Comparative Philosophy Today and Tomorrow

Comparative Philosophy Today and Tomorrow: Proceedings from the 2007 Uehiro CrossCurrents Philosophy Conference

Edited by

Sarah A. Mattice, Geoff Ashton
and Joshua P. Kimber

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INTRODUCTION

Aloha,

It is with great pleasure that we share this collection of papers and topics presented at the 2007 Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference hosted by the Philosophy Department at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UH). The theme and subtitle of the conference was Comparative Philosophy for Today and Tomorrow, and its currents can be sensed throughout this text. Each of the essays collected here contributes to this theme. These essays also represent perspectives and voices from across the United States and throughout the world. The value of each essay and the conference overall may be appreciated most fully in light of the surrounding context of the conference, its history, significance and possible future. We would like, therefore, to share the story of the Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference as well as some of the core objectives and outcomes that these essays and their authors helped to achieve.

The story of this conference begins with two main questions that emerged at its inception: what is comparative philosophy, and what is its value today and for the future? When confronted with the task of selecting a theme, the conference committee was struck by these questions, for this was, after all, to be a comparative philosophy conference. How is it possible to have a comparative philosophy conference when the definition of comparative philosophy is unclear? As the consideration of these questions continued, it became increasingly evident that whatever comparative philosophy may be, it is most appropriately understood as a plurality of views. No single definition seems adequate. We decided, therefore, to hold these questions open and to strive toward a greater understanding of comparative philosophy in and through the conference itself.

It was in this way that the core theme and subtitle of the conference was born: Comparative Philosophy for Today and Tomorrow. The essays presented here help to illuminate this theme and the questions that inspired it, as each offers a slightly different approach to comparative philosophy while hinting at the value offered in such practice. This theme was also a fitting continuation of the main concerns and developments of the 2006

CrossCurrents Philosophy Conference: Navigating a Pluralistic World, directed by Jeremy Henkel.

In addition to breadth of content and variety of perspectives, there is also an important qualitative element to comparative philosophy: the *spirit* in which it is engaged. Overall, we came to see this conference as an opportunity to practice comparative philosophy in the spirit most appropriate to it: a spirit of open dialogue and discourse characterized by a sensitivity to its potential benefits, and consideration of its value and implications for oneself and the world. This will, undoubtedly, continue to be an important part of the Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference in the years to come. It will now be helpful to consider the historical context within which this conference is situated.

I. The Department of Philosophy at The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa has long been a locus and world center of comparative philosophy. The Department of Philosophy was established in 1936 under the guidance of the late Charles A. Moore and the late Wing-tsit Chan, and has maintained a commitment to comparative philosophy since its inception. The well-known journal of comparative philosophy, *Philosophy East and West,* was founded at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in 1951 and is currently edited by Professor Roger T. Ames. The department boasts a faculty consisting in experts in various fields of both Western and Asian thought, and a community of affiliated scholars that stretches around the globe. The East-West Philosophers' Conference, one of the largest recurring events in comparative philosophy, also has its origins in Hawai‘i and now takes place every 5 years at UH. The first East-West Philosophers' Conference took place in 1939. The most recent conference was directed by Roger T. Ames and was held in 2005. It brought scholars together from around the world to discuss the topic of Educations and Their Purposes: A Philosophical Dialogue Among Cultures.

As graduate students, we feel fortunate to be part of this tradition of comparative philosophy that has fostered beneficial exchange between scholars from around the world for several decades. When a graduate student philosophy conference was first started at UH, it was seen as an opportunity for graduate students to participate in the traditions of this accomplished department. It was also seen as an opportunity for graduate students to participate in the important exchange that regularly draws

hundreds of the world's leading scholars to Hawai'i for the East-West Philosophers' Conference.

Initially, the graduate student conference was to be held every two years, except when it conflicted with the East-West Philosophers' Conference. And there was, indeed a *CrossCurrents* Graduate Student Conference held in 2003 and another in 2006. It was during the planning of the 2006 *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference, however, that the graduate student conference took an exciting turn. The possibility of making it an annual event became a reality thanks to the growing demand for such international graduate student dialogue in comparative philosophy and the interest and generosity of the Uehiro Foundation for Ethics and Education of Japan.

