Practising to Know: Practicalism and Confucian Philosophy

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Abstract
For a while now, there has been much conceptual discussion about the respective natures of knowledge-that and knowledge-how, along with the intellectualist idea that knowledge-how is really a kind of knowledge-that. Gilbert Ryle put in place most of the terms that have so far been distinctive of that debate, when he argued for knowledge-how's conceptual distinctness from knowledge-that. But maybe those terms should be supplemented, expanding the debate. In that spirit, the conceptual option of practicalism has recently entered the fray. Practicalism conceives anew the nature of knowledge-that, as being a kind of knowledge-how. In this paper we enlarge upon this conceptual suggestion. We draw from an ancient Chinese text, the *Analects of Confucius*, explaining how it lends some support to practicalism.

1. Introduction

Are human actions guided by knowledge whenever these are what Gilbert Ryle would have called intelligent? The idea that all such actions are so guided is what Ryle named *intellectualism*. It is also what, famously, he discarded. His arguments against it are philosophically well-known.[1] And these arguments – are they correct? here, we assume so[2] – have helped to launch the subsequent epistemological debate.

[1] For explication of them, see Jeremy Fantl, 'Knowing-How and Knowing-That', *Philosophy Compass* **3**(3) (2008), 451–470; Stephen Hetherington, *How To Know: A Practicalist Conception of Knowledge* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), sec. 2.2. For their original presentations, see Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), and 'Knowing How and Knowing That', in his *Collected Papers*, Vol. II (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 212–225.

[2] Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson deny so: 'Knowing How', *The Journal of Philosophy* **98** (2001), 411–444. But we will not engage with their argument. Here, we will travel along a quite different philosophical path.

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However, they have also contributed to limiting that debate unnecessarily. If successful, they show that knowing how to act in a particular way – such as knowing how to juggle – need not be constituted at all by some knowledge that this-and-not-that is how to so act. Knowing-that and knowing-how, concluded Ryle, are metaphysically distinct because intellectualism is false. But any such inference is too swift. Even if intellectualism's falsity entails that knowledge-how is not even partly a kind of knowledge-that, this fails to entail the fundamental distinctness of knowledge-that and knowledge-how. Rather, there is a further option to consider – namely, *practicalism*. It has recently received some expressions of support.[3] In this paper we offer a new line of partial support for it – not a fully developed conceptual argument; but a suggestive argument for at least a proto-practicalism, an argument centred upon some comparative philosophy, directing us to elements of Confucian philosophy.

2. Practicalism's Main Idea

Like intellectualism, practicalism is about constitutive relations between knowledge-that and knowledge-how. But while intellectualism is a way of reconceiving of the nature of knowledge-*how* – as being a kind of knowledge-that – practicalism reconceives the nature of knowledge-*that* – as being a kind of knowledge-how. Whereas intellectualism pictures intelligent action as being guided by knowledge-that, for practicalism the converse guidance reigns. How should we formulate the latter idea? Here is a strong version of it:

> *Practicalism about knowledge-that*. To know that *p* is to know how to perform various pertinent actions, ones bearing upon or reflecting *p* in particular.

Knowledge-that is thus to be understood as being a kind of knowledge-how.

That is a highly schematic thesis, though. Can we render it less so (before commenting upon how to argue for it)? We can indeed, by considering a competing (and standard) epistemological view.

Usually, knowledge is said by epistemologists to be a state of belief – not *merely* belief, of course; a belief instead with some epistemically significant properties. Practicalism likewise allows knowledge to be a state; but most likely a more complex one, and not necessarily one of belief in particular. Practicalism tells us that knowledge is a

[3] See Hetherington, *How To Know*, op. cit., ch. 2

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state of knowledge-how – the complex knowledge how to perform actions from some apt *range* of possibilities (the complexity being commensurate with this range). And, as we will now explain, having a belief that *p* might but need not constitute that full range.

For example, suppose you know that you are sitting on a chair. According to practicalism, your having this knowledge is the following:

> Your knowing how to answer accurately to questions about where you are sitting, *and/or* your knowing how to make inferential links accurately between such an answer and other claims or thoughts, *and/or* your knowing how to describe accurately to yourself what you are doing, *and/or* your knowing how to accommodate your body accurately to a circumstance of sitting on a chair, *and/or* so forth.

The point is not that you have the independently specifiable knowledge that you are sitting on a chair – which then gives you some or all of these cases of knowledge-how. The practicalist's point is that your former knowledge-that is not specifiable independently of these in the first place; for it *is* your having some or all of these and more instances of knowledge-how.[4] Clearly, any actions with which we would manifest or express these kinds of knowledge-how (answering accurately, reasoning accurately, etc.) are the sorts of action which – speaking traditionally, and perhaps bespeaking a residual intellectualism – we may wish to describe as ways of *using* knowledge:

> 'You have the belief. It is also true and well justified. Indeed, it is knowledge. Hence, *because* you have that knowledge, you are able to act knowledgeably in at least some of these other ways, all of them bearing upon *p*. That is, your having the knowledge that *p* allows you knowledgeably to reason, question, perceive, act, etc., in ways that bear upon *p*.'

