuing certain issues from what he sees as over-subjectivization. He is especially concerned that aesthetics and aesthetic experience not be understood as purely subjective experiences. Because his account of play serves in the text to describe the being of the work of art, and because of earlier subjectivist account of play, he is especially keen not to understand play as something a person does, as a subjective or inner experience. Instead, he wants play to have a distinct status that goes beyond the individual. It is through players that the play reaches its presentation, but it is not controlled by them. Gadamer writes that “the primordial sense of playing is the medial one.”\(^{155}\) That is, the priority of the gerund “playing” indicates that play is not first and foremost something a

\(^{151}\) Gadamer argues that conceptual analysis should always begin with metaphorical usage: “Here as always the metaphorical usage has methodological priority. If a word is applied to a sphere to which it did not originally belong, the actual ‘original’ meaning emerges quite clearly. Language has performed in advance the abstraction that is, as such, the task of conceptual analysis” (*Truth and Method*, 103).
\(^{152}\) Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 104.
\(^{153}\) Ibid, 105.
\(^{154}\) Ibid, 106.
\(^{155}\) Ibid, 104.
person does: “the actual subject of play...[is] the play itself.” This medially of play indicates that the player and the play are two ways of viewing the same phenomenon; there is no play without a player, no player without play. Playing, the medial sense of the term, emphasizes the importance, for Gadamer, that play is not about or controlled by the subject—it is not a subjective phenomenon. Play is not, primarily, something someone does. It is primarily playing—the activity, not the attitude. The player is involved in “a ‘being-played’—a happening, therefore, which constitutes the Being of playing.”

Gadamer argues, as mentioned earlier, that play is not to be contrasted with seriousness, as internal to play there is a kind of sacred seriousness that is to be respected. The players must take the play seriously, must relate in a genuine way to the world of play. Fred Lawrence argues that play “only starts when players become serious by not holding themselves back in ‘just playing’.” That is, to play is to be serious about the play, to take its purpose on as one’s own—if one is not playing seriously there are other purposes than the play involved. Play is violated, as it were, when players do not play seriously. This is an internal seriousness, as what one might be doing while playing could appear to lack seriousness. However, in order to play, in order to suspend normal purposive relations and genuinely be absorbed into playing, the play must be primary, have a place of importance and be undertaken earnestly. Someone who plays as if it were a joke is not really playing.

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156 Ibid, 104.
158 One might also describe this seriousness as a kind of respect for the play.
Players experience play as being more than something in their individual consciousness, more than a simple volitional activity. Play rises above the elements constituting it and absorbs the players into itself: “The structure of play absorbs the player into itself.”\textsuperscript{160} Gadamer notes that “Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play.”\textsuperscript{161} To play is to be fully absorbed in play; playing suspends normal purposive relations and creates a world of its own that has no purpose but itself. If I play with my cat while watching TV, there is a sense in which I am not really playing with him. The play should absorb me in it, to the point that I am not paying attention to the TV, for example. While we play, I have no other focus than our play, no outside purposes. This purposivelessness requires that the player is not solely in control—it requires that she be entirely absorbed in the play. If she is not absorbed in the play, she is not really playing; she is not taking the play seriously. When she is absorbed in play, the player loses herself; her individual consciousness and volition is subsumed into the ongoing process of the play. She is “freed from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence.”\textsuperscript{162} Thus this absorption, or entry into the flow of play, is also a kind of freedom from constraint, freedom from strain, freedom from commitment.

Although it may seem contradictory, play also has a certain lightness about it; it is without the feel of strain or exertion: “It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort.”\textsuperscript{163} This is not to say that play doesn’t require effort, but rather that when engaged in play, when caught up and absorbed in

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid, 105.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid, 103.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, 105.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, 105.
play, the player doesn’t feel the play as work. In losing herself in it, she has abandoned or suspended her connection to purposes outside of play, and so her experience of play is one of ease and lightness, according to Gadamer. The player is swept up into the play with all seriousness—she puts the play first. But in doing so the exertion that one might feel when striving to do something other than what you are doing fades away. The basketball player’s leap to the hoop is full of lightness—she does not need to concentrate on exerting herself; if she is absorbed in the play she feels the action as light, even though it takes a great deal of training and conditioning in order to be able to feel it as without strain. In sports terminology, this is being “in the zone”, where one’s absorption in the activity is such as to make all effort effortless.

1. Philosophy as Gadamer’s Play

How does Gadamer’s account of play structure the philosophy as play metaphor? Charles Byrum discusses this in his article “Philosophy as Play.” He asserts a distinction between philosophy understood as a “play with ideas” and as a “play of ideas.” Drawing on Huizinga for his account of philosophy as a play with ideas, Byrum explains that on this view, what we might also call the finite game view, “man sees himself in the position of transcending the ideas and manipulating them; playing with ideas becomes self-conscious, calculated, and even belligerent.” He juxtaposes this vision of philosophy with a Gadamerian vision of philosophy as a play of ideas: “Being and man are involved in an inter-play...characterized by a creative openness to the ‘new-not-yet’ which

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164 By losing herself, I mean to suggest that she loses a kind of individual, conscious, volitional control. The play takes over and guides her actions.
165 Byrum, 318.
continually arrives in perpetual novelty...as a thinker plays with an idea, he is a part of the life or truth of that idea, or of Being itself.”\textsuperscript{166} The philosopher plays with Being—Being is her playmate—and she is absorbed in Being through playing. There is a kind of reciprocation or response between idea and player; each influences the other. That is, the play of ideas is different from play with ideas in that, per Gadamer’s account, the medial sense of play takes priority. We as philosophers are being played—we are played in and by Being—more than we are controlling or manipulating things to play with them: involvement in true play or a real game brings the realization, not that one is playing, but that one is being played! Any single individual or single occasion of understanding is a subordinate part of the whole movement of understanding, the entire play of being. The most essential understanding of man is thus gained, not in seeing him as transcending, manipulating, or autonomous from the whole, but as intrinsically related to the totality of Being as a player who is being played.”\textsuperscript{167}

On Byrum’s account, the play of ideas invites us to see ideas as the very play of Being itself, and to see philosophers as entering into that play with Being and being played by it. The interaction between philosopher and Being is play, and that play is philosophical activity.\textsuperscript{168} We might note here the importance for Gadamer of tradition and historicity, and see that in being played by Being, we are in a sense being taken up into a play of our tradition that has been going on long before we came along and will continue to go on

\textsuperscript{166} Byrum, 322, 324.
\textsuperscript{167} Byrum, 324.
\textsuperscript{168} Fred Lawrence goes so far as to suggest that in this case, Being is God (a Christian God), and that Gadamer’s account of play is at the very least parallel, if not connected to, a Christian account of grace and faith. See Lawrence, “Gadamer, the Hermeneutic Revolution, and Theology,” in The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer, 189.
long after we are gone. We are moments in this play, and we neither initiated it nor are we controlling it.

Byrum sees play as an important corrective to a philosophical tendency toward dogmatism and rigidity. If dogmatism is clinging to a belief or system of belief without examining evidence to the contrary, then if philosophy is play there is no place for that kind of thinking. The to-and-fro, dance-like movement of thought on a play metaphor means that thought should not stay rooted in one place. The play of ideas is continually refreshing itself, opening itself toward the new and the unexpected: “a full appreciation of the dimension of ‘play of’ or ‘played by’ serves to protect philosophy from becoming too serious...the dimension of ‘playing of’ or ‘played by’ has an inherent iconoclastic element, its desire for, pursuit of, and expectation of ‘the new.’”\(^\text{169}\) That is, to see philosophy as play—play of ideas—is to emphasize the endless nature of its questioning-answering, the lack of absolutes, and the constant consideration of new and different evidence and perspectives. If there is always something new entering into the play of ideas, then there is always something more to consider, to play with. Play has its own continuation as its purpose, and as such, philosophy as play never comes to rest. Philosophy as play, on this view, is a balance against a kind of thinking that might absolutize or become static ideology.

So the play metaphor for philosophy, using Gadamer’s account of play as a foundation, sees philosophical activity as a kind of movement, a to-and-fro that repeats and renews itself. It understands philosophy as being medially prior—the activity of philosophy takes priority over the philosopher—and as absorbing the philosopher in the activity. The philosopher engages Being, and this engagement is play, the play of

\(^{169}\) Byrum, 325.
philosophy. Philosophy has its own sense of internal seriousness, but is also accompanied by the phenomenological feel of lightness or absence of strain, freedom from commitment and openness to possibility. The mediality of play, in the context of philosophical activity, indicates the importance of tradition, historicity, and language. The philosopher enters into play that has already been proceeding—her thought is already shaped by her language, culture, history, and context. As she plays, then, her contribution becomes part of the play itself.

2. Inadequacies of Gadamer’s Play for the Play Metaphor

Although there are many ways in which the play metaphor, as understood through Gadamer’s account of play, is valuable and attractive for understanding philosophy, at this point there are certain inadequacies that need to be addressed. First, Gadamer’s account of play, especially as seen through Bryum, relies heavily on certain assumptions regarding Being. This vision of play carries over these ontological assumptions into what it means to do philosophy. Can we understand play without Being? Even if this is simply a matter of language use, we still need to be able to separate out play from the ontological role it has in Gadamer’s larger project.

Second, Gadamer’s account of play still comes back around to games and their rule-bound nature: “The particular nature of a game lies in the rules and regulations that prescribe the way the field of the game is filled. This is true universally, whenever there is a game. It is true, for example, of the play of fountains and of playing animals.”

While we may say that the play of water in a fountain follows, from our perspective, the

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170 Gadamer, 107.
law of gravity and the rules of surface tension, this is not akin to the rules I follow when I play chess, and Gadamer does not recognize this. It is also unlike my play in the water at the beach—an outside observer can impute rule-following to my activity, but I am not following rules in playing; this is part of what it means for me to be fully absorbed in the activity. Gadamer begins his account by saying that he is going to focus on play, as its own activity, but ends by covering over the differences between games and play and importing a sense of rule-boundedness back into play. María Lugones, in her article “Playfulness, ‘World-travelling,’ and Loving Perception,” is critical of Gadamer on precisely this point. Play, as distinct from games (finite games) is not precisely rule-bound. In fact, when trying to make some distinctions between games and play, we noted earlier that games are rule-bound, but play has a more indeterminate relationship with rules. Lugones writes that for us, play “may not have rules, and when we do have rules, there are no rules that are to us sacred.”

In other words, although Gadamer builds an account of play that does not need to be tied to games, he does so anyway.

These inadequacies suggest a certain paucity to Gadamer’s account of play. What we need at this point is a richer understanding of play, or philosophy as play, that does not carry transcendent ontological commitments and is not centered on determinate rules. With Gadamer’s notion of play as a framework, we can build on it using resources from the Zhuangzi, a text that is neither committed to a transcendent ontology nor to determinate rules.

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II. *Zhuangzi* and Play

In Chinese philosophy, *Zhuangzi*\(^{172}\) is often considered to be the paradigmatic exemplar of philosopher-at-play. We can begin our analysis of play and philosophy as play in the *Zhuangzi* with Michael Crandell’s essay, “On Walking without Touching the Ground: ‘Play’ in the Inner Chapters of the *Chuang-tzu*.” In this essay he argues that play, understood through Gadamer’s account, is the philosophical concept providing unity and coherence to the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.\(^{173}\) Although we are not here interested in Crandell’s claims about coherence, we can borrow his framework to start to think through play and philosophy as play in the *Zhuangzi*. Crandell uses the features of play from Gadamer’s account discussed above—the to-and-fro movement, mediality, and absorption—to make conceptual links with the *Zhuangzi*. Crandell writes that “Instead of Gadamer’s treatment of play in its various aspects, the *Inner Chapters* present a selection of philosophical leitmotifs. And instead of clinical descriptions of each aspect, the *Inner Chapters* symbolize the meaning of the leitmotifs by setting them in stories.”\(^{174}\) What

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\(^{172}\) With the exception of titles, all Wade-Giles transliterations have been changed to pinyin (ex. *Chuang-tzu* to *Zhuangzi*).

\(^{173}\) The *Zhuangzi* as a text is composed of thirty three chapters (the Guo Xiang version), of which the first seven are styled the Inner Chapters. These Inner Chapters were thought to have actually been written by Zhuang Zhou, who may have lived in the 4th century BCE, while the Outer Chapters were thought to have been written by his disciples. Textual and linguistic evidence now suggests that even the Inner Chapters have perhaps twelve different authors. The text as a whole displays the work of many people over several hundred years, riffing on the same set of themes. As such, it is more precise to read any reference to Master Zhuang (*Zhuangzi*) the author as instead a reference to the Masters Zhuang, in the plural. For more information on this issue, see David McCraw, *Stratifying Zhuangzi: Rhyme and Other Quantitative Evidence*, Taipei: Institute of Linguistics, Academica Sinica, 2010.

\(^{174}\) Michael Crandell, “On Walking Without Touching the Ground: ‘Play’ in the *Inner Chapters* of the *Chuang-tzu*,” in *Experimental Essay on Chuang-tzu*, ed. Victor Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983) 116. In Crandell’s article, he is concerned with demonstrating that Gadamer’s account of play provides a kind of conceptual unity to the Inner Chapters. For our purposes, we are more interested in Crandell’s exposition of the *Zhuangzi* as a means to think through its account of play as harmonizing with and going beyond Gadamer’s.
follows uses Crandell’s work as a springboard for constructing an account of play and philosophy as play from the text.

A. To-and-fro: Hua 化

Crandell identifies the to-and-fro movement of play in Gadamer’s analysis as hua 化, ceaseless transformation, a key philosophical term in the Zhuangzi. Hua is the unending process of change and transformation that characterizes everything—from the myriad things (wanwu 萬物) to human beings. This is a transformation that has no specific beginning or ending; it is not dependent on anything other than itself, and requires no Being for its changes. It is the play of the world, the world as play. The text itself opens with an image of transformation: the Kun fish transforms (hua) into the Peng bird. In Chapter Six (Dazongshi 大宗師), Confucius tells Yan Hui about Mengsun Cai, the best mourner in the land: “That Mengsun has the whole secret, he has taken the step beyond knowledge...Mengsun does not know what he depended on to be born, does not know what he will depend on to die, does not know how to be nearer to the time before or the time after. If in transforming he has become one thing instead of another, is it required that what he does not know terminated in being transformed?” The passage ends with Confucius telling Yan Hui to smile and laugh at the various transformations one undergoes—we and everything around us are undergoing constant transformations,

175 Note that the to-and-fro movement of play, although necessary for play, is not itself sufficient. Not all movement or transformation is play. All of the features of play need to be understood as together forming the account of play.

176 The myriad things (the 10,000 things and events, everything) includes human beings.

and Mengsun Cai is the best mourner in the land because he recognizes and appreciates this. *Hua*, these ceaseless transformations, are the constant movement and change of the world and everything in it. Crandell writes that Zhuangzi has set up a desideratum of the proper life-attitude, namely, the acknowledgement and acceptance of ceaseless change...he says ‘transform yourself with the Way...’ This...kind of *hua* appears to take the form of play in that it consists of to-and-fro movement between differing viewpoints in the absence of the goal of attaching oneself to one in particular.\(^{178}\)

In the text, we see *hua* in terms of the transformation of all things and events, the transformations of the human body, life and death, and the cycles of day and night. One of the most famous *hua* passages is at the end of Chapter Two (*Qiwulun* 齊物論), where Zhuang Zhou dreams he is a butterfly:

Last night Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, a vivid and lively butterfly, who felt just like a butterfly should. He didn’t know he was Zhou. Suddenly he awoke, and was pleasantly surprised to be Zhou. He didn’t know if he were Zhou, dreaming he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhou. Between Zhou and the butterfly, there must indeed be some distinction. This is called the transforming of things and events.\(^{179}\)

Some interpreters see this passage as pointing to the illusory nature of life, but a more textually grounded interpretation is that neither Zhuang Zhou nor the butterfly have any sort of priority. All things and events are constantly transforming, and will transform.

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178 Crandell, 107.
179 *Zhuangzi*, Chapter Two: 昔者莊周夢為胡蝶，栩栩然胡蝶也，自喻適志與！不知周也。俄然覺，則蘧蘧然周也。不知周之夢為胡蝶與，胡蝶之夢為周與？周與胡蝶，則必有分矣。此之謂物化，A translation that emphasized the deeply participatory nature of *wuhua* (物化) would perhaps be “thingly transforming.”
Zhuang Zhou is always already becoming something other, just as the butterfly is what the caterpillar has become. The transformations of things (物化) are the natural processes of the world; we can make distinctions, like that between Zhou and the butterfly, but both are part of the same process of transformation. This sense of constant transformation and movement can be understood as part of the play activity; this play is the to-and-fro renewing repetition of all things, including human beings. Recognition, acceptance, and appreciation of this ceaseless transforming is at the heart of the text’s recommendation to its audience—in Crandell’s terms, the text is enjoining us to cultivate and maintain a lusory attitude toward ourselves and the world around us.

B. For Itself: You 遊

Crandell argues that the lusory attitude recommended by the Zhuangzi is experienced as a kind of roaming, roving, traveling, wandering, or rambling (you 遊). The contemporary Chinese term for play is 遊戯. Xi means joke, game, play, frivolity, performance, etc. Also, you is in the title of the first chapter: Xiaoyaoyou, “Going Rambling without a Destination,” “Free and Easy Wandering,” “Roving about Aimlessly,” and so on.

You is a kind of movement that is nondirected, without specific external purpose or aim: touring aimlessly with one’s companions. The title of Chapter One of the Zhuangzi contains the term you, and it is a key term in the text as a whole. Near the end of Chapter One there is a description of the perfected man that reads, “As for one who travels straight between the heavens and earth, and rides on the changes of the six energies in...”

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180 Roaming, roving, wandering, rambling, etc. The contemporary Chinese term for play is 遊戯. Xi means joke, game, play, frivolity, performance, etc. Also, you is in the title of the first chapter: Xiaoyaoyou, “Going Rambling without a Destination,” “Free and Easy Wandering,” “Roving about Aimlessly,” and so on.
181 See Crandell, 114. See Ch1: 若夫乘天地之正，而御六氣之辯，以遊無窮者，彼且惡乎待哉！故曰：至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名。; Ch2: 若然者，乘雲氣，駕日月，而遊乎四海之外。死生無變於己，而況利害之端乎; you also has a secondary meaning of traveling with friends and making friends.
order to rove without limit, there is nothing on which she depends! It is said: the
perfected person is without self, the inspired person without effort, and the sagely person
without fame.”182 This roving or playing is for-itself, it depends on nothing other than
itself. When manifested in the different personages (perfected, inspired, sagely)183, it
becomes clear that this play is one that is without egoistic self, with a sense of lightness
or ease about it, and without consideration of attaining some external goal.

You is also advocated as the movement of one’s heart-mind: in Chapter Seven
(Yingdiwang 應帝王) the nameless man tells Tian Gen, “Let your heart-mind rove in
bland simplicity, blend your qi with the indifferent desert, flow spontaneously with things
and events, do not allow your private self therein, and the world will thereby be
ordered.”184 This is an immersion in play, absorption in the things and events of the world
without a sense of idiosyncratic ego in control of events. Furthermore, in Chapter Two
(Qiwulun), Confucius the Daoist sage tells Zigao, “Travel with things and events in order
to let your heart-mind rove, trust in what is necessarily so in order to nourish the center,
that is the most you can do.”185 You is what we are supposed to do with hua; we play with
the play of the world. The great Peng bird, whose soaring flight and transformation opens
the text, is the very image of you, a productive image that “eventually becomes a
recurrent motif that continues throughout the text, exemplifying the ideal Daoist state of
mind. The Peng flies high above the chapter of its origin and becomes a powerful symbol

182 Zhuangzi, Chapter One, my translation. 若夫乘天地之正，而御六氣之辯，以遊無窮者，彼且惡乎
待哉！故曰：至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名。The consummate person who roves without limit is
here contrasted with Liezī, who could journey with the winds for fifteen days before he had to return.
183 Various places in the text set up loose hierarchies of self-cultivation. They do not need to be read as
ladders—one is first perfected, then inspired, then sagely—but can be seen as different aspects of
cultivation.
184 Zhuangzi, Chapter Seven, my translation. 無名人曰：‘汝遊心於淡，合氣於漠，順物自然，而無容
私焉，而天下治矣。’
185 Zhuangzi, Chapter Two, my translation. 且夫乘以遊心，託不得已以養中，至矣。
of the value the entire text promotes.”186 This state of mind so valued by the text is you, roving with no other purpose or constraint than to rove—just as play has no other purpose but itself. The Peng bird does not strain in flight; the very flight itself is an image of the lightness of you, and the feel of you as flexible movement.

C. Absorption: Wu sang wo 吾喪我

Crandell also notes that the Zhuangzi manifests a notion of the absorption of play. In the text, this is discussed as “forgetting oneself” or “losing oneself”.187 Brian Lundberg writes that for the Zhuangzi, “Only by engaging our world from a perspective of no-self can we become one with the flow and rhythm of dao. If the absence of self describes the spiritual condition of a fully realized person, then forgetting is its practical application.”188 Becoming one with the flow and rhythm of dao is an achievement greatly valued by the text; this is full absorption in the play of the world, the play of dao. To lose oneself in this context is to lose isolation and egoism, to enter fully into a sense of belonging in the flux of events and relations.189

187 Note, just as Zhuangzi’s ontology does not require transcendence—hua is fully immanent—there is no substantial “self” that is to be lost. Rather, what is lost is more like an egoistic attachment to one’s self. Thus even being fully absorbed is still fully absorbed in this world, here and now, not in Being. For more on this, see for example Chris Jochim’s “Just Say No to ‘No Self’ in Zhuangzi,” in Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi.
189 Consider some of the passages already cited, including the Tian Gen passage in the preceding section. The advice there is to blend one’s qi with all the things and events of the world, and to not let one’s private self interfere. That is, absorption requires a certain shift of attention and intention away from oneself.
Chapter Two (Qiwulun) opens with an image of a wise man who has forgotten himself:

Ziqi of Nanguo sat reclined, looking up at the heavens he sighed, trance-like as though he had lost his counterpart. Yencheng Ziyou stood in waiting before him and asked:

“What is this? Can your form really be made to be like a withered tree, and your heart-mind really be made to be like dead ashes? The reclined man here now is not the reclined man of yesterday.”

Ziqi replied, “Yen, you do well to ask this! Just now I lost myself (lit. I mourn the loss of myself), can you fathom it? You hear the human pipes but not the earthly pipes, you hear the earthly pipes but not the heavenly pipes!”

In this story, Ziqi has lost his self, and so is able to listen to all of the different pipings, to appreciate—to be absorbed in—the music of the heavens and not get caught up in making unhelpful distinctions. In Chapter Twelve (Tiandi) Lao Dan tells Confucius,

“Forgetting about things and events, forgetting about the heavens, this is known as forgetting oneself. A person who forgets herself may be said to enter the heavens.”

That is, forgetting oneself—being able to rove about (you) in the play of all things and

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190 Zhuangzi, Chapter Two, my translation. “南郭子綦倚欄而坐，仰天而嘆，若焉似喪其耦，顔成子游立侍乎前，曰：‘何居乎？形固可使如槁木，而心固可使如死灰乎？今之隱機者，非昔之隱機者也。’子綦曰：‘偃，不亦善乎而問之也！今者吾喪我，汝知之乎？汝聞人爵而未聞地爵，汝聞地爵而未聞天爵夫！’ The loss of self, the mourning of self, and the loss of counterpart is here indicative of Ziqi’s wisdom or attainment of a higher level... The passage continues with a parable of the wind through the various pipes. Graham comments: “Zhuangzi’s parable of the wind compares the conflicting utterances of philosophers to the different notes blown by the same breath in the long and short tubes of the pan-pipes, and the noises made by the wind in the hollows of different shapes. It is natural for differently constituted person to think differently; don’t try to decide between their opinions, listen to Heaven who breathes through them” (49). That is, Ziqi’s loss of self allows him to listen to the heavenly piping. Crandell doesn’t use this passage specifically, but it fits his overall point.