II. The Uehiro Foundation for Ethics and Education

Known throughout Japan and the world, the Uehiro Foundation for Ethics and Education has its origins with Hiroshima survivor Tetsuhiko Uehiro. His son Eiji and grandson Tetsuji have contributed to the growth of the foundation into a world-wide presence that supports various programs in a wide range of fields. According to its mission, the Uehiro Foundation for Ethics and Education "seeks to deepen understanding and broaden dialogue about ethical and educational issues confronting modern individuals, families, societies, and states." The Department of Philosophy at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa is honored to be acquainted with the Uehiro Foundation for Ethics and Education. In 2006, this acquaintance extended into an opportunity to support the graduate student conference as an annual event. It was in this way that the *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference transitioned into the Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference. Energized, and filled with enthusiasm from the success of the 2006 conference, the graduate students immediately began planning the first Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference to be held the following year.

III. The 2007 Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference

Between March 2006 and March 2007, graduate student volunteers dedicated themselves to planning this conference. All of this work and preparation ultimately made it possible for nineteen graduate student presenters to share their research while participating on six panels, organized thematically. We were joined by young scholars from across the

United States, Australia, Canada, England, Japan and Germany. Hawai‘i is an inviting locale, but most of our presenters had to travel over thousands of miles of ocean—some traveled around the world—to participate, and we appreciate their dedication and interest. The Island of O‘ahu, where the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is located, is known as “the gathering place,” and for the days of the conference and much of the following week, it was a place of valuable interaction and exchange between student scholars from across the globe.

The conference itself officially began on Wednesday, March 21st at a welcome event, and then covered two full days of panel presentations from early Thursday morning through Friday afternoon. Dialogue continued well into the night on Friday at a closing feast and throughout the weekend and the following vacation week. The conference also enjoyed the involvement and support of several members of the UH faculty and community. Professor Ron Bontekoe offered initial remarks and welcomed University President David McClain, who shared valuable perspectives on the significance of such collegial exchange. Professor Bontekoe also offered a heart-warming introduction to Professor Eliot Deutsch, former Chair of the Department. Professor Deutsch shared several insights into the history of the department and the importance of comparative philosophy, appropriately setting the stage for the conference.

The conference panels then began under the following themes: Self Cultivation; Religion, Science and Postmodernism; Global Citizenship; Comparative Philosophy; Science, Ecology and Technology; and Environmental Ethics. Each panel was facilitated by a moderator. The objective of each panel was to plant a seed of dialogue appropriate to the panel topic, to clarify the questions at hand, and to propose ways in which they might be addressed. There was no attempt to reach a final conclusion on the topics under discussion. The focus was on opening the topic for further consideration and development.

In an attempt to maintain a spirit of open dialogue and communication appropriate to this focus, presentations were kept to approximately fifteen minutes each, followed by questions from the moderator and then the audience. Panel members had all read one another’s papers in advance, and all conference papers were posted online for attendees to read before the conference. This arrangement enabled us to focus on generating dialogue during the panels which could then be pursued throughout breaks, meals and even as we traveled around O‘ahu on the days following the conference. It is our hope that the essays presented here will continue to inspire fruitful dialogue among the readers of this text.

On Friday afternoon, after the final panels, Professor Mary Tiles, our current Philosophy Department Chair, presented her compelling and provocative keynote address, "Why We Shouldn't Talk About *The* Environment." She challenged those present to find meaningful and practically relevant ways to address the real environmental concerns facing us, and she presented creative ways of thinking and talking responsibly as philosophers about environmental issues. Her keynote address was a fitting end for this conference, as it drew together many of the questions raised in each panel while directly addressing the core theme of the conference. The dialogue that followed Professor Tiles' keynote address continued into the night as conference participants and faculty conversed throughout the concluding feast and gathering.

In addition to the stated themes of the conference, several questions emerged throughout the presentations and the ensuing dialogue that captured common currents and concerns. For instance: what role will philosophy play in the attempt to address issues of social, political and environmental concern? What might education and self-cultivation have to offer the challenges and opportunities we face as members of a pluralistic world? We hope that future Uehiro conferences will have the opportunity to continue to explore such questions.

We were also delighted to introduce two awards at this year's conference. These awards recognize outstanding presenters. The Ruth Kleinfeld-Lenney Award recognizes a paper or project that exhibits academic excellence and contributes to or emphasizes the practical application of philosophy and philosophical thinking. This award is sponsored by Ruth Kleinfeld-Lenney, a valued participant in the Philosophy Department who embodies the spirit of philosophy in all of its joy and wonder. Her presence in our program greatly contributes to the quality of our philosophical endeavors. This award was given to Sarah Mattice for her paper, "*Li* and P4C: A Case Study of Confucian *Li*." A second award, the Uehiro Award for Outstanding Presentation, is given to one conference presenter and is determined by the overall academic quality of the presentation and the presentation's contribution to the spirit and themes of the Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference. Laura Biron received this award for her paper, "Global Justice and the TRIPs Agreement." We are fortunate to have the support and involvement of such wonderful people and organizations. We truly value them and their presence, and we are happy that we can honor them in and through our conference. They enrich our experience, and for this we are grateful.