But practicalism offers an alternative conception of the relationship between the knowledge that *p* and those sorts of action. It allows us

[4] There can be correlative complexity in the knowledge-how which is the knowledge-that. That complexity may be differently manifested, too, by different epistemic agents or by a single epistemic agent at different times. On different occasions, for instance, your knowledge that you are sitting in front of a table could be constituted as *different* composites still amounting to some knowledge-how. Today, you know how to describe your situation in visual terms. Tomorrow, you would not – when in a darkened room.

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to regard these actions, insofar as they are expressing or manifesting the knowledge-how (the knowledge how to reason, to question, etc., in such ways), as *thereby* expressing or manifesting the knowledge-that – the knowledge that *p*. And it allows this by conceiving of the knowledge-how which is being expressed or manifested *as itself being* the knowledge-that.

Apart from the elegance of that practicalist picture, though, why would one adopt it? Again, the standard epistemological motivation for *not* doing so includes describing knowledge as a belief with some epistemic properties. Again also, these epistemic properties may well be said to render the believer able to perform various actions, such as the ones listed above – questioning accurately, answering accurately, reasoning accurately, etc. On that interpretation, the believer can – *because* she has the belief that *p* with its epistemic properties (that is, she has the knowledge that *p*) – reason accurately regarding *p*, answer accurately as to *p*, perceive accurately with respect to *p*, act accurately in relation to *p*, and so on. Accordingly, we are told, there is this interconnected, albeit loosely specified, grouping of capabilities, with the epistemically augmented true belief that *p* (the knowledge that *p*) located firmly at its core. The augmented belief thereby *is* the knowledge that *p*, with these other capabilities being present because the augmented belief is.

However, that picture is more conceptually optional than epistemologists have tended to realise. This is precisely where we should acknowledge a conceptual opening for an alternative picture, a practicalist one. After all, maybe the true belief that *p*'s having its epistemic properties (those which would be thought to make it knowledge) is partly constituted by the presence of these further features. If they did not exist, presumably we would be reluctant to deem it even epistemically justified from the outset. If the true belief was not accompanied by apt abilities to question, reason, answer, act, etc., then even the presence of much logically supportive evidence would not make the belief justified sufficiently to be knowledge.[5] This suggests the possible unwarrantedness of the usual epistemological approach of placing the epistemically augmented true belief that *p* at the grouping's core, treating that belief as being *independently* understandable as sufficiently epistemically augmented to be knowledge that *p*.

[5] And this would not be an insufficiency akin to the one putatively discovered by Edmund Gettier: 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis* **23** (1963), 121–123.

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That point is reinforced by the fact that any *other* member of the grouping could equally, no less fluidly, be understood as locatable at the grouping's core. We might have said, for instance, that *reasoning* accurately about *p* (not *believing* accurately that *p*) is what sits at the core of such a grouping – with the rest of these capabilities, including the believing, being reflections or expressions of *it*.[6] In turn, we may proceed to speak in that same way, *mutatis mutandis*, for each member of that grouping – not only for reasoning accurately, and not only for believing truly or accurately, but for answering accurately or for questioning accurately or for acting accurately, etc. The conceptual result is that *no* member is constitutively prior to the others in such a way that only it (when suitably augmented) could be the knowledge and in such a way that all of the others must at best be mere ways of using that knowledge.

Consequently (and by the same token), we may decline to place *any* one in particular of those possible members at the core of that grouping; for to do so would be to elevate, to conceptual pre-eminence within the project of understanding knowledge-that, what has no greater claim to that status than do other members of the grouping. Practicalism allows us thereby to decide that the augmented true *belief*, say, is not any more the knowledge than are any of those other possible states. Knowledge is as much believing-accurately-with-epistemic-properties as it is asserting accurately, questioning accurately, answering accurately, moving accurately, etc. – still with epistemic properties. But knowledge is also no *more* one of these than it is one of the others. It is any or all of these, equally.

Yet how *can* that be so? How *could* the knowledge that *p* be any or even all of these, equally? Here is how. It can be so by being not quite any of them, while equally being potentially any or all of them. And it can achieve this tantalising balance by being at once the knowledge-how *to* be any or all of them. In other words, the knowledge that *p* can be the knowledge-how which would typically be expressed or manifested in any or all of those ways. On this conception, the knowledge that *p* is the knowledge how to act in any or all of these clearly *p*-relevant ways. The knowledge that *p* is the knowledge how (not the knowledge *of* how) to perform any or all of these sorts of action, or to respond in any or all of these ways – all of them bearing upon or

[6] That could be an *inferentialist* conception of the epistemic order; as to which, see Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), and *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

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reflecting the truth that *p*. A specific epistemic agent's knowledge that *p*, for a specific *p*, at a specific time will be a case of knowledge like that.