191 Zhuangzi, Chapter 12, my translation. 忘乎物，忘乎天，其名為忘己。忘己之人，是之謂入於天。Note in this case that “the heavens” is a natural realm—the realm of the stars or the sky, perhaps.
events (hua) without being narrowly or egoistically attached to any one thing—is what allows one to truly enter into the luminosity of the world. Losing oneself is about becoming fully immersed in relationality and interdependence. Many thinkers see a kind of spiritual meditation in the text that advocates a loss of self, a full absorption into the transformation of things. Lundberg notes that when one loses or forgets oneself, “one is then able to experience that rhapsodic mystical-like state described by Zhuangzi as climbing the skies, roaming the mists, and dancing in the infinite.” Chapter Two tells us that “without a self there is no choosing one thing rather than another,” where the choosing of one thing over another is seen as a central human problem; to be absorbed in the transformation of the world is to not resist transformations as they occur, to not cling to one thing over another. And, in one of the classic passage on the topic of meditation and absorption—the Confucius/Yan Hui dialogue on the “fasting of the heart-mind”—where Confucius tells Yan Hui that the secret of things is fasting one’s heart-mind and transforming with the myriad things, Graham comments:

For Yan Hui...to go to the King full of good intentions and well thought out plans will do harm instead of good. He must first train the motions in himself which can spontaneously move another in the direction of the Way. He must...[train] with the meditative technique...Then the self dissolves, energies strange to him and higher than his own (the ‘daemonic’) enter from outside, the agent of his actions is no longer the man but Heaven working through him...He no longer has

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192 However, the text is not so clear and unified on this point.
193 Lundberg, 217. Also, Lundberg notes that “Mystic union with the cosmos is surely a sign of spiritual awareness in the Zhuangzi,” where we might read “union” as an absorption into the play of the cosmos (214).
194 Zhuangzi, Chapter Two. Translated by Graham, 51. On the topic of not resisting transformations, see the death and cripple passages, especially in Chapter Five. Also note that losing one’s self or no-self does not posit the presence of a “self” with some sort of ontological status before it can be “lost”.
195 For the whole passage, see Zhuangzi, Chapter Four, Graham 66-69.
deliberate goals, the ‘about to be’ at the centre of him belongs to the transforming processes of heaven and earth.\textsuperscript{196}

In other words, what Confucius is telling Yan Hui to do is become fully absorbed in the ceaseless transformations—to allow the medial sense of play to take priority. He must lose himself as an agent in order to be able to belong to the transformations of the world.

D. Cook Ding

Finally, Crandell takes the Cook Ding story to be emblematic of the full range of play in the text.\textsuperscript{197} Cook Ding is the butcher whose knife never needs sharpening, who never hits a tendon or a bone when carving, who acts without individual volition—he lets the daemonic, the spirits, act through him in order that he feel the spaces in the joints of the ox. The King for whom he is butchering an ox in the story sees Cook Ding as

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\textsuperscript{196} Graham, 69.
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\textsuperscript{197} “Cook Ding was carving an ox for Lord Wenhui. As his hand slapped, shoulder lunged, foot stamped, knee crooked, with a hiss! With a thud! The brandished blade as it sliced never missed the rhythm, now in time with the Mulberry Forest dance, now with an orchestra playing the Qingshou.

‘Oh, excellent!’ said Lord Wenhui. ‘That skill should attain such heights!’

‘What your servant cares about is the Way, I have left skill behind me. When I first began to carve oxen, I saw nothing but oxen wherever I looked. Three years more and I never saw an ox as a whole. Nowadays, I am in touch through the daemonic in me, and do not look with the eye. With the senses I know where to stop, the daemonic I desire to run its course. I rely on Heaven’s structuring, cleave along the main seams, let myself be guided by the main cavities, go by what is inherently so. A ligament or tendon I never touch, not to mention solid bone. A good cook changes his chopper once a year, because he hacks. A common cook changes it once a month, because he smashes. Now I have had this chopper for nineteen years, and have taken apart several thousand oxen, but the edge is as though it were fresh from the grindstone. At that joint there is an interval, and the chopper’s edge has no thickness; if you insert what has no thickness where there is an interval, then, what more could you ask, of course there is ample room to move the edge about. That’s why after nineteen years the edge of my chopper is as though it were fresh from the grindstone.

‘However, when I come to something intricate, I see where it will be hard to handle and cautiously prepare myself, my gaze settles on it, action slows down for it, you scarcely see the flick of the chopper—and at one stroke the tangle has been unraveled, as a clod crumbles to the ground. I stand chopper in hand, look proudly round at everyone, dawdle to enjoy the triumph until I’m quite satisfied, then clean the chopper and put it away.’

‘Excellent!’ said Lord Wenhui. ‘Listening to the words of Cook Ding, I have learned from them how to nurture life’.” (Graham, 64).
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emblematic of how to nourish life—Cook Ding has not only seen the play of the world, but is able to play with the world. Crandell argues that “we see in this story the basic elements of Gadamer’s entire analysis: the dancelike quality of the playful movement, the absence of strain in the player, the primacy of naturalness in the phenomenon, the seriousness of the event, and finally the play itself—in this case carving—as the actual subjectum of the playing.”¹⁹⁸ We see not only the to-and-fro renewing movement, the absence of strain, seriousness and absorption, but also the fully medial sense of play; Cook Ding has allowed the play to take him over, and butchering is no longer simply a volitional activity—it is not something he does, but something that is done through him.

E. Further considerations for play and philosophy as play in the text

While Crandell’s examination of the text in terms of Gadamer’s account of play is a helpful starting point, it has certain limitations we must go beyond. First, Crandell is not critical of any of Gadamer’s assumptions and their applicability to the Zhuangzi—specifically, he has no problem importing concepts like Being or a subject/object division into the text. However, as has been pointed out by many scholars, early Chinese thought possessed neither a transcendent ontology nor a strong subject/object division. Second, Crandell uses only material from the inner chapters. While this may perhaps have been simply for the sake of brevity in the article, it betrays a concern with identity and authorship that is problematic. Third, Crandell reads the text as promoting a kind of “cheerful indifference” that he sees as lusory. However, the text does not promote

¹⁹⁸ Crandell, 117.
indifference. The main dramatis personae are deeply involved with one another and the
world around them, and do not react with indifference to what happens around them.
Sometimes the various discussions of death are taken to signify indifference, but as is
discussed below, they rather demonstrate an involvement with and acceptance of the
transformations of the world, not a lack of interest or impact. Third, the account of play
in the text is already deeply metaphorical in a way that Crandell does not recognize. Play
is world as play, and philosophy—thinking—is play with the play of the world. The text
is already using play in this complex manner, correlating different fields in relation to one
another. In addition, Crandell does not highlight the difference in accounts between
Gadamer and the *Zhuangzi* on this issue of who plays—for Gadamer, others may play
with me, but have no particular place in play—the philosopher plays with Being. For
*Zhuangzi*, as we see below, playmates are a key part of play. Finally, Crandell fails to
draw a distinction between play as an activity and playfulness as an attitude—a
distinction that is crucial for Gadamer but perhaps not for *Zhuangzi*. Thus what follows
appropriates the features of Crandell’s account that are helpful while leaving behind his
problematic assumptions.

1. *Qiwulun* and *Shi/Fei*

*Qiwulun*, the title of Chapter Two, is translated by Graham as “The Sorting that
Evens Things Out,” or we might say, “Discussion on the Parity of Things and Events”.
One of the main philosophical directions this chapter explores is the problem with
*shi* (是) and *fei* (非). These two terms in Classical Chinese are an affirmation and a
negation, a “deeming it so” and “deeming it not so”—Graham translates them as “that’s
it” and “that’s not”. Graham locates his discussion of these terms in Mohist logic and the Zhuangzi’s reaction against the Mohists and Confucians: “we have the ‘That’s it, that’s not’ of Confucians and Mohists, by which what is it for one of them for the other is not, what is not for one of them for the other is...No thing is not ‘other”, no thing is not ‘it’.”

In Mohist disputation, if the object in question fits its name (an ox, for example), then it is deemed (shi) to be an ox. Here, however, the text suggests that any moment of hard and fast judgment allows the alternative to be present, and any rigid division leaves something out. Graham points out that “Zhuangzi sees it as the lesson of disputation that one is entitled to affirm or deny anything of anything. He thinks of Confucians and Mohists who stick rigidly to their affirmations and denials as lighting up little areas of life and leaving the rest in darkness.”

That is, while the kind of thinking that proceeds through shi and fei claims to have some real (moral) authority, it is still partial and is covering over as much as it is revealing. Thus we can see a central claim of the text in relationship to rules and rule-boundedness is that any kind of fixed or determinate rules are going to be highly problematic. If one should shi every fei and fei every shi—even things out, so to speak—no fixed rules are possible.

There is a kind of hua to shi and fei as well—when one shi’s and fei’s without appreciating the to-and-froing of the world, one suffers because of one’s rigidity and failure to recognize the play of the world and to play with it accordingly. Consider the following passage called “Three every morning”:

A monkey keeper handing out nuts said, ‘Three every morning and four every evening.’ The monkeys were all in a rage. ‘All right then,’ he said, ‘four every

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199 Zhuangzi, Chapter Two. Translated by Graham, 52.
200 Graham, 53.
morning and three every evening.’ The monkeys were all delighted. Without anything being missed out either in name or in substance, their pleasure and anger were put to use; his too was the ‘That’s it’ which goes by circumstance. This is why the sage smoothes things out with his ‘That’s it, that’s not’, and stays at the point of rest on the potter’s wheel of Heaven. It is this that is called ‘Letting both alternatives proceed’. 201

From this story we see how best to treat shi and fei; our judgments are temporary and useful, but not rigid or stagnant. The sage stays at the center of the potter’s wheel—from the center, she sees all the edges of the wheel equidistantly, and from there is able to be flexible and accommodating with how she proceeds, rather than fixed to one spot on the edge of the wheel where she is forced into opposition and cannot move without creating new opposition. This is also an example of hua and you as play and philosophy as play: the wheel of life turns constantly, one side up now, then the other. To rove with that motion is to see it as an alternating movement, to sit at the center of the wheel and be able to respond effectively to the to-and-froing of life. In playing with her thinking—doing philosophy—the sage does not take sides, develop a fixed position, or operate according to determinate rules; she is able to use the shi and fei of circumstance without being committed to inflexibility. WU Kuangming 202 notes that “there is a difference between arguing for a definite position, on the one hand, and playing with various arguments around many positions, on the other, happily meandering among those positions so as to expose the absurdity of being stuck in a single position.” 203 That is, understanding

201 Zhuangzi, Chapter Two. Translated by Graham, 54.
202 All East Asian names will follow the style of family name before given name, and the first use of each name will capitalize the family name.
203 Wu, 19.
philosophy as play in this context means being able to be as the sage, playing with positions without fixing a commitment to any single one. Play, then, for the Zhuangzi is not rule-bound—it recognizes conventionality, but is always engaged in play with rules. Play is not a game that is determined to whatever extent by rules—the play of the world is its constant transformation, and the play with those transformations follows no set rule but its own continuation.

Near the end of Chapter Two we read the following passage:

What is meant by ‘Smooth them out on the whetstone of Heaven’? Treat as ‘it’ even what is not, treat as ‘so’ even what is not. If the ‘it’ is really it, there is no longer a difference for disputation from what is not it; if the ‘so’ is really so, there is no longer a difference for disputation from what is not so.\footnote{Zhuangzi, Chapter Two. Translated by Graham, 60.}

The sage smoothes things out, brings them to stand shoulder to shoulder with one another by playing with them. She moves playfully and responsively between alternatives, and in doing so, instead of using shi to cut up the world into tiny pieces, “one may use the word to embrace and approve everything, to say ‘Yes!’ to the universe.”\footnote{Graham, 60.} Her play—her philosophical activity—is a celebration of being fully immersed and enmeshed in the world around her. As WANG Youru notes,

One thing, one aspect, or one perspective is always relative to its other and, in this sense, is always limited. But this relativity or limitedness opens the possibility of limitless things, aspects, or perspectives. It allows multiple things, aspects, and perspectives to thrive without partiality. Zhuangzi understands this as the
operation/balancing of nature (tianni 天倪)\textsuperscript{206} and advises us to stay with the axis of dao and to respond to endless changes, that is, to awaken us from our fixation on limited views or perspectives, allowing us to be nimble and flexible with things.\textsuperscript{207}

Thinking playfully, then, is a philosophical response to the problem posed by Chapter Two.

2. Goblet Words

Our roving with the changes of the world—our philosophical activity—is intrinsically connected to the play of language. As a text, the Zhuangzi is full of language play, from the more formal play structure of dialogues and anecdotes to paradoxes, humorous stories and plays on words, irony and dissemblance. The world plays in language, and we play with it in language as well. Chapter Twenty-Seven (Yuyan 寓言) contains a discussion of three modes of discourse found throughout the text: dwelling words (yuyan 寓言), heavy words (chongyan 重言), and goblet words (zhiyan 尻言).\textsuperscript{208}

Dwelling words, or metaphorical sayings, refer to parables, anecdotes, and imaginary conversations that “become the lodging or dwelling (jiyu) places for ideas, meanings, implications.”\textsuperscript{209} These are stories, like the conversation between Do Nothing and Say Nothing, where the fact of the conversation as story is part of what makes it

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\textsuperscript{206} Note: The term tianni is highly controversial, and is variously also translated as the whetstone or grindstone of Heaven. For our purposes, the differences between these translations is not significant, as both the operation of nature and the whetstone of heaven make use of the idea of the axis of the dao.


\textsuperscript{208} See the opening of Chapter Twenty-Seven for the full passage.

\textsuperscript{209} Wang, 202.
meaningful. Heavy words put “the author’s words into the mouths of those wise old men whom people respect, in order to give the statement more weight.”210 These might be the words attributed to Confucius, for example, or to the wise old sage or a saying of old. Both of these kinds of discourse, however, are also understood to be goblet words.211 Goblet words, or discourse that tips itself over and rights itself again, are often considered to describe the text’s general stance toward language: “The notion of ‘goblet words’ suggests that words function like a goblet that tips when full and rights itself when empty. It indicates how Zhuangzi’s words ‘adapt to and follow along with the fluctuating nature of the world and thus achieve a state of harmony’. ”212 Language is provisional and focused on efficacy. We can use the discussion of goblet words to help us frame the text’s play with language and to see the general place of language play in play.

When our words, sayings, and expressions are goblet words, they match and balance with the natural rhythm of the cosmos: “if language is going to function in an ever-changing world, it must sustain itself in an ever-renewing process.”213 That is, language that functions as a goblet, tipping over when full and righting itself when empty, has the character of constant and ceaseless self-renewal. Language itself takes on the character of hua, of transformation, and of you, a roving movement that seeks no final goal other than its own continuation.

Furthermore, understanding language as goblet words helps to remind us of the participatory nature of language—to discover how the wine tastes, one must actually pick up the goblet and drink, let the wine sit on the tongue, and savor its taste. Its flavors will

210 Ibid, 203.
211 Dwelling words and layered words also empty themselves out. Stories lose their impact and must be retold, and sayings become stagnant and require a new context for meaning.
212 Ibid, 197.
213 Ibid, 198.
differ subtly between people, depending on their palate, what they’ve eaten or drank earlier in the day, and so on. Wang writes that

What distinguishes the mode of goblet words from ordinary modes of language is the fact that the former embodies Zhuangzi’s view of communication as sharing and participation, rather than conveyance of information or knowledge. Zhuangzi has simply no objective information or knowledge to convey, nor does he wish to express a particular, cognizable position among other competing positions. The text communicates through these different types of discourse, inviting the reader to pick up its goblets, taste and share what it has to offer, and in the process of doing so, come not to a predetermined conclusion proffered by Zhuangzi, but to play with and in the text in such a way as to continue renewing its ideas in their own lives.

The text uses goblet words, as well as dwelling words and layered words, to evoke—to get the reader to play with it. Wu writes that this style of discourse “evokes the reader into thinking on his own; he must fall back on himself. He is provoked into experiencing as many sides of the issue as his originality allows.” That is, the play of language in the text not only invites but requires readers to respond in turn, to rove with it through the transformations of the world, the reader, and the text. We might see this understanding of language as the play of language in the play of the world, and as one way in which we engage the play of the world—we play with the world and in the world through language, because our worlds are linguistically constructed. Philosophy as play, then, involves a deep sense of language play, of the need to tip over and refill one’s

214 Ibid, 201.
215 Wu, 39.
discourse so as not to let it become stagnant—this is a similar point to Byrum’s view of philosophy as play as serving an iconoclastic function.

Wu also notes the important role of irony in the text: “One sort of goblet words is irony, which says what it does not mean....ironies set forth no thesis, but are a perpetual agility.”216 In the Zhuangzi, irony and dissimulation are important features of play. It is in part surprise at the unexpected and appreciation of textual illusions and allusions that makes the self-renewing character of goblet words possible.

3. Relationships and Playmates

One element of play not mentioned to any great extent in either Crandell’s analysis of the Zhuangzi or in Gadamer’s account of play217 is the role of relationships in play. Wang notes that Zhuangzi has a “holistic, relational, and dynamic understanding of human existence and the world.”218 And Lundberg argues that “the human relations expressed through friendship are integral” to the text—“befriending an other stimulates personal transformation.”219 Play—including the play of the cosmos—is not an isolated activity. That is to say, although one can play by oneself, play is in some ways fundamentally other-oriented. In the text, the philosopher’s playmate is both hua, the world in all its transformations, and her playmates. The philosopher does not just play with hua (as Gadamer’s player plays fundamentally with Being)—each person is already in relationships when engaging hua. Play has a built-in place of priority for playmates—

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216 Ibid, 34.
217 Gadamer mentions the importance of responsiveness in his account of play, but focuses most of his attention on play by oneself, not play with others. We could extract from his account that the responsiveness of the other is prior to the responsiveness of that with which one plays, but this is not explicit in his discussion.
218 Wang, 196.
219 Lundberg, 211.
“I play” is already “I play with others.” The Zhuangzi highlights this aspect of play through some of its stories. If we consider some of the major dramatis personae of the text—Zhuang Zhou and Confucius, for example—and the persons with whom they are importantly in relation—Zhou’s wife, Hui Shi, Yan Hui—we can see that the persons we play with, our playmates, as it were, are central to the process of playing.

In Chapter Twenty-four (Xujuven 徐無鬼), we find a brief passage that details Zhuangzi’s remarks upon passing by the grave of Hui Shi (aka Huizi). Many of the dialogues in the text are set between Zhuangzi and Hui Shi, with Hui Shi usually taking the position of the logician or the sophist. Thus we might think that because Zhuangzi is usually arguing with/against Hui Shi he did not care for him. However, as he passes the grave Zhuangzi tells his attendant a story about a man of Ying who, when he had a bit of plaster on his nose, the Carpenter Shi would slice it clean off, without touching his nose. When questioned, Carpenter Shi said that he used to be able to do it, but his partner is now dead. Zhuangzi then said, “Since the Master [Hui Shi] died, I have had no one to use as a partner, no one with whom to talk about things.” Hui Shi was more than an opponent to Zhuangzi—he was a play-mate, someone with whom Zhuangzi could enter into play and let his heart-mind rove. Remember, you (rove) also carries the connotation of traveling about with and/or making friends. One can rove about alone, but there is a very fundamental sense in which playing calls for playmates. Roger T. Ames, in commenting on this passage, writes that

In this particular reverie, Zhuangzi acknowledges that his own repartee—his ability to wield his wit like the wind—has been dependent upon his relationship

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220 Zhuangzi, Chapter Twenty-four. Translated by Graham, 124.
with Huizi who could stand his impeccably logical ground without batting an eye.

Death has made Huizi one of a kind, because in Huizi’s absence, there is no one who can take his place in a relationship that has made these rich philosophical experiences possible.221

This passage evokes the deep friendship and intimacy between the two men, and the fact that their relationship was necessary for each of them to be able to play with the other while playing with hua: “The profundity of their friendship takes them beyond mere argumentative debate and into a mode of dialogue that engenders mutual transformation and insight.”222 This mode of friendship, of being genuine playmates, makes possible the full cycle of their intellectual play. Likewise, in discussing the Carpenter Shi passage, Lundberg writes, “Success requires that the two men respond to each other in attunement, and forget and fears, concerns, or thoughts of self and other that might interrupt the flow of dao.”223 They enter together into the flow of play, becoming absorbed into the ongoing processes.

We also find another important passage in the text, in Chapter Eighteen (Zhile 至樂), that details Zhuangzi’s reaction to his wife’s death.224 Hui Shi has come to offer his condolences, but finds Zhuangzi drumming on a pot and singing, not wailing and mourning as he expected. Zhuangzi’s response perplexes some commentators, who see it as an indication of his indifference to life and death. However, his response is more helpfully read as a deep celebration of this woman he cared for a great deal. He came to recognize that her transformation was part of what made her as her possible, and as such

221 Roger T. Ames, “Knowing in the Zhuangzi: ‘From Here, on the Bridge, over the River Hao,’” in Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi, 222.
222 Lundberg 215.
223 Lundberg, 215.
224 For the entire passage, see Graham, 123-4.
possible for him to care for. She has gone from being his companion to being the companion of spring and autumn, summer and winter. Zhuangzi’s seemingly odd celebratory response to her death is a celebration of her life and their companionship, and of the inevitability of transformation. Thus to be able to transform with someone for even a little while is meaningful and enhances the quality of the play.

Confucius is also one of the main characters who is found repeatedly in the text. There is some debate as to whether or not his appearances are ironic—later Daoists often saw their philosophy as opposed to Confucianism, so the appearance of Confucius “the Daoist sage” may be surprising. However, the text was compiled prior to the establishment of a Confucian orthodoxy, and so we can imagine that for the Masters Zhuang, writing the text, Confucius may have not always been a symbol of reified ritual and corrupt bureaucracy, but more of a repository of wisdom directed at operating well within a political sphere not narrowly identified as “Confucian”. Many of his appearances in the text are with his favorite disciple, Yan Hui. Consider the surprising passage (already mentioned) in Chapter Six where Yan Hui, always the disciple, becomes the teacher. Yan Hui, in describing his progress, tells Confucius, “I just sit and forget.” This sparks a conversation about what it means to “just sit and forget,” at the end of which, Confucius says, “Has it really turned out that you are the better of us? Oblige me by accepting me as your disciple.”

For the paradigmatic exemplars of teacher and student to shift roles so completely is extremely unexpected. This is an instance of reversal and renewal, of the need for others in keeping our play from becoming ossified. Yan Hui, in this passage, has reminded Confucius that he too still has things to learn, and that students can be important teachers.

