

Introduction

Having a Word with Angus Graham At Twenty-Five Years into His Immortality

Carine Defoort and Roger T. Ames

When people die, they also live on in a variety of ways. This phenomenon is even more apparent in the case of great scholars and grand personalities. When Angus Charles Graham left us in March 1991, the most obvious way in which he was bound to survive was through his daughter, Dawn, and his two grandchildren, Calum and Holly, all of whom will carry on some of his genes. But since humans are storytelling animals, we also live on in the narratives woven around the events of our lives and personalities. A widely-known account of Angus Graham can be found on Wikipedia: it starts with his birth in Wales (1919), his studies of theology at Oxford, then his reading of Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, his subsequent appointment as lecturer in Classical Chinese at SOAS (1950–1984), followed by visiting positions at various universities, including at Michigan, Hong Kong, Cornell, Brown, and Hawai'i.¹ With an Englishman as wonderfully idiosyncratic as Graham, there is inevitably a wealth of unofficial stories: how he eluded a V-2 rocket during the Second World War by simply walking away from a boring companion just the moment before it struck, how he “got the year wrong” for his visiting appointment at Brown University, how he claimed to “hate Zhuangzi” in order to avoid a teaching assignment, and how he nevertheless agreed to hold a weekly class on the same subject under a banyan tree at Waikiki beach.² A third way that one remains alive is through rituals: the yearly Angus Graham Memorial Lectures organized at SOAS since 2010 can be seen as a ceremonial occasion

to keep his memory alive in a continuing series of lectures and workshops that have been inspired by his work.³

But aside from blood ties, narratives, and rituals, the most obvious type of immortality achieved by scholars lies with their publications. Over a professional career of more than thirty years, Graham produced an impressive amount of scholarship on a wide array of topics, ranging from grammar and philology to poetry and philosophy. Among his most well-known monographs are *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (1960), *Later Mohist Logic* (1978), the *Chuang-tzu* (1981), and *Disputers of the Tao* (1989).⁴ His combination of rigorous scholarship and philosophical originality has continued to inspire scholars to tackle related research topics and, in so doing, has required of them to respond to his views. Thus, Graham's last and, perhaps for him, most gratifying version of longevity would lie not only in the enduring value of his own publications, but in the work of others who have been inspired by him. The various fields within sinology, including the history of Chinese thought, Chinese philosophy, Chinese philology, and the art of translation, are still replete with scholarship elaborating upon, disagreeing with, or reacting to Graham's work. We can fairly claim that Graham's ideas have become fundamental to the way in which Chinese philosophy is now read within the corridors of the Western academy.

March 2016 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Graham's death. As a small contribution to his immortality, we invited some of his colleagues, friends, students, and admirers to continue the conversation with this grand old gentleman by sharing some of their current research as it has been inspired by his work. One of Graham's self-declared "hobby horses" was the topic of spontaneity in Chinese philosophy in which he saw a novel solution to the Western fact/value dichotomy. Graham began to elaborate on spontaneity in an early monograph, *The Problem of Value* (1961), gave it a full reconsideration in his *Reason and Spontaneity* (1985), and ended up bumping into this topic wherever he looked, claiming:

A point of interest in the Chinese tradition is that, various as it is, it seems everywhere to start from the assumption, quite foreign to at least the Kantian tradition in the West although familiar to common sense, that the ultimate springs of action are in spontaneous preference the value of which depends on the wisdom of the agent.⁵

This quote along with his tenacious interest in the topic of spontaneity strongly suggest that what Graham had found in the Chinese texts was himself. Whatever he read, even a text as neglected and corrupt as the *Heguanzi*, taught him something that he recognized as both very familiar and yet

philosophically intriguing: spontaneity. On an academic level, he proposed increasingly subtle reflections on this topic, thus engendering debates that have moved other scholars to join him, including some of the contributors to the present volume. At the same time, the topic was consistent with Graham's own idiosyncrasy and his resolute conviction that, as a person as well as a scholar, he ought to follow his own preferences. Emotional support for this deeply felt commitment and his continuing theoretical reflections on the legitimate limitations of preferences (for example, the duty to enhance one's awareness of any situation to the fullest) brought together the combination of rigorous thinking and personal intuition that characterizes much of Graham's work. His hypothesis that Confucius's changing views can be appealed to as explanation for inconsistencies in the *Lunyu*, his monumental reconstruction of later Mohist logic, and his reconfiguration of the book *Zhuangzi* are some examples of this peculiar combination of careful analysis and bold speculation.

