
Introduction

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It is only quite recently that moral relativism has become a central topic among moral philosophers. About thirty years ago, in 1979, Philippa Foot had the following to say: Because moral relativism is “one of those natural philosophical thoughts . . . one might therefore expect that moral relativism would be a central topic among those discussed in classes and in the journals. Surprisingly, however, the truth has for long been quite otherwise. Many recent books on moral philosophy ignore the problem or give it perfunctory treatment, and it is only in the last two or three years that strong, interesting articles have begun to appear in print” (Foot 2002, 20). In 1984, David Wong’s *Moral Relativity*, the first book-length study of moral relativism appeared (Wong 1984). Since then, there have been many books and journal articles on the topic.¹ It is a significant fact that, in contrast to most of the people who have aimed at establishing its falsity, Wong is among a handful of contemporary philosophers in the English-speaking world who are willing to defend certain forms of relativism.²

In his second book on moral relativism, *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism* (Wong 2006), which is the focus of this edited volume, Wong gives new arguments for an ambitious, sophisticated, and original version of moral relativism, which was first sketched out in his 1984 book. As one of the reviewers remarks, Wong’s new book is “the most systematic and persuasive defense of moral relativism that has yet been written” (Gowans 2007). At the Pacific Division Meeting of American Philosophical Association in 2008, we organized an “author meets critics” session on Wong’s book; three chapters of this volume (by

Lawrence Blum, Steven Geisz and Brook Sadler, and Yong Huang) and Wong's responses to them were first presented there. Chad Hansen's chapter was originally written for the session, although he could not attend the session to present it. For this volume, we also commissioned two chapters from Christopher Gowans as well as Paul Bloomfield and Daniel Massey, and invited Wong to respond to them.

We divide this introduction into two parts. In the first part, we highlight a few salient features of Wong's pluralistic moral relativism, as developed in *Natural Moralities*, and its relationship with some important aspects of Chinese philosophy. In the second part, we highlight a few central issues involved in the exchange between contributors of this volume and David Wong.³

I. David Wong's Pluralistic Moral Relativism

1. The Strategy and Style of Wong's Approach: Working Out a Defensible Relativism

Suppose there is a philosophical position, R, and all philosophers can be divided into those who believe in R and those who do not. Suppose one wants to write a book about R with the subtitle "A Defense of R." What would be the best way to do it? Obviously, some might try to defend all versions of R at all cost. We shall call such a defense an "ideological" defense of R. However, most philosophers would agree that the best strategy to defend R should rather be to figure out (and, in many cases, construct) a defensible (or even true) version of R, and one should not try to defend those versions of R that are clearly indefensible. This is exactly what Wong does in his defense of moral relativism. His basic strategy is that a debate about whether relativism is true or not should be turned into a debate about what kind of relativism may be true.

This partly explains the explorative and empirical style of Wong's book. He does not defend all forms of relativism; instead, he tries to find out what form of relativism is the defensible one by drawing on a broad set of empirical studies in the natural and social sciences and the humanities such as psychology, psychotherapy, evolutionary theory, game theory, anthropology, sociology, history, and literature. This also explains why the process of working out his pluralistic relativism, as we see it unfolding in the book, is also the process of ruling out those other forms of relativism that are indefensible, which are what Wong calls "the straw relativism that univer-

salists love to pillory” (Wong 2006, 73). We may mention two examples of the “straw relativism” here. The first is what Wong calls a “crude and uncritical conventionalism,” namely, the position that “simply regards the popularly accepted moral norms in a society as determinative of the truth conditions for moral statements in that society” (Wong 2006, 73). In other words, according to this view, all existing moralities in various societies are true. Wong’s pluralistic relativism does not imply such an extreme form of relativism because he believes that the truth-conditions of moral judgments in a society must be determined by both locally contingent criteria (LCC) and universally valid criteria (UVC).⁴ Wong’s relativism does not endorse those existing moralities that do not meet the UVC.

Another extreme form of relativism that Wong rejects as indefensible is what he calls “radical difference relativism” (Wong 2006, 11). Some philosophers have claimed that there can be “brutal confrontation between mutually unintelligible ways of life” (Wong 2006, 83). By “mutually unintelligible,” Wong means that either we cannot make sense of the function or purpose of others’ moral practices, or the values embodied in their practices are radically different from the values embodied in our practices. Here by saying that our values are “radically different” from theirs, one means either that we do not have any value in common, or that we find their values completely unintelligible. Some philosophers have claimed that all moral conflicts are of this kind, which is a view Wong rejects vigorously. As we have pointed out, Wong’s rejection of the “crude and uncritical conventionalism” implies his rejection of a number of actual or potential moralities, endorsed by such a form of relativism because they do not meet his local and universal criteria. However, when he rejects the radical difference relativism, Wong does not intend to reject all the actual moralities it regards as radically different. Instead, Wong simply wants to show that these moralities are not as radically different as such an extreme form of relativism claims.