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225 Zhuangzi, Chapter Six. Translated by Graham, 92.
Finally, in considering the role of relationships in the Zhuangzi’s play, we cannot leave out the story of Hun Dun. Hun Dun (渾沌) is the amorphous Emperor of the Center, who honeycombs himself with the various other cardinal directions. In early Chinese cosmology, Hun Dun is the primordial, indefinite, amorphous blend of everything that is later differentiated into the myriad things. It is because Hundun is indistinct and indefinite that he/it contains such creative potential. He was very hospitable and generous when the other emperors came to visit him, and so they were trying to decide how to repay his kindness. They reasoned that since all men have seven holes through which they breathe, eat, hear, and so on, and Hundun didn’t have any, that it would be a great service to give him holes. “Every day they bored one hole, and on the seventh day Hun Dun died.”

Not only did he die, but the other emperors died as well—his indefiniteness was necessary for them to live as well. In trying to fix him, to make him definite, they took away his creative possibilities. In other words, indefiniteness and uncertainty are necessary features of life, and without them, life becomes predicable and so life-less. The Zhuangzi, then, can be read as presenting a caution on living and thinking with too much determination, with fixed rules or definitions. The play we see in the text is Hundun’s play, his indefiniteness as locus of creative potential that requires a lack of fixity. Play, then, is only really possible with indefiniteness. In addition, the story is a caution for how we engage those with whom we are involved—the North and South Sea Emperors were not responding to Hun Dun’s context and situation when they decided he needed holes like everyone else. They failed as playmates to be responsive to Hun Dun himself, and ended up overdetermining not only him but themselves as well.

226 Zhuangzi, Chapter Seven. Translated by Graham, 98.
Thus although the text sees persons, events, and things enmeshed in a relational network, persons should still respond appropriately to one another as they rove together with the changes of the world.227

4. Playfulness

As mentioned earlier, one of the issues with Crandell’s framework is that he is uncritical of some of Gadamer’s main assumptions. One of the assumptions he does not engage becomes quickly problematic for his argument. An important part of Gadamer’s project as a whole, and his account of play in particular, is a move away from what he sees as an excessive emphasis on the subjective. This is part of the reason he spends so much time focusing on the mediality and absorption of play—play is not, for Gadamer, something I do or control, it is not an inner experience. But we note that Crandell repeatedly refers to the Zhuangzi as recommending a luzory attitude—recommending that we, the reader, be playful. Classical Chinese does not support as strong a distinction as English between play or playing and being playful, so we can understand why Crandell is not conscious of the slippage between these terms.228 However, there may be something to be gained by trying to appreciate the text and its discussions as playful, in addition to dealing with the activity of play.

What is the difference between play as an activity and playfulness as an attitude?

In the article, “Playfulness, ‘World-travelling,’ and Loving Perception,” Maria Lugones presents an intriguing critique of certain ways of understanding play. She is concerned

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227 The appropriateness of playmates’ responses to one another is shaped by the structure of play itself, and the need for play to continually renew itself. In terms of using play to understand philosophical activity, this raises certain questions about the ethical demands of playmates on one another.

228 It is unclear from the article whether or not Crandell has any direct familiarity with classical Chinese language, and so whether or not he would have been able to see the ambiguity in the terms.
with how we approach the project of trying to know or understand others, especially others who inhabit different worlds from us.\textsuperscript{229} She proposes a kind of “loving playfulness” as the attitude to adopt when approaching other worlds.\textsuperscript{230} It is in this context that she discusses play and playfulness.

Her discussion begins with a contrast between what she terms “agonistic playfulness”—the play of Huizinga and Gadamer\textsuperscript{231}, according to her—where play fundamentally has to do with contesting and seeking victory. She argues that “An agonistic sense of playfulness is one in which competence is supreme. You better know the rules of the game...There are rules that inspire hostility. The attitude of playfulness is conceived as secondary to or derivative from play.”\textsuperscript{232} On this account of play, players have a fixed conception of themselves and a strong sense of self-importance; they want to win on their own merits and competence. And, any kind of “playful attitude” arises only out of the structure of play itself, as a secondary feature of the activity. That is, play as activity is what creates playfulness as attitude. This kind of play, however, is “inimical to travelling across ‘worlds’. The agonistic traveller is a conqueror, an imperialist.”\textsuperscript{233} That

\textsuperscript{229} Lugones discusses worlds in a quasi-Heideggarian sense—worlds have their own language, norms, customs. They may be ethnic or cultural worlds, class worlds, neighborhood worlds, etc. Ex. a Latina world, a white upper class woman’s world, a southern African American world.

\textsuperscript{230} One might think that Lugones is using playfulness as a metaphor here, and in some senses she is. However, she is also suggesting very seriously that loving playfulness is the attitude we should adopt when trying to approach and understand others, in which case the metaphor is world-traveling, not playfulness.

\textsuperscript{231} Lugones is somewhat unfair to Gadamer—she is really focusing on Huizinga’s play, and does not make any effort to distinguish their accounts from one another. As we might say that Huizinga’s play is the play of finite games, Gadamer’s play has the space for infinite games, even if it does not exclude finite games in the way I suspect Lugones would prefer.

\textsuperscript{232} Lugones, 15.

\textsuperscript{233} Lugones, 15-16. Lugones goes on to say that “Huizinga, in his classic book on play, interprets Western civilization as play. That is an interesting thing for Third World people to think about...Agonistic travellers fail consistently in their attempt to travel because what they do is try to conquer the other ‘world’... for people who are interested in crossing racial and ethnic boundaries, an arrogant western man’s construction of playfulness is deadly.” In other words, just as Huizinga identifies western civilization as playful, Lugones uses the same move to identify this kind of “play” as perpetuating systems of domination, oppression, and erasure.
is, the agonistic view of play prevents persons from understanding one another and promotes a kind of epistemic thematization or totalization of the other.\textsuperscript{234}

Lugones contrasts this idea of play with what she calls “loving playfulness”. Setting the scene with an image of playing with stones beside a river, she writes

We are playing. The playfulness of our activity does not suppose that there is something like ‘crashing stones’ that is a particular form of play with its own rules. Rather the attitude that carries us through the activity, a playful attitude, turns the activity into play. Our activity has no rules, though it is certainly intentionality activity and we both understand what we are doing. The playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an openness to surprise...We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are open to self-construction. We may not have rules, and when we do have rules, there are no rules that are to us sacred. We are not worried about competence. We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular ‘world’. We are there creatively. We are not passive.\textsuperscript{235}

Her account of play, then, is secondary to the attitude of playfulness. Playfulness is a meaning-giving attitude—playfulness as an attitude creates situations of play as an activity. This playfulness is not particularly rule-bound. It is open to surprise, to the unexpected, and is built on an understanding of oneself that is flexible, permeable, and

\textsuperscript{234} For more on the problems of thematization, see Marilyn Frye’s The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory, or Emanuel Levinas’s Totality and Infinity.

\textsuperscript{235} Lugones, 16. My italics.
multiple. Playfulness requires a sense of creativity regarding oneself and one’s self-construction.

As Lugones notes, in order to be able to move between worlds, to engage others, we need to have a sense of ourselves that is not fixed or rigid, but is open to change. We need to be creative of ourselves. In other words, we find ourselves in new contexts, with new materials and constraints upon us, and through becoming playful, adopting a playful attitude, we create ourselves anew. In Gadamer’s terms, if every event of understanding is also an event of self-understanding, then our engagement with others—in terms of trying to understand them—must also be an event of understanding ourselves, of changing with new experiences. In that case, our sense of self must be flexible and creative enough to accommodate new experiences and engagements. We must be able to be continually recreating ourselves, in order to try to understand others.

Playfulness as an attitude is an approach, a directedness outward toward (in this case) others. Lugones describes her account of playfulness as “loving playfulness”. What does she mean by “loving”? She is often criticized on this point, because she suggests that to enter the world of another (playfully) and try to love them is an attempt of identification; she writes that loving others is identification because it requires understanding “what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes.” She frames her discussion of this in terms of Marilyn Frye’s distinction between arrogant and loving perception. Frye is very clear that loving perception entails recognition of the

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236 Lugones is emphasizing a specific situation of playfulness as an approach to other persons. However, we could also read her account in terms of being playful with things as well as people. The sense of directedness still remains.
237 Lugones, 17.
independence of the other, of her in her otherness: the loving eye is “the eye which presupposes our independence.” Lugones seems to conflate love with identification, with finding similarities. However, as Frye points out, this is a problematic way of understanding love. We can understand loving playfulness as an attitude toward the other that recognizes and appreciates her otherness, while wanting to engage her in an attempt to understand her—neither subsuming her into oneself nor subsuming oneself into her.

Playfulness, loving playfulness, creates situations of play. It allows for an approach to others that respects them while attempting to enter into relations of understanding. In the Zhuangzi, we can see playfulness, as an attitude, in the discussions in the text of youxin (遊心), of letting one’s heart-mind rove. We can also see the recommendations of Chapter Two dealing with shi and fei as recommendations of playfulness as an attitude, as a way of approach. To be playful with things, events, and others in the world is to bring to every situation an attitude that has the potential to turn that situation into play.

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239 Frye, 82. This is contrasted with the arrogant eye, which sees only dependence and subsumability. Frye writes: “The loving eye does not make the object of perception into something edible, does not try to assimilate it, does not reduce it to the size of the seer’s desire, fear and imagination, and hence does not have to simplify. It knows the complexity of the other as something which will forever present new things to be known” (76).
240 See Section II.B
III. Conclusion

A. The Play Metaphor

At this point, we can construct an account of philosophy as play that is sensitive to both Gadamer and Zhuangzi’s descriptions. From Gadamer’s account, we can see play as a certain kind of movement, characterized by a lack of purpose outside itself, where the players are absorbed into it and the play takes priority over them. Byrum takes this to lead to philosophy as the play of ideas, an iconoclastic check on the dogmatizing tendencies of philosophical thought. When we blend in philosophy as play from the Zhuangzi, a richer account emerges. The metaphor of philosophical activity as play activity is characterized by the following:

1. Participants in philosophical activity become playmates, responsive to one another and roving (you) together with the transformations.
2. The structure of the activity becomes one of hua, a to-and-fro renewing repetition, where possibilities are always underdetermined and there is no fixed goal.
3. The purpose of the activity becomes the activity itself: the medial sense of play takes priority.

This metaphor is very valuable. Understanding philosophical activity as play means seeing it as an activity that has no beginning and no end, but that is ceaselessly transforming and changing. Philosophical thinking as play is sensitive to the problems of shi and fei; it does not fix itself in any one position, but treats each position as a
temporary lodging-place, moving flexibly at the axis of the wheel. The philosopher, in playing, has no set purpose or goal in mind, other than enjoyment of the activity itself. She loses or forgets herself, and so is absorbed in the play of ideas, and this absorption is akin to the meditation advocated by Yan Hui or Chapter Six’s Zhenren 真人. It is not the individual will of the playmates that controls events; rather, the philosopher lets herself move with events, transforming and being transformed with ideas. Like Zhuangzi, the philosopher employs multiple discursive strategies, characterized as goblet words. These forms of discourse are able to tip themselves over and fill themselves up again—they are constant sources of renewal and newness. Through goblet words, she is able to continually bring new elements into her discourse, and as such avoids rigid judgments or fixations, and is able to respond to changes in the world around her. As mentioned previously, one element of goblet words is irony—when the philosopher plays, on this account, she uses irony and dissimulation to spark herself and her playmates into thinking for themselves, to experiencing the issue at hand without a determined direction to their thinking. The philosopher, in playing, may in fact pretend to be other than she is, and may see things and events as other than they appear. Philosophical activity is a celebratory achievement of perspective, where in not affirming any one position all positions as possibilities are affirmed, and so celebrated in their changes. And, since our playmates are an important part of the play, we must treat them well and respond to them in their particularity.

The metaphor also includes a kind of sub-metaphor—a philosophical attitude as a playful attitude. On this metaphor, a philosophical attitude as a way of approach to others or to topics or questions is what turns the situation into philosophical activity. Like the
discussion of playmates, a playful philosophical attitude is one directed to others in a loving way, a way that respects their otherness while attempting to understand them.

B. Adequacies and Inadequacies of the Play Metaphor

Chapter Two concluded with a discussion of certain inadequacies of the combat metaphor for philosophical activity. The play metaphor explored in this chapter can respond to some of those inadequacies, while also having certain issues of its own.

In terms of the problems with the combat metaphor, the play metaphor addresses well both the issues of the internalization of violence and the narrowing or limiting of discourse possibilities. Recall that if we consider thinking to be an internalization of philosophical activity with others, then how we think is structured in the same way as how we do philosophy with others. For the combat metaphor, this meant that we internalize violence—combat—toward ourselves just as we direct it to others. On a play metaphor, however, when the philosopher does philosophy alone—when she thinks by herself—she internalizes the structure of play, positioning herself as her own playmate. She internalizes not violence toward herself, but responsiveness and respect.

On a combat metaphor, the possibilities of the activity are limited by its goal—seeking victory is a specific purpose and requires the activity be structured so as to meet that purpose. On a play metaphor, however, where the only purpose is enjoyable self-renewal, possibilities are always underdetermined and new and fresh ideas are constantly

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241 See Chapter Two, Section II.B.1
242 See Chapter Two, Section II.B.2
being added to the play. Play necessarily includes surprise, uncertainty, and a lack of commitment.

The combat metaphor was also found to be inadequate on the issue of its lack of recognition of power relations between participants in philosophical activity. The play metaphor, as we saw in the Zhuangzi, has built in the importance of playmates. Appreciating the social location and identity of one’s playmates is crucial to being able to respond effectively in playing. Thus we see Confucius engage differently with Yan Hui from Lao Dan, for example. The text recognizes that our interactions with others are structured by who we are, and that in order to play well with one another we must respond well to context, without being so caught up in hierarchy as to reify identity.

However, even with the inclusion of the material from the Zhuangzi, which addressed the issues found in Gadamer’s account of play, play as a metaphor for philosophy still has one issue on which it is problematic. This issue is the necessity of absorption in play. We saw this necessity in Gadamer as well as in Zhuangzi.

Understanding philosophy as absorbing in the way that play is leads to some unwelcome conclusions about philosophical activity. Gadamer states that play must absorb the players into it; there is a fundamental “primacy of play over the consciousness of the player.” If the philosopher is fully absorbed in philosophical activity, where is the space for self-reflexivity? For second-order thinking? How many times can we imagine being lost in play and not realizing we are hungry, thirsty, or tired? A

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243 See Chapter Two, Section II.B.3
244 Consider the famous example of the dancing centipede: a grasshopper, jealous of the centipede’s beautiful movements, asks the centipede how he dances. The centipede then goes to dance but cannot—his absorption in the movement was necessary him to be able to play. Reflecting on how he does what he does took him out of the moment of the dance, and ceased the play of it.
245 Gadamer, 105.
Philosopher needs to be able to engage herself and her own thinking in a conscious way. Philosophical activity, going back to Socrates, has held the importance of knowing oneself, of reflecting on one’s own situation, beliefs, and actions. On a play metaphor, however, “playing” philosophy would mean being absorbed in it, to the point that one loses oneself, one’s initiative and purposes connected with the world outside of play. If the philosopher is primarily absorbed in play, she is caught up in the idea, problem, or question at hand, and it is difficult for her to step away and engage her own beliefs about it. While fully absorbed, there is no distance necessary for philosophical reflection. Philosophical activity requires both absorption—caring about the question or topic—and reflective distance. In addition, if she is fully absorbed in the play of philosophy, when does she reflect on the norms and standards for her practice? Absorption also leaves out the possibility of meta-critique.

Furthermore, absorption in play, in the fully for-itself nature of the activity, leads to certain questions about the fit between the goals or aims of philosophical activity and play. Philosophical activity has aims outside of its own activity, its own continuation. What becomes of solving a problem, coming to a better understanding of an issue, on the play metaphor? While this lack of finality is a comforting balm against the combat metaphor’s search for a final victor, it leaves a crucial gap between philosophical activity and play.

There are, as discussed earlier, many ways in which play is a desirable metaphor for philosophical activity. Play emphasizes the ceaseless back and forth, to-and-froing of philosophical discourse. It suggests that, mindful of the problem of shi and fei, philosophers be flexible and seek temporary lodging places, rather than permanent
abodes, for their thought. The goblet words of philosophical activity likewise invite continual renewal—new and different ideas, sources, and solutions. On this metaphor, philosophical activity centers on playmates and their responsiveness to one another as they are drawn up into something more than themselves, an activity that is genuinely for its own sake, and its own enjoyment. And, considering a philosophical attitude as lovingly playful allows us to understanding philosophical activity as something that comes into being also through the approach of the playmates.

However, as a metaphor there are certain areas in which it is less than apt, and these should invite us to consider alternatives.246 If we reflect for a moment on both Gadamer and Zhuangzi, a direction becomes clear. Gadamer’s discussion of play is situated in a broader argument about the nature of a work of art—for Gadamer, play is the being of the work of art. In a related fashion, while play is a significant concept in the Zhuangzi, the text itself is sunk deeply in an aesthetic vision of the world and of understanding the world. Its account of play very nearly stretches to the aesthetic. Thus, the next chapter is an exploration of the metaphor of philosophy as aesthetic experience.

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246 I am not suggesting that any of these metaphor need be or are mutually exclusive—in fact, as Lakoff and Johnson argue, our complex concepts are structured by many different metaphors. However, in recognizing the value and also some of the limitations of given metaphors, we can work to be more aware of how we conduct our activities, which metaphors we emphasize, and how we understand what we are doing. This does not mean that inadequacies should be death sentences, but rather than they open the door for new ways of understanding philosophical activity.
This chapter explores the metaphor of *philosophical activity as aesthetic experience*. This can best be understood in terms of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s idea of conceptual metaphors. Conceptual metaphors are a mapping between a source and a target domain; the “understanding and experiencing (of) one kind of thing in terms of another.”\(^\text{248}\) Before proceeding to the mapping of philosophical activity with aesthetic experience, it may be helpful to say a few words about the analysis of metaphors. If we take for example the Shakespearean metaphor *Juliet is the sun*, we can explicate to some degree what the mapping of Juliet by the sun does to our understanding of Juliet. The sun is the center of our solar system, around which all local bodies turn. Its presence gives light and life, and its absence brings darkness and death. For Romeo, Juliet exerts a gravitational pull. He feels more vivid and alive in her presence, and fears (dramatically) that without her his life will be diminished. In Lakoff and Johnson’s terminology, the metaphor “systematically links the literal meanings of...expressions about [the source domain] to corresponding meanings in the [target] domain.”\(^\text{249}\) The power and meaning of metaphors, even “dead” metaphors\(^\text{250}\) like Juliet is the sun, comes from this bringing together of different conceptual domains. As such, the mapping of the metaphor is not

\[^{247}\text{William Butler Yeats, “Among School Children.”}\]
\[^{248}\text{Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 5.}\]
\[^{249}\text{Ibid, 65.}\]
\[^{250}\text{For the difference between “dead” and “live” metaphors, see Chapter One, Section I.}\]
meant to convey identity—we understand that Juliet is not in fact a burning ball of hydrogen and helium. Rather, the metaphor allows us to understand Juliet and her relationship with Romeo through certain relevant features of the sun, and so to enrich the idea of her. And, just as the metaphor of combat for philosophical activity does not suggest that philosophers should expect to be literally bruised and bloodied after a discussion, neither does the philosophy as aesthetic experience metaphor suggest identity between philosophical activity and aesthetic experience. Rather, this chapter seeks to understand philosophical activity through the use of certain relevant features of aesthetic experience.

To this end, the chapter is broadly divided into two sections. The first is a discussion of the structure and nature of the source domain, aesthetic experience. This section brings together a variety of resources in order to discuss aesthetic experience. It first explores the nature of experience in aesthetic experience, and then explores aesthetic distance as a condition for aesthetic experience. It then articulates the triadic structure of aesthetic experience itself: artist, work of art, and participant. Throughout this section elements from Chinese aesthetics are brought in to complement the theories discussed and to complicate certain traditional features of western aesthetics.

Notably, Chinese aesthetics, arising out of a significantly different worldview from traditional western aesthetics, has its own distinct set of aesthetic concepts and concerns. For example, in China “Music was the first art to be given serious philosophical consideration,” while in the west painting and sculpture took early
Likewise, while the concept of beauty reigned in aesthetic discourse in the west for thousands of years, in traditional Chinese thought “the category ‘beauty’ did not play a significant role.” Furthermore, in traditional Chinese aesthetics, the question of the relationship between the moral quality of the artist and the quality of the work was extremely important. Chinese aesthetics has a “fundamental preference for moderation, [a] life-affirming (rather than sin-oriented) view of humanity, as well as the perceived close relationship between humans and heaven or nature.” This is in contrast to a Christian-influenced western aesthetics that paid a great deal of attention to sin and salvation in its works, but rarely had any interest in the moral character of the artist. Traditional western aesthetic vocabulary includes such important concepts as beauty, form, symmetry, order, disinterest, and pleasure. Traditional Chinese aesthetic vocabulary includes such important categories as responsiveness, balance, tranquility, blandness, purity, subtlety, spiritedness, and naturalness. Categories, rather than concepts, tend to be the organizing features of Chinese narratives, including aesthetics. As John Hay notes,

Categorical obsessions are, of course, common in many aspects of traditional China. This circumstance is obviously related, at one level, to the phenomenon of correlative thinking that is so prominent in Chinese cosmology...One of the commonest Chinese terms for the category of category is lei (💔), and it is common in many fields. Yang and yin are probably the two most obvious lei.

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254 FMI, see Zong-qi Cai’s Prologue to *Chinese Aesthetics*. 
Such categories are necessarily holistic. The significance of any single phenomenon within one of the sub-categorizations of yin, for example, unfolds only through the structure as a whole. Most phenomena represent proportional categories, such as minor yin in yang. That is to say, most aesthetic descriptions in traditional Chinese narratives function not as absolutes but as balanced correlatives. Aesthetic experience, like philosophical activity, is not limited to western narratives, and so in making use of aesthetic experience as a metaphor for philosophical activity we must take into account a more inclusive and sensitive view of aesthetic experience. After all, while in western discourse aesthetics is often marginalized, as the influential scholar Li Zehou notes, for the Chinese “an aesthetic consciousness is the highest consciousness to be attained in human life.”

This is seen especially in the importance of aesthetic order in organizing patterns of thinking in Chinese narratives. Roger Ames and David Hall, following A. N. Whitehead, draw a distinction between predominant methods of order in Chinese and western narratives. They identify a dominant form of order in the west as logical order: an ordering where the parts conform to pre-established patterns/rules/laws, one consequence of which is absolute substitutability of the parts for one another. Aesthetic order, a dominant mode of ordering in the correlative thinking of early China, is characterized by the “emergence of

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255 Hay, 61-2.
256 Li Zehou and Liu Gangji, Zhongguo Meixueshi (History of Chinese Aesthetics), (Beijing: Xinhua, 1984)
33.
257 I say “predominant methods of order” because as Hall and Ames articulate in their text, it is not the case that aesthetic order is the only method of order found in China or that logical order is the only method of order found in the west. Rather, this identification of methods of ordering serves as a heuristic for thinking through relevant differences in styles of ordering. The fact that what we can understand as aesthetic ordering—an emphasis on irreplaceable particulars, harmony between elements, sensitivity to change, and integration—played a very important role in much of Chinese thinking and did not play an equally important role in most western systems of thought discloses the significance of aesthetic thinking from a Chinese perspective.

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a complex whole by virtue of the insistent particularity of constituent details.”

Systems of aesthetic order place a great deal of emphasis on relationships between constituent elements and sensitivity to change: “aesthetic order discloses an ad hoc unity formed by irreplaceable items.”