For the authors of this volume, Graham was a model of rigorous scholarship and creative reflection: each of the essays included herewith contains an original contribution on some specific topic that Graham had once worked on, from linguistic and textual matters to philosophical issues. We also encouraged the contributors to follow their hearts: to share their recollections, to ride their own hobby-horses, to rely on their own assumptions, to use their own orthography, and to disagree with each other, with us, and with Graham. The result is a kaleidoscope of twelve essays on spontaneity, the *Zhuangzi*, human nature, textual criticism, translation, uncommon assumptions, the use of metaphor, and much more. The essays do not divide neatly into textual matters and philosophy, but if there is a discernable pattern, it is perhaps in the gradual evolution of Graham's interests from Chinese grammatical and textual matters to formal philosophy itself.

Graham took painstaking scholarship on textual formation that called upon philological skills and philosophical insight as the ground of his own more speculative work. Indeed, one of his most enduring contributions was his reconstruction of texts such as the later Mohist canons, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Heguanzi*. It is because of this commitment to evidential scholarship that we begin this collection of essays with the sustained reflections by Esther Klein and Liu Xiaogan on his reconstruction of the *Zhuangzi*, a project that Graham himself found exasperatingly inconclusive on most fronts, and who on many occasions insisted that he was "done with it." Inspired by archaeological finds and recent scholarship, both scholars identify hidden assumptions in the field and nevertheless reach diametrically opposed conclusions. Continuing her earlier findings concerning the possibly late date of the Inner Chapters, Klein questions current expectations of authorship and textual unity. She argues that the received *Zhuangzi* is best read as one version of a

concatenated anthology belonging to a continuing lineage grouped under a single name rather than as the product of any particular author or identifiable period. While Graham saw himself as engaging in the reconstructive project of untying philological and philosophical knots in order to restore the more coherent “original” text, Klein is more interested in acknowledging uncertainties about authorship and attribution and in uncovering more or less explicit “castles in the air” that have, to some extent inevitably, constituted a major part of the currently dominant Zhuangzi account. Her insights into different possible kinds of textual production have many ramifications for how we read and understand these early canons.

Liu Xiaogan agrees with Graham on the integrity of the Inner Chapters but disputes the chronological priority of the *Zhuangzi* and his reconstruction of the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters. Appealing to recent archaeological discoveries, Liu challenges what he identifies as four hidden assumptions in the work of Graham, D. C. Lau, and Qian Mu, namely, that the paucity of extant texts can fully represent the whole ancient body of texts, that speculations are more reliable than imperfect historical records, that historical records must either be judged reliable or be discarded, and that small samples can be reliably used as evidence for general conclusions. Liu argues that, while absolute certainty is impossible, in order to draw more probable conclusions in textual studies, we have to reexamine these assumptions. His point is not that all early records are to be endorsed or that skeptical reasoning should be discouraged, but rather that we need to avoid mere speculations and critically construct a methodology combining the best findings of existing scholarship. Since Liu explicitly defends a position that implicitly still dominates the field, it is most appropriate that it be spelled out in this volume.

Harold Roth and Michael Nylan take us from this discussion on what we can learn from the structure of the *Zhuangzi* to its philosophical import. Roth introduces the notion of “cognitive attunement” and advances his claim that this is in fact the main thematic of this composite text. He interprets the *Zhuangzi* via the intersection between cognitive science and a phenomenology of the varieties of contemplative experience advocated as a methodology by the newly established academic field called contemplative studies. Invoking William James’s “pure experience” and the “tacit understanding” derived from cognitive science research, Roth argues for a cultivated cognitive and perceptual experience. He appeals to an “effortless attention” that is spontaneous and nonintentional, and that can lead to “cognitive attunement” in a first-, second-, third-, and “no-person” or nonattached experience. Roth mounts a sustained textual argument that this transformed free and flow-like non-self-consciousness is the goal of the contemplative practices around which the *Zhuangzi* as a text has been woven.