This section has presented the barest sketch of practicalist thinking. But it was sufficient for our immediate purpose, of providing simply a sense of how such thinking might be formulated and to some extent supported.[7] Our main aim in this paper is to describe some further support for practicalism, some support which (unlike this section's thinking) is not so conceptual. The ensuing sections will present a different kind of argument — the core of the paper. As section 1 mentioned, this argument will draw upon some Confucian philosophy.

3. Confucian Philosophy: Epistemological Background

In addressing some of the questions posed in the previous sections, we focus primarily on a Confucian text, the *Analects*, a compilation of anecdotes presented in the form of conversations with Confucius.[8] The received version of the *Analects* comprises conversations that date from between the 5th to 2nd centuries BCE, a period dubbed the Warring States period (476–221 BCE).[9] This was a turbulent time in Chinese history and the texts proposed solutions to

[7] For more on the ins and outs of practicalism, see Hetherington, *How To Know*, op. cit. John Bengson and Marc Moffett call practicalism *radical* anti-intellectualism: 'Two Conceptions of Mind and Action: Knowing How and the Philosophical Theory of Intelligence', in J. Bengson and M.A. Moffett (eds), *Knowing How: Essays on Knowledge, Mind, and Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–55. They provide a useful taxonomy of the surrounding logical space.

[8] E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks offer an interesting translation of the *Analects* based on their understanding of events in the lives of the early Confucian followers: *The Original Analects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). For a discussion on *reading* the *Analects*, see Karyn Lai, 'Understanding Confucian Ethics: Reflections on Moral Development', *Australian Journal of Professional and Applied Ethics* **9** (2007), 21–27.

[9] For an authoritative discussion of the text's history, see Anne Cheng, 'Lun yü', in M. Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, Early China Special Monograph Series No. **2** (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), 313–323.

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the unrest. This aim dominated the subject matter of these debates, their conceptual frameworks, and methodological approaches.[10]

We discuss relevant passages in the *Analects* in order to reveal their assumptions about epistemic matters. While there are discussions of comparative Chinese and western epistemology that draw more broadly from the range of Chinese philosophical traditions,[11] the purposes of this paper will be better served by more in-depth analysis of approaches to knowing in the text of one philosophical tradition.

In their solution to the unrest, Confucius and his followers dwelt on how some of the models of exemplary conduct of an earlier age – the early Zhou 周 when the collective good flourished (*Analects* 3.14; 7.5) – could be appropriated and realised in their

[10] The dominant tendency was to propose systems comprising standards and their implementation in aspects of life, including especially those in the administration of government and everyday behaviours. The Confucians proposed a model of government based on exemplary moral leadership (*ren* 仁) that were encoded (*zhengming* 正名) in normative practices (*li* 禮) for the common people (*min* 民). The Mohists proposed the standardisation (*fa* 法) of moral concern as an extension of the application of standards in craftsmanship, their area of expertise. The Mohist standard of equal concern of each person for everyone else (*jianai* 兼爱: see Angus C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* [Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1989], 41) was in part a criticism of the Confucian emphasis on loyalty in particular relationships (e.g. *Analects* 13.18). The Legalists sought to impose conformity through a system of penal law (*fa* 法) propped up by severe punishments (*xing* 刑) for those who failed to comply with them: see Karyn Lai, *Introduction to Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 172–198. A group of thinkers known collectively as the Daoists were the most prominent objectors to the institution of standards: David B. Wong, 'Zhuangzi and the Obsession with Being Right', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* **22** (2005), 91–107; Karyn Lai, 'Philosophy and Philosophical Reasoning in the *Zhuangzi*: Dealing with Plurality', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* **33** (2006), 365–374. See also Jana S. Rošker, *Searching for the Way: Theory of Knowledge in Pre-Modern and Modern China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008), 9.

[11] Few thinkers during the Warring States period expressed their views of knowledge and knowing discursively. The notable exception would be a group of thinkers dubbed the Later Mohists who sought explicitly to clarify the terms of inquiry, for example, through making clear distinctions (*bian* 辨), defining similarities and differences (*tong-yi* 同-異), what was so and not-so (*ran-buran* 然-不然), and so on. See Lai, *Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, op. cit., 111–141, and Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, op. cit., 75–95.

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time. There are extensive conversations in the *Analects* on learning processes and the primacy of practice, and it is where we may find support for practicalism.