2. *The Three Main Theses of Wong’s Pluralistic Relativism*

Wong labels his theory “pluralistic relativism”: “The theory is *relativistic* because it holds that there is no single true morality. It is *pluralistic* because it recognizes limits on what can count as a true morality” (Wong 2006, xv; emphasis added). We refer to these two parts of Wong’s theory as the “relativistic thesis” and the “pluralistic thesis,” respectively. One may characterize Wong’s position as an alternative to both radical universalism (which claims that there is one single true morality) and various forms of indefensible relativism (one of which claims that all existing moralities are true).

In other words, Wong is fighting on two fronts at the same time: He is *refuting* extreme forms of both universalism and relativism.

However, Wong's purpose is not solely negative. He aims at constructing an ethical theory by accommodating an array of diverse ethical theories from various philosophical traditions in the West as well as China. In other words, he practices what he preaches in the book, which is the importance of the virtue of accommodation in today's pluralistic world. In an important sense, one may also characterize Wong as *accommodating* on two fronts at the same time. With his relativistic thesis, Wong is accommodating one aspect of relativism, namely, its rejection of radical universalism. There is no single true morality; instead, there can be a plurality of true moralities, which may exist across different traditions and societies. Similarly, with his pluralistic thesis, Wong is accommodating one aspect of universalism, which is that there exist some universally valid criteria that all moralities have to meet. Wong's "pluralistic" thesis about the existence of the UVC puts constraints on how far relativism can go, or how relativistic one can be. This universalistic aspect of his theory differentiates his moderate version of relativism from extreme forms of relativism, including the crude and uncritical conventionalism, which holds that all existing moralities are true. Because existing moralities, by definition, are the ones that meet LCC in their societies, and because the truth-conditions of moral judgments in a society are determined by *both* LCC and UVC, existing moralities that do not meet the UVC cannot be true. In other words, Wong's relativism does not endorse them as true and adequate moralities.

The pluralistic thesis is one of the most distinctive features of Wong's moral relativism. Wong's basic insight seems to be that *moral* relativism should only be applicable to things that are truly and adequately "moral." In the phrase "x relativism," x is supposed to be referring to the domain. Wong's insight is that there must be content constraints on what counts as an adequate x; they put constraints on what defensible forms "x relativism" can take. We have mentioned earlier that Wong's basic strategy is to turn a debate about whether moral relativism is true into a debate about what form of relativism may be true. He now argues that to settle the latter we have to settle the debate about what counts as true and adequate moralities. As a result, Wong has turned the discussion about what kind of relativism may be true into an investigation about the nature of morality. This is why the significance and achievement of Wong's book goes far beyond the issue of moral relativism.

In other words, one of Wong's major contributions to moral philosophy is that he has given us a naturalist account of the nature of morality

by providing a set of UVC that are the necessary conditions for anything to be qualified as a morality. The following are some of the specific criteria:

1. An adequate morality should serve the social function of morality, which is to promote social cooperation.
2. It should be consistent with naturalistic accounts of human nature as we know it from naturalistic and evolutionary studies of human psychology.
3. It should be consistent with a naturalistic account of the nature of human cooperation, which must have the following components: “requiring human beings to seek only that which they have some propensity to seek; inclusion of norms of reciprocity in light of strong self-interest; in specification of norms and reasons, balancing self- and other-concern in ways that include putting less pressure on other concern through provision of some ‘payoff’ in terms of self-interest” (Wong 2006, 65).
4. An adequate morality of a society should be justifiable to the people who are governed “in terms of their interests when presented without falsification” (Wong 2006, 65).
5. An adequate morality should include the value of accommodation of moral disagreement.

As is seen in Part II of this introduction, these criteria are at the heart of the debate between Wong and his critics.

Now we want to suggest that in order to fully understand and appreciate the achievement and significance of Wong’s pluralistic relativism we need to pay attention to his fifth thesis, which might be called the “accommodation thesis.” It states that relativism should make it possible for us to accommodate one another in the sense that we can learn from one another, to become open-minded, and to enrich our horizons. Here, Wong draws on the relativism of Zhuangzi, the ancient Chinese Daoist philosopher, which teaches us “recognizing the worth of other ways of life is not a threat to be avoided but an opportunity for enrichment” (Wong 2006, xvii). We think the thesis of accommodation might be the most original and distinctive feature of Wong’s relativism. It enables him to respond to another critique of relativism, arguably the most serious one, which is that relativism only appears to be open-minded. For example, many people may claim that they

are “relativists” because they want to be open-minded and be tolerant of radically different cultures and value systems. They often claim that all values are relative to a group of people; certain values embodied in a group are only true *to them*, and our values are only true *to us*. In other words, what is true to them is not necessarily true to us (or what is intelligible to them is not necessarily intelligible to us). Then why should we even try to learn from the other group? What is the point of learning about things that are *false values to us* or *unintelligible to us*? In other words, the real reason why this kind of relativism should be rejected is that it leads to closed-mindedness. It closes off possibilities of learning from others. As we shall see, this idea plays an important role in Wong’s defense of his pluralistic relativism.