Michael Nylan focuses her analysis on how to characterize the kind of optimal experience advocated by the *Zhuangzi*. Nylan reiterates what

we observed earlier in this introduction: Graham imports and ascribes to Zhuangzi his own philosophy of life in which a hyperawareness enables one to act spontaneously and with optimal vitality in realizing the potential that the human experience brings. This being the case, Graham's Zhuangzi seems to advocate for "heightened awareness" as a kind of superhuman omniscience that we might associate with sageliness and that, in her eyes, is more closely tied to cognitive reach than to emotions and intuition. Nylan takes exception to such a reading of Zhuangzi and proposes as a rather intriguing alternative to "be aware," the injunction "to be fully present." Zhuangzi with his *xiaoyaoyou* (逍遙遊), the oft-referenced expression used to capture the optimal Zhuangzian experience, recommends the cultivation of an attitude that not only recognizes but also affirms our entanglements in the ordinary human condition, where clarity and vitality, far from leading to "free and easy wandering," in fact characterize a keen awareness of the complexity of the human experience and the resolutely muddled state of mind that attends it. The life of optimal vitality comes with an appreciation of the gift of life and a curiosity about it that welcomes new, befuddling experiences and pleasure. It is the openness to the complexities of the ordinary rather than insight into the extraordinary that enables us get the most out of life and to live it fully and well.

Moving away from the *Zhuangzi*, Henry Rosemont Jr., Robert Gassmann, and Jane Geaney engage Graham critically as the translator and interpreter of several texts and concepts. Rosemont attempts to illuminate Graham's views on both language and thought by examining the latter's criticisms of Rosemont's own work on the relations between the two, along with his collaborator Roger Ames. According to Graham, they both appear to confuse translation and interpretation at times, which is odd, given that he has elsewhere praised Ames and Rosemont for the way they employ the distinction between language and thought, with results that Graham has elsewhere praised them for. Moreover, as a student of Noam Chomsky and a proponent of his universal grammar, Rosemont finds Graham to be inconsistent in at once accepting claims about the uniqueness of conceptual schemes while at the same time assuming that there must be objective truth standing above cultural differences. But at the end of the day, Rosemont opines that the identifiable disagreements among largely consistent exegetes might amount more to speaking past each other than having substantive differences in our understanding of the language and philosophy of classical China. In any case, during the preparation of this volume Henry left us to join Angus in the great transformation of things. Now there are two old friends with their boundless affection for each other and for us too, arguing the fine points, making merry, and waiting for us to join the happy company.

Robert H. Gassmann is also concerned about how we understand and translate the basic terminology that defines the classical Chinese world. To

make his point, he takes one key term—*wu* (物), conventionally rendered “things”—that is given a concise explanation by Graham in his work on the later Mohist canons. Gassmann uses Legge’s rendering of the *Chunqiu zuozhuan* as representative to show how elsewhere a proliferation of different ways of translating this single term produces a “semantic jumble” that he considers to be a demonstration of “lexicography by assumed contextual fit”—that is, a willingness on the part of less than careful translators to tailor their understanding of terms in order to make sense of particular passages. Through a careful application of analytical grammatical and lexicographical methods, Gassmann proposes a significantly alternative understanding of *wu*. He argues that the term references an “aggregate” or “assemblage”—that is, a variously structured union or group of two or more objects that can further be delineated into subtypes. Gassmann meticulously translates relevant passages, analyzes their contexts, and sets up the parameters of the meaning of the term to produce the evidence for his claim.