The second section of the chapter explores the implications of this idea of aesthetic experience for understanding philosophical activity. It develops the parallels between the structure of aesthetic experience—artist, work, and participant—and a structure of philosophical activity—philosophical artist, philosophical work, and philosophical participant. After articulating the general features of philosophical activity under an aesthetic experience metaphor, the section continues by explicating the unique features of this metaphor, in terms of the objections raised to previous metaphors and how this metaphor changes the understanding of such central philosophical goals as coming to an understanding. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of certain twentieth-century critiques of aesthetic experience such as John Dewey’s and Bertolt Brecht’s on the understanding of philosophical activity through aesthetic experience.

I. Aesthetic Experience

What is aesthetic experience? This section begins with an articulation of experience as a necessary component of aesthetic experience, followed by a discussion of

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aesthetic distance as a condition for aesthetic experience. It then examines the triadic structure of aesthetic experience—artist, work of art, and participant.

A. Experience as Aesthetic

As aesthetic experience is a kind of experience, we must begin by clarifying what we mean by experience. Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that experience is a process...this process is essentially negative...Language shows this when we use the word ‘experience’ in two different senses: the experiences that conform to our expectation and confirm it and the new experiences that occur to us. The latter—‘experience’—is always negative.260 Experience, for our purposes, refers to this second kind of experience—experience as fundamentally negative. This is not negativity as in something unwelcome, but negativity as an absence. That is to say, experience at its heart is of something new, something not previously understood or not what we expected it to be beforehand. This further implies that “the structure of the question is implicit in all experience. We cannot have experiences without questions.”261 The question, then, is itself the essential negativity of the experience, the not-yet-known, but what is nevertheless desired to be known. Experience begins and is structured around a question; the question is a genuine lack of understanding.

While Gadamer refers to the question at the heart of experience as fundamentally negative, we can also see this negativity, or lack of understanding, as a moment of

261 Ibid, 356.
wonder. Iris Marion Young, in the essay “Asymmetrical Reciprocity,” articulates gift-giving as a metaphor for interpersonal communication, focusing on questions. She writes that “Questions can express a distinctive form of respect for the other, that of showing an interest in their expression and acknowledging that the questioner does not know what the issue looks like for them.” While she is most directly concerned with questions we might ask one another, we can take these questions we ask of one another as a paradigmatic example of Gadamer’s negative question. After all, Gadamer’s master metaphor for understanding is conversation. Young continues, writing that

A respectful stance of wonder toward other people is one of openness across, awaiting new insight about their needs, interests, perceptions, or values. Wonder also means being able to see one’s own position, assumptions, perspective as strange, because it has been put in relation to others. Since the other person is a subject-in-process, I cannot assume that because last week I understood her standpoint I can do so today. Respectful listening thus involves attentive and interested questioning. But answers are always gifts. The transcendence of the other person always means that she can remain silent, or tell only part of her story, for her own reasons.

This wonder, the “openness to the newness and mystery of the other person,” is precisely the negativity, the nature of the question, at the heart of experience. Experience is thus a process of attentive and interested engagement that begins in a moment of wonder. This

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263 Young, 56.
264 Ibid, 56.
moment of wonder is a moment of waiting, of not understanding, of deferring to the question in order that the other might respond from her otherness.

Just as Gadamer sees experience in two senses, those experiences that conform to expectations and those that are surprising, John Dewey also makes a distinction between experience as the constant and habitual interaction between person and environment, and “an experience” or “real experience,” which has a felt unity and stands out from the background of everyday operations. An experience, he argues, “possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement.”265 For Dewey, experiences stand out from the background of everyday living because they hold themselves together in an integrated fashion, having a beginning and an end of themselves. He further explains that

we have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and only then is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is an experience.266

In other words, an experience has a felt quality of unity and consummation. As he is clear to point out, this is not to say that experiences simply end or cease to be, but that by their

266 Ibid, 37. My italics.
very nature they have a progression that leads to the experience being felt as an integrated whole.

Aesthetic experience, as a kind of experience, shares these characteristics. It begins with an absence of understanding, a question and a moment of wonder. It is an experience that stands out from habitual life and has the character of integrity and consummation. The negativity or wonder at the heart of aesthetic experience is the question to which the work of art is its development. The work of art begins with a question, and our engagement with it begins with wonder at that question. Gadamer, following R.G. Collingwood, writes, “It is like understanding works of art...Here too we have to discover the question which it answers, if we are to understand it as an answer.”267 The work of art has the character of the negativity of experience in that it puts to whomever would try to understand it a question, a not-yet-known or understood, and requires a stance of openness and a recognition of the status of its question. Thus aesthetic experience is an experience of the question of the work of art.

B. Aesthetic Distance

Aesthetic Distance, also called artistic detachment, arose in western aesthetics as a significant concept in the wake of Immanuel Kant’s 1790 *Critique of Judgment* and nineteenth and twentieth century responses to Kantian aesthetic theory. As Eliot Deutsch explains, “this attitude [of Distance] (basically our openness to the work) is not itself the

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267 Gadamer, 364.
essential character of aesthetic experience; rather it is a condition for that experience.\textsuperscript{268}

As an aesthetic concept, distance is present not only in western aesthetics but in many different aesthetic traditions, including those of India, China, and Japan.\textsuperscript{269} Steve Odin, in \textit{Aesthetic Detachment in Japan and the West: Psychic Distance in Comparative Aesthetics}, argues that distance is an extremely important concept for comparative aesthetics because it is so widespread. He suggests that in many eastern and western aesthetic traditions, “the experience of beauty is constituted not only by the thing that is seen but also how it is seen.”\textsuperscript{270} However, distance is not disinterested contemplation—it is not a disconnected, impersonal, or unemotional stance:

artistic detachment [Distance] is not exclusive of its opposite, namely, interest, feeling, desire, sympathy, or passion...The attitude of artistic detachment is not an anaesthesia, apatheia, indifference, or insensitivity but a heightened state of embodied intersensory awareness that maximizes both clear observation and affective feeling.\textsuperscript{271}

1. Edward Bullough and Aesthetic Distance

In the influential article, “Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle,” Edward Bullough examines the concept of “Distance” as an aesthetic and creative principle. He argues that it is distance that makes aesthetic experience possible, in terms of the artist, the work, and the participant. Distance is a condition in that without it, aesthetic experience is not possible—without putting oneself

\textsuperscript{270} Odin, 8.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid, 3.
out of gear with overly personal and practical affairs and becoming open to the work, one’s average and everyday mentality reigns and aesthetic experience is prevented. That is, some things must be backgrounded in our experience in order for the aesthetic to come to the fore. Aesthetic experience, then, requires a certain personal effort—the effort of distancing—on the part of both artists and participants.

As a condition for the possibility of aesthetic experience, distance is required for an artist’s self-expression: the artist is most effective “in the formulation of an intensely personal experience, but he can formulate it artistically only on condition of a detachment from the experience qua personal.”²⁷² In creating the work, the artist is not simply venting her emotions or experiences, for Bullough, but is filtering and refining her experience; a person simply crying or raging is not a work of art. An artist is not overcome by or submerged into her experiences and emotions, but rather by distancing them appropriately is able to refine and distill her expression. She filters the personal aspect of her work, letting the work become of itself: “Distance…stands between the artist’s conception and the man’s.”²⁷³

In addition to the need for distance during the artistic process, distance is required for the participant. Here as well distance is a filtering of the personal and practical. Distance is a particular kind of achieved relation: “a personal relation, highly emotionally coloured, but of a peculiar character.”²⁷⁴ The peculiar character of the relation is the role distance plays in it. Imagine standing on a beach as a hurricane comes ashore. In this

²⁷³ Ibid, 330-1.
²⁷⁴ Ibid, 323.
situation, one’s thoughts might be occupied with the need to seek shelter, the sting of sand as it’s blown into skin, or any number of other practical concerns. However, if one were able to background these concerns for a moment, one might be struck by the awesome power of the storm, the vibrant color of the sky and the clouds, the crashing of the waves. In other words, by distancing certain features of practical concern, the experience of the storm coming ashore could be intensely aesthetic. Another classic example for distance between the participant and work is the need for distancing of commercial interest in a work: I may want to own the piece, but in aesthetically appreciating it I put that desire aside for the moment.

Furthermore, a work has a better chance of being appealing, according to Bullough, if we are already prepared for its appeal though our relation with the work. “The success and intensity of its appeal would seem...to stand in direct proportion to the completeness with which it corresponds with our intellectual and emotional peculiarities and the idiosyncrasies of our experience.” However, this is not without qualification. Bullough writes that “the coincidence [between participant and work] should be as complete as is compatible with maintaining Distance.” This is to say that the participant should be as close to the work—intellectually, emotionally, and experientially—as she can be while not becoming overwhelmed by her own personal and practical affairs. Bullough’s classic example of this is when a husband with a cheating wife goes to see Othello. He would seem to be perfectly prepared to be able to experience the work aesthetically, in terms of the coincidence of his life experience with the play, but if he is unable to distance himself from some of his personal and practical affairs—

275 Ibid, 323.
276 Ibid, 324.
his anguish over broken vows and anger at his wife—then he will be unable to engage aesthetically with the work. Bullough contends that “what is therefore, both in appreciation and in production, most desirable is the utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance.”\(^{277}\) He refers to this tension between the need for decreased Distance and the still necessary presence of distance as the “antinomy” of distance.

As Bullough explains, there are two ways of failing to distance: “either to ‘under-distance’ or to ‘overdistance.’ Under-distancing is the commonest failing of the subject, an excess of Distance is a frequent failing of Art.”\(^{278}\) These two ways of failing to distance properly are almost always found together in some combination, although the emphasis may be more on one side than another. The jealous man watching *Othello* has failed through under-distancing: he can’t get enough distance between himself and the work. Kasimir Malevich’s work (the “White on White” series, for example)\(^ {279}\) could be accused of failing from over-distancing, his pure abstract painting lacking any point of access for engagement: “An excess of Distance produces the impression of improbability, artificiality, emptiness, or absurdity.”\(^{280}\) The “White on White” series is often called the height of Malevich’s “suprematist” movement, which called for art that does not need humanity. These paintings are a series of white squares painted on white backgrounds. I would suggest that his work is too removed and theoretically abstract for most to engage intensely.

Not only are the artist and the participant subject to the need for distance, but the work itself has a set of conditions for the variation of distance. Distance varies by degree

\(^{277}\) Ibid, 324, my italics.
\(^{278}\) Ibid, 325.
\(^{279}\) http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/malevich/sup/
\(^{280}\) Bullough, 325.
based on the capacity of the individual engaging the work to maintain the appropriate distance (close but not too close) and the artist’s ability to maintain just enough distance for the work to be viable on its own; it also varies based on the nature of the work. Some works are too close or too far (under- and over-distanced) for the given audience in their times or cultural locations. In theory, no theme or topic is off-limits for the work, but in practice, some themes and topics will prevent the audience from being able to engage it: “Allusions to social institutions of any degree of personal importance...the questioning of some generally recognized ethical sanctions...are all dangerously near the average limit and may at any time fall below it, arousing, instead of aesthetic appreciation, concrete hostility or mere amusement.”\(^{281}\) A good recent example of this failure of a work to Distance with a certain audience is Cosimo Cavallaro’s Chocolate Jesus installation, entitled “My Sweet Lord,” which was shut down due to protests from Christian groups.\(^{282}\) The work is a sculpture of a giant naked Jesus made entirely from chocolate. The artist is very clear that he made the piece in celebration of the body and sensuality of Jesus as a man; the piece was not shock-art. However, for some Christian groups, the in-your-face sensuality of a Jesus with chocolate genitals was too close, too under-distanced for appropriate aesthetic engagement. The work, with regard to its Christian audience, failed to distance properly.

\(^{281}\) Ibid, 325.
2. Peter Lamarque’s Internal and External Perspectives as Distance

Another way to understand this concept of distance is through Peter Lamarque’s essay, “Tragedy and Moral Value.” In this essay he makes a distinction between internal and external perspectives on a literary work. Although he focuses exclusively on literary works—specifically tragedies—his distinction between internal and external perspectives is useful for explaining in more detail the concept of distance as it relates to the participant. The internal perspective is the fictive dimension, “direct imaginative involvement with the...work.”283 The external stance, on the other hand, highlights the very fact of fictionality, the “modes of representation...literary devices, and narrative structures.”284 The external perspective gives the reader characters, styles, genres, and skills, whereas the internal perspective gives the reader fellow people in “real” situations, and elicits emotional responses. From the external perspective, Juliet’s suicide is necessary to the story hanging together as a whole; from the internal perspective, the reader wishes each and every time that she could intervene and stop Juliet’s rash act.

Without the external perspective, Juliet’s suicide and the tragic ending of the play lack the feeling of inevitability. Without the internal perspective, Juliet’s suicide is simply one of many ways a play can end and be considered as in the genre of tragedy. Both perspectives are necessary for the possibility of aesthetic engagement.

This is another way from which to understand how aesthetic distance functions—we as participants have to care about Juliet and be intellectually and emotionally invested in her life and story in order to engage aesthetically with the work. At the same time, however, some distance must be maintained, and we must recognize that her suicide is

284 Ibid, 279.
crucial to the success of the particular work as a whole. Distance functions as the tension and interaction between these two perspectives, allowing the participant to be fully engaged with the work while at the same time neither being subsumed into it nor imposing herself onto it.

3. Distance in Chinese Aesthetics

Aesthetic distance, or artistic detachment, is widely regarded as an important condition for aesthetic experience, not only in the Kantian-influenced western world, but in major aesthetic traditions in India, China, and Japan. Steve Odin writes that “the idea of nonattachment in the sense of artistic detachment is often implicit in the classical Chinese texts,” although it is not systematically theorized until it is taken up in concert with western aesthetic concepts by twentieth century synthetic thinkers.\(^{285}\) Distance was one of the few western aesthetic concepts to be taken up by Chinese thinkers in the 20\(^{th}\) century. WANG Keping argues that “although Modern Chinese aesthetics began with translation, introduction, and transplantation of Western aesthetics, it was not an instance of simple imitation or mechanical reproduction.”\(^{286}\) That is, although aesthetic distance as a concept was taken up by Chinese thinkers, they chose this concept because it had certain resonances with their own tradition. In fact, ZHU Guangqian “based his argument and analysis on some key theories of Western modern aesthetics...Such notions, for instance, of ‘qingjing jiaorong’ (fusion of emotion and scene) and “[c]haoran wubiao’ (identifying oneself with the object contemplated) in Chinese classic art theory were

\(^{285}\) Odin, 16.
employed to interpret Lipps’ doctrine of ‘Einfühlung’ and Bullough’s principles of ‘psychic distance’.”

WANG Guowei is another important twentieth-century aesthetician who incorporated western aesthetics into his own thinking. Odin writes that an explicit theory of “artistic detachment is to be found in the writings of Wang Kuowei.”

However, each of these modern aesthetic thinkers is heavily influenced by western aesthetics, and they are now criticized for not giving enough weight and respect to the Chinese tradition itself. QIAN Zhongshu, in discussing Wang’s explication of *Dream of a Red Chamber*, writes:

> The *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a great novel, and Schopenhauer’s philosophy contains many supreme and subtle truths. If we treat the two in accord with their natural tendencies, their excellences will complement each other. But if we try to force a unity between them, the two masterpieces will be at odds...In Chan meditation the important thing is to use techniques flexibly. In scholarship what is crucial is knowing when to stop. It is better to abandon the raft and climb the bank than to ‘cling to the bridge pillar and drown’.

Thus, in looking for distance in Chinese aesthetics we are not seeking a replica of Bullough’s theory, but rather for resonating concepts that might enrich his theory and provide an additional vocabulary for describing the relationships between artists, works

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287 Ibid, 119: *qingjing jiaorong* (情景交融); *chaoran wubiao* (超然物表).
288 Odin, 16.
of art, and participants. This section, then, focuses on the aesthetic concepts of guan 觀, he 和, and ying 應 as a way to orient the discussion of distance in Chinese aesthetics.  

Odin identifies analogous concepts to Distance in early Confucianism (zhong 中), Daoism (wuwei 無為), and Buddhism (wuxin 無心), but argues that guan 觀, Hexagram twenty from the Yijing (Book of Changes 易經), is the “symbol of detached observation in all its forms, including artistic detachment.” The many commentaries on Hexagram twenty can, argues Odin, be taken together to “generally express the meaning of [g]uan as representing a calm, tranquil, spontaneous, and detached contemplation of nature as a creative aesthetic process of perpetual change and transformation.”

In the Shuowen Lexicon, guan is defined as dishi 警視, careful observation or attention, and is given as a synonym for tai 臺. A tai is one of the watchtowers built on the walls of early Chinese cities, and a guan is an observatory on one of these towers: from an observatory like this, from specific perspective and height one can give careful and detailed attention to the surroundings, observing and contemplating their significance in relation to oneself and one’s context. In the Yijing (Book of Changes), guan is what the sages of old did—they carefully attended to (comprehensively observed) the changes and transformations in yin and yang, and from there established the gua 卦. The sages of old, models for appropriation and inspiration, created the grams by adopting a particular

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290 We could also consider the chengyu broadly applied in Tang Dynasty literary criticism: 不即不離. This phrase means neither approaching too close nor going too far away, and is used for poems that are optimally evocative.
291 Ibid, 16.
292 Ibid, 16.
293 “臺: 觀，四方而高者，从至从之，从高省，與室屋同意.”
294 說卦:昔者聖人之作《易》也，幽贊於神明而生蓍，參天兩地而倚數，觀變於陰陽而立卦，發揮於剛柔而生爻，和順於道德而理於義，窮理盡性以至於命。
attitude and relationship to the transformations of the world around them. This attitude is one of contemplation. The judgment to Hexagram 20 states: “Viewing (guan), as when the ablution has been made but not the offering, fills one with trust and makes for a solemn attitude.”

Wang Bi’s commentary on the judgment follows: “Here the subject of Viewing (guan) is rendered in all its dignity and grandeur, so those below who do the Viewing are morally transformed.” From this we can appreciate that the kind of contemplation involved in guan is respectful and detached in the sense that it is not ego-driven. It focuses on what is to be contemplated, rather than the contemplator.

Additionally, the commentary on the next Hexagram states: “Only after something can be viewed (guan) is there the possibility to come together with it. This is why Guan [Viewing, Hexagram 20] is followed by Shihe [Bite Together]. The he [in Shihe] means he [unite, i.e., join the laws together].” That is, only after a certain kind of attitude that brings one into a relation with what is to be contemplated can one be united with the subject of the contemplation. Aesthetic experience, then, requires this attitude of careful attention and comprehensive observation in order for there to be unity between artist, participant, and work of art. But, in contrast to Bullough’s formulation of distance, guan can help us to appreciate that distancing is not a single act that occurs once and then is finished. Instead, like the ablutions before an offering at the temple, or the attention of the person on watch, one must continue to attend to distancing throughout the experience, and one must be prepared to distance properly.

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296 Ibid, 260.
297 Ibid, 267.
As noted above, guan is necessary for he, an important concept in Chinese aesthetics, which is often translated as either harmony or unity. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. argue that in the Analects specifically and early Chinese thought generally, “harmony is celebrated as the highest cultural achievement.” This idea of harmony is about the balanced interaction of different parts, not sameness. In Analects 13.23, “The Master said, ‘Exemplary persons seeks harmony not sameness; petty persons, then, are the opposite’.” The paradigmatic example of harmony in early Chinese thought is soup:

The Marquis of Qi had returned from the hunt, and was being attended by Master Yan at the Chuan pavilion when Ju of Liangqui galloped up to them. The Marquis said, “Only Ju is in harmony (he 和) with me!”

Master Yan replied, “Ju is just agreeing (tong 同) with you. Wherein is the harmony?”

“Is there a difference between harmony and agreement?” asked the Duke.

Master Yan replied, “Yes, there is a difference. Harmony is like making soup; you use water, fire, vinegar, sauce, salt, and plum together in order to cook fish and meat, and you burn kindling as cooking fuel. The cook harmonizes all of these, blending them in order to achieve a good flavor. She adds flavor when there

299 Analects 13.23, trans. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation (Ballantine Books: 1999). Alternate translation: “Exemplary persons are harmonious but not the same as one another; petty persons are similar but not harmonious.” 2.14 and 15.22 are justification for their reading of the passage as “seek” rather than are.
isn’t enough, and dilutes it if it’s too strong. When you eat it, sir, it will balance your spirits.”

Harmony or unity, then, “entails both the integrity of the particular ingredient and its ease of integration into a larger whole.” It is not the agreement between two or more elements, but the way the relationship between the elements develops so as to enrich the entire context. It does not erase the differences between constituent elements, but brings those differences together in the most productive way possible. The Zuozhuan passage above concludes: “Whatever you say is right, Ju also says is right; whatever you say is wrong, Ju also says is wrong. If you use water to flavor water, who would eat it? If you play the same note on your lute, who would listen? The inadequacy of ‘agreement’ is like this.”

It is the differences between elements in a relationship that allow for the possibility of harmony. Music of only one note is hardly harmonious. Kenneth DeWoskin writes that “Within music, ho [he] describes the ability of one note to make a palatable whole with another.”

Li Zehou writes that the spirit of Chinese aesthetics “at once affirmed and reined in the senses, and...sought detachment while remaining very much rooted in the real world.” He argues that a major trend in Chinese aesthetics is the need for balanced unity between the personal and the impersonal, between the emotional and the rational.

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300 Zuozhuan, Duke Zhao, 20. 齊侯至自田，晏子侍于邜臺，子猶飢而造焉，公曰，唯據與我和夫，晏子對曰，譙亦同也，焉得為和，公曰，和與同異乎，對曰異，和如羹焉，水火醯醢醯梅，以烹魚肉，爌之以薪，宰夫和之，齊之以味，濟其不及，以取其遍，君子食之，以平其心。
301 Zuozhuan, Duke Zhao 20. 咸所謂可，譙亦曰可，君所謂否，譙亦曰否，若以水濟水，誰能食之，若琴瑟之粵壹，誰能聽之，同之不可也如是。
When speaking of music—the paradigmatic art example for harmony—in classical China, Li writes, “This is to say that both the art form (the musical composition) and the emotion (happiness) must maintain the basic standard of ‘harmony’. In saying that the art form and the emotions must be in harmony with one another, we can see Li suggesting a kind of distance, an appropriate balance between the personal and the impersonal. To see distance as a kind of harmony is to emphasize that distance is not a lack of closeness. Li explains this further:

We can state that Chinese art is ‘expressive,’ though what it expresses is not individual subjective emotions or personality, but rather universalized emotions that must be able to objectively ‘harmonize with heaven and earth.’ Even landscape architecture, ‘though man-made,...will look like something naturally created’—it is to both ‘imitate’ and ‘express’ nature. Crucial to this type of imitation or representation, however, is the endowment of the scene with emotion, in order to create an yijing, a mood or artistic idea.”

Emotions, then, are not to be either given in to or gotten rid of. Instead, in Chinese art the emotion of the artist is transformed into the emotional tone of the work. On the same note, as sinologist François Jullien writes, “Chinese aesthetics constantly urges that the experience not be allowed to split between the poles of ‘without’ and ‘within,’ ‘emotion’ and ‘landscape’ (qing and jing), visual experience and inner experience.”