3. *Wong’s Defense of Pluralistic Relativism*

Because Wong’s relativist thesis (the claim that there is no single true morality) is identical to a rejection of radical universalism (the claim that there is one single true morality), Wong’s argument for the relativist thesis is identical to his argument against radical universalism. The argument is basically that radical universalism cannot explain a certain kind of moral disagreement, which consists of moral disagreements that evoke a complex reaction Wong calls “moral ambivalence”:

Moral ambivalence is the phenomenon of coming to understand and appreciate the other side’s viewpoint to the extent that our sense of the unique rightness of our own judgments gets destabilized. In other words, the most discomfoting kind of moral disagreement is not simply one in which both sides run out of reasons that are persuasive to the other side but is also a disagreement in which coming to the other side brings along an appreciation of its reasons. (Wong 2006, 5)

Note the words Wong uses here: “coming to understand and appreciate the other side’s viewpoint,” and “coming to the other side brings along an appreciation of its reasons.” It is important that what Wong is describing here is a typical learning experience.

To avoid potential misunderstandings, it must be pointed out that Wong is only explaining how a type of moral disagreement may give rise to the moral ambivalence reaction, which is an occasion for learning experience. Wong does not imply that this type of moral disagreement is the only type of disagreement. Let us consider the following two types of encounters

between two groups of people. In the first scenario, we come to see that the others have certain different practices in their own society, but we do not have anything to learn from them. In the second scenario, we come to see that other people's practices embody a moral value that we also recognize as overlapping with a value of our own, although perhaps to a lesser degree, and have lower priority in our own society. As a result, "our sense of the unique rightness of our own judgments gets destabilized" and "any prior convictions we might have had about the superiority of our own judgments get shaken" (Wong 2006, 5). That is to say, we have a learning experience only in the second scenario; and as long as the encounters are among groups of people with equally true and adequate moralities, moralities that meet Wong's universal and local criteria, moral ambivalence is the appropriate reaction, which warrants pluralistic relativism.

Now we can see why Wong's defense of the relativist thesis consists largely of arguments against "radical difference relativism." The second scenario of moral ambivalence would not have happened had radical difference relativism been true, for we would not have been able to recognize other people's values as overlapping with our own. In such a case, our reaction would have been moral *indifference*, not moral *ambivalence*. For Wong, it is crucial that moral conflicts are usually not conflicts between radically different value systems: "Differences between moralities do not typically consist in radical difference: one set of values confronting another totally different set" (Wong 2006, 10). Wong believes that, although we may find that the value embodied in other people's practices is in conflict with certain values of ours, we might still share some other values with them. Drawing on Davidson's discussion of the principle of charity, Wong argues that in general other human beings must remain in principle "interpretable," which means it is wrong to assume that there can be a radical difference in the sense that we do not share any value with them.

Now here is an example of the possible situations in which we do not have a reaction of moral ambivalence (and hence no occasion for learning experience). Imagine the practice under consideration is the ancient Mayan practice of human sacrifice, which was once practiced in a society that has long ceased to exist. When we are confronted with such a notionally possible way of life, we (people living in the contemporary world) would remain firm about our moral conviction against human sacrifice. Bernard Williams has argued that in cases like this we are warranted to hold what he calls "relativism of distance." When a practice of a group of people is only a notional possibility rather than a real option to us, in the sense that we cannot realistically realize it in our society without massive self-deception

and coercion, we can safely say that this practice embodies a “value” that is only “true” to them, but not “true” to us.

There are good reasons why Wong is not interested in encounters in which relativism of distance might be true.⁵ Wong is not interested in ways of life that are only *historically* significant and hence not a living option to us today. The reaction of moral ambivalence is built into his definition of pluralistic relativism. This must have something to do with his accommodation thesis, namely the idea that the function of moral relativism is to promote open-mindedness, accommodation, and the enrichment of our values. In the following passage, Wong seems to be making the important point that relativism should be about the others’ way of life *that is a real, competing rival to our own way of life*:

The problem is that the less we understand others, the less their way of life appears to be a *rival* to our own. If we don’t understand how their way of life would be attractive to human beings, it is difficult to conceive of it as *competing* with our own. (Wong 2006, 11)

In other words, relativism of distance might be a defensible form of relativism, but it is not an *interesting* one. Moral relativism should be about living a life in which accommodation is a vital component. Wong’s pluralistic relativism is made possible by the philosophical and moral courage to confront real and challenging options of diverse moral practices. In our own pluralistic world today, relativism of accommodation can indeed be a helpful guide in our constant negotiations and navigations of pluralistic values in everyday life.

4. *Wong’s Moral Relativism and Chinese Philosophy*

As someone well versed in Chinese philosophical tradition and exceptionally skillful in doing comparative philosophy,⁶ in developing his pluralistic moral relativism, Wong draws heavily on Chinese philosophical traditions, particularly Confucianism and Daoism. In the following, we highlight a number of the most important aspects.