4. Knowing and Realising: *zhi* in the *Analects*

The primary epistemic term in the *Analects* is *zhi* (知),[12] corresponding to 'knowledge' although it is used more frequently as a gerund – and most appropriately translated as 'knowing' – where it refers to the *manifestation* of knowledge. In the *Analects*, *zhi* may refer to the capacities, practices or actions associated with the exercise of wisdom, intelligence, knowing and understanding. It may function as a verb (to know), or a noun (the subject matter of one's knowing), or it may denote the state of a person (who knows). The meaning of *zhi* varies according to a number of factors including especially the context of the discourse, the subject matter of discussion and its objects (that is, the objects of knowing). The variety of meanings of *zhi* when coupled with different objects include:

zhitianming (知天命) – to apprehend and realise the ordinances of heaven (*Analects* 16.8);

zhiren (知人) – to understand people in order appropriately to utilise their capacities in official tasks (*Analects* 1.16; 12.22; 13.2;

[12] We make this point with some caution because, although *zhi* is the primary epistemic term in the text, it does not on its own provide a comprehensive picture of Confucian epistemology. In any case, it is not the aim of this paper to present such a picture. But let us consider what *is* required, if we were to take on such a task, as it involves important methodological issues. There is a need to avoid the oversimplification of semantic investigations of Chinese philosophy by equating the notion of a *concept* with single Chinese (character) terms. Christoph Harbsmeier presents an authoritative analysis of a large number of terms in early Chinese philosophical discourse that do not *in themselves* (i.e. as single terms) contain epistemic connotations, or whose referents are not clearly associated with knowledge or knowing: 'Marginalia Sino-Logica', in Robert E. Allinson (ed.), *Understanding the Chinese Mind: The Philosophical Roots* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 59–83. For example, the notion *xin* (信) is normally translated as 'trustworthiness'. In *Analects* 7.37, Confucius refers to a particular saying and then asserts that it is '*xin*'. Harbsmeier suggests that, although the concept 'truth' is not referred to, *xin* in this passage expresses the notion of semantic truth, that is, it is to be believed or accepted (ibid., 131).

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14.30; 14.35) and, more generally, to respond to people appropriately;

zhiyan (知言) – to appreciate the use and force of speech (*Analects* 20.3);

zhisheng/*zhisi* (知生/知死) – to understand life and death (so as to appreciate what is morally weighty) (*Analects* 11.12); and

zhili (知禮) – to grasp and abide by the norms of behavioural propriety (*Analects* 3.15; 3.22).

In the large majority of conversations that refer to *zhi*, it is used in conjunction with a specific subject matter, usually in relation to the tasks or duties associated with an official career. It is interesting to note that *zhi* is seldom referred to as a single character on its own;[13] this perhaps indicates that there is no prioritisation of the activity or state of knowing that is independent of its subject matter. Where the conversations focus on whether a person *has* knowledge of a particular subject matter, evaluations are made on the basis of whether a person is or has been able to carry out a specific task. This gives the impression that 'knowing-how' is an appropriate understanding of the term *zhi*. Across a number of conversations in the *Analects*, *zhi* pertains both to the discovery of possibilities for, and implementation of, a particular set of actions relating to the topic in question. This suggests that there is no dichotomy that parallels that in contemporary western epistemology: on the one hand, the *possession of* knowing-that and, on the other, the *application of* knowing-how.

Zhi (知) in the *Analects* is closely related to a key moral term, *ren* (仁). *Ren* is the defining characteristic of an exemplary person who both attends to particular relationships and has a more inclusive concern for all people (*Analects* 4.2, 6.23, 9.29, 14.28). At the core of the Confucian proposal is the capable official who is able to realise *ren* in rectifying the unrest.[14] There is a robust conception of

[13] *Analects* 12.22 is one of those occasions where an interlocutor asks about *zhi*, without reference to its subject matter. There are a few conversations where the subject matter is not specified (e.g. *Analects* 2.12) although there is a placeholder, *zhi* (之), which may function as a pronoun or an auxiliary word, i.e. 'of *x*'.

[14] Contemporary literature on this topic bears out this point. Antonio S. Cua, *Dimensions of Moral Creativity: Paradigms, Principles, and Ideals* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979); Antonio S. Cua, 'The Conceptual Framework of Confucian Ethical Thought', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* **23** (1996), 153–174; Joel Kupperman, 'The Indispensability of Character', *Philosophy* **76** (2001), 239–250; Joel Kupperman, 'Virtue in Virtue Ethics', *Journal of Ethics* **3** (2009), 243–255;

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knowing – perhaps having many parallels with virtue epistemology – in the Confucian tradition. Lisa Raphals, commenting on wisdom in classical Confucianism, notes that *zhi* in the *Analects* may be set out according to a range of levels:[15]

> (1) The mastery of a set of ideas, expressed as rules for appropriate conduct (*li*), contained in a body of written texts; (2) the acquisition of a moral or ethical outlook (*ren*, *yi*), embodied in a set of practices described in the texts; and (3) the ability to recognize (*zhi*), and at times predict, situations in life and conform one's conduct to the guidance of those texts – in other words, to act appropriately. Hence Confucian knowledge concerns both ideas and modes of action.