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305 Ibid, 22.
306 It should be noted here that emotion in Chinese—qing—is not private in the same sense as emotion in most western narratives. Qing originally meant something like the facts of the matter, the relevant features of the scene in front of one. It later came to take on certain senses of how one reacted and responded to those facts. So, emotion in this case can be understood as not necessarily idiosyncratic, but as having to some degree a relational character and a sense of appropriateness to it.
and the impersonal are inextricably intertwined and interacting with one another, harmonizing and uniting the work, the artist, and the participant. Where Bullough’s aesthetic distance may cause one to think of making distance between elements—distance as farness or detachment—the role of harmony or unity in distance is to emphasize the fact that aesthetic distance is a relationship of closeness, where the parts—artist, work, and participant—interact in such a way as to make balanced engagement possible. No one element in aesthetic experience overrides the others; rather, each element works together to energize each other. For example, Dewoskin writes,

> Calligraphy is one of the most controlled of all cultural practices and one of the most spontaneous. When practiced as an art form, it requires a formal knowledge of each individual character to be as deeply internalized as are the words in a spoken language. As these forms are externalized through the activities of the psychophysical body, the brush and ink become the exclusive channel between the interior of the body and the writing surface outside it.\(^{309}\)

All of the elements in a calligraphic performance—knowledge of characters, muscle memory of bodily practice, brush, ink, and energy of the artist—come together through the artist to create the work. As the participant engages the work, she herself is recreating and retracing the movements of the artist, the sweep of the brush and the feel of the character.

Finally, he requires interaction or resonance between elements. In Lu Ji’s *Wenfu* (Rhymeprose on Literature), *ying* is the first of the aesthetic terms to be discussed. DeWoskin explains that *ying* as a concept is “broad, overlapping with notions of correspondence, correlation, consonance, and resonance, and describes two seemingly

\(^{309}\) Dewoskin, 68.
unrelated things that have significant interactive capabilities.” Often translated as sympathetic resonance, the term has its aesthetic origin in music, where the vibration of one string or instrument would cause another to resonate with it. DeWoskin cites the *Liji* (Book of Rites), which states that “Music unites,” and argues that “For music to unite, the tenets of *ying* must be met.” That is, response and correspondence make harmony or unity possible. This can be seen clearly in the important aesthetic category of *qingjing jiaorong*, or the fusing of emotion and scene. Li Zehou writes that this fusing of emotion and scene can be said to consist of the melding of the appreciating (or creating) self with the appreciated (or created) object. The appearance or action of the object calls forth my mental and emotional activity, which is subsequently dissolved in the full concentration of my faculties in the process of appreciation or creation, so that it is eventually replaced by the features and actions of the object, resulting in the unity of my own subjective emotions with the objective form.

In other words, the participant, in order to appreciate the work of art, must bring herself as close as possible to the work, to the point of melding and transforming her own personal experience with the impersonal form of the work. This is not to say that the participant is entirely lost in the work, but rather that her appreciation requires her to set aside for a moment those features of her personal experience that would prevent resonance between her and the work. The emphasis in the Chinese tradition is toward the pole of unity, but as mentioned above, given the prevalence of correlative and categorical

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310 Ibid, 199.
311 Ibid, 199-200.
312 Li, xiv.
thinking in early Chinese aesthetics, even *qingjing jiaorong* is not exclusively focused on unity, but still contains an element of difference.

In terms of aesthetic distance, we can see resonance as what allows for Bullough’s coincidence between experience and work. And, resonance is most powerful when the resonating elements are close in proximity to one another. Elements cannot enter into harmonic relation with one another without moving toward each other, approaching one another in a way that allows each to maintain its own uniqueness while at the same time contributing to something greater.

These three concepts—*guan*, *he*, and *ying*—provide additional material from which to enrich the concept of aesthetic distance as a condition for the possibility of aesthetic experience. Distance is found in a particular set of relationships between artists and works, works and audiences, and participants and works. It begins with an attitude of careful attention and concern, as seen in the watchman on the watchtower. She is unfailingly vigilant; she does not observe her surroundings just once, but continues to do so. While she is attentive, she is seeking harmony and resonance between herself and the subject of her gaze. Neither overwhelms the other, but both come together and unite the space between them by approaching one another in a certain kind of relationship. This unity, however, is not identity or sameness. The participant is not removed from the relationship with the work of art—she enters into a harmonious relationship with it. This requires a balance between the personal and the impersonal, but is never a complete loss of either. Instead, distance is the careful attention to the particulars of the elements involved in the harmonious relation. Distance is harmony and resonance between artist, work, and participant. Bullough writes that a coincidence of experience better prepares us
to engage works, but this preparation is not a static event. The work and the participant approach one another in resonance. Likewise, the artist’s experiences resonate with the work as she creates it, balancing her life and emotions with the need for the work to have its own integrity. And finally, the work itself must unify itself with its audience. This does not mean that they are identical, but that the differences between work and audience are productive of experience, rather than preventative. While the concept of distance in western aesthetics may invoke connotations of disinterest, separation, and detachment, when we consider it in concert with the cluster of categories of distance in Chinese aesthetics, we can balance the connotations of separation with those of engagement, unity, harmony, and continual practice.

C. The Triadic Structure of Aesthetic Experience

As an experience of a work of art\textsuperscript{313}, aesthetic experience is necessarily tied up with works of art. In \textit{Essays on the Nature of Art}, Eliot Deutsch develops an account of the nature of a work of art and several related concerns, including aesthetic experience. As Deutsch explains, a work of art is a special kind of integrated whole: “one must not radically sunder the artist from the artwork and the artwork from the contemplative participant of it.”\textsuperscript{314} That is to say, before beginning a description of what precisely a work of art is, it is necessary first to understand that it is not an isolated object. And, as the focus of aesthetic experience is the work of art, neither is aesthetic experience

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{313} Some theorists develop accounts of aesthetic experience that are not tied to works of art as paradigmatic examples of aesthetic experience.
\textsuperscript{314} Deutsch, 30.
\end{footnotesize}
isolated. Instead, considering that aesthetic experience is an experience of and with a work of art, aesthetic experience shares the relational structure of the work of art, bringing together the artists, the works themselves, and the participants. In Deutsch’s words, “aesthetic experience is...a close attentiveness...it is an active engagement between a work and the contemplative participant of it.” 315 Aesthetic experience is the integration of the artist, work of art, and participant, into a whole—the individual elements can be analyzed separately, but the quality of the experience is such that they are in fact always bound up together. In discussing the history of Chinese arts, John Hay writes that Chinese art “demonstrates a performative view of the arts of the gentleman...In any performance, the way it is performed is crucial to success. The performer, therefore, is inherently part of the product.” 316 In terms of the experience, artist, work, and participant are united in one integrated whole.

1. Artists

It would be easy to say that the artist is simply the person who skillfully created something that is deemed a work. In the history of western aesthetics, artists have been seen as many different things, from conduits for the gods—“The position of the artist is humble. He is essentially a channel” 317—to tortured souls—“An artist is a creature driven by demons.” 318 They have been seen as those who express their innermost nature: “Every

315 Ibid, 32.
316 Hay, 64.
artist dips his brush into his own soul and paints his nature into his pictures.” Paul Klee, in a similar vein, wrote, “I paint in order not to cry.” Each of these may capture something about being an artist for some artists in particular times and places, but these kind of descriptions fail to take into account the contextual nature of person as artist. In Chinese aesthetics, for example, the identity of the artist is defined in terms of the ‘embodiment’ of the meanings and values implicit in the artistic references to the significations of one’s precursors, the ‘voice’ of the Other, that is, tradition...Authorship, in Chinese culture, is thus a profoundly relational identity, and never refers simply to the artist as an isolated individual self.

The artist, then, must be conceived broadly to include the context from which the work emerged. This includes the persons most directly responsible for the work’s design and creation, as well as the culture, tradition, and society in which they live and work. In this way, it is not irrelevant to refer to the artists of the Pantheon or the great Pyramids in the same breath as the artists of African dance masks or the artists of the New York Ballet Company. Percy Bysshe Shelly wrote that “Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the

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322 Some readers may object that this falls prey to the intentionalist fallacy. I argue that it does not, because the intentionalist fallacy (as described by Beardsley et al) rests on the question of what one needs to know about the author’s intentions as realized or not in the work; it does not suggest that knowledge of the author and her context are not relevant to understanding the work at large.
creations, of their age.”  That is, as artists they are both shaped by their context and through their creative acts have a hand in shaping their world.

Artists are also often seen as the locus of creativity—that by which the work itself is created and manifests creativity. The word “creativity” comes from the Latin verb creare, meaning “to make or produce,” and is related to the verb crescere, meaning “to arise or grow.” When we speak of creativity, then, we are speaking of a certain kind of skillful making or production, usually one in which the object made is unique in some important way. It is important to note, however, that creativity is not the same as novelty—to simply digress from established norms is not, in this fully aesthetic sense, creative.

Creativity is always bounded by initial conditions, by the medium in question and the techniques available. As Robert Frost said in his 1935 address at Milton Academy, “Writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down.” In other words, the boundaries set by the initial conditions of a work of art are an important part of how the work is created, and so how it manifests creativity. The creativity of a work is seen in how it responds to its initial conditions, how it negotiates its boundaries. As Deutsch writes, “creativity in art has always to do with working with a particular medium.”

Creativity involves a transformation by the artist of the habitual and the everyday. To lack creativity is simply to do what has been done before; mimicry is not creative. However, as mentioned earlier, creativity is also not just novelty, not just doing something new. Rather, creativity resides in the interaction between the new and the

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324 Robert Frost, Address at Milton Academy, Massachusetts, May 17, 1935.
325 Deutsch, 17.
familiar, between the past and how it is taken up in the present moment for the future. That is to say, creativity is a special kind of imitation, where imitation is understood not as mimicry or copying, but rather as a participation with, a partaking of, or a drawing from reality. Deutsch writes that “To imitate in art...means to be determined by reality at its most essential level.”\(^{326}\) When we imitate we begin from what is already present, from our lived experiences and our cultural heritage. We begin there, and then we appropriate—we make it our own. The creativity evidenced in Picasso’s African period (Les Demoiselles de Avignon, for example) can be seen as arising from the relationship between Picasso drawing on reality, in the form of African masks exhibited in Paris, and how he took up the style of the masks into his work, making it uniquely his own. Deutsch argues that creativity “is not an act of withdrawal from actuality; it is precisely an intensification and exploration of one’s involvement with some one or more aspects or dimensions of reality.”\(^{327}\) Being creative does not involve turning one’s back on what has gone before (in an attempt to be novel), but rather an intense imitation and transformation of what is into a work of art. The newness or uniqueness of the work, the manifestation of creativity in the work, comes not from separation between this work and those that came before it, but from how the question of the work is taken up by the particular artist, in her specific context, with precisely these materials and techniques. The creativity of the artist is seen in how she makes the question and answer of the work her own.

Deutsch’s view of creativity is influenced by his understanding of creativity in certain Asian aesthetic traditions. In Chinese narratives on creativity, for example, creativity is not simply a human activity—the entire cosmoi are creative, constantly

\(^{326}\) Ibid, 14.
\(^{327}\) Ibid, 15.
changing and transforming. In fact, we could say that creativity is a species of transformation. On this view, there is no creation from nothing; all creative activity is creating something from something else. Tu Weiming argues that “In the language of the Book of Change, the cosmos is never a static structure but rather a dynamic process. In its constant unfolding, it always generates new realities by creatively transforming the existing order, laden with inconsistencies, into an ever-innovating congruent process...[creativity is] open, dynamic, transformative, and unceasing.”\(^{328}\) As a kind of skillful making, then, creativity is a transformation of how things were into something new, different but related to what came before.

One way of understanding creativity in the early Chinese aesthetic tradition is to see it as the unity and harmony between *ziran* (自然 naturalness) and *fa* (法 regularity). Karl-Heinz Pohl writes that “Chinese literary and art theorists, all through the ages, elaborated on the notion that a work of art both follows and transcends rules (*fa*).”\(^{329}\) That is, works follow certain regularities and patterns, but great works show that they both follow these regularities and go beyond them. Pohl elaborates:

The concept of unity of naturalness and regularity – in terms of following the rules of nature - was further elaborated on by juxtaposing the notion of "living rules" (*huo fa* 活法) against that of "dead rules" (*si fa* 死法). In the Qing period, the literary critic Ye Xie (1627-1703) expressed his idea of "living rules" in the image of the clouds on Mt. Tai. They form their beautiful and natural structure just because they do not follow dead rules but the unfathomable living rules of

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In other words, artists draw on the regularities of the world around them, on what has come before, but do not simply mimic what already is. Instead, in going beyond regularities, they seek living rules: organic, dynamic energy for their work.

In order to do this, artists in China had a close relationship with prior great works, and gongfu—constant practice—was seen as the only way to gain mastery of a technique. However, again simply following what had gone before wasn’t enough. Stephen Goldberg argues that for a Chinese master, “the proper approach to the canonical art of the past involves ‘creative imitation’ (fang faction) and ‘transformation’ (bian modification) within one’s own personal style in a way that will allow one to speak with authority to the historical and art historical conditions of the present.”

That is, the artist studies great works, styles, and techniques of the past, but her creativity is not in reproducing them, or in doing something so novel as to be unrecognizable. Rather, in appropriating past styles and such to herself and her own style, she is able to create from her unique location, and so to be creative. She transforms prior works and techniques as she takes them up for herself, and after careful practice is able to author her own work.

Additionally, creativity in Chinese aesthetics is often associated with qi or qiyun (breath/vital energy, breath resonance). One of the most famous statements of this is in Xie He’s Six Canons of Painting, where he writes, “What are these Six Canons? The first is ‘breath resonance,’ which refers to liveliness and animation.” If qi is vital breath, then painting (and later by extension all arts) must display the qi of the subject that is

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330 Pohl, 4.
331 Goldberg, 232. Characters inserted.
332 Xie He, qtd and translated by Qian Zhongshu, “Resonance in Criticism on the Arts: The Misreading of Xie He’s ‘Six Canons’” in Limited Views, 97.
painted: “‘breath resonance’ is none other than making the person in the painting appear fully vital and alive.” That is, an important way in which the artist is creative—not just in copying, although copying earlier models (Canon #6) is necessary—is in how she develops the feeling of energy, spirit, and vitality in the work itself.

Furthermore, when examining what we mean by the role of “artist” in aesthetic experience, we can look to Japanese aesthetician YANAGI Soetsu, founder of the folk-art movement in Japan, who gives an intriguing critique of the “artist” focus in modern, western aesthetics. He suggests that the emphasis on individuality serves to obscure the value of traditional craft objects and traditional craft practices. These traditional practices place the priority of the artist-work-participant triad on the process of the materials coming to be the work; this does not deny the role of the artist or the participant, but rather refocuses attention on how the work came to be as it is, and how this process bears on our engagement with it. Yanagi argues that contemporary western art places too much emphasis on the individuality of the artist and the artist’s control over the work—the cult of personality so associated with modern and contemporary art is ego-driven and distracts from the aesthetic value of both artists and works. Craft pieces, like a simple bowl used in a tea ceremony, are often anonymous or attributed to a group or region instead of a single person. This is also the case with accretion texts like the Zhuangzi, which came together over a long period of time with many different authors, each drawing on a lineage of phrases, anecdotes, and philosophical vocabulary. Yanagi argues that this allows us, as participants, to see more clearly the process of how the work was created as involving many different factors, and that it is more clearly connected to daily life.

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333 Qian, 99.
In discussing the role of the individual in creativity, Yanagi writes that “If we were to select a hundred examples of the most beautiful crafts out of the past and present, ninety-nine percent, no possibly one hundred percent, would be unsigned.” This is not to suggest that the artist-craftsman isn’t important, but rather to highlight the fact that her ego and isolated sense of agency need not be tied into the work; many of the greatest works of all time were created by groups of anonymous artisans. As painter Carol Cottone-Kolthoff writes, “It is the consistent act of painting or drawing that creates an artist—the painting is only the bi-product.”

Finally, the role of the artist in aesthetic experience is not isolated from the role of the participant. The artist stands in a dual relation to her work; she is not only artist but also participant to her own work. This does not mean she has privilege among the participants, but rather that she too must approach her own work to understand and appreciate it. Every time the painter sets her brush down and steps back to survey her work, she becomes participant as well as artist. As Dewey explains, “The artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works.”

2. Works of Art

A work of art, according to Deutsch, is a kind of “culturally embedded” created object. We might perhaps prefer a term other than “object” when referring to works of art; works of art are not static, isolated artefacts, nor are they necessarily physical, as “object” would suggest. Rather, works of art are processes that hold themselves together

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336 Dewey, 50.
337 Deutsch, 33.
as a whole, having an integrity to themselves, whether that integrity has the character of a painting, a musical piece, or a performance event. However, the idea of the work of art as culturally embedded is very important. Works of art are not isolated or independent from their contexts—historical, social, or cultural:

One need only look to the social standing of the artist and the ‘for whom’ and under what conditions the artwork was intended to be viewed and appreciated in different times and places to see how these contributed to any given society’s self-understanding of what a work of art is.\(^{338}\)

The work of art, then, is socially, historically, and culturally located, although this is not to say that works of art are restricted to their own locations. Instead, this points to the importance of context for the work. The location of the work also must include the materials from which it is constructed and the technical skills and style used to construct it.

Furthermore, Deutsch writes that each work of art “has its own intentionality, which is precisely its aiming to be aesthetically forceful, meaningful, and beautiful.”\(^{339}\) Works have their own intentionality in the sense that the work, as a question and an answer to that question, sparks a moment of wonder. The work resists totalization; it has something of its own to say, and in order to be heard it must be listened to attentively. In as much as the work fulfills its own intentionality, it is successful as a work of art.

Aesthetic force, as a condition for intentionality, is “the power of [the work’s] coming into being as controlled and disciplined and found...everywhere in the work.”\(^{340}\) The force or power of the work—its emotional expressiveness—is what invites

\(^{338}\) Ibid, 3.
\(^{339}\) Ibid, 33.
\(^{340}\) Ibid, 19.
participants to engage intimately with the work; Deutsch suggests that the work holds itself together as “the process of its being.” However, we might prefer not to use such substantive terminology as “being” when referring to works of art—works of art “work” with those who are appreciating them; they are dynamic, not static. Instead, we could say that the aesthetic force of the work of art is its qiyun, its breath resonance. The vitality of the work is what captures our attention, draws us in, and allows us to see the work as having its own integrity.

A work’s intentionality also involves meaning, or aesthetic content: “A work of art is meaningful to the degree to which it realizes the possibilities that it itself gives rise to.” On this account, works are purposive—they create certain ends or expectations appropriate to themselves. Realizing or apprehending the meaning of a work, then, involves understanding the internal trajectory of the work, what its possibilities are, and how well it fulfills them. Consider the following examples of both success and failure in terms of fulfilling a work’s own possibilities. Floria Sigismondi’s 2010 film The Runaways, the story of the first all-girl punk band, early on raises certain possibilities about the different kind of relationships between the women in the film, but ultimately fails to seriously explore the lesbian relationship between the two main characters. Glass artist Dante Marioni has a series of vessels that are entirely classic Venetian in style, but very large and brightly colored. The first of these works may have raised possibilities about how Venetian style is taken up in contemporary art, but as a series they fail to be anything other than big. Contrary to this, the novel Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson does an excellent job of appropriately fulfilling the possibilities it raises concerning the impact

341 Ibid, 19.
342 Ibid, 25.
of rape on a teenage girl. The exploration of geometric simplification and optical phenomena in Paul Cezanne’s work is only possible because of the way he distorted figures and objects. Finally, consider Joe Wright’s 2005 film version of Pride and Prejudice. His particular style of cinematography—long, wide-angle shots with broad horizons and muted colors—mimics British landscape paintings of the time, which allows the viewer to enter more fully into the environment of the novel. The way in which each work of art responds to its own initial conditions is its ability to be aesthetically meaningful, and those pieces that do not fulfill the possibilities they themselves raise fail in some level of their intentionality.

The final condition Deutsch gives for intentionality is beauty. For Deutsch, beauty “has to do with aesthetic authenticity, with what is right for the individual, particular work of art...Beauty in art is...when the artwork itself exhibits as a whole a fulfilling rightness.”\(^{343}\) That is, a work is beautiful in as much as it is forceful and meaningful. However, given that Deutsch has already used the language of rightness and authenticity, we might prefer to avoid the baggage of beauty as an aesthetic term\(^ {344}\), and instead focus on the idea that the work of art should have its own sense of integrity, thorough vitality, and appropriateness of meaning. A work’s intentionality—its success—is realized under these conditions.

Furthermore, in Gadamer’s terms, the work of art signifies an “increase in being” or an “excess” or “overflowing” of being.\(^ {345}\) Although we might again wish to avoid

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\(^ {343}\) Ibid, 27-8.
\(^ {344}\) The history of western aesthetics is littered with accounts of what beauty is, from coincidence between form and function, harmony of proportions, and significant form to simply what pleases the eye. Rather than enter into an in-depth discussion of how Deutsch is modifying the term, I find it more helpful to focus on the descriptors he uses: rightness and authenticity.
Gadamer’s ontological imposition, we can recast this by recalling Young’s discussion of questioning another person. Young writes, “Since the other person is a subject-in-process, I cannot assume that because last week I understood her standpoint I can do so today.”\(^{346}\) The other person is a mystery—she always has the power to surprise me, and I will never be able to be finished with understanding her. That is to say, the task of understanding—and so interpreting—of a work of art is a never-ending task. A work always holds open the possibility of returning to it and discovering something new, something as-of-yet unthought. The work is always potentially disclosive, but is never truly closed. This is not to say that we never come to resting places with our experiences of a work, but rather that the work does not present itself as a quantum that could be known and understood once and for all. For a work of art, it is not that anything goes as far as understanding it is concerned\(^{347}\); works of art can’t just mean anything, but they are open-ended in their meaning.\(^{348}\)

This idea of “excess” resonates with an important concept in Chinese aesthetics. However, as noted earlier, Chinese narratives do not rely on a substance ontology. Therefore, an “excess of being” would be an odd idea in Chinese aesthetics. Instead, the work of art as processual and dynamic leads to notions of overflow or echo. Qian Zhongshu, noted twentieth century literary critic, writes: “In the biographies of literati in *The Jin Dynasty History*, Zhang Hua (232-300) praises Zuo Si’s “Rhapsody on the Three

\(^{346}\) Young, 55.

\(^{347}\) Gadamer explains this by saying that the adequate interpretation must recede into the work. “In view of the finitude of our historical existence, it would seem that there is something absurd about the whole idea of a unique, correct interpretation...Here the obvious fact that every interpretation tries to be correct serves only to confirm that the non-differentiation of the mediation (*Vermittlung*) from the work itself is the actual experience of the work.” (*Truth and Method*, 118).

\(^{348}\) For Gadamer, the excess of the work of art is deeply connected with his idea of the being of the work of art as play and the mediality of play. Because he emphasizes playing over the subjectivity of the player, when this is transferred to the realm of the work of art, it serves to reinforce the idea that the work always means more than can be captured in any single instance, or by any single participant.
Capitals” this way: ‘When the reading is over, something lingers’. He likewise discusses the famous saying about Zhang Xuan’s paintings: “The meaning surpasses the image,” and “when the act of painting came to an end, the meaning did not.” Qian writes that this is “an important precept in theories of the arts in China.” The excess or overflowing of the work is here seen as a lingering taste or a resounding echo. That is, something about the work both stays with us after we leave it and invites us to return to it.

In a short essay on art and morality, Deutsch makes two intriguing claims about art: 1) creativity, and so art, is necessarily celebrative; and 2) art is necessarily communal. Unfortunately, the text offers us very little on which to base a more full account of these claims. However, we can use these terms to continue to think through the work of art.