Many people contributed to this conference in many ways. Please take the time to read our acknowledgement page, where we extend our gratitude to those who helped make this conference a success.

IV. Looking Forward

Overall, the 2007 Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference: Comparative Philosophy for Today and Tomorrow was characterized by collegiality, hospitality and academic rigor. It achieved its objective of opening channels of discourse among the diverse group of presenters that participated in the event. The conference was a successful exercise in comparative philosophy in practice, and as it broadened our understanding of what is meant by comparative philosophy, it also broadened the network of relationships within which comparative philosophy will be practiced in the future. It is our hope that each future Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference will make new contributions to comparative philosophy while maintaining a focus on the dialogue and participation that contributed to the high degree of collegiality and camaraderie realized in the 2007 Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference. The 2008 Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference: Crisis and Opportunity, continued in this tradition, and we have every reason to believe that the 2009 Conference will as well.

We ask that you, the reader of this text, keep the context and the objectives mentioned here in mind as you read through the essays that follow. In this way, the quality that was achieved when we met on O‘ahu may enhance your experience as you participate in the comparative philosophy discourse initiated at the 2007 Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference.

Enjoy!

Mahalo,

2007 Uehiro *CrossCurrents* Philosophy Conference Coordinators,
Josh Kimber, Geoff Ashton and Sarah Mattice

CHAPTER ONE

SELF CULTIVATION

After the morning's opening remarks by Professors Ron Bontekoe and Eliot Deutsch and UH President David McClain, the conference began with this panel, moderated by Benjamin Lukey, PhD candidate at UH Mānoa. Philosophy has always been concerned, to some degree, with education, and one of the traditional themes of comparative philosophy has been self cultivation. The papers on this panel all addressed questions of the relationship between philosophical activity and the quest to become a better person. We are only able to present here one of the three essays from this panel.

In her essay, "*Li* and P4C: A Case Study of Confucian *Li*," Sarah Mattice begins with a detailed explanation of the early Confucian understanding of *li*, often translated as ritual, ritual propriety, right action, etc. She then discusses a way of teaching thinking called Philosophy with Children, and argues that this can be seen as a contemporary example of *li*. In early Chinese thought, rituals and structured social behavior were often seen as crucial to the process of self cultivation. By bringing this concept into a contemporary context, Mattice encourages us to think about our own social structures and how they may aid in personal development.

Li (禮) and P4C: A Case Study of Confucian *Li*

Sarah Mattice

In recent scholarship there has been much discussion of how to bring Confucianism into a contemporary context, how to see the thought of Confucius as important beyond its cultural and historical situation in China and East Asia. There are many difficulties with this project, not the least of which is the striking differences between the world in which Confucius lived and our own. However, this is not to say that *li* (禮)—often translated as rites, rituals, or ritual propriety—a key Confucian concept, is not to be found in today's world. In fact, the concept of *li* is one rich in possibilities for comparative thinking. In this paper I present an interpretation of *li*, through the works of David Hall, Roger Ames, and David Wong. After explicating *li* in some detail, I provide a concrete example of *li* in contemporary terms, through the *li* of a mature Philosophy for Children (P4C) classroom.

I. *Li*

What is *li*? It has been translated most often as some form of "ritual", "rite", or as "customs", "etiquette", "rules of proper behavior", and "worship." Hall and Ames choose to translate it as "observing ritual propriety" or "ritual action." They write that "li are those meaning-invested roles, relationships, and institutions which facilitate communication, and which foster a sense of community."[1] The character itself is a combination of "the radical *shih*…meaning, 'show,' 'sign,' 'indicate,'…[and] the 'ritual vase' component [which] further associates ritual with the sacred."[2] According to Confucius, "originally ritual actions were formalized procedures enacted by the ruler in an attempt to establish and continue a relationship with the spirits and gods."[3] Initially, then, we see *li* in a very religious context, dealing with proper ways of comporting oneself in one's relationship to the sacred. As time went on, this narrow understanding of *li* was expanded to include "the various kinds of formal

human conducts that structure interpersonal activity."[4] All kinds of formal conduct are included under the heading of *li*—from its initial conception of funeral rites, to table manners, greetings, ways of showing deference, etc. One way to describe *li* is as a sort of social grammar, a way of moving in and out of relationships and encounters, of investing situations with meaning, and remaking the values of one's tradition to become one's own. *Li* can also be seen as ways to socially manifest relationships of excellence and deference.