Raphals' characterisation of *zhi* follows the knowledge-how/knowledge-that dichotomy suggested by Ryle. She classifies *zhi* as covering two possibilities: ideas (propositional knowledge contained in *texts*) and modes of action (procedural know-how). The argument in this paper does not deny that such a distinction may be made. However, we suggest that the latter has significantly greater weight in the philosophical framework of the conversations.

Some support for this thesis is raised in the distinction that is made between recitation (*song* 誦) and knowledge (*zhi*). In one conversation in the *Analects*, Confucius notes: 'If people can recite all of the three hundred *Songs* and yet when given official responsibility, fail to perform effectively, or when sent to distant quarters, are unable to act on their own initiative, then even though they have mastered so many of them [the *Songs*], what good are they to them?'[16] This comment implicitly refers to the role of knowledge in official life. Here, Confucius remarked on the futility of *recitation* of the *Songs* without being able to realise their insights in official duties. This conversation, as does another in *Analects* 9.27, specifically uses the term *song*, recitation, and not *zhi*. This suggests that the *possession* of a body of information, which may also include the ability to say it *correctly*, does not constitute *zhi*. Interestingly, Ryle made a similar comment, also using recitation as an example of knowledge-that not

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Xinzhong Yao, *Wisdom in Early Confucian and Israelite Traditions* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

[15] *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 33.

[16] 13.5 in *The Analects of Confucius*, (trans.) Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 163.

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necessarily accompanied by knowledge-how and, importantly, of knowledge-how of a particular activity not necessarily accompanied by a corresponding or underlying ability to cite or formulate the rules associated with that activity.[17]

In light of the assumptions about the roles and nature of knowledge and knowing in Chinese philosophy, Lao Sze Kwang (Lao Siguang 勞思光), an influential contemporary scholar of Chinese philosophy, suggests that Chinese epistemology is 'orientative' in character.[18] On this, he notes that Chinese philosophy focuses on problems of 'where should we go' instead of 'what it is'.[19] The extensive focus on learning (*xue* 學) in the *Analects* is geared toward orientation to particular circumstances and then to *select* what is appropriate (*ze* 擇): I hear much, select what is good, and put it into practice. I see much, and commit it to memory (*Analects* 7.28; trans. by Lai).[20] These considerations suggest that the search for truth or the possession of conceptual knowledge is not unimportant in Chinese philosophy. However, neither truth nor conceptual knowledge has the same priority as in contemporary western epistemology. Unlike intellectualism, Chinese philosophy does not have a particular metaphysical commitment to (true) belief as basic.[21] This claim is substantiated in the contemporary research literature on Confucianism.[22]

[17] *The Concept of Mind*, op. cit., 42.

[18] Lao, Sze-Kwang, 'On Understanding Chinese Philosophy: An Inquiry and Proposal', in Allinson, *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, op. cit., 265–293.

[19] *Ibid.*, 290.

[20] 多聞擇其善者而從之，多見而識之. From *Analects* 7.28: *ICS Lunyu*, 7.28/17/6 (*A Concordance to the Lunyu* (論語逐字索引), (eds.) D.C. Lau, Ho Che Wah, and Chen Fong Ching. ICS series. Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1995).

[21] This is not to deny that there are some discussions in the early Chinese texts that refer to a notions that correspond roughly to the abstract concept 'truth' or its epistemological cognate, belief. Harbsmeier's analysis demonstrates, however, that 'there is often little obvious difference between "truth" as the "property" of a sentence that makes it true, and "reality, the facts of the matter"': 'Marginalia Sino-Logica', op. cit., 140. Nevertheless, Harbsmeier contends that 'Chinese philosophers would not place emphasis on the notion of scientific objective truth' (*ibid.*, 141).

[22] See, e.g., Roger T. Ames, 'Meaning as Imaging: Prolegomena to a Confucian Epistemology', in E. Deutsch (ed.), *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 227–244; A. S. Cua, 'The Conceptual Framework of Confucian Ethical Thought', op. cit.; Kim-Chong Chong, *Early Confucian*

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In the following section, we examine an important use of *zhi*, in its coupling with *li* (禮), behavioural propriety. The notion of propriety captures both the Confucian understanding of human relationships and its emphasis on the performative aspect of human attachment (*Analects* 3.3). We focus on what it means to *know li*.