Deutsch writes that “art is a celebration of personhood and world, if not in their given actualities at least in their (real) potentialities,” and that even dark and dejected works “take their judgmental stand from a concern for human dignity and worth.” To say that works of art are celebrative is not to say that they are necessarily happy, upbeat, or joyous. Rather, when we consider celebrating as an occasion for giving honor, recognizing importance, and observing or performing with appropriate rites and ceremonies, we can see that the very act of creating the work is celebratory in that it affirms the value and importance of the work itself and gives honor to the creative potentials of human beings. On a similar note, Dewey writes that for “Craftsmanship to

349 Qian, 30.
350 Ibid, 32.
351 Ibid, 29.
352 Deutsch, 87.
be artistic in the final sense [it] must be ‘loving’: it must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised.”

The celebratory nature of the work also calls for an appropriate interaction between work and participant; the work addresses the participant meaningfully and the participant engages the work with an attitude of appreciation and understanding. The emotional content of the work, be it affirmation or despair, is not what designates the artwork as celebratory. It is the fact of its being a work of art, the fact that someone took the time and effort to create it, thus endowing it with value, that makes it celebratory. Even a work that recognizes the cruelty or futility of human life is still a work—it presents itself as meaningful to an audience, and in so doing takes its stand. A work that decries the cruelty of nature, such as Federico Garcia Lorca’s Yerma (in which the main character is infertile), still says to its audience—“I suffer! It should not be so!” This invites us not only to try and understand the work but to contemplate the very possibility of creating such a work. As Iraqi poet Reem Kubaa writes, “We have to forget the black side of life. If our art is black, that means we are stopped. We are not doing our job as artists.” However, this is balanced by Akira Kurosawa’s statement that “To be an artist means never to avert one’s eyes.”

Additionally, to celebrate originally meant not only to honor but to gather people together in order to give honor. Thus, the celebratory nature of the work also implies its communality. British painter David Hockney writes that “What an artist is trying to do for people is bring them closer to something, because of course art is about sharing: you

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353 Dewey, 49.
wouldn’t be an artist if you didn’t want to share an experience, a thought.”

Deutsch suggests that not only is art communal because works of art present themselves as objects for consciousness in a social context, but because engagement with works of art is “thoroughly informed by a sense of a sharing that is yet to be...A communion to be established with others is always implicit in all art making and experience.”

Art is a sharing of understanding, appreciation, and recognition between the artists and participants as well as between different participants—the work is a locus of connection between the artists and her world and the participants and her world. Igor Stravinsky writes that “Art postulates communion, and the artist has an imperative need to make others share the joy which he experiences himself.”

In a celebration people gather together and share in an experience. The work of art is itself a connection between persons and worlds, between artist and participant, and between those gathered together as participants. The work is communal because it has the character both of being intentionally created and of meaningfully addressing others. It exists as a valuation of self and other, of the possibility of understanding one another.

In addition, this is not simply a connection between two isolated individuals: artist and participant. Artist and participant are roles that exist as intersections between history, society, economics, culture, religion, gender, sexuality, etc. And not only are these roles so constituted, but the persons performing these roles are also constituted by their family members, friends, colleagues, etc. The sharing between artist and participant is a sharing between persons as a meeting of loci of relations. When I, in all my particularity, attend a

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356 David Hockney, “David Hockney Portraits,” booklet to accompany the National Portrait Gallery Exhibit.
357 Deutsch, 87.
guqin performance by a Chinese master musician, the music draws me together with those around me and with the musician and his education in Chinese National Conservatory and with the seventh-century composer of the piece. The work invites me to another time, another place, another culture, even as it encourages me to consider my place, my time, and my culture. The work is an invitation of intimacy with both the artist and others who also stand as participants. Participants are drawn together in a shared experience by the work.

3. Participants

A participant is a person or persons actively engaged with appreciating, attending to, and understanding the work. Just as with artists and works of art, participants have an historical, social, and cultural location that is relevant to their participation. In Gadamer’s language, this is the “historically effected consciousness,” the idea that every encounter of understanding brings with it the prior understanding of the person in question, including her personal experiences, social situation, and cultural tradition. How she understands anything is already situated as a “horizon” at the intersections of these fields of identity. Thus, every time she attempts to understand something, that object of understanding must be integrated into her horizon. John Hay writes that

Identity is, in a sense, location. At the same time, it is characteristic of the Chinese tradition that practice is interpretation. This very general circumstance

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359 It may be tempting to think that this example, being so temporally and culturally varied, would not hold up as well with a work closer to my own time and place. However, if aesthetic experience really does begin with an experience of negativity, of a question and a real acknowledgement of a lack of understanding, then any work, even Cavallaro’s “My Sweet Lord,” operates as a connection and invites this sharing of understanding.

360 See Chapter One for more details on Gadamer’s account of historicity in understanding.
relates most broadly to the lack of any external creator-agent and, correspondingly, to the lack of any articulation of the absolute. Since there was no ultimately authoritative text, instead of a constant effort to ‘see through the glass darkly’ there was an unending process of interpretation...Interpretation extended in inherent, specific and unceasing sequence through both time and space. At the same time, each interpretive act remained tied elastically yet inextricably to the textual canon.\footnote{Hay, 68.}

Deutsch argues that “in our experience of artworks we must be knowing participants,” and work to develop a “keen sensitivity.”\footnote{Deutsch, 31-2.} He also suggests that the engagement with works of art “require[s] the full play of one’s intellectual and intuitive as well as sensuous powers.”\footnote{Deutsch, 32.} Engaging a work of art as a participant, then, requires not only careful attention, but a cognitive and emotional openness and sensitivity directed toward understanding and appreciating the work at it is in itself.

Deutsch also suggests that works of art call for a loving consciousness. What would it mean to suggest that art calls for a loving consciousness? Art calls to be appreciated; it challenges its participants to understand it. A work of art requires both an artist and a participant. As Ron Bontekoe writes regarding Gadamer’s account of art and aesthetics, “Any artwork is an intentional human creation...[and] The work of art in its meaningfulness is \textit{addressed} to its audience.”\footnote{Ronald Bontekoe, \textit{Dimensions of the Hermeneutic Circle}, 96.} This is another way of putting our previous claim that an artwork has a triadic yet continuous structure—the artists, the work, and the participants. Because works of art call to be understood, they call for a

\footnote{361 Hay, 68.} \footnote{362 Deutsch, 31-2.} \footnote{363 Deutsch, 32.} \footnote{364 Ronald Bontekoe, \textit{Dimensions of the Hermeneutic Circle}, 96.}
certain kind of consciousness to be directed toward them. This consciousness is a loving consciousness because it is directed to the best of its ability to the work in and of itself. The participant does not foist her own conceptions onto the work, but tries to let the work speak for itself. She recognizes its inexhaustibility, the fact that by its very nature it cannot be totalized: no judgment is final and determinative. In doing so, she approaches the work as something of value, something that deserves her care and attention, something that deserves to be appreciated and understood. To try and understand or appreciate the work at all she must direct her concern toward it; if to ask a question is to make it a real question for the one asking, then to approach a work one must be concerned with its question and the significance of its question for the development of the work.

This sharing of appreciation and the drive to understand on the part of participants with works of art is not solely directed at the work. Any genuine engagement with a work of art, as an engagement of understanding, is also an engagement of self-understanding. Gadamer argues that all art falls under the province of hermeneutics, in the sense that each work of art presents itself to be understood: “Thus our task is to understand the meaning of what it [the work] says and to make it clear to ourselves and others...It must be integrated into the self-understanding of each person.”\(^{365}\) As we engage a work of art, trying to appreciate and understand it, we bring with us our own self-understanding: who we are as historically, socially, and culturally situated persons, as well as how our previous experiences have shaped how we see and understand ourselves and the world around us. In our attempt to understand the work of art, we experience it as a negation, as

a question, as something that demands to be understood. If we are genuinely engaging the
work, and not simply foisting ourselves onto it, then we must recognize that “To
understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the
answer to a question.” The question of the work must be a real and live question for the
participant. And, when she recognizes the power of the question, she recognizes
something she does not know or understand. As such, in her engagement with the work
and her drive to understand it, her own sense of what is significant and meaningful is
altered, as well as her pre-judices regarding the work: “Questioning opens up possibilities
of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one’s own thinking on the
subject.”

II. Philosophical Activity as Aesthetic Experience

A. Articulating the Metaphor

At this point, with the above explication of aesthetic experience, we can now
begin to articulate the features of philosophical activity that are highlighted by this
metaphor. In order to do this, this section begins with an analysis of philosophical activity
as aesthetic experience, using as guides the nature of experience in aesthetic experience,
distance as a condition for aesthetic experience, and the triadic structure of aesthetic
experience. Next, it examines how the aesthetic experience metaphor responds to

367 Ibid, 368.
critiques of previous metaphors in Chapters Two and Three. And finally, it articulates the uniqueness of this metaphor in terms of how it shapes the central philosophical goal of solving problems or coming to an understanding of something.

To begin, we must recall that just as the artist, work of art, and participant need to be understood as composing an integrated whole for aesthetic experience, so too is philosophical activity an integration of several elements, none of which can be genuinely separated from one another in the activity itself. Using the triadic structure of aesthetic experience to understand philosophical activity leads to a triadic structure of philosophical activity: philosophical artists, works, and participants. Just as with aesthetic experience, these three elements may or may not occur together in a single person—the artist of a work can and must act as participant to her own work, as well as potentially a participant to the works of others.

1. Philosophical Activity and Experience

The experiential quality of aesthetic experience highlights the negativity or absence of understanding that is the question at the heart of experience, the wonder and openness toward this question, and the consummatory feel of an experience as distinct from normal, everyday background experience. If philosophical activity is understood through aesthetic experience, then these features of experience are also relevant for philosophical activity. This means that philosophical activity has a negativity or lack of understanding—a question—at its core, that this question requires a stance of wonder and openness, of deference to the question as it is in itself, and that philosophical activity stands out as distinct from normal everyday activities.
2. Philosophical Activity and Distance

In addition to the characteristics of an experience, this metaphor suggests that philosophical activity has distance as a condition for its possibility. Just as the artist must distance her personal emotions and experiences in order to create the work, if the philosopher is an artist then she, in creating the question and its development, asks a question and develops it in a way that maintains a harmonious balance between the personal and the impersonal. Her creation of the question must be personal—she is really asking the question and trying to give a genuine answer to it—but it is not solely her question. Additionally, as the work of art must establish an appropriate distance with its audience, especially as highly regarded ethical and social norms are concerned, so too are philosophical questions and their development sensitive to their audience. For example, a contemporary non-Christian philosopher is not the intended audience for Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*. She will have to work very hard to close the distance between herself and the work’s audience in order to be able to engage it on its own terms.

Furthermore, if the participant with the work of art negotiates the tension and interaction between perspectives, between her own practical affairs and her ability to engage the work on its own terms, then the philosopher-as-participant too is seen as negotiating this balance between the personal and the impersonal, between her practical affairs and the question itself. The philosopher, in trying to understand the question and its development, must come to ask the question herself. In Gadamer’s words, “the text must be understood as an answer to a real question,” and so the philosopher must be as

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ready as possible (intellectually, emotionally, and experientially) to be able to genuinely ask the question, while maintaining enough distance so that her own prejudgments of it do not overwhelm the question itself. For example, when a philosopher engages Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, she makes the question of the text (What does it mean to be human?) a real question for her, while at the same time trying to appreciate the text’s development of the question and not simply her own answer to the question.

In philosophical activity distance functions as the necessary attempt to identify prejudices and biases. As Gadamer writes,

> A person who believes he is free of prejudices, relying on the objectivity of his procedures and denying that he is himself conditioned by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him as *vis a tergo*. A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light.”

The two possible failures of distance highlight this even more clearly. Under-distancing is a problem of the overly personal, while over-distancing is a problem of the lack of the personal, the overly impersonal. To believe oneself free of prejudices is to believe in the possibility of aesthetic engagement without any personal elements. On the other hand, to be unaware of one’s prejudices is to be under-distancing, to put the personal onto the work. The prejudices of the jealous husband watching *Othello* prevent his engagement with the play because he is unable to recognize that they are at work—he is too caught up in himself and his own situation. As a condition for aesthetic experience, one of the things distance requires is the recognition of those prejudices that make a harmonious relationship between artist, work, and participant impossible. The jealous husband has

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369 Ibid, 354.
already judged Desdemona—his prejudice prevents his engagement with the play. As a condition for philosophical activity, then, distance requires us to try to recognize when we are being overly personal and allowing our prejudices to unjustly determine the question, and when in pretending we are unbiased we are preventing real engagement with the question itself. Consider the question of what *tian* (天) means in the *Analects*. If in attempting to understand *tian* I think of Heaven (a standard English translation), I am bringing along with me many Judeo-Christian connotations of the term that are not only not relevant but are misleading as to how the term functions in Classical Chinese texts. Or consider a Christian philosopher who refuses to read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—she is allowing her personal prejudices to prevent her engagement with the work.

The aesthetic experience metaphor, with regards to distance, shows us a vision of philosophical activity as requiring a certain effort of balance between the impersonal and the personal on behalf of the one asking the question and developing it and the one engaging it.

3. The Philosophical Artist

By philosophical artist we can understand the person or persons who initiate and develop the philosophical question at the heart of the inquiry. For example, from the traditional western philosophical canon we could say that Plato is an artist and the question “What is Justice?” and his development of this question are examined in his dialogue *The Republic*. The many Masters Zhuang whose questions and developments came together in the text the *Zhuangzi* are also artists on this metaphor. But philosophical artists are not restricted to canonically important authors. Philosophical activity can begin
with many different starting points, from texts, poems, or songs to conversations with a
neighbor on the porch steps or the imagination of a child. Just as the experience of
negativity, the not-yet-knowing of the question, or the moment of wonder is at the heart
of aesthetic experience, so too is the genuine question and its inquiry at the heart of
philosophical activity.

Philosophers can be understood as artists in the sense that each question or theme,
like every work of art, has an original locus. Some questions have specific people or
movements who initiated them, while others have cultural locales or time periods from
which they come, just as some art works have individual artists, while others can be
sourced only through their location, time, culture, or social status. Michelangelo carved
La Pieta, and David Hume wrote the Treatise on Human Nature; Cage cups were made
by unknown artisans in the early Roman empire, and the Neo-Confucians were deeply
interested in the relationship between li 理 and qi 氣. In any case, though, the context of
the philosopher, just as that of the artist, is relevant to what kind of question she asks and
how she develops it. As artists of their question, philosophers make choices about
materials and means and give voice to their own experiences in their formulation—they
create the question and its development. And, just as with aesthetic experience if there
were no artist there would be no work of art, and so no aesthetic experience, for
philosophical activity without a philosopher there is no question, no development, and no
philosophical activity. Furthermore, just as artists stand in relation to their own work as
participants, so too do philosophical artists stand in relation to their own work as
participants. Philosophical activity does not stop with the question, but begins there.
Taking this project as an example, I am related to this work both as its artist and as a
participant engaging it. The question for the work began with me, as a result of my education, experiences, and interests, but in order to develop this question of metaphor in metaphilosophy I must not only raise the question, but must also be a participant—a participant to my work of art, trying to understand and appreciate it, judge it and interpret it.

4. The Philosophical Participant

What does it mean to understand a philosopher as a participant with a work of art? A participant is attentively engaged with a particular work of art, experiencing it, appreciating it, and trying to understand it. A philosopher can likewise be understood as engaged with a particular question and its development, for the purpose of better understanding it. I did not initiate the question at the heart of Kant’s Critique of Judgment, but when I read it I am trying to understand and appreciate it as a participant trying to understand and appreciate a work of art. Kant, the Critique, and I are all elements in a moment of philosophical activity. And, just as the location (social, historical, and cultural) of the participant matters to how she understands and engages the work of art, so too does the social, historical and cultural location of the philosopher matter to how she engages the philosophical question and its development, and to how she engages others with whom she is trying to understand the question and its development. Take, for example, a philosopher trying to understand the Analects. In order to understand the work, she must appreciate it—What are its questions? How does it develop these questions? Why is it significant? She tries to understand the work and what it has to say on its own terms. Gadamer writes,
To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be undetermined, awaiting a decisive answer. The significance of questioning consists in revealing the questionability of what is questioned.370

The philosopher, in coming to understand the question and its answer, must reveal the question as meaningful to her, and approach it with a kind of openness in order to be able to understand it. As Dewey writes, “a beholder must create his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent...Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art.”371

When I read Emmanuel Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*, if I am going to be able to appreciate it and try to understand it I must first understand what the work’s question is, and in order to do so, I must care about this question. If it is not a real question to me, then I cannot engage the text. Not only does this hold of individual philosophers engaging texts, but also of philosophers engaged together in dialogue. In that case, the philosophers are participants with a work of art, trying together to understand and better appreciate it.

Philosophical participants, on this metaphor, are also especially sensitive to aesthetic order. Just as participants with a work of art recognize the need to pay careful attention to each of the particulars in the work of art and how they come together to create an integrated whole, so too do philosophical participants attempt to see all of the elements of the question and its development holistically. In this way, the philosopher aspires to a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the question. This

370 Ibid, 357.
371 Dewey, 56.
aspiration is a felt quality of unity and the movement toward consummation of the question.

5. The Philosophical Work of Art

To see philosophical questions and their developments as works of art is to highlight the fact that they stand before us as culturally embedded and created; each question or problem has a time and a place from which it came, and a way or ways in which it was asked that matters to the nature of the question. Gadamer writes, “A question places what is questioned in a particular perspective.”\(^{372}\) It stands as coming from a particular tradition, time, and place, as well as from a particular person or group of persons. Philosophical questions and developments, like works of art, are culturally embedded and made from specific media using specific techniques and skills. The language in which a question is asked and the style and format of its development are important to the question, just as whether or not a sculpture is made from wood or stone is important to the work of art. For example, the fact that Heidegger chose the word “Dasein” and not the more straightforward “human being” or “man” is extremely important for the development of his particular brand of existentialism. Likewise, the fact that the *Analects* is written in Pre-Qin classical Chinese means that in order to approach the text one must be sensitive to the differences between classical Chinese and English.

Not only does this metaphor show us philosophical activity as a triadic structure of philosophical artist, work, and participant, but works of art also have a certain sense of inexhaustibility, lingering taste, or constant possibility of return. How many times can a

\(^{372}\) Gadamer, 356.
person read *Twelfth Night*, view Guo Xi’s *Early Spring*, or see a production of the ballet *Sleeping Beauty*? Works are not exhausted by a single experience, but are overflowing with possibilities of engagement and meaning. The inexhaustibility of a work of art is its excess of being, its constant possibility of return to new understanding; if a participant can always return to a work and gain something new, then a philosopher, in engaging a given question and its development, can always return to that question and find new meaning, new possibilities there. Gadamer makes the explicit point about inexhaustibility of texts: “the philologist dealing with poetic or philosophical texts knows that they are inexhaustible. In both cases it is the course of events that brings out new aspects of meaning in historical material. By being re-actualized in understanding, texts are drawn into a genuine course of events in exactly the same way as are events themselves.”

This is true not only of texts but of all genuine philosophical questions and their developments. Each encounter with a question is, in a very real sense, a new encounter, having the character of negativity—to see that there is a question is to recognize something as not understood, and to understand the question is to ask it for oneself, to be held in wonder before it. The course of events, be it new experiences in one’s life, or a new partner in philosophical activity, changes how a given philosophical question is understood.

Returning to the idea of the work (as well as the artist and participant) as culturally embedded, the idea of creativity emphasizes both from where the work has arisen and how it has presented its possibilities for resolution in its own particular way,

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373 Again, this is not to say that each aesthetic experience is incomplete. On the contrary, each aesthetic experience has a sense of consummation, but this consummation is not a final terminus. Instead, the experience encourages continued engagement with the work and a renewed sense of meaning and possibilities for the work.

374 Ibid, 366.
with its specific media and techniques. Philosophical activity, then, has a question that arises from a specific time/place, and each question presents its own possibilities. When Emmanuel Levinas wrote *Totality and Infinity*, he was a prisoner of war and had seen firsthand the horrors that follow from a lack of respect for and responsiveness to the alterity of other human beings. Creativity is seen when those possibilities are taken up by a philosophical artist and made her own, through her specific means. This emphasizes the fact of the question as arising from lived experience, from imitation—that is, intense transformation—and the importance of it being taken up by particulars. If creativity is a kind of transformative imitation, then in philosophical activity the question and its development must also be seen as having this character of transformative imitation, where the philosopher has appropriated her tradition and experiences and in developing the question and its answer reveals the question as vital and living.

What does it mean to say that philosophical activity is celebrative, communal, and calls for a loving consciousness? To ask a question is to recognize the question as real, as worthwhile, and to try to answer it is to honor the nature of the question—to celebrate the question and our ability to continue to ask questions, to not be so despairing, skeptical, or dogmatic to not be able to wonder—to ask and engage philosophical questions. Questions too stand as points of connection between people, times, and cultures, and call for understanding and appreciation, as well as a sharing of experience. Finally, questions and their developments call for a loving consciousness in that they call for care and concern to be directed to them as they are in themselves. In other words, the work has to be respected on its own terms before it can be understood. Many teachers of philosophy
invoke this loving consciousness every time they advise students to make sure they understand an argument before trying to develop counter-arguments.

How does philosophical activity involve self-understanding? Just as the participant engages a work of art in order to better understand and appreciate it, so does the philosopher engage the question in order to understand it. And just as the understanding of the participant necessarily involves self-understanding, so does the understanding of the philosopher necessarily involve self-understanding.

The priority of process in aesthetic experience, when taken into the philosophical realm, indicates a priority of the question and its development and the process of both forming the question and how it comes to be answered. This is a layer of support, using the aesthetic experience metaphor, for Gadamer’s claim that in philosophical discourse the question always has priority. Additionally, by de-emphasizing the individuality of the artist, it both supports the earlier claim that artists are relational, and points out the many varieties in which philosophical artists can be found. Like aesthetic experience, philosophical activity doesn’t only occur with regards to major canonical figures.

B. What makes this metaphor unique?

1. Responses to Challenges of the Combat and Play Metaphors

As seen in Chapters Two and Three, the combat and play metaphors for philosophy have certain points of tension that create problems for these metaphors as adequate source domains for philosophical activity. Each of these areas of tension can be addressed by the aesthetic experience metaphor.
If philosophical questions and their developments are seen as inexhaustible then
the problem of narrowing and limiting of possibilities\(^{375}\) in a philosophical dialogue, as
seen on alternate philosophical metaphors (such as combat), is not relevant. The question
at the heart of philosophical dialogue, when seen as a work of art, can never be closed off
decisively. Questions are always potentially open, ready for new engagement and
different understandings. If the purpose of engaging the work of art is to understand and
appreciate it, then there is no drive to be done with it, no sense in which there is a single
right interpretation. The work is inexhaustible, and so the question is inexhaustible. Each
engagement with the question brings with it a sense of consummation, of movement and
development, but not cessation of questioning.

Additionally, on an aesthetic experience metaphor, philosophical activity should
not be accused of perpetuating an internalization of violence.\(^{376}\) On an aesthetic
experience metaphor, the participant as philosopher is encouraged to engage the work
and other participants from a stance of loving consciousness, trying to understand and
appreciate the question and its development as it is in itself. Thus if self-reflexivity in
philosophical dialogue involves internalizing the dialogue, with aesthetic experience as
the metaphor, one is dialoguing with a partner who is also trying to understand and
appreciate the work as it shows itself. Aesthetic experience does not require violence or
domination, and so in philosophical activity what is internalized is not an opponent to
oneself, but another participant.