However, formal conduct is not the only part of *li*. The ritual must be approached with the right attitude or disposition, otherwise it is not being performed correctly, and its power is lost. In other words, the ritual and its dispositions must be internalized. In *Analects* 3.4,

> Lin Fang asked about the roots of observing ritual propriety (*li*). The Master replied: 'What an important question! In observing ritual propriety, it is better to be modest than extravagant; in mourning, it is better to express real grief than to worry over formal details.'[5]

The feeling must be real and sincere, arising from within, in order for the ritual to be meaningful—otherwise it is just empty actions. David Wong writes that "the proper performance of ritual must involve the expression of attitudes appropriate to the ritual in question."[6] One cannot pretend to perform a ritual; the participant must be "in the moment" with the ritual in question.[7] Additionally, the ritual is not understood completely unless both the formal and the informal aspects are considered.

It is important, however, as we begin to speak of ritual, to see that *li* cannot be understood solely in terms of how we might use "ritual" in a contemporary sense. In a contemporary American sense, "ritual" almost always carries with it negative connotations, of just going through the motions or doing something meaningless, formal, without purpose, other than perhaps to make one feel more comfortable. We might speak of social niceties, but not of meaning, value, or person-making.

In *Thinking Through Confucius*, Hall and Ames discuss many important features of Confucianism, guided by a close reading of the *Analects*. Their interpretation is oriented by their concept of person-making, or self-cultivation, as the central project of Confucian thought. They use passage 16.13 of the *Analects* to identify several important features of *li*. The first aspect of *li* they discuss is its social context. In the beginning, *li* were used to increase and reinforce the sense of connection between the human community and everything else, including spirits and ancestors. They developed over time to be more socially focused, stressing each participant's place within both the larger context and the more local

ritual context. As they stress repeatedly in their work, Confucius believed that the specific context was crucial in determining action, and *li* is without question social and relational. *Li* are the ways in which we negotiate social terrain, the ways we are able to invest significance in otherwise formal or structural situations. By their very nature, they arise in some way from tradition, from past stores of meaning and values, and allow us to manifest those values, making them our own through practicing them.

The second aspect they discuss is the "disclosing and displaying function" of *li*.[8] As discussed earlier, the two components of this character, one meaning to show or indicate, and the other meaning ritual vase, together initially manifested human intentions to the spirits and their relationship in a sacred context. Although the context expanded to "include the various kinds of formal human conducts that structure interpersonal activity, this evolved notion of social ritual never lost the sense of sacredness."[9] As the focus shifted from the specifically religious to the context of social and moral norms, customs and relationships, the more "secular" *li* were infused with the sacred, and came to disclose or display the sacred in the everyday. Hall and Ames point out that this residue of religiousness in *li* is extremely important because it provides people "an apparatus for spiritual development through social intercourse."[10] Thus we see one of the most important features of *li* is its ability to bring the sacred into the everyday, and provide a means for people to connect themselves to a larger context.

The third point Hall and Ames draw from this passage in the *Analects* is that there is an analogy which can be made between the aspect of *li* which requires one to "take a stance" and the "body" of a ritual tradition.[11] Hall and Ames also discuss the etymological connection between the character *li* and the character *ti* (體), which means body. Both share the phonetic term *li*, or "ritual vase", suggesting a deep connection between ritual action/propriety and the human body. To take part in the *li* is, in a very real way, to become that tradition, to embody past values and meanings in your own person. They describe rituals as "an inherited tradition of formalized human actions that evidence both a cumulative investment of meaning by one's precursors in a cultural tradition, and an openness to reformulation and innovation in response to the processive nature of the tradition."[12] This tradition becomes meaningful in its practice, in being enacted. The body of the tradition, in its openness to creativity, requires a continual influx of new participants, new bodies to embody, in their own particularity, the tradition. The body of ritual actions and

propriety requires, for its survival, reworking, remaking, and creative interpretation, arising from the original body.