The first aspect to emphasize is the idea of morality as social construction. Although naturalistic moral relativism, as pointed out by Bloomfield and Massey, can be perfectly consistent with moral realism, this is not the approach that Wong takes. Indeed, one of the salient features of Wong’s moral relativism is its view that “morality is partly a system of norms and

reasons that human beings have developed in order to work and to live together. One of its functions is to regulate cooperation, conflicts of interest, and the division of labor and to specify the conditions under which some people have authority over others with respect to cooperative activities” (Wong 2006, 37). In developing this view of morality as social construction, although Wong claims his theory builds on the previous accounts, the section discussing such accounts, except a short paragraph describing the view of Plato’s Protagoras, is entirely devoted to the view of Xunzi, one of the early Confucians. Wong acknowledges that “Xunzi’s genealogical story contains two claims that also form the cornerstone of my own functional conception of morality” (Wong 2006, 39). These two claims are respectively related to what Wong considers the interpersonal and intrapersonal functions of morality. On the one hand, Xunzi argues that ancient sage kings created moral norms to control the inborn tendency of human beings to seek gain in order to avoid conflicts. So morality here performs the interpersonal function of social cooperation. On the other hand, Wong underscores the difference between Xunzi and Hobbes, to whom Xunzi often is compared. For Xunzi, morality is not simply to constrain human behaviors but also to transform their characters through rituals, music, and poetry. This, for Wong, serves morality’s intrapersonal function of “promoting a psychological order within the individual” (Wong 2006, 40).

The second aspect deserving particular attention is Wong’s conception of moral ambivalence: “understanding other moral codes and the ways of life in which they are embedded is not to see them as alien and incomprehensible but in some respects familiar and in other respects constituting a challenge to our own codes and ways of life” (Wong 2006, 20). This is because for Wong different moralities are simply different configurations of the same universe of values. As these values cannot be all coherently integrated into one single system, different social groups invented different ways of ranking and prioritizing them. Thus values ranked high in other moralities are either ranked low or absent in our own moralities not because they are unfamiliar to us or regarded negatively by us, but because they are in conflict with other values we want to embrace. Wong develops this idea of moral ambivalence, to a great extent, through his understanding of Confucianism from the contemporary American perspective. He discusses several examples in detail. One of them is the Confucian conception of *xiao*, filial piety. Although the most important Confucian virtue is *ren*, humanity, it is stated in the *Analects* that filial piety is the root of humanity. In this sense, without filial piety, there will be no humanity. Thus, filial piety has become central to the Confucian tradition, which stipulates very stringent

duties toward parents. Wong observes that, in contemporary American society, “we generally do not accord it nearly as central a place in the catalogue of moral virtues, nor do we conceive its duties to be so stringent” (Wong 2006, 17). However, this is not because we regard filial piety as a disvalue but because it comes into conflict with other values, such as individuality and autonomy, which we cherish more. Thus, Wong claims that not only are there still some analogues of this Confucian virtue in American culture, but we also can understand why Confucian society gives it such a central place, “because we can imagine ourselves having taken a path we have not taken” (Wong 2006, 18).

The third aspect we would like to highlight is Wong’s uniquely hybrid view of moral reasons in the debate between internalism and externalism. His theory of moral reason is externalist in one respect and internalist in another: Moral reasons must be internal to human nature but may be external to (some) individuals’ motivational system. If Wong clearly mentions the Confucian sources in his articulation of the above two aspects of his moral relativism, Wong does not explicitly mention, at least in this book, the Confucian source of his theory of moral reason, although it is also closely related to Confucianism. The problem with externalism is that it seems odd to say that one ought to do something even if one does not have any reason to do it. However, internalism is equally, if not more, problematic because, if it is true, we would not be able to morally condemn atrocious actions such as Hitler’s, because Hitler does not have any reason in his motivational system to do other than what he actually did. It is in this context that Wong’s hybrid view of moral reasons is particularly interesting. Moral reasons must be internal to human nature, because “what we have moral reason to do is, in an important sense, dependent on what human beings are generally capable of being motivated to do. We cannot be morally required to be what has no relation to what human beings are or what they could be” (Wong 2006, 196). Of course, this does not mean that such a reason actually exists in every individual’s motivational system, as otherwise there would be no immoral actions or persons. However, even those who do not have moral reasons in their motivational systems, as human beings, are still capable of being motivated to be moral because moral reasons are internal to human nature. Such a view bears a close affinity to the view of the Mencian school of Confucianism. As is well known, Mencius believes that human nature is originally good, and everyone is born with the four hearts, the heart of commiseration, the heart of shame and dislike, the heart of humility and deference, and the heart of approving (the right) and disapproving (the wrong), which can be developed into the four cardinal human

virtues respectively: humanity, rightness, propriety, and moral wisdom. It is in this sense that Mencius claims that any individuals who have lost these four hearts are no longer human beings and have become indistinguishable from beasts. However, when Mencius makes this claim, he is looking at them not in terms of what they are; but in terms of what they ought to be. Individuals who have lost their four hearts are still different from beasts. We can say that they ought to have the four hearts, although we cannot say that beasts ought to have the four hearts. The reason is, to use Wong's terms, the four hearts are internal to human nature but are not internal to the nature of beasts. So although they are not internal to those who have lost them, it is still within their power to regain them, or they are capable of being motivated to regain them.