The structure of the aesthetic experience metaphor also helps to keep in mind the
situatedness of the philosophical artist, work, and participant. It is counterproductive to

\(^{375}\) See Chapter Two Section II.B.2.
\(^{376}\) See Chapter Two Section II.B.1.
aesthetic experience to pretend that there are not relevant factors of identity and media involved in the experience. The combat metaphor assumes that all combatants are on equal footing. However, this belies the fact of differences in power relations\textsuperscript{377} between participants in a philosophical inquiry. Aesthetic experience recognizes the situatedness of artist, work, and participant, in a web of cultural, historical, and social factors. An important part of coming to understand the work is coming to see it as arising from a particular context, made of specific media and techniques, and relating to the participant as she is in her context. And, when different participants engage the same work, their differences are crucial to their understandings and interpretations of the work, and may be beneficial to each other in showing a new possibility for understanding.

Furthermore, by foregrounding the role of understanding in philosophical activity, the aesthetic experience metaphor necessarily includes the continual role of self-understanding in any project of understanding. This highlights the reflexivity of the artist and the participant, as they are each continually in the process of modifying their own understanding as they approach the work. On a combat metaphor, participants in a dialogue become combatants. They are encouraged to look only to victory and the means for gaining victory. As such, they are not encouraged to engage in meta-critique\textsuperscript{378} of what they are doing—soldiers on the battlefield must obey orders, not question why and how the are entering into combat. However, on an aesthetic experience metaphor, because every engagement with the work is also an engagement of self-understanding and so involves the modification of one’s pre-judgments, the participant is encouraged to

\textsuperscript{377} See Chapter Two Section II.B.3.
\textsuperscript{378} See Chapter Two Section II.B.4.
reflect on herself, her understanding, her culture and tradition, and questions about the nature and intentionality of the work.

On an aesthetic experience metaphor, philosophical activity is seen as having its own sense of appropriateness. A work of art raises its own possibilities and part of its success is responding to and fulfilling those possibilities well; this is the intentionality of the work, and the work’s sense of rightness or authenticity. Mapping this onto philosophical activity, we can see that the problems with the earliest formulation of the play metaphor\(^{379}\) are not relevant here. Artworks that raise possibilities of deep and abiding human concern succeed when their response to and fulfillment of those possibilities is proportionate to the nature of the possibility. Flippancy or light inconsistency is not possible of a work that carries out its intentionality. Thus, in the realm of philosophical activity, serious questions call for serious answers and serious engagement.

Finally, if philosophical activity requires distance then the problem of absorption\(^{380}\) (as seen in the play metaphor) cannot occur. Distance requires that those engaged with the work maintain a minimum of distance—they are neither overwhelmed by their own affairs nor subsumed into the work. Distance as a condition is the establishment of space for self-reflexivity; as a continual return to the negotiation between the personal and the impersonal, distance requires us to pay careful attention to ourselves and to the question.

As the play metaphor was developed in Chapter Three, we noted its connections with and approach to the realm of aesthetics. At this point, we can more definitely state

\(^{379}\) See Chapter Three Section I.B.
\(^{380}\) See Chapter Three Section III.B.
these connections: the aesthetic experience metaphor includes room for elements of the play metaphor. For Gadamer, play is the being of the work of art—it is the ceaseless wellspring of meaning the work of art displays, which invites participants in and yet eludes their ability to completely grasp it. Play is in the close side of distance, the inexhaustibility of the work of art, and the constant renewal of the participant’s interpretation. Aesthetic experience brings the necessary distance or space to the play metaphor, while the play metaphor situates itself in terms of the responsiveness and interconnections between artists, works, and participants, the creativity of playfulness, and the holistic perspective of the Zhuangzi. The aesthetic experience metaphor not only responds to the challenges of the combat metaphor, but is also able to accommodate the play metaphor within it.

2. Coming to an Understanding in Aesthetic Experience

On this metaphor, how do we understand the important philosophical tasks of coming to an understanding or solving a problem? If we first consider the idea that philosophical activity, like aesthetic experience, has a felt consummation, then coming to an understanding or solving a problem would be this consummation of experience. Solving a problem or coming to an understanding, like coming to rest with an interpretation or understanding of a work, is never a terminal process. If each question, like each work of art, has the character of inexhaustibility, this means that each solution is provisional, and can always be returned to and revised.
Consider the assertion made by John Keats that all creative geniuses possess “Negative capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties.”\textsuperscript{381} If aesthetic experience encourages us to dwell for periods of time in doubt, then on the metaphor of philosophical activity as aesthetic experience, we are encouraged philosophically to become comfortable with the productivity of uncertainty and ambiguity, even while working toward an integrated development of the question.

The aesthetic experience metaphor also highlights the importance of creativity and skill development in philosophical problem solving. Just as a musician practices scales or a brush painter practices bamboo, so too the philosopher must hone her intellectual and interpersonal skills through practice. However, artists are not simply repeating what has come before, and neither are philosophers. The element of creativity in philosophical activity can be disguised on alternate metaphors, but remains firmly in the foreground when philosophical activity is understood as aesthetic experience. In addition, the priority of process seen in aesthetic experience suggests that solving a philosophical problem, like understanding a work of art, rests on being able to work one’s way through the process of creating the problem in order to better appreciate and understand it.

III. Conclusion

This chapter articulates key features of aesthetic experience as a metaphorical source domain for philosophical activity. It argues that the aesthetic experience metaphor

\textsuperscript{381} John Keats, in a letter to his brothers George and Thomas on December 21, 1817.
is capable of responding to the problems found with the combat and play metaphors, as well as adding additional dimensions to our conceptualization of philosophical activity. Taking this chapter as an object lesson of the argument it makes, the chapter as a whole can be seen as a question—what would it mean to understand philosophical activity as aesthetic experience—and the development of that question. As the author of this chapter, I am its artist and my care for the question is evident in these pages, but there are many hands in addition to mine visible here, from teachers and colleagues to the various influences of my education and training up to this point. The materials I’ve brought together here form an integrated whole that has purposive movement from beginning to end. And while I am a participant with this text, the reader is also a participant, attempting to understand and appreciate my question and development of the question. In addition, the reader may note that my engagement with the various materials in this chapter attempts to follow the metaphor as I have articulated it here; the goal of my engagement has been neither to demonstrate my victory over these authors nor just to play with their texts, but rather to appreciate their arguments and integrate them productively into my own work.

Charles Baudelaire writes that “In order for the artist to have a world to express he must first be situated in this world, oppressed or oppressing, resigned or rebellious, a man among men.”382 There are several powerful critiques of aesthetic theory found in the work of twentieth century thinkers that stress Baudelaire’s point: art is not separate from lived experience. One element we don’t see from Deutsch, Gadamer, or most of the

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Asian sources mentioned here is a response to this type of critique of aesthetic theory. John Dewey, for example, argues that in the contemporary world,

Art is remitted to a separate realm, where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effort, undergoing, and achievement. A primary task is thus imposed upon one who undertakes to write upon the philosophy of the fine arts. This task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience.\(^{383}\)

That is, Dewey charges philosophers with the task of reconnecting aesthetic experience with experience in general; all experience should strive to be aesthetic. A similar critique is found in the work of playwright and theoretician Bertold Brecht, who famously claimed that the only non-political art is the art of the ruling class.\(^ {384}\)

What does Brecht mean by this claim? He means that the only time we are unconscious of the prejudices of our social locations (race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.) is when we are members of the privileged group. Art does not separate us from the masses, but reveals us as inevitably socially located.

While Deutsch and Gadamer don’t specifically address this concern, we can see how the understanding of aesthetic experience developed in this chapter does encourage artists and participants to be aware of the importance of intersections of personal identity

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\(^{383}\) Dewey, 2.

\(^{384}\) Bertolt Brecht, “Thus for art to be ‘unpolitical’ means only to ally itself with the ‘ruling’ group,” in “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” in Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic, ed. and trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), Section 55, pp. 196.
as they relate to the work of art. If the critique of metaphor involves, as David Cooper\(^{385}\) suggests, the Frankfurt School-style articulation of hidden assumptions in everyday language, then the aesthetic experience metaphor, in responding to certain other metaphors for philosophical activity, attempts to be self-consciously political, in the sense explained above. Each element in aesthetic experience is socially, historically, racially, and experientially located, and those locations are relevant not only to how the work becomes a work, but also to how it fulfills its possibilities, the creativity it manifests, and the ways in which participants can understand it.

Furthermore, if we take seriously the idea that the way we understand “the philosopher” has something to tell us about the way we understand human beings, then the philosopher as artist and participant in aesthetic experience gives us a vision of persons as contextual, creative, and striving for understanding and appreciation. As Dewey himself suggests, we can say that philosophers, no less than artists or participants, should be striving for all activity to be philosophical. That is, on an aesthetic experience metaphor philosophical activity is not something for special occasions only, but rather an activity to treat as a living art; if all experience should strive to be aesthetic then the fully philosophical life is the goal of the philosopher’s aspirations.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

“But it is by no means an easy matter to change the metaphors we live by.”
—Lakoff and Johnson

This dissertation has demonstrated the need for careful attention to the metaphors we use to describe, understand, and conduct philosophical activity. Beginning with the issue of the role of metaphor in metaphilosophical discourse, the first chapter engaged cognitive linguistics, hermeneutics, and correlative thinking in Chinese philosophy to argue that metaphor is a key component in how we think. It provides structure to our conceptual systems and is a large part of the process of understanding. As such, philosophical activity, which includes thinking about our thinking, when seeking to understand itself also must critically reflect on its metaphors.

The second chapter turned its attention toward a specific metaphor for philosophical activity—the combat metaphor. This chapter demonstrated the socio-historical situatedness of the combat metaphor as a way of understanding and doing philosophy, going back to the time of the Ancient Greeks. It also pointed out that the metaphor is not meaningfully found in certain other philosophical traditions, lending weight to the claim that the prevalence of the combat metaphor is not a universal phenomenon. The chapter then focused on ways in which the combat metaphor is inadequate as a way of understanding and conducting philosophical activity.

The third chapter moves from the combat metaphor—a finite game—to the play metaphor—an infinite game. It opened with a discussion of the importance of treating play as distinct from *agon*. The chapter then focused on Gadamer’s account of play, and

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386 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 145.
how that play can be used to understand philosophy. Next, the Zhuangzi’s account of play is discussed, as a means of supplementing Gadamer’s concept of play. This recreated account of play is then used to understand philosophical activity—when we play with ideas, we situate ourselves at the center of the wheel, moving flexibly to-and-fro with our playmates as we rove about in and are absorbed by the play of the world. Although the play metaphor has many benefits for understanding philosophical activity, the chapter concludes by addressing certain ways in which play is undesirable as a metaphor for philosophical activity.

Chapter Four sought to respond to the issues of Chapters Two and Three by building a metaphor for philosophical activity as aesthetic experience. In order to do this, the chapter first discussed the nature of aesthetic experience, focusing on the triadic structure—artist, work of art, and participant—as a framework. Drawing on not only western but also on certain elements from Chinese aesthetics, the first half of the chapter demonstrated the importance of the negativity of experience and aesthetic distance in aesthetic experience. The next section of the chapter articulated the metaphor of philosophy as aesthetic experience, discussing how it responded to the inadequacies of the combat and play metaphors, and what makes it unique as a metaphor.

Despite the attractiveness of the aesthetic experience metaphor, we can be sensitive to Lakoff and Johnson’s concerns, voiced in the opening quotation, regarding the difficulty of changing our metaphors, especially when dealing with one that is sunk as deeply into our historical, cultural, and linguistic systems as the combat metaphor. This does not lead to lamenting the futility of considering alternatives, however, but rather to looking for a point of access—can the aesthetic experience metaphor help us to
understand a something the combat metaphor does well? Is it more capacious? Not only does the aesthetic experience metaphor respond to the inadequacies of the combat and play metaphors taken separately, but it is a more comprehensive metaphor. We have already seen how the aesthetic experience metaphor is helpful in terms of understanding the connections between play and aesthetic experience, and how the play metaphor fits into the more holistic aesthetic experience metaphor. Building on the previous discussions, this chapter addresses how, on an aesthetic experience metaphor, we can understand practices of dealing with difference and disagreement—one facet of philosophical activity that is intuitively captured well by the combat metaphor. We can understand this as a philosophical sense of “oppositionality”—how we, as philosophers, deal with difference, disagreement, and critique amongst ourselves and with concepts, ideas, texts, and traditions. To oppose is to place oneself in contrast to, to struggle against, to face or be opposite to something, to resist, and to counter or disagree with. On the combat metaphor, this is formulated under the banner of victory and defeat—Combat is an agonistic oppositional practice, focused on victory over and against the other. However, oppositionality shapes and is shaped by how we understand philosophical activity—the metaphors we use to describe and conduct philosophical activities. As such, the sense of oppositionality found in the combat metaphor as described in Chapter Two is only one way of understanding practices surrounding difference and disagreement. This

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387 This is not to suggest that we are looking for the one metaphor to rule them all—this is not an argument for aesthetic experience as the only or even the best metaphor, but as a more adequate metaphor. One of the ways in which it is more adequate as a metaphor is its capaciousness, its capacity for including contributions from the other metaphors.

388 In the projects of thinking about thinking, conceptual clarification, and searching for deeper understanding regarding questions and issues central to human concern, we find many ways in which we must deal with difference, disagreement, and critique. Oppositionality is a part—but only a part—of philosophical activity.
chapter uses the aesthetic experience metaphor to construct a non-agonistic (non-hostile) account of oppositionality—a loving sense of oppositionality.\(^{389}\)

I. Oppositionality in Combat

On the combat metaphor as described in Chapter Two, oppositionality is hostile and agonistic, but we can imagine that this is not necessarily the only way to understand it. This section begins with an exploration of combat in a different cultural context—early China—and identifies some ways in which combat, as a socially and historically situated concept, is different in early China, and how these differences can be productive. The next portion of this section looks at alternate philosophical traditions that have embraced elements of a combat metaphor—specifically, it examines two traditions of dharma combat. What role does dharma combat play in these traditions? How can looking at dharma combat help us to think through an aesthetic sense of oppositionality?

A. Combat in early China

Combat is a culturally situated concept, and the philosophical literature on combat differs widely across traditions. Francois Jullien writes that while for Clausewitz, “in warfare, the sole object of an engagement is the destruction of the enemy forces...The

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\(^{389}\) This is especially important considering certain anti-utopian/futilist critiques of oppositionality, i.e. questions regarding the purpose of oppositional activities given a world that may never achieve a situation that does not require opposition, where “victory” is an unattainable goal. These critiques are not only politically but also interpersonally applicable.
ancient Chinese treatise on warfare recommends the exact opposite.”\textsuperscript{390} That is, we can look to classical Chinese discussions of combat to rethink the role of oppositionality in combat. As discussed previously, Chinese thinking is generally characterized by an emphasis on aesthetic order—the importance of each particular element in a holistic pattern. This is as true of military thinking as it is of discussions of morality or art. Roger Ames notes that “It is the ability of the leader to achieve ‘harmony,’ however it is defined, that is signatory of what it means to be a person of superior character, whether this harmony is expressed through communal leadership or through military prowess.”\textsuperscript{391} In other words, military thinking in early China is structured aesthetically, with an eye toward restoring harmony rather than conquest.\textsuperscript{392} This harmony is a harmony between persons, families, ministers, states, and the cosmos at large.\textsuperscript{393} This is not to say, however, that Chinese warfare (of the pre-Qin period, specifically) had any fewer casualties, or was any less brutal or inhumane than western warfare. Rather, this emphasis on harmony points to the role of aesthetic values in thought during this period and to the start of the divergences between a classical Chinese understanding of combat and a more traditional western understanding.

When discussing warfare in early China, there are many texts that are available as resources. Almost all early Chinese philosophical texts contain at least some discussion of warfare, from strategy and tactics to the behavior of generals and the need for an

\textsuperscript{392} For more on harmony, see Chapter Four, section I.B.3
\textsuperscript{393} From the opening passages of the \textit{Daxue} (大學): “When things and events are investigated, ideas and intentions become sincere; when ideas and intentions are sincere, hearts-and-minds are attuned; when hearts-and-minds are attuned, one’s person is cultivated; when one’s person is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; and when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world.”
ordered government. However, the *Sunzi* (孫子) and the *Sun Bin* (孫臏) stand out as among the oldest and most widely studied military treatises in the world. The *Sunzi* originated as a text during the Warring States period (403—221 BCE) and is attributed to Sun Wu, a military commander who was roughly a contemporary of Confucius. The *Sun Bin* is attributed to Sun Bin, a later descendent or follower of Sun Wu. These texts are particularly useful for our purposes here because they present a strikingly different picture of what combat meant to these early Chinese thinkers (and practitioners) than their western counterparts. Not only were the early Chinese concerned with aesthetic structuring, in terms of harmony, but warfare was explicitly understood as a last resort—if one had to go to war, one had failed in some important respect. The *Sun Bin* states: “You must go to war only when there is no other alternative.” War is not a glorified enterprise, but is seen as a project to be undertaken only when all the other means at one’s disposal have been exhausted. This is a recognition of the extreme costs of warfare, on the state, the soldiers, their families, crops and provisions, trade, and morale. Roger Ames writes that in classical China, war is justifiable only when all possible alternatives have been exhausted, and must be entertained with the utmost seriousness...The first priority is the avoidance of warfare if at all possible. Once, however, a commitment has been made to a military course of action, the project becomes to achieve victory at the minimum cost.

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395 See *Sunzi*, Chapter 2.
This idea of achieving victory at the minimum cost is connected with the notion that in warfare, the enemy is to be encircled and brought into one’s own state, not destroyed outright. Jullien writes that Chapter Three of the Sunzi “begins by laying down the following principle: ‘In general, the best way of proceeding in war is to keep the [enemy] country intact.’ To destroy it is not the best option.” At the point when one is committed to war, committed to victory, one is precisely not committed to the destruction of the enemy, but rather to doing one’s best to make sure that the enemy’s state, infrastructure, lands, citizens, and soldiers remain as whole as possible.

Before going to war—before marching out the troops—the good general has already put in place everything needed for success. This is the idea of upstream manipulation: the good general begins by making small changes that will lead to favorable conditions for his army. Chapter Eight of the Sunzi states: “Do not depend on the enemy not coming; depend rather on being ready for him. Do not depend on the enemy not attacking; depend rather on having a position that cannot be attacked.” That is, good generals practices foresight—they anticipate the possibilities of a situation, from well before it begins, and see the many ways in which it could develop. By making small alterations before the situation actually begins, they can put into place circumstances that are most fortuitous.

Furthermore, a distinct sense of what it means to be an enemy, to be in opposition to another, emerges from these texts. Jullien writes that the Yijing, the foundational early

397 Jullien, 47.
399 Jullien distinguishes the Chinese sense of efficacy from a Greek-derived sense of efficacy in part by focusing on the differences between how the two understood goals and consequences, the role of deliberation, and means-ends relationships. For more on this, see Jullien, 45. He is not suggesting that no other generals cared about planning or anticipating possibilities, but rather that the inevitability of transformative processes has a different sense than the agent who brings about change—he is relying on a subtle ontological distinction here.
Chinese text, “is constructed on the basis of the opposition between two types of strokes, the one continuous, the other broken, representing the two poles of every process, interprets reality as a continuous transformation.”

This is seen in the realm of combat in the use of a series of polar correlations: us/enemy, aggressor/defender, attack/defend, many/few, strong/weak, courage/timidity, intimate/distant, full/empty, slow/fast, movement/stillness/ rested/exhausted, order/disorder, viable/fatal, victory/defeat, surprise/straightforward, advance/retreat. These polar correlations illustrate “the assumption that any situation definable on a continuum can be manipulated into its polar opposite.”

To be opposed, on this view, is not to be separate from—this is not an absolute opposition where the presence of one opposite entails the negation of the other, where the opposites are fully distinct, separate, and mutually exclusive—but is rather to be intimately bound up with one’s opposition. The sense of continuous transformation carried down from the Yijing is here, in a military context, the sense that opposition is a form of transformation. The enemy becomes us if on their defeat they are intact and encircled into our state. Opposition here is a necessary process of movement between positions and strategies that is, however, neither absolute nor final. This kind of transformation was seen throughout the history of the Chinese tradition; for more than half of its two thousand years of imperial history, China was ruled by foreigners. The strategy for long-term victory here was one of cultural transformation rather than direct opposition—after the Mongol defeat of the Song Dynasty, for example, the Mongolians were sinified in a process that both transformed them and enriched Chinese culture.

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400 Jullien, 51.
Using these considerations to think through philosophical activity and the role of oppositionality in philosophy, we can see a vision of oppositionality that is not hostile—not intent on the destruction of opposing forces, but rather one that attempts to keep them as intact as possible. This is an oppositionality that is a last resort, only after all other options have been exhausted. In terms of philosophical activity, it is a useful opposition in exercises of anticipation; like the good general, the philosopher seeks to anticipate possible problems and set into place the conditions for success. Additionally, this view of opposition is one of polar opposites, not absolute opposites, where the opposing forces are understood as mutually informing and transforming.

B. Dharma Combat

The Greek tradition is also not the only tradition to have seen philosophical activity and intellectual exchange in terms of combat. Within the many Buddhist traditions, several take dharma combat—intellectual combat regarding the teachings of the Buddha—to be an important part of their practice. What follows is a brief discussion of two of these practices of dharma combat—in Tibetan Ge-luk Buddhism and in Linji Chan Buddhism.

1. Tibetan Buddhist Debate

Among the monks of the Ge-luk school of Tibetan Buddhism, practice and mastery of a form of dharma combat known as “debate” is an important part of the training. One of the best windows into this training process comes from the semi-
autobiographical text, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*, by Georges B. J. Dreyfus, a Geshe in the Ge-luk tradition.\(^{402}\) In this text, he argues that one of the best ways to understand Tibetan Buddhist debate is as an aesthetic practice: “debate is performative and fun...A good debate is akin to a theatrical event.”\(^{403}\) Debates are highly structured events, beginning with a ritual invocation and following strict rules. They take place between a questioner and a defender; the defender puts forth a true thesis and proceeds to defend that thesis against the questioner, who through his questions is trying to get the defender to utter something contradictory. The defender has only three possible responses to any given question, and a limited amount of time in which to answer. These debates take place in a specific location within the monastery—the debating courtyard—and may be witnessed by hundreds of monks and lay people. They are very physical and proscribed gestures are used throughout the event. The debate creates and is situated in an aesthetic atmosphere and is judged to some extent by criteria of performance.

In addition to highlighting the performative character of debates, Dreyfus notes their crucial pedagogical functions: debates are “dialectical practices aimed at reaching greater understanding and developing crucial intellectual habits;”\(^{404}\) they are not “sterile intellectual shell games but [are] lively intellectual practices that embody the creativity of this tradition.”\(^{405}\) That is, although the debates are highly structured, their structures act

\(^{402}\) Another excellent resource for debate in Tibetan Buddhism is Kenneth Liberman’s *Dialectical Practice in Tibetan Philosophical Culture: An Ethnomethodological Inquiry Into Formal Reasoning,*


\(^{404}\) Ibid, 200.

\(^{405}\) Ibid, 198. Note one of the differences between this and practices of intellectual combat in early Greece: the Buddhist combat is a constant cycle of negation, where victory itself is also a negation (the establishment of a contradiction indicating that the premise of the defendant is problematic). Putting forth a thesis that is not shown to lead to contradictions does not lead to victory in this tradition.
akin to the performance of a play where some lines may be set, but the actors in taking up their roles have the potential for great creativity.