5. Knowing Behavioural Propriety

The term *li* has a central place in the Confucian tradition; it is one of the defining characteristics of Confucian philosophy. It occurs in many of the conversations in the *Analects*. Although its scope and meaning varies in the contexts of particular conversations, it is acceptable to say that *li* in general denotes the behavioural propriety that is indispensible in communicating the attendant attitudes and feelings appropriate in a particular situation.[23] In practical terms, *li* are the social ritual norms appropriate in specific contexts. The phrase '*zhili*', (知禮) to *know li*, is used typically to denote that a person has incorporated *li* in his actions. In other words, the basic understanding of *zhili* is its manifestation in action. There is no explicit statement to the effect that a person's knowledge-that of appropriate *li* informs and drives the right kinds of performances of *li*. In fact, one of the four occurrences of *zhili* in the *Analects* (passage D below) reveals an interesting scenario where both (propositional) knowledge of *li* and knowing how to manifest it are brought into question. We examine the four conversations (A to D below) in the text where *zhili* is mentioned.

> (A) The Master said, 'One who does not know the conditions of life (知命 *zhiming*) is unable to be an exemplary person. One who does not know behavioural propriety (*zhili*) is unable to be (properly) situated. One who does not know words (知言 *zhiyan*) is unable to know people [*zhiren*].' (*Analects* 20.3; trans. Lai)[24]

This passage addresses knowing, coupled with four objects: knowing the conditions of one's life and circumstances, knowing *li*, knowing

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Ethics: Concepts and Arguments (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 2007).

[23] Karyn Lai, '*Li* in the *Analects*: Training in Moral Competence and the Question of Flexibility', *Philosophy East and West* **56** (2006), 69–83.

[24] 子曰：'不知命，無以為君子也。不知禮，無以立也。不知言，無以知人也。' *ICS Lunyu*, 20.3/58 /3-4 (*A Concordance to the Lunyu*, op. cit.)

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(the impact of) words and knowing people (so as to respond to them appropriately). It appears to be a list of prerequisites for developing the characteristics of the exemplary person. Could *zhi* in these couplings refer to knowledge-that as prerequisites of knowledge-how (i.e. to know that particular *li* apply in particular situations *in order that* one may know how to adopt a particular stance)? If we were to consider this passage on its own, this interpretation is possible. However, we have seen that, across the text on the couplings of *zhi*, manifestation, not the possession, of knowledge is the primary concern. To say that a person '*zhiren*,' for example, is to say that they know how to treat and respond to others appropriately, as previously discussed. There is no specific mention of knowing-that as necessary for *zhi*, knowledge. Nevertheless, this still leaves us with the question of whether, in these conversations, knowledge-that is assumed in the manifestations of *zhi*. We return to this question in section 6.

> (B) The Master said, 'Guanzhong was lacking in capacity.'
> Someone asked: 'Do you mean that Guanzhong was frugal?'
> The Master replied: 'Guanzhong had three residences and each member of his staff had only one responsibility. Where's the frugality?'
> 'This being so, did Guanzhong know ritual propriety [*zhili*]?' he was asked.
> The Master replied: 'The ruler of the state set up ornamental stone blinds before his gates, and Guanzhong did the same; for entertaining other rulers the ruler of the state had a stand for inverting drinking vessels, and Guanzhong had the same. If we say that Guanzhong knew ritual propriety [*zhili*], then who doesn't [*zhili*]?'[25]

In this passage Guanzhong had overstepped the ritual boundaries for a person of his status. Although he was not a ruler, he took it upon himself to enjoy the benefits due to rulers. Confucius criticises him for his lack of understanding of *li*. If we were to apply the knowing-how/knowing-that distinction, *zhili* may refer either to knowledge of the proprieties appropriate to his status (knowledge-that) or to his ability (and perhaps motivation) to manifest *li*, or to manifest the specific knowledge-that relating to his status. There are no comments in the passage that explicitly suggest any of these readings. What is clear, however, is that Confucius judges

[25] *Analects* 3.22; adapted from the translation by Ames and Rosemont, op. cit., 87.

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Guanzhong – that he does *not* know *li* – on the basis that he has failed *to* manifest the appropriate *li* in court. In this conversation, Confucius, as the assessor, makes an evaluation concerning whether we may attribute *zhili* to Guanzhong. Does Guanzhong qualify? Not in this case. Hence, Confucius asks the rhetorical question concerning whether Guanzhong did really know *li*.

> (C) The Minister of Justice of the state of Chen inquired, 'Did your late Duke Zhao of Lu know ritual propriety [*zhili*]?' and Confucius replied, 'He knew ritual propriety [*zhili*].' Confucius then withdrew.
> The Minister then bowed to Wuma Qi, and summoned him to come closer. 'I have heard your Master say that the exemplary person (*junzi* 君子) is not partisan, and yet isn't Confucius himself acting partisan in this?' he said. '[Duke Zhao] of Lu took a wife from the state of Wu who had his same surname, "Ji", and then called her "Wu" Mengzi. If he knew ritual propriety [*zhili*], who doesn't!'
> Wuma Qi told the Master of this exchange, and the Master said, 'I am so fortunate. If I go astray, others are certain to notice it.'[26]

Is this a conversation wherein Confucius admits a mistake? Brooks and Brooks, who have worked on the text and its place in the early Confucian tradition, suggest that Confucius could not have criticised his ruler (Wuma Qi) while visiting in a different state, for that would have breached customary expectations.[27] Perhaps this is a case of a conflict in the requirements of *li*: perhaps Confucius has had to select between speaking ill of his ruler while in another state, and being partisan, and he selects the latter.[28] No matter which way we interpret the evaluative significance of this scenario, it is clear that the question of whether we can say that Confucius knows *li* is judged by his responses. The Minister of Justice does not grant that Confucius knew *li* on the basis of his alleged failure to *act* – in this case, through appropriate speech – in a non-partisan way.