The fourth and final aspect we would like to bring to readers' attention is Wong's idea of accommodation. The Daoist Zhuangzi has long been one of Wong's favorite philosophers. In *Natural Moralities*, one of the central ideas of Wong's moral relativism is accommodation as a value or attitude toward disagreements among different moral systems. Wong claims that disagreements among different moral traditions are disagreements among different configurations of the same moral universe instead of disagreement among different universes. Accordingly, he argues that the preferred attitude toward moralities different from and yet as true and adequate as ours is neither complete endorsement nor complete rejection. It is not complete endorsement because this would mean that we have to reject our own moral system, which includes, or ranks high, values that we cherish but are either absent or ranked low in other moral systems. It is not complete rejection, because these alternative moralities include a significant number of the same values as in our own, because values included or ranked high in alternative moralities, which are absent or ranked low in our own, are not disvalues but are values that we would wholeheartedly endorse should they not come into conflict with other values we cherish more; and because these alternative ways of configuring the universe of values are the ways that we could have adopted in different circumstance. For all these reasons, Wong claims that a better attitude toward moral disagreement is accommodation: to broaden our view of what other ways of life are acceptable, although we do not accept such ways ourselves. Central to this value of accommodation is to respect alternative ways of life on the one hand and to be committed to one's own way of life on the other. This is indeed something that comes from Wong's reading of the Daoist Zhuangzi. Wong sees Zhuangzi as providing an answer to Joseph Raz's dilemma between the detached perspective and engaged perspective: From the detached perspective, we recognize the

worth of other ways of life, which undermines our commitments to our own; from the engaged perspective, we are committed to our own way of life, which makes it impossible for us to appreciate other ways of life. On Zhuangzi's argument, however, Wong claims the following:

the detached perspective from which we recognize a broader array of genuine values is also an engaged perspective from which our original moral commitments become broader and more inclusive. To recognize others' commitments or one's own as partial selections from a universe of values, is, after all, to recognize that such commitments concern genuine value, if not all value. Zhuangzi's constructive skeptical argument . . . encourages us to retain our own commitments as commitments to genuine values, but also to expand our view of what other commitments have a similar status. (Wong 2006, 236)

II. Central Issues between Wong and His Critics

This volume includes six critical essays on Wong's moral relativism as developed in *Natural Moralities* and Wong's detailed responses to them. In this part of the Introduction, we highlight some (of course not all) central issues between Wong and his critics. It has to be pointed out that, although most of these issues are regarded as central in both critics' essays and Wong's responses to them, there are some issues either regarded as central by the critics but not so by Wong or by Wong but not so by his critics, occasionally with issues that are perhaps marginal to both Wong and his critics but regarded as illuminating by the two editors of this volume. All these issues, however, are important not only in this critical discussion of Wong's book but also for any future discussion of moral relativism in general.

1. A Morality of Humanity Over and Above Moralities of Social Groups?

As a good moral relativist, Wong states that there is no single true morality. This statement has two meanings, depending on the two meanings of "true morality." When we mean morality true to different groups, then the statement accents on "single": There are many true moralities, each true to the social group that develops and subscribes to it. However, when we mean morality true to all human beings, its accent is on "no": There is no morality that is true to all human beings or true to all human beings as human

beings. So Wong's pluralistic moral relativism allows the existence of many true moralities, each of which is only true to a particular group and not all human beings. Although all these moralities, in order to be regarded as true, have to satisfy a number of universal constraints that Wong illustrates in his book, these universal constraints will not make the moralities within such constraints themselves universal.

In his contribution, although not rejecting Wong's group-centered morality, Lawrence Blum argues that such group moralities are incomplete unless supplemented by a humanity-centered morality (or dimension thereof) or at least constrained by an additional universal criterion: to treat others as *human beings as such* and not merely as members of a particular group, although he acknowledges that a morality that has something to say only about how to treat others as human beings as such is also incomplete unless it is supplemented by Wong's group-centered morality. The point of this universalistic dimension of morality is not merely about how to treat people outside one's social group. Blum acknowledges that Wong's group-centered morality can handle this, either by extending morality originally governing in-group activities to out-group activities or by developing specific rules governing the out-group activities. The problem with such ways to handle out-group activities, in Blum's view, is primarily not that different groups will still have different ways to handle out-group activities, and therefore none of them is universalistic. Rather, the problem is that such moralities all treat others, whether inside or outside a social group, as merely members of this or that social group and not as members of humanity or as human beings as such.

So the universalistic dimension of morality or constraint on all true and adequate morality that Blum envisions is different from Wong's expanded group morality that handles relationships with people outside the group in two senses. First, it is "a morality for human beings as such, governing how one human being is to treat another qua human being, not qua member of a particular group, whether one's own or an out-group" (38). It is only in the sense that we should treat everyone as a human being that such a morality or dimension of morality is universal. Blum argues that there can be such a morality because we have an unquestionable and even paradigmatically moral conception of "human" so that to treat someone in an inhuman way is clearly immoral. Second, unlike the norms expanded from group morality to govern out-group activities, this universal morality or universal dimension of morality "is not a matter of taking a particular moral principle that governs in-group behavior and extending it outward to all out-group members. Rather, the starting point is humanity itself, and a

recognition that our being human is morally laden in a way that we can, in part, spell out in the form of moral precepts, even if there is a good deal of disagreement and unclarity about the precise content of those precepts” (39).