The final point Hall and Ames make about *li* is that, if we are to say they have normative force, if they have moral or ethical value, it does not come from any other source than those who participate in the rituals, both past and present. Their power is not that they come from an outside source, from something other—their power comes from the fact that they are human creations, arising from specific, particular situations, and that they seek to build and bring importance and significance to relationships and events.

This is especially important given that, according to Hall and Ames, moral education takes place through modeling, and in order for this to be the case, we must be able to clearly and concretely recognize exemplary moral models. One of the ways in which we recognize excellence in others is through their superb participation in *li*. *Li* also helps to build and maintain community, as well as bring about appropriate feelings and desires in others. Robert Gimello writes,

> What was of ultimate and comprehensive value to Confucius…was the process whereby one could live a rich and fulfilling spiritual life solely as 'a man among other men.' In this process, the *li* themselves came to be regarded… as paradigms of human relations.[13]

The *li* are how people interact, how we relate with one another, and those who are most excellent in their dispositions and actions are clear. The internalization and proper enacting of rituals is a mark of one who is on the path of self-cultivation, and one of the functions of *li* is to help people along this path.

David Wong situates his interpretation of *li* in terms of the political arena. In his article, "Harmony, Fragmentation, and Democratic Ritual," Wong discusses *li*, ritual, as that which can bring about harmony. He makes a distinction, in terms of democracy, between harmony and consensus. Consensus requires agreement "on a relatively specific set of values and normative doctrines, and such agreement turns out to be practically impossible given the plurality of differing value commitments the participants already have."[14] Harmony, however, embraces the unique particularity of participants, and through the respect generated for differing viewpoints out of ritual engagement, harmony maintains the individuality of each participant while at the same time managing to build a cohesive whole.

According to Wong, *li* refers to "formal rules and ceremonies performed within a community," which later expanded "to customs, habits,

and etiquette in the conduct of social relationships in everyday life."[15] Wong also stresses the importance of proper attitude, but is clear that rituals can bring forth or strengthen the proper feeling—it is not realistic to expect that the feeling will always arise before the ritual. In this way, rituals function as a sort of attitude or feeling habituation, in which the repetition of the action shapes the feeling. He refers to these attitudes or feelings as "virtues of character," and rituals create, strengthen, and reinforce these virtues. And, "those virtues, especially as they bear upon one's relationship to others, support harmony."[16] In *Analects* 1.12:

> Master You said: 'Achieving harmony is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety. In the ways of the Former Kings, this achievement of harmony made them elegant, and was a guiding standard in all things large and small. But when things are not going well, to realize harmony just for its own sake without regulating the situation through observing ritual propriety will not work.[17]

This is a key passage dealing with *li* and harmony. Wong stresses the importance of not seeking harmony without ritual propriety, because rituals have the power to create mutual respect between the participants and to foster "a sense of community that is rooted in the past and stretches onward into the future."[18] These senses of community and respect arising out of rituals are crucial to his point, because they don't require a common cultural, religious, or ethnic background. Communities can come in many shapes and sizes, and in our current situation it is important to find ways to build communities that don't rely on factors outside of one's control, such as race or religion. Rituals can create harmony without requiring agreement, which is very valuable.

Another feature of rituals Wong points out is that rituals can be incredibly meaningful without necessarily being expressible through discursive language. As Richard Madsen writes, "the main symbols making up the rituals are actions rather than words."[19] This makes sense when we consider the importance of attitude and feeling, because actions, especially those drenched with potential value and meaning, can be much more powerful than simple words. A heartfelt handshake can express a myriad of things, from respect or admiration to congratulations or condolences. The ritual and feeling behind it are what (generally speaking) effects the communication, not whatever words may be spoken during it, or may be descriptive of it.

Madsen also points out that, for a given ritual, there are a range of possible interpretations, some of which are accepted by the community as more "correct" than others. However, because of the ambiguity inherent in

most rituals, a community agreeing on a range of interpretations for a given ritual does not require that they relinquish any of the points on which they disagree. The ritual instead highlights the commonalities between different groups, opening the door for communication and harmony.