> (D) The Master on entering the Grand Ancestral hall asked questions about everything. Someone remarked: 'Who said this

[26] *Analects* 7.31; adapted from the translation by Ames and Rosemont, op. cit., 117–118.

[27] *The Original Analects*, op. cit., 86.

[28] Ames and Rosemont suggest that the person who poses the question – the Minister of Justice – may perhaps be the one who offends against ritual propriety (*li*) as he should be aware that one is not 'free to speak ill of a superior': see their translation of the *Analects*, op. cit., 242n. 116.

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son of a man from the Zou village knows ritual propriety [*zhili*]? On entering the Grand Ancestral Hall he asks questions about everything.'
When Confucius heard of this, he said: 'To do so is itself ritual propriety.'[29]

The person who has observed Confucius asking questions at the Hall presumes that Confucius does so because he lacks *knowledge*. On this basis, he asks if Confucius actually knows *li*. Confucius' response turns the tables on the inquirer. To ask questions is not a sign of not knowing (that); it is in fact a manifestation of knowing to perform *li* – this suggests that it is an act of respect or courtesy by a visitor to the Hall to show interest in its details.[30] In this passage, Confucius evaluates his knowledge in practical terms and not in mental-state terms. The important issue is not about whether he knew particular proprieties (that is, believed them to be true or correct) but that he knew how to manifest them (by asking questions),

These conversations challenge intellectualism's central claim that knowing-how is reducible to knowing-that. In (B) – (D), knowing-how is basic: the conversations on *zhili* suggest that claims of a person's *knowing li* are justified only insofar *as* the person is able to manifest *li* in practice. In other words, it seems that performance of actions in line with *li* is necessary for knowing *li*.

Of course, practicalism makes a stronger claim than that. Section 2 claimed that knowledge-how is sufficient for knowing (since the latter amounts only to the former); and so intelligent actions do not owe their status as intelligent – as manifestations at least of knowledge-how – to the existence also of knowledge-that, set apart conceptually from the knowledge-how. Hence, we must confront two questions about knowing, as it is discussed in the Confucian tradition.

[29] *Analects* 3.15; adapted from the translation by Ames and Rosemont, op. cit., 85–86.

[30] Bill Haines (in personal communication) has suggested two other possible interpretations of this passage. We adapt his comments here: In the first interpretation, *zhili* (知禮) means 'knowledge that' and, in that light, Confucius' response is a cheap trick. (This reading seems implausible as it would be strange that Confucius is remembered in this way by his followers). The second reading is that perhaps the problem with Confucius' questions was not that he was asking for information but asking questions in the temple was inappropriate. In that case, Confucius' reply was a counter-assertion. The charge against him was that he did not know how to behave in a temple, and not because he did not know some specific rule such as is at issue in 3.22 and 7.31.

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First, is the performance or manifestation of a particular type of activity ever *sufficient* for the existence of associated knowledge or knowing? Passage (D) seems open to this possibility: Confucius' asking questions at the Ancestral Hall *is* (to) *zhili*. Confucius' statement suggests that the performance of *li*-type acts are sufficient (for us) to grant that a person knows *li*. Yet the passage does not state unambiguously that this is so. Section 6 will ask what we may nonetheless infer.

Second, given practicalism's position that all knowledge-that is knowledge-how, what relation do manifestations of the latter bear to knowledge-that? Section 2 suggested that knowing that *p* is knowing how to perform any or all of a collection of types of *p*-related activity. This conception of any or all manifestations of knowing-how (to act in ways reflecting or bearing upon a truth *p*) has elsewhere been called an *epistemic diaspora*, a loose or flexible gathering whose members collectively constitute knowing-that.[31] Our understanding of *zhili* in the Confucian tradition lends weight to this aspect of practicalism.