Blum complains that *this* universalistic dimension, essential to any true and adequate morality, is absent in Wong’s definition of such morality. In his response, Wong admits that his universal constraints on true and adequate morality indeed do not include treating others as *humans as such*. Yet, Wong argues that when a group morality is extended to cover principles to govern out-group interactions, “there often arises the evaluative notion of the human, and once some moral principles are applied to others, critical reflection can give rise to expanding the scope of moral protections and responsibilities” (185). However, Wong insists that such an evaluative notion of the human is a local, not universal, criterion for true and adequate morality.

That means several things. First, because it is a local criterion, it can only be used to evaluate the morality of a group that accepts this notion of the human, and this group may even be able to use this local criterion to criticize the morality of another group for lacking such a notion, but it is not applicable to all moralities and therefore cannot be used to judge, from a meta-ethical view, whether a particular morality is true and adequate.⁷ Thus, second, although for Blum, a morality that lacks an evaluative notion of the human, even if it satisfies all universal and local criteria that Wong discusses, is not a true and adequate morality, for Wong, “[t]he most relevant function in this context is that of promoting and sustaining social cooperation, and I can see no argument that all moralities adequately performing this function *must* contain the evaluative notion of the human” (184–5). So Wong does not see a way to rule out a morality as false simply because it lacks such a notion. Third, for Wong, this does not mean that he has a less strict criterion for an adequate and true morality than Blum, because Blum’s strict criterion is not workable. As Blum makes it clear that the evaluative notion of the human is not a bottom–up notion, derived by gradually expanding the scope of one’s familiar group so that the group eventually becomes identical to humanity. Rather it is a top–down notion, coming from humanity itself and applied to individual human beings. In order to have such a notion, Wong claims, we must hold that “moral properties are there independently of whether human beings conceive of them and hence the same for everyone” (187). From a constructivist rather than a realist point of view, however, Wong thinks that the evaluative notion of the human present in our local morality, just like other moral ideas, is our construction. This means that even for those local moralities that do have evaluative notions of the human, there are a significant number of variations

of their evaluative notions of the human. In other words, even if members of two different groups treat people as humans as such according to their respective moralities, they may still treat people differently. So Wong claims that even if we do add a notion of the human to the universal constraints on true and adequate morality, “[w]e still do not address the question of *variability* in the kinds of treatment conceived to be due to all human beings as such, and variability in what it takes to qualify as a human being” (187).

2. Can a Metaethics that Is Naturalistic, Pluralistic, and Relativistic Accommodate a Normative Morality that Is Non-Naturalistic, Monistic, or Universalistic Morality?

In *Natural Moralities*, Wong develops a meta-ethical view that is naturalistic, pluralistic, and relativistic. Although such a meta-ethics does not have to endorse all normative values, one normative value is directly derived from and central to it: accommodation. When we come across a group of people subscribing to a morality different from ours and yet we cannot detect any mistakes they make, the most appropriate attitude for us to take is accommodation: to regard it as equally adequate and true as ours and as something that we ourselves could have adopted in different circumstances. In their contribution, Steve Geisz and Brook Sadler ask this interesting question: Can a meta-ethical view that is naturalistic, pluralistic, and relativistic accommodate a normative morality that is precisely opposite: non-naturalistic, monistic, and universalistic?

First, Wong’s ethical view is pluralistic, allowing different moralities to be true and adequate. This is closely related to his moral value pluralism: There is a universe of values, things all human beings consider to be good. However, there are conflicts among these values in the sense that one cannot have them all. So each group constructs a system of values, whose coherence is obtained by excluding some values and providing a ranking of values included. Wong’s value pluralism thus means that each morality endorses many different values, made coherent in a system, rather than a single value, whereas his pluralist moral relativism means that there are many different ways to systematize the different values. Now Geisz and Sadler ask whether Wong’s pluralistic relativism can accommodate a monistic morality, a morality that affirms one fundamental value, also as a true and adequate morality for a particular group. Their view is that this is a possibility that cannot be excluded out of hand, as it is conceivable that such a monist morality can satisfy all the conditions that Wong stipulates for true and adequate moralities. Geisz and Sadler do not try to defend

any such value-monistic morality, but the point they try to make, it seems, is that if Wong's pluralistic relativism is true, then his moral value pluralism is not necessarily true: A pluralist view of true and adequate moralities can accept both those that embody moral value pluralism and those that embody moral value monism.⁸

Second, Wong's meta-ethical view is relativistic, claiming that each of these true and adequate moralities is true and adequate only relative to a particular group. In other words, none of these moralities are universally true and adequate. Now, Geisz and Sadler ask: Because whether a morality is true or adequate for Wong is determined according to the relevant universal and local criteria, is it possible that a universalistic morality, such as the Kantian or even utilitarian morality, can also be regarded as true and adequate? In their view, although such a universalistic morality is apparently opposite to Wong's moral relativism, it cannot be excluded as false or inadequate simply because it is universalistic, as Wong's own standard for a true and adequate morality is not whether it is universalistic or relativistic but whether it meets the universal and local criteria and a universalistic morality is conceivably able to meet them. If this is so, Wong's relativistic metaethics would have the awkward consequence of accepting some universalistic moralities also as true and adequate.