If harmony is the acknowledged goal, then the resolution of conflicts has to be addressed. Wong believes that rituals can be a means to resolve conflicts between groups holding different and/or opposing values. Because rituals neither desire nor require one defined version of what is right or true, and are able to maintain some ambiguity, they are an excellent medium for creating an atmosphere conducive to the respect necessary for resolving conflicts. According to Wong:

> The value of ritual lies in its power to make salient what is already shared, while not forcing specific and divisive interpretations of the way shared values are to be ordered in conflicts. This dual effect is made possible by the fact that much of the meaning is carried by the dramatic structure rather than the statement of specific doctrine.[20]

As he points out, democracy requires a foundation of widely shared values, but this does not require that all values be shared, or that some values may not be in conflict. Rituals bring out commonalities, encourage mutual respect, and generate stronger communities. The harmony they generate is stronger from the differing viewpoints constituting it, in the same way that a song is made more beautiful by differing but complimentary notes, or a soup made more delicious by adding spices and other ingredients.

II. P4C

P4C, or Philosophy for Children, is a way of teaching thinking started by Matthew Lipman, a Columbia University professor, around 1969. He was concerned with his students' ability to reason well, and created a curriculum to engage children with basic philosophical themes. In the mid 1970's, Dr. Thomas Jackson brought Philosophy for Children to Hawai‘i and expanded on Lipman's original ideas. P4C Hawai‘i is a dynamic movement composed of many teachers and schools, and which has affected hundreds of students.[21]

If you were fortunate enough to visit a P4C classroom, what would you see? The first thing you might notice is that the students *and* the teacher are seated in a circle. As Jackson writes in his article, "The Art and Craft of 'Gently' Socratic Inquiry," "unlike the more traditional configuration with students in rows, the circle allows all members of the community to

make eye contact, to *see* each other."[22] This is important because, given that the format of the class (philosophical activity) requires genuine and authentic discussion and dialogue, all the participants (students and teacher) must be able to see and hear each other, to see one another's reactions, and to come to know one another as members of a community. Another thing that might stand out as unusual in a traditional classroom setting is the presence of a brightly colored ball of yarn or other soft object. It is often passed between participants, to designate the speaker. It is not (usually) simply tossed from teacher to student and back again, but is one of the tools used to allow the students a measure of control in each inquiry. They call on one another, they direct the dialogue. Students and teacher must know each other's names, and be comfortable enough with each other to designate one another as speakers.

Two tools you might see in use in a P4C classroom are the Good Thinker's Toolkit and the Magic Words. The Good Thinker's Toolkit is composed of seven letters, WRAITEC.

W: What do you mean by…
R: Reasons
A: Assumptions
I: Inferences, Interpretation
T: Truth
E: Examples
C: Counterexamples[23]

These are used to facilitate discussion, critical thinking, and deep inquiry, as well as to "scratch beneath the surface" on a specific topic. They often structure the interaction in such a way as to be more implicit than explicit, especially among older students. Magic Words are also used to facilitate the discussion, although in a more administrative way. They, like the ball, allow students to be in control of their discussion. Some Magic Words are:

SPLAT: Speak a little louder, please
IDUS: I don't understand
POPAAT: Please, one person at a time
OMT: One more time
LMO: Let's move on
GOS: Going off subject[24]

These Magic Words let the students guide the discussion, let them bring it back to the subject at hand or move on, let them ask for the speaker to do something, or ask for clarification. A community whose members are not afraid to say "IDUS" is a community whose members are comfortable

with one another. It is not unusual in most traditional classrooms for students to not feel easy enough both with other students and the teacher to admit that they do not understand.

All of the features I have identified so far have been leading to what I see as three key aspects of a P4C classroom: community, inquiry, and safety. These three aspects are mutually entailing and supporting. Inquiry arises in some way from the students, from their interests and their questions. While the teacher directs the material to varying degrees, the inquiry itself is shaped by the students' interests, by their questions. In order for learning, for questioning, to be authentic, it must come from the students themselves. There are several ways this can manifest itself, but one thing that is never seen in a P4C classroom is a student's sincere question being treated disrespectfully or as a stupid question. The goal of the P4C session is not to find the one correct answer or the right way that the teacher wants you to answer the question. Instead, the goal is to question, to push understandings deeper, to seek sincerely, and to build the community into a community of inquirers, of those who want to know, who want to ask questions.

Safety is a difficult concept to define. It requires a high degree of respect, both between students and between students and teachers. It is the cultivation of certain habits of action, the cultivation of feelings of intellectual, emotional, and physical safety, even when the material being discussed is quite difficult or personally challenging. Students and teachers must be comfortable with themselves and with one another in order to successfully participate in the inquiry. Inquiry requires that participants be willing to "put themselves out there," to discuss things that may be personal or in conflict with their value systems. Without safety, inquiry remains at the surface level, unable to delve deeper into the subject or become a spark for self-reflection, as it can be and is in a safe and mature community.