Jane Geaney elaborates upon Graham’s insights into how “sounds” or utterances of “naming” (*ming* 名) function within an early Chinese nominalism, and upon her own work that distinguishes audible names from visible action. Making a distinction between detached and immersed views of language, she argues that discussions about “names” in early Chinese texts do not constitute linguistic theories about abstract language but reflect on speech as utterances in contextualized actions and grounded in situations. Body and, more specifically, disabled bodies enter the discussion because of the parallel in the literature between not knowing a name and a blind person’s not knowing color, or a lame person’s not being able to walk a long distance. In examining the relevant passages from the early texts, she finds that a crucial feature of reliable knowledge is the complementary relationship between sound and sight, and that a necessary condition of “naming knowledge” is missing when no visual action accompanies the sounds that constitute naming.

These debates on interpretation bring us to the essays of Carine Defoort and Roger Ames that take the *Mencius* as a focus of reflection. Starting from a well-known passage in which Mencius criticizes Yang Zhu’s supposed egoism and Mo Di’s extreme altruism, Defoort argues that this assessment may to a large extent have been the result of Mencius’s rhetorical imagination rather than an account of the two actual figures. On the basis of the little textual evidence that we have, she tries to reconstruct Mencius’s portrayal of both masters as an inventive response to existing arguments in terms of “weighing” priorities in life. Even though Mencius’s double portrayal was probably neither founded on historical evidence nor followed by contemporary masters, it became increasingly influential after the Han dynasty, to the extent that it still dominates interpretations of the three masters: Mencius, Yang Zhu, and Mozi. As a result, we have failed to notice how exceptional

and unreliable it is as historical testimony. Even though Graham was open to alternative readings of Yang Zhu's portrayal, he also took part in the confirmation of the traditional Mencian picture.

Graham's *Mencius* scholarship is also the topic of Roger Ames's essay. Ames celebrates Graham's openness to continually question the received wisdom and to revise his own, always tentative conclusions. Beginning from a seminal article on the Mencian notion of "human nature" (*xing* 性) that Graham first published in 1967, Ames traces Graham's evolving interpretation of this key philosophical idea as it continued to develop over his long career. Ames largely allows Graham to speak for himself, citing Graham's own published work that over time evidences a growing sensitivity to and a deepening understanding of the cosmological assumptions that constitute the interpretive context within which these early texts must be read. For Graham, *xing* as a dynamic, gerundive concept references a process that is spontaneous and realizes its own potentialities when it is nourished and unimpeded. But taking his interpretation a step further, rather than assuming a doctrine of external relations where relations merely conjoin putatively discrete and independent "things," Graham endorses an understanding of early Confucian cosmology that assumes a doctrine of internal relations where relations are themselves constitutive of "events." Thus, his interpretation of *xing's* "own potentialities" would make them radically contextual, historicist, particularist, and emergent—that is, Graham offers us an embedded, narrative understanding of human nature rather than the familiar ontological or developmental models associated with the idealism and teleology most often attributed to Mencius.

Moving further toward Graham's growing philosophical preoccupation with spontaneity as a key to how we might best think about moral action, we have reached the three remaining essays in this volume by Lisa Raphals, Paul Kjellberg, and Chris Fraser, all of whom explore Graham's foray into formal philosophy with his commitment to spontaneity as an integral factor in achieving moral competence. Raphals sets out to track down the argument that motivates Graham's *Reason and Spontaneity* written relatively late in his career, and that also provides structure for *Disputers of the Tao*. The argument is captured succinctly in what Graham calls his quasi-syllogism:

In awareness of everything relevant to the issue (= everything which spontaneously moves me one way or the other), I find myself moved towards X, but overlooking something relevant I find myself moved towards Y.

Be aware.

Therefore, let yourself be moved towards X (= choose X as end).⁶

Graham rejects both Kantian rationalism and romantic irrationalism in favor of a notion of self in which awareness achieves an integration of reason with spontaneity. Because Graham's argument is both philosophical and empirical, Raphals responds to it through the lens of recent arguments in philosophy and research that has been undertaken in psychology and biology. In her first section she argues that Graham's account of inclination informed by awareness (rather than reason) as the basis for agency and the choices made do not require an account of *Zhuangzi* as "anti-rationalism." She then turns to his empirical argument and defends it by appeal to recent research on the biology of agency. Having brought not only focus but also additional support to Graham's argument, Raphals ends by critiquing his overdrawn distinction between humans and animals that puts him at odds both with the *Zhuangzi* and contemporary science.