In his response, Wong distinguishes two different senses of universalism in play here. One is that a morality is universal in the sense that it is a morality universally applied to all humans; another is that a morality is universal in the sense that it is applied (or accepted) by all human beings. Wong calls the former normative universalism and the latter meta-ethical universalism. Wong's relativist meta-ethics does allow the former but is irreconcilable to the latter. As we have already seen, Wong agrees that a group may expand its local morality to deal with its relationship to people outside its group, and the expansion, if it goes far enough, will result in a normative universalism: A morality this particular group (and not necessarily any other group, which may have its own universal moralities as a result of the expansion of its own group moralities) uses to treat all people, whether in or out of their own group. So if such moralities as Kantianism are universal in the normative sense, Wong can endorse them as true and adequate (as long as they meet his normal criteria for true and adequate moralities, both universal and local), but if they also claim to be universal in the meta-ethical sense, then Wong cannot endorse them as true and adequate. Because such moralities normally claim to be universal in both senses, Wong thinks the way out is to separate the normative contents of such moralities from their meta-ethical claim.

Third, Wong's meta-ethical view is naturalistic in a methodological sense: It requires that moral constructions "should not employ a distinctive, a priori method for yielding substantive truths shielded from empirical testing" (Wong 2006, 30). Given this clear statement, it seems that whether a non-naturalistic morality is allowed in Wong's pluralistic universe of moralities is out of the question. However, Geisz and Sadler argue that if such non-naturalistic morality as Kantian deontology can meet all the universal and local constraints Wong stipulates for true and adequate morality and perform the function of promoting social cooperation and individual agency, then it seems that there is no reason to exclude it from true and adequate morality. In their view, Wong's naturalism is better to be constrained at the meta-ethical level, in the sense that it should be used to guide our stipulation of the universal and local constraints on true and adequate moralities and of functions a true and adequate morality must perform. If so, a naturalist meta-ethics would allow a non-naturalistic morality as true and adequate. Wong does not respond to this point directly, but he does argue against Geisz and Sadler's proposal to interpret Xunzi as a non-naturalistic moral philosopher. Although Confucian morality is invented by sages, it is not invented in the same way divine command is issued by God: The former is based on empirical fact, while the latter is not.

3. The Principle of Humanity vs. the Principle of Charity: Interpretation of Confucianism

One of the key ideas in Wong's book is moral value pluralism, the "doctrine that there exists a plurality of basic moral values, where such values are not derivable from or reducible to other moral values" (Wong 2006, 6). Although each of these values is "valuable," they are not all compatible with each other, and no morality can ensure the maximal realization of them all. So each morality "must specify priorities to govern cases of conflict between these values" (Wong 2006, 7). Different moralities, as long as they are true and adequate according to Wong's universal and local constraints, are simply different prioritizations of the same universe of values. Thus a group that practices one morality sees another group that holds a different morality not as holding a false morality because values ranked high in the other group's morality are excluded from or ranked low in one's own morality not because one thinks that they are disvalues, but because they come into conflict with other values that one cherishes even more.

Wong argues that such a moral value pluralism is supported by Davidson's principle of charity, as when interpreting others "charity directs us to

‘optimize’ agreement between them and ourselves wherever it is plausible to do so. The idea is to make them ‘right, as far as we can tell, as often as possible’” (Wong 2006, 13). In his contribution, Chad Hansen is primarily concerned with this principle of charity, which he thinks is inferior to the principle of humanity, originally developed by Richard Grandy as an alternative to the principle of charity, particularly the version formulated by Quine and adopted by early Davidson that aims at the “maximal” agreement between the interpreter and the interpretee. Both principles are related to the purpose of translation, which is “to make the best possible predictions and to offer the best possible explanations of the behavior of the translatee” (Grandy 1973, 442). Grandy’s principle of humanity states: “If a translation tells us that the other person’s beliefs and desires are connected in a way that is too bizarre for us to make sense of, then the translation is useless for our purposes. So we have, as a pragmatic constraint on translation, the condition that the imputed pattern of relations among beliefs, desires, and the world be as similar to our own as possible” (Grandy 1973, 443). In appearance, this does not sound much different from the principle of charity, but what Grandy wants to emphasize is that our interpretees are also humans and so tend to err, and when they actually err, we should not interpret them as not erring out of charity. He uses the example of a person, Paul, coming to a party and making a claim that “the man with a martini is a philosopher” when he saw a man who, not a philosopher, was actually drinking water from a martini glass, and yet there was indeed a philosopher at the party, whom Paul didn’t see, who was drinking a martini. Now Grandy says that the principle of charity may dictate us to interpret what Paul says as true, while his principle of humanity will recognize Paul’s statement as false.