The previous two aspects of P4C, in order to emerge, require a strong community. A P4C community is not just a group of people thrown together in a room, as most classrooms are. One of the most important parts of creating a P4C community is community building—establishing and nourishing relationships between community members, student to student and teacher/student relationships. Inquiry and safety both depend on the community as a strong foundation. Being part of such a community is crucial to students developing as good, respectful people, as independent thinkers, and as responsible citizens.

III. P4C and *Li*

In the first section I explored detailed interpretations of the Confucian concept of *li*. In the second section I briefly explained of some of the more salient features of a Philosophy for Children classroom. It is my contention that the features described above as part of P4C can be interpreted as *li*, and that this interpretation helps to both explain P4C and deepen our understanding of *li*.[25]

In the first section I presented two definitions of *li*. The first, Hall and Ames', is that "*Li* are those meaning-invested roles, relationships, and institutions which facilitate communication, and which foster a sense of community."[26] In David Wong's article, he defines *li* as, "formal rules and ceremonies performed within a community," which later expanded "to customs, habits, and etiquette in the conduct of social relationships in everyday life."[27]

How does P4C fit in these definitions?[28] Formal education, by its very nature, is ritualized to some extent. Each participant knows or is expected to know or learn her role, whether as teacher or as student. These roles come with certain sets of appropriate behavior, certain ways to interact with others, and expectations for such behavior. Students sit in rows, with the teacher at the head of the rows. When the teacher speaks, the students are silent. Students must first raise their hands and wait to be called on before speaking. These are some of the rituals of a traditional classroom.

The P4C classroom is different in several ways, as I have already attempted to show. The P4C classroom's customs and habits include the circle, the ball, the toolkit, the Magic Words, etc. These are everyday activities done in the context of social relationships—student to student, student and teacher. These activities put the participants into a structured physical, intellectual, and emotional relationship with one another, which is an important aspect of *li*. The more intense and meaning-invested rituals are those involving the community, inquiry, and intellectual safety. These are the rituals that come alive, that create and reinforce the feeling of the ritual. They are inherited from those who came before, from the tradition of P4C and the intellectual traditions which inspired P4C, but do not require common backgrounds from students.

Both interpretations I have presented emphasize the community aspect of *li*, which is unquestionably an essential feature of P4C. In Hall and Ames' definition, they stress that *li* facilitates communication. Communication, real communication, requires that the participants have a deep respect for one another, and have relationships that are built to allow authentic exchanges. P4C communities are built to strengthen safety and

develop good inquiries, which are real communications for students and teachers. Additionally, one of the things David Wong explicitly requires of rituals is that there is a proper attitude or disposition accompanying the physical and intellectual posture of the ritual. One of the ways an observer can determine when a community is well-developed is when the tools of P4C are internalized and become inseparable from and implicit in the dialogue. As I mentioned earlier, the repetition of the ritual is crucial to the participant's ability to develop the proper attitude or feeling, which is then reinforced by the continued performance of or participation in the ritual. A mature P4C classroom as I have described it does not happen overnight—it requires many, many hours of dedicated work on the part of both students and teachers.

Interpreting P4C as a complex ritual can help us to better understand both P4C and *li*. Seeing P4C as a ritual wherein participants interact with one another in meaningful ways, investing their education with value and habituating their dispositions to be more in line with self-reflection, thinking for themselves, respecting others, etc., allows us to see P4C in a new light. Instead of just a way of teaching, we can now look at P4C as an extraordinary part of everyday life, as a ritual that can develop participants into good people.

Self-cultivation and harmony are the two overarching aims of the interpretations I have presented. These are also, in my opinion, aims of P4C. One of the ways P4C can help us to better understand *li* is as a case study, a real-life example of how some of these Confucian ideals can be realized. Because we are in many ways very removed from Confucius, his time, and his thought, it can be difficult to see *li* in our everyday lives, apart from the traditional and somewhat trivial examples of the handshake and its like. Rituals that develop and cultivate people and communities are invaluable, and having concrete examples helps us to better understand how Confucius could have meant some of the things he said. P4C enables self-cultivation by enabling self-reflection, giving students the tools to inquire deeply into questions and problems arising out of their own lives, allowing an awareness of alternate ways of being in the world, and presenting choices which can be adopted or rejected as part of the student's project of self-cultivation or self-creation. It also develops a harmonious community. Because the community is safe (intellectually, physically, and emotionally), the differing value commitments each member brings to the inquiry become not points of conflict, but rich sources and resources. The successful inquiry is a manifestation of harmony, of the coming together of different people for a common aim: deeper understanding.