Paul Kjellberg thinks through the seeming tension between the vows of constancy that ground the institution of marriage, and the spontaneity and openness to new experience advocated by the *Zhuangzi* and firmly embraced by Graham. Kjellberg follows Graham through the Humean observation that no account of the facts by itself determines what people should do on the basis of those facts. Kant agrees with Hume's "is/ought" distinction and brings reason into the discussion as an a priori foundation that can serve as a categorical ground for what is right and what people ought to do. Graham, and others, conclude that Kant's rationalism has failed in only giving us what morality would have to be if it exists, rather than proving that it in fact does exist. This leaves us with what Graham calls "irrationalism" as the pure subjectivism of the romantic for whom values are purely volitional, and Graham's own "anti-rationalism" as spontaneity in our inclinations (rather than pure rational deliberation) informed by a full awareness of the circumstances. He thus makes spontaneity the underlying foundation for both a more limited and contextualized function of reason and for morality itself. Kjellberg concludes that Graham's "grounded rationality" is not telling us to do anything differently, but rather by illuminating the way that we choose, he means to help us do what we have done all along better, that is, with more intelligence and greater awareness. It is this more subtle reading of Graham's project that for Kjellberg ultimately holds the key to reconciling spontaneity and marriage.

Chris Fraser brings our volume to a close with a delightful dialogue between a reluctant and critical Zhuang Zhou and the "anti-rationalist" Graham, who would include Zhuangzi as his fellow sojourner. As Kjellberg has done, Fraser challenges the appositeness of Graham's not always helpful distinctions—rationalism and anti-rationalism to begin with. Fraser in the persona of Zhuang Zhou makes a parody of the kind of simple rationalism that is sometimes assumed in Graham's own reasoning and in his charac-

terizations of the early doctrines. Fraser summons Hui Shi, the Mohists, and Yang Zhu, too, in requiring that Graham provide a clearer and more nuanced account of spontaneity as the putative antithesis of reason. The disputes are sometimes quite technical, but at every step, Fraser allows Graham to speak for himself and is gracious even where he thinks Graham has led us astray. At the end of the day, Fraser allows Graham to save himself by redescribing his characterization of Zhuangzi as neither a rejection of rationality nor an endorsement of impulsive, spontaneous responses, but rather as someone who recommends an uncodifiable, adaptive virtuosity. Fraser then really speaks on behalf of all of the authors of this volume by thanking Graham for requiring that we abandon fixed interpretations of these early texts and philosophize for ourselves.

Notes

1. For more information, see also the bibliographical note by Henry Rosemont in *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts: Essays Dedicated to Angus C. Graham*, ed. Henry Rosemont (La Salle: Open Court, 1991), xii–xiii. For a more personal account, see A. C. Graham, *Unreason within Reason: Essays on the Outskirts of Rationality* (La Salle: Open Court, 1992), 1–6.

2. For some of those stories, see the interview by Connor Walsh made at SOAS, <http://www.coffee flavoured tea.net/wordpress/?p=1898>.

3. Since the inauguration of the memorial lectures, the speakers have been Robert H. Gassmann (2010), Liu Xiaogan (2011), Carine Defoort (2012), William Nienhauser (2013), Roger Ames (2014), Michael Nylan (2015), and Christoph Harbsmeier (2016). Their lectures can also be accessed through the URL in note 2.

4. For a close to complete bibliography of his work edited by Henry Rosemont, see *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts*, 323–328.

5. Graham, “A Chinese Approach to Philosophy of Value: *Ho-kuan-tzu*,” in *Unreason within Reason*, 121–135, esp. p. 121. The essays gathered in this posthumous volume attest to this lifelong interest in this topic.

6. A. C. Graham, *Reason and Spontaneity: A New Solution to the Problem of Fact and Value* (London: Curzon Press, 1985), 7.