The reason is that, for Grandy, the principle of humanity is closely connected with the causal theory of belief, according to which whether a belief is true does not simply depend on what this belief is and whether there is something in the reality that corresponds to the belief but also on what causes one to have this belief. In other words, “we are focusing on the speaker’s use of words to refer, rather than on what the words refer to in the semantic sense” (Grandy 1973, 446–7). For this reason, the principle of humanity allows an interpreter to attribute false beliefs to the interpretee in cases the principle of charity does not allow, and this is the precise feature that Chad Hansen has in mind when he appeals to the principle of humanity: in contrast to the principle of charity that “endorses the interpretive theory that makes more of the corpus of expressions of the target language *true*,” “[a]dvocates of the principle of humanity worry that application of the principle of charity poses a danger, since in practice, it foists upon

users of that language a body of truths which we (with a completely different scientific and cultural background) accept. So they proposed that we maximize *reasonableness* rather than truth. . . . The principle of humanity thus allows us to attribute philosophical doctrines that are different from any we adopt now or have historically adopted. Our interpretive theory must simply explain why, given people's other beliefs, they accept the belief in question. That it now seems (or ever seemed) true to us is not crucial" (Hansen 1972, 10–11).

However, as Hansen himself is aware, Wong is not only familiar with but also sympathetic about the principle of humanity, which he discusses in detail in his earlier book (Wong 1984, 107–12). However, although Hansen claims that it is significantly different from the principle of charity, Wong argues that the version of principle of charity adopted by the later Davidson, which emphasizes *optimal* agreement instead of *maximal* agreement, has already incorporated the fundamental ideas of the principle of humanity, as it also allows us to interpret others as making mistakes. So although Hansen and Wong may still disagree about whether these two principles are essentially the same, there seems to be no disagreement between them about how we should interpret others. Then precisely where does their disagreement lie? According to Wong, it exists where we find others believing something different from us and yet we cannot identify the mistakes they make: His principle of interpretation allows us to construe them as making no mistakes and even as taking a path that we could have taken ourselves, whereas Hansen's principle of interpretation allows us to deem them to be mistaken.

In Wong's view, this is precisely why he and Hansen interpret and assess Confucianism so differently. In his book, Wong not only draws heavily on Confucianism in developing his pluralistic moral relativism but also regards Confucianism itself as one of the true and adequate moralities. Even when we disagree with its way of configuring different values, we cannot tell what is wrong with it. For example, the value of community ranked so high in Confucianism is also a value that we cherish. Of course, this way of configuration results in the minimization of the value of individuality, but our own configuration, which ranks the value of individuality so high, minimizes the value of community. Hansen, however, thinks that Wong is too charitable to Confucianism: When Wong cannot interpret Confucians as agreeing with us (and thus holding beliefs true to us), he tends to regard them as being rational (and thus holding beliefs true to them). In Hansen's view, "the status and role Confucianism plays in the larger dialectical context can be shown only by a more holistic or unified constructive justification of Confucian doctrines *in*

the translation manual for Chinese" (80). From this large translation manual, Hansen claims that commitments of Confucian authors, except Xunzi, are not philosophical reflection but the familiar human acceptance of authority, scriptures, rituals, and traditions; and even Xunzi's philosophical rationalization of Confucian commitments is predated by his philosophical apology for them, and Xunzi's account itself derives from the better one available in the culture, Mohism. So Hansen complains that, when Wong's *Natural Moralities* claims that Confucianism is one of the true and adequate moralities, "it does not do this with a constructive argument about the reasonableness of Confucianism in the inference scheme of either Classical or modern Chinese. It takes the reasonableness for granted in construing it, constructively renders *received* Confucian beliefs as reasonable for them" (80).⁹

So it seems that the real disagreement between Hansen and Wong is not as much about which principle of interpretation to adopt as about how to interpret Confucianism. This Wong clearly recognizes in his response: "[i]n fact, I suspect that it is my treatment of the Confucians that persuades Hansen that despite what I say in general about interpretation, I am in practice maximizing true belief à la early Davidson. He thinks I am distorting what Confucians thought and believed in the interests of making their beliefs maximally true. Not surprisingly, I think *Hansen* is distorting what they thought and believed in the interests of making their beliefs mostly false" (230).

4. *Naturalism and the Naturalistic Fallacy*

Wong's moral relativism is pluralistic in the sense that, while it allows multiple moralities to be true and adequate, it is able to exclude a number of moralities as false and inadequate. So as a meta-ethical theory, it does not merely provide a descriptive explanation of existing moralities but also can provide a normative evaluation of them. This normative evaluation is in light of his methodological naturalism: how such moralities are related "to human needs, desires, and purposes" (Wong 2006, 36). In his contribution, Christopher Gowans takes issue with this normative aspect of Wong's methodological naturalism. While acknowledging that some psychological facts may indeed impose *constraints* about what a morality can require humans to do in light of Owen Flanagan's minimal psychological realism (i.e., it cannot require what it is impossible for people to do), Gowans argues that it is controversial to regard facts, psychological or sociological, as a *source* of a morality, as in the latter, "these facts might be taken to imply some normative statements" and thus the naturalistic fallacy of deriving *ought* from *is*