One of the most valuable things I find in this creative interpretation is the light it sheds on relations of excellence and deference. As I mentioned earlier, in P4C the relationship between teacher and student is not the traditional unidirectional authority of most classrooms. As all participants, including the teacher, are community members engaged in the inquiry together, each participant must be prepared to engage every other member with deference, if deference is earned. *Analects* 7.22 says, "The Master said, 'In strolling in the company of just two other persons, I am bound to find a teacher. Identifying their strengths, I follow them, and identifying their weaknesses, I reform myself accordingly.'"[29]

Teacher and student are not cemented roles; at any given point anyone can have something to teach another, or something to learn from another. It requires participants to approach the situation with the right attitude. This is not to say that, practically, the teacher does not have different aspects to her role, as she is a facilitator and a practical authority figure as well as a community member.[30] Rather, the teacher does not put herself up as an absolute authority—she too is an inquirer, and her authority as authentic must be earned, as it must be earned by all community members. She must approach her students as potentially excellent, just as they must approach both her and their fellow students as potentially excellent, with the deference and respect of good community members. The teacher stands on the one hand as a model, with duties and responsibilities that are different from those of the student's, and on the other hand as a member of the community, who shares in the inquiry and the development of the group. As the community develops together, they recognize the achievements of personhood amongst each other.

The way in which participants behave during the ritual, during a successful P4C session (or, perhaps better, a series of sessions), manifests their internalization of the attitude/feeling of the ritual, and the taking over of the aims of the ritual—self-cultivation, thinking for oneself, respect, etc.—as their own. In this way as well, the moral modeling that is so characteristic of Confucian education is also a part of the P4C classroom. Teacher and student stand as potential models for one another.

P4C begins in the classroom. However, it and indeed any ritual we would speak of in this same sense, does not end at the door to the classroom. In fact, it cannot end there. If P4C is to have the potential benefits of respect, community, harmony, and self-reflection, it must go beyond the formal, the institutional. It must become a part of daily life. What would this look like? Clearly, the classroom, the ball, the magic words and such, may not be present. However, the spirit of the ritual, that

which is internalized through repeated practice, if it is being practiced authentically *must* seep into everyday actions.

Earlier I spoke of *li* as a kind of social grammar, a way in which we interact with one another. The richness of P4C as an example of *li* may begin in the classroom, but it ends with people who have the tools, the attitudes, and the desire to continue on a path of self-cultivation and harmony in a community—not only the community of their classroom, but in their families, their towns, and as responsible citizens of their nation. If a participant has truly internalized P4C, she cannot wander unthinking through her everyday life. Her interactions with people are altered, reflecting that she is attempting to mindfully live P4C, to constantly practice the ritual.

Although most of this paper is dedicated to the more formal and institutional aspects of *li*, especially in the exposition of P4C as *li*, it is crucial that this not be seen as the only way *li* is enacted. It is true that these two understandings of *li*, the formal, classroom setting, and the informal, everyday interactions, are not exactly analogous. However, the point is that once the formal ritual has developed sufficiently, once the participants have internalized it, they cannot simply turn it off when they leave the classroom. A ritual's power is diminished if it is only seen in the "formal" context, although that context is critical to understanding it as a whole. The outstanding features of P4C—community, safety, and inquiry—and the accompanying dispositions, once the participant has begun to make them her own (through internalization), become hers not only during scheduled P4C classes, but in ordinary interactions with her family, friends, classmates, and others. The informal aspect of the ritual is seen in a kind of continued mindfulness, cultivated in the formal setting and brought from there into everyday life.

In this paper I have attempted to illustrate that P4C can be understood and interpreted as a kind of contemporary *li*, an everyday educational ritual. The features that make P4C so characteristically different from traditional styles of education—community, safety, and inquiry—are the very features which allow it to be understood as ritual. Rituals require community and communication, and manifest themselves in how people interact with one another and how we invest meaning in our daily lives. P4C allows us to build communities consisting in diverse memberships, and allows people to communicate deeply and inquire together not only in spite of their different value systems, but about those very differences in self-reflective ways. It is in this way that P4C embodies the spirit of the Confucian concept of *li*. Rituals bring people together, allow them to interact in meaningful and harmonious ways, and create and sustain

attitudes and dispositions that help them engage in projects of self-cultivation.