Debates are pedagogical in three distinct senses. First, the debates require students to internalize the texts of their tradition and make the arguments their own: “Those who must debate a topic are forced to assimilate the texts that present the topic.” The debates serve as an engaging way to get students to learn the history and texts of their tradition; this is not unlike the gongfu of Chinese calligraphers, who practice the pieces of the masters over and over again. Second, training in debate requires students to foster careful analytic skills and teaches them important questioning skills: “one can be trained to learn how to ask questions, in an education that fosters the habit to see what is questionable in the propositions one encounters. This is what debate provides.” That is, because students perform both the roles of defender and questioner, they learn both how to develop a position in a consistent fashion and how to find problems in chains of reasoning. Third, these students are not just any students—they are monks in training. Debates are an important way that these student-monks begin to internalize and realize the central tenets of their religion and tradition: “The use of debate as a method of inquiry is particularly appropriate to the Madhyamaka approach.” Briefly, Madhyamaka traditions focus on a non-dual understanding of emptiness. They hold that in persons or things/events in the world, there are no fixed or unchanging substances (souls, for example). The first step in training, then, is to recognize that positive reification—there are real beings/things—is illusory. The second step is to recognize that this does not lead to nothingness—negative reification is also illusory. The student is then left with an

408 Ibid, 239.
understanding of emptiness that values the impermanent and fleeting character of persons/things without reifying them in either direction; the mind is freed from a dualistic understanding and able to embrace emptiness. However, this is not solely an intellectual endeavor, and thus requires a method that engages not only one’s intellect, but one’s whole person: an “approach is needed that enables one to understand emptiness while at the same time undoing any characterization used in the process.”

As Dreyfus characterizes it, Tibetan Buddhist debate is this kind of holistic method, engaging not only one’s intellect, but also one’s emotions and perceptions.

Victory in a debate occurs only when the questioner proves that the defender is holding a contradictory position. Thus, the positive moment of the debate is a constant negation. Debates demonstrate that any position is open to criticism and any interpretation is provisional. In a sense, they perform the negativity of experience, the not-yet-known that sparks the drive to understand and appreciate.

Dreyfus also notes an intriguing feature of these debates: students are encouraged to lose. He writes, “Teachers would even encourage us to lose. ‘Do not seek easy victory but always prefer a defeat that will advance your learning,’ was their unanimous advice. Another statement often heard was that the person who loses wins, for he is the one who gains some ‘better understanding’.” This illustrates the fact that the combative features of these debates are in service to a non-combative goal—better understanding and practice of the dharma, of their tradition.

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410 Ibid, 197.
411 Dreyfus does note that this is not always how the debates actually unfold—teachers often remind students to be aware of their motivations, and to not take excessive pride in winning a debate.
2. Linji’s Dharma Combat

Linji Yixuan (臨濟義玄) was a Chan Buddhist master who lived in the ninth century ACE. He became the founder of the Linji school of Chan Buddhism, which later developed into the Japanese school of Rinzai Zen. This tradition is characterized by certain Mahayana commitments, including the identification of emptiness and co-dependent origination, no-self, a focus on impermanence and non-attachment, the connection between impermanence, compassion, and aesthetic sensitivity\(^{412}\), and the already present Buddha-nature; it also shares many features with the Chinese tradition out of which it developed, including especially its aesthetic inheritance from the Zhuangzi. One of the practices (in a literal and in a literary sense) that became important for the development of Chan is dharma combat—an often emotionally charged confrontation or story of an encounter between teacher and student (or teacher and teacher) regarding some aspect of the teachings of the Buddha, for the purpose of helping the student to achieve a realization.\(^{413}\) As Peter Hershock explains,

instead of offering doctrines and explanations, Linji’s practice was to challenge his audience, asking if any among them would be ready to enter into ‘dharma combat.’ In a typical occurrence, a monk came forward before the assembly and asked Linji to explain the meaning of one of his teaching phrases: the ‘true person of no rank.’ In response, Linji leapt down off the teaching platform, took the

\(^{412}\) This is particularly characteristic of the Japanese schools of Zen (and Buddhism in general). In Japanese aesthetics, we see this in terms of the important aesthetic values of *mono-no-aware* (物の哀れ the heightened sensitivity to and appreciation of impermanence) and *wabi-sabi* (侘寂 the aesthetic value and appreciation of things that are old, broken, decaying, or in some way manifesting their impermanence).

\(^{413}\) For an example of how Chan dharma combat is used today, see John Daido Loori’s *The Cave of Tigers: The Living Zen Practice of Dharma Combat*. For a more in-depth discussion of the literary role of encounter dialogues, see John R. McRae’s *Seeing Through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*. 

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monk by the throat, and began choking him, demanding that he ‘speak! speak!’...the monk hesitates, deliberating about what to do. He is turned loose with a snort and a crude rebuke. ‘What kind of used shit-wiping stick is this “true person of no rank”? ’

Not all dharma combat is actual physical combat, like this story, although there are many stories in Chan literature that describe a master beating a student with a stick, or hitting or kicking their disciples, often with the result of sudden enlightenment. Like the Tibetan Buddhist debate described earlier, Chan dharma combat is used as an important teaching tool—teaching not just for intellectual understanding, but for a holistic realization.

In the story above, the student has demonstrated that he has not yet realized his true nature and is still fixed on a conception of himself and a need for principles and formulae from which to act. The limitations of the student’s understanding are preventing him from the kind of immediate and virtuosic response characteristic of someone who is practicing enlightenment.

The idea, then, is not that a combative encounter is a necessary part of how we think or reason, but that one must be able to shift flexibly between perspectives—to take

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414 Peter Hershock, Chan Buddhism, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005) 123.
415 Often the stories contain some element of metaphorical, paradoxical, or illogical response designed to help the student realize her own Buddha-nature.
416 This is also true of the role that these stories play in a literary sense—many such stories come from the classical period of Chan, and were used later to help students cultivate an aesthetic sensibility to themselves, others, and their tradition.
417 For more, see Hershock, 123. The true nature of the student is his Buddha-nature. The student has yet to understand—and practice his understanding—that he does not have a self, and that he is intrinsically connected with all other beings. Linji’s “true person of no rank” has no fixed position from which to act, no firm or isolated self to guide their actions.
418 Most Chan schools argue that enlightenment is not a final goal to be reached through practice, but that practice is enlightenment. Thus the goal of the teaching moment is to get the student to understand the causes of her suffering and ignorance, and to practice in such a way as to become enlightened in her every action. This is why the cook has such a valued place in most Chan monasteries.
on an aesthetic perspective of non-attachment. Dharma combat is done for the sake of the other, to help her realize, understand, and practice enlightenment. It is, in an important sense, a pedagogical tool. The teacher does not engage in dharma combat to demonstrate victory over her students, but acts out of compassion for the suffering of others—she wants her students to recognize the source of their suffering in their fixed attachments to themselves, their ideas, and the world. This compassion arises from an appreciation of the impermanence of all things and the attendant feelings of loss and suffering. This sense of compassion can also be seen to have certain resonances with loving consciousness, as discussed in Chapter Four; loving consciousness as a feature of aesthetic experience is a way of approach to a work of art (or another participant) characterized by a recognition of the value and inexhaustibility of the other, in her otherness.

Linji also advised his students to “Face the world and walk crosswise.” That is, we recognize and appreciate the particulars of our current situation and we do everything we can to help alleviate the suffering of others. We “turn things around. Change their meaning. The responsibility that goes along with taking the bodhisattva vows of Mahayana Buddhism does not have any limit.” In vowing to postpone one’s own enlightenment until all beings are enlightened—recognizing that given co-dependent origination and emptiness there is no enlightenment for one without all—one also recognizes a responsibility to and for others that can never fully be met. The response to this is an aesthetic response, sensitive to the particulars and their relationships with one

419 In the case of this story, the student is stuck in—attached to—a goal-seeking perspective.
420 Linji, qtd. in Hershock, 125.
421 Hershock, 125.
422 And, on Dōgen’s reading, there is no enlightenment that is not right here and now, in this very world.
another—a responsiveness to and appreciation for situations as they emerge in their uniqueness. The aesthetic nature of this response is also seen in its parallel with aesthetic distance as discussed in Chapter Four—the Bodhisattva vow calls for maximum commitment and minimum attachment⁴²³—in terms of seeking the least possible distance between oneself and the work, for example, while still maintaining necessary distance.⁴²⁴ To act out of compassion for others is to appreciate their inexhaustibility, to try and understand them in their own context, while not foisting one’s conception onto them.

From the perspective of these practices of dharma combat, we can see the oppositionality of philosophical activity in terms of a kind of performance that has important pedagogical functions for both the performers and the community, and that is ultimately for the sake of greater understanding (and personal realization). This is an opposition undertaken out of compassion, for oneself and for the other, with an aesthetic appreciation of the interdependence and impermanence of all things.

II. Oppositionality in Play/Playfulness

Returning to Chapter Three and the play metaphor for philosophical activity, which is now situated under the auspices of aesthetic experience, we can appreciate how understanding philosophical activity as play and as playful helps us understand oppositional encounters. First, when we play philosophy, we play with playmates. Our playmates are not incidental; they are constitutive of the possibility of play. As such,

⁴²³ My thanks to Thomas Jackson for this phrase.
⁴²⁴ For more on the parallels between aesthetic distance and compassion, see Steve Odin’s *Artistic Detachment in Japan and The West: Psychic Distance in Comparative Aesthetics.*
moments of opposition within play are not opportunities for getting rid of one’s playmates, forcing them off the field of play, but rather are opportunities for continuing the engagement. Without the other there is no play—while opposition in combat leads to the defeat of one party, and so to their demise as opponents, in play opposition enriches the field of possibilities. Opposition in play is about responsiveness, not about removal of the other from play.

Additionally, if we consider again Lugones’s arguments surrounding loving playfulness as a way of approaching others and creating situations of play, we can appreciate oppositionality in terms of loving playfulness. What does this mean? It means that the moment of opposition, when approached playfully, is an opportunity for understanding and appreciation, an opportunity to turn a potentially combative situation into play. We approach others (we world-travel) in order to try and understand them, to appreciate them in their specificity. Lugones argues that agonistic play (combat) is imperialistic; it can do nothing but try to take over the other. Loving playfulness, on the other hand, does not try to take over the other, but recognizes the ways in which the other is inexhaustible and non-totalizable. A lovingly playful approach to another does not begin with a fixed conception of self, a reified sense of who I am and who she is. Instead, it begins with creativity and flexibility—who are we to one another? It proceeds through care for the other in all her particularities, in an attempt to understand her and her world, on her own terms. For those we disagree with (especially about matters that shape and make our lives meaningful), this approach is especially important. As playmates we are already engaged in an intimate relationship with one another, and finding ourselves in
opposition to our playmates can be difficult. However, because the drive is to continue the play, we seek first to understand and appreciate, rather than to overcome the other.

We must also keep in mind the seriousness internal to play when we are considering play(ful) opposition. Not all opposition is resolvable, but as Carse notes, “Who chooses to compete with another can also choose to play with another.” That is, part of playing with others (in the sense of infinite games) is about learning how to deal productively with opposition, especially when it comes to serious issues. If play has as its purpose its own continuation, then the quality of relationships between playmates is key to maintaining play. This does not suggest that playmates need to agree with one another about everything, but that oppositional encounters recognize the importance of the oppositional issue to one another, and respond accordingly.

Carse uses his finite/infinite game distinction metaphorically to analyze not only games, as such, but careers, society and culture, family, sexuality, and politics. Consider for a moment the example of parenting, in terms of play and oppositionality. When approached as an infinite game, parenting centers on the quality of relationship between parent and child, and the ability of each to flourish as human beings. This does not mean that there are never moments of opposition between parent and child. For example, take an adult child who disagrees with a parent on an important issue. The child believes the parent to be mistaken, and thus finds herself in a situation of opposition

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425 Carse, 100.
426 Carse is careful to note that within infinite games, finite games can and are played—they take on a different character when placed in an infinite context. Thus the relationship between finite and infinite games is not one of mutual exclusion.
427 He gives the example, to contrast, of parenting approached as a finite game, wherein a mother does not recognize a difference between her feelings as a mother and her feelings as her—she forgets or allows herself to forget that she is “playing” a role, not to win but to enjoy.
428 We can imagine a variety of examples here, from the socio-political (racism, gender roles, marriage, the war on terror) to the more personal (issues of interpersonal interaction).
with her parent. In a situation of infinite play, the child seeks a way of opposition that preserves the relationship and the quality of their play, while not dismissing or ignoring the issue of opposition.

Using parenting relationships as an example of how oppositionality can be understood in term of the play of infinite games, we can consider the early Confucian tradition—one that has given careful thought and attention to parent-child relationships, among others, and that shares certain premises with infinite games. Early Confucian thought can give us some suggestions for how oppositionality might work in play, with the idea of remonstration as a means of addressing/resolving opposition, rather than direct confrontation or combative opposition. In discussions of filiality (xiao 孝), a common piece of advice is “do not act contrary.” This is tempered, however, with frequent injunctions regarding the need for careful remonstration: Confucius said, “In serving your father and mother, remonstrate with them gently.” That is, approach an issue of opposition in terms of care for the other and your relationship; emphasize careful adjustment rather than direct confrontation. Recognizing that direct confrontation between parent and child is unlikely to lead to the desired change in behavior/thought, the Analects advises us to consider remonstrance (jian 讚), an earnest and careful presentation of reasons for opposition that is structured around the relationship of those involved, and which points out or demonstrates the problem in question.

429 For example, shared premises include irreducible relationality and the locus of ethical action in relationships, and the importance of tradition and practices of continuing and expanding tradition and culture.
431 Ibid, 4.18.
Putting this idea in concert with that of passage 2.13 fleshes out this idea of remonstrance further: “Zigong asked about exemplary persons (junzi 君子). The Master replied: ‘They first accomplish what they are going to say, and only then say it’.”\footnote{Ibid, 2.13.}

When remonstrating with someone, especially someone with whom you are in a close relationship, the idea is not to change the other person forcibly, but to demonstrate within oneself a commitment that will make the other want to change.\footnote{See also discourses on laihua 来化. Additionally, see Analects 4.1—the multitude of stars pay the north star tribute because it is demonstrating its excellence, they are drawn to it. If our behavior affects those around us, then changing our behavior can change the behavior of others.} This is not direct confrontation, but alteration and response to opposition through example. We also see, in passage 4.20, an injunction to refrain from changing one’s late father’s ways for three years after his death. This tells us that we should take the time and care to try to understand our father’s position, why he did what he did, before altering it. We seek first to understand and appreciate, and when we find ourselves in opposition, keeping this in mind, act carefully, making small moves and suggestions, making sure that our actions are in accord with what we wish to say to the other. We recognize that as children, we too will someday be parents. In the infinite play of family relationships, we succeed one another in our roles. As such, when we find ourselves in opposition we take the time to understand both our own position/actions and those of our parent, before beginning a careful dialogue on the issue.\footnote{Additionally, remonstrance sometimes also implies the need for triangulation, for a third-party’s involvement.}

When heard in concert with the play metaphor, opposition in philosophical activity takes on the character of remonstrance, of responsiveness in loving playfulness that recognizes the seriousness and importance of the situation. Because play seeks to
continue itself, moments of opposition are handled in terms of maintaining and preserving the quality of one’s relationships with one’s playmates, while seeking remonstrance rather than direct confrontation. In play, how one is oppositional is key to whether or not the play continues and with what quality.

III. The Aesthetic Experience Metaphor and Oppositionality

Chapter Four’s metaphor of philosophical activity as aesthetic experience also presents directly certain resources for reconceptualizing oppositionality in aesthetic terms. The aesthetic experience metaphor reflects oppositionality in three interrelated ways: the artist struggling with her work; the work opposing some facet of the world; and participants opposing one another regarding a work. As discussed in some detail in Chapter Four, harmony is a key aesthetic value, and will help us greatly in thinking through oppositionality in aesthetic terms. If harmony is an important goal—and this is not a harmony of identity but a multivocal harmony that engages difference—then oppositionality, as a manifestation of difference, is a point of productivity, of richness and diversity that adds to the whole.

An artist struggles with her work—she works within the bounds of her tradition, her skills, her understanding and appreciation, the materials and techniques available to her—in order to create the work.\textsuperscript{435} This is oppositionality as creative tension. John

\textsuperscript{435} Recall here the important role of distance in artistic creation—the artist is not just emoting, for example, but to use Dewey’s metaphor, is a vintner using her own grapes to make wine. Even in the case of an artistic genius like Mozart, for whom the music just came, there is still the movement between what he heard in his mind and his hand, the pen, the paper, the notes—how to transform his inner music into a form that was recognizable by others, for example. Some artists who operate like this will complain, for instance, that they cannot write quickly enough to keep up with what has come to them.
Dewey writes, “Since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved [the aesthetic], he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. He rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities.” There is no creation without resistance: resistance from oneself, from the environment, society, language, tradition, materials, or skill.

Works of art can themselves also stand oppositionally to features of the world. Consider the importantly oppositional role some works of art have played in commenting on or inciting social change, from Picasso’s *Guernica* to Tangerine’s recent graffiti *Who’s Afraid of Ai Wei Wei*? While there is a fine line between artistic political statements and politically oriented works of art, there are many works of art whose question is a question of opposition, of standing against, resisting, or struggling for a particular issue or cause. Even within the artworld itself there have been many famous examples of this, from Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* or Andy Goldsworthy’s temporary environmental creations to Hans Haacke’s installation pieces, all of which challenge the sacred space of the museum or gallery and the relationship between works of art, location, society, and permanence. Or we could consider the work of Paul Cezanne, which manifests its oppositionality in relation to a common understanding of how visual perception works.

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438 see Deutsch on works of art vs. artistic gestures. Most transgressive works of art have been highly controversial on precisely this issue—do they count as works of art? This returns to the debates about the separateness of the aesthetic realm from daily life. See *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality* for more on this.
439 This is not necessarily a political cause—it could be a memory, a personal issue, a local situation, etc.
Participants, as critics, can stand in opposition to one another (and to the artist as participant) regarding the interpretation of a given work, but their oppositionality is always situated in the context of being for the sake of greater understanding and appreciation. One of the central roles of a critic is to point out features of the work, the artist, and the tradition in order to help others to engage it productively. The point is not to find the one correct interpretation (thus cutting off the inexhaustibility of the work), but rather to add richness and complexity to an interpretation, which one is forced to do when confronted with an opposing or divergent view. Disagreement between critics is not about finding a singular resolution, necessarily, but about seeing the other’s interpretation as possible, and trying to figure out how one’s own interpretation can accommodate and/or respond to it.

As discussed earlier, another important element of aesthetic oppositionality is loving consciousness, a kind of compassion directed at the others (and the works) with whom one is engaged. An attitude of loving consciousness is one that recognized the call of another to be appreciated and understood, and that situates her in a relational context—we are meaningfully addressed to one another. This loving attitude is directed to the other in and of herself, tries to let her speak for herself, and appreciates that she will always exceed my understanding and conception of her. When acting with loving consciousness we approach another as inherently valuable, deserving of care and attention, and significant in her own right.

Works of art sometimes manifest at once all of these senses of aesthetic oppositionality.\textsuperscript{440} Consider for a moment the (in)famous rap protest song “Fuck tha

\textsuperscript{440} Activist art is a direct example of this, but more traditional and/or mainstream art also demonstrates these senses of oppositionality. Take for example Frida Kahlo’s self-portraits, which display her frustration
Police” by the pioneering group NWA. The artists in this case struggled to create a new sub-genre of hip hop music (West Coast), using some features of classic hip hop such as call and response and sampling, while innovating new features as well. The song itself stands oppositionally in relation to the previous genre of hip hop, issues of racism, socio-economic status, abusive authority, and the problems of inner-city life: “my identity by itself causes violence.” The song is narratively structured around testimony from the band members regarding police brutality and racism in their neighborhood. It manifests their frustration with the status quo and the pre-determined nature of their identity: “Comin straight from the underground/Young **** got it bad cuz I'm brown/And not the other color so police think/They have the authority to kill a minority.” The song ends on the ironic note of a police officer screaming “I want justice/I want justice!” Finally, the song is (and was) highly controversial, both due to the explicit nature of the lyrics and its anti-authoritarian message. Some critics refuse to recognize it as music, while others hold it up as an example of Kant’s genius (that for which there was no rule of creation but which subsequently becomes a rule for others). One can imagine a very fruitful discussion between critics on this song, each attempting to help the other appreciate her interpretation.

441 Released in 1988 on the album *Straight Outta Compton*. For the lyrics to this song, see [http://www.lyricsdepot.com/n-w-a/fuck-tha-police.html](http://www.lyricsdepot.com/n-w-a/fuck-tha-police.html). For the music video, see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WiX7GTeITPM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WiX7GTeITPM).
442 I have censored out a term that the artist(s) is using to refer to himself, because I feel it is inappropriate for me to reproduce it here.
443 One could argue that this refusal is a classic instance of improper distancing.
Seen from the aesthetic experience metaphor, oppositionality in philosophical activity is a productive tension, seeking harmony\textsuperscript{444}, understanding, and appreciation. It is a key part of philosophical activity—just as the dissonance in Paul Hindemith’s compositions is necessary for their beauty, so too is oppositionality and the ideas and possibilities it provokes a key component in philosophical activity. The philosophical artist struggles in order to create; the philosophical work can stand in opposition to other works, social norms, unreflective assumptions, etc.; and philosophical participants can manifest oppositionality through their engagement with one another regarding how to understand a work. This aesthetic oppositionality is an oppositionality that approaches other persons and texts with a loving consciousness.

IV. Conclusion

Sections I, II, and III above have demonstrated that aesthetic experience, as a metaphor for philosophical activity, contains and creates its own sense of oppositionality, one that is not agonistic, but that nonetheless provides a way of thinking through practices of oppositionality—dealing with difference, disagreement, and critique—in philosophical activity. Aesthetic oppositionality is not hostile—it does not seek the destruction of the other, but rather to appreciate and understand her in her own context, and to keep her as intact as possible. Oppositional positions are understood as mutually informing and transforming one another, and oppositional encounters take on the character of performativity that is for the sake of greater understanding and appreciation,

\textsuperscript{444} Recall here the discussion of harmony in Chapter Four, Section I.B.3. Harmony is not about either agreement or sameness.
done out of compassion for oneself and the other. This oppositionality is responsive, serious, and can be seen as a kind of careful remonstration aimed at maintaining and preserving the quality of relationships. Aesthetic oppositionality is the productive tension that allows new harmonies to emerge. To be oppositional in philosophical activity is to approach situations of difference and disagreement with the loving consciousness of aesthetic experience. This is a further illustration of the capaciousness of the aesthetic experience metaphor—it not only responds to the challenges of the combat and play metaphors, but it contains within it positive contributions from the play and combat metaphors.

This dissertation began with the claim that metaphilosophical inquiries—inquires into the nature, goals, and methods of philosophical activities—need to critically reflect on the metaphors used to describe, understand, and conduct philosophical activities. The result of this critical reflection on the metaphors of combat, play, and aesthetic experience leads not only to a recognition of the role and importance of metaphors in metaphilosophy but also to a more conscious awareness of which metaphors we use and why, to an increase in the diversity and richness of our resources for understanding and conducting philosophical activity. While Lakoff and Johnson, in this chapter’s opening epigraph, comment on the difficulty of trying to change the dominance of deep-seated metaphors—like the combat metaphor—they also note that Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor.
This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies.\textsuperscript{445}

It is my hope that the aesthetic experience metaphor may become such a guide for future action.

\textsuperscript{445} Lakoff and Johnson, 156.
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