Suppose *li* (behavioural propriety) is one such type of knowing. Throughout the *Analects*, there are references to *li* in a wide range of contexts: religious ceremonies (3.4), filial conduct (2.5), official life (3.19), government (4.13) and conduct of an exemplary person (12.15), to name a few. At one level – judging by the anecdotal tone of the conversations – discussions of *li* seem merely to be *examples* of how *li* are realised in action. If we place these conversations in the context of the Confucian concern to prepare oneself for an official career, however, it becomes clear that these 'examples' *are* ways of manifesting *li*. Confucian learning is not about the memorisation (and possession) of knowledge that there are particular normative prescriptions in a range of contexts. As we have seen, on the basis of their actions or performances, different individuals are said to know.

Each manifestation of *li*, expressed in a particular context, is sufficient to demonstrate that a particular person may be regarded as knowing *li* – as we have seen in passages (A) – (D). There is no particular type of *li*, or a specific context in which it is realised, that is singled out as the defining characteristic of knowing *li*. This lends weight to the practicalist view that a person's knowledge of *li* must be properly understood in terms of his or her performance of a specific (set or type of) *li* at a specific time.

[31] See Hetherington, *How To Know*, op. cit., ch. 2.

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6. An Interpretive Principle of Charity

What substantive philosophical morals have our Confucian texts given us? In particular, to what extent are those texts practicalist? (*Have* sections 3 through 5 supported section 2?) The question is pressing because (unlike what we would expect to find in contemporary Western epistemology)[32] the Confucian texts are not *systematically* epistemological or, therefore, practicalist. No general theory of the objects of knowledge-attributions – let alone directly those of knowledge – is stated; none is sought.

Nevertheless, we note, what is articulated in those texts is more practicalist than not. Some, even if not all, of what a contemporary Western epistemologist might recognise as practicalism (e.g., as this was presented in section 2) *is* made explicit within our texts. Moreover, *whenever* talk of knowledge and of knowing enters the relevant stories and observations, so does a practicalist spirit. This is because, as we have seen, knowledge-*how* and intelligent actions are being accorded the contextually needed explanatory weight.

Is that merely because there was no linguistic means for these authors to have been talking of knowledge-that? Not at all. Harbsmeier notes that, in *Analects* 9.23, a conversation concerning *zhi*, Confucius expresses 'uncertainty about a possible fact rather than unfamiliarity with an actual fact'.[33] In this instance, Confucius lacked certainty in relation to a particular piece of knowledge-that. Further, Harbsmeier points out that, while there are constructions in the early texts that distinguish between 'believing something to be so' and 'knowing something to be so,' the Chinese 'did not have a count noun for a belief or a piece of knowledge.'[34] Hence, that linguistic construction – of knowledge that – was available. It was simply not chosen within these settings. It was not

[32] But *like* what is found in pre-Socratic philosophy. On how knowledge is discussed – non-theoretically – by Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles in particular, see J.H. Lesher, 'Early Interest in Knowledge', in A.A. Long (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 225–249.

[33] 'Conceptions of Knowledge in Ancient China', in H. Lenk and G. Paul (eds.) *Epistemological Issues in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 11–33, at 18.

[34] 'Conceptions of Knowledge in Ancient China', ibid., 11.

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reached for as a required part of, or accompaniment to, these ascriptions of knowledge of intelligent actions.[35]

So, here is a principle which seems to us to be true, and in the light of which we interpret our cited and analysed texts:

> In practice, whenever these texts aim to speak explanatorily of knowledge and knowing, they talk of knowledge-how and of intelligent actions – manifestations of knowledge-how. And they treat such talk as *sufficing* for that explanatory purpose.

The texts' explicit epistemic references are to knowledge-how and to its being manifested – knowledge exemplified in actions both potential and actual. The texts evince no compulsion also to buttress such talk with references to a *further* form of knowledge, a kind of knowledge independently understandable as knowledge-that. In practice, the texts' explicit focus is on knowledge in *action* – potential actions, actual ones. That focus was not treated as thereby needing separately to highlight knowledge-that. And that textual observation suggests, without entailing, a view at odds with intellectualism: namely, the texts display no felt need to talk of knowledge-that also, as somehow distinct from, and even as undergirding, the knowledge-how which those intelligent actions exemplify or express.

Consequently, we return to this section's initial question. *Was* practicalism being articulated within these texts of Confucian philosophy? Not fully, we allow; but partly so, we claim. Yet if the articulation was only partial, *may* we reasonably infer any fuller endorsement of practicalist thinking? In a cautious way, perhaps we may do so, *given* the following implication of our interpretive principle of charity:

> These texts convey *some* philosophy of knowledge's nature. And *whatever* they convey in this respect exemplifies a practicalist sensibility. (Nothing competing, nothing intellectualist, about knowledge is conveyed, even as aspects of what we would deem to be practicalism are.)

The result is at least a *proto*-practicalism. And part of the conceptual interest in noticing this is its reminding us that the contemporary

[35] There are explicit comments in another Confucian text of around the same period on the *manifestation* of knowledge as opposed to its accumulation: 'The point in knowing (*zhi*) is not quantity, it is in carefully examining what one knows' (*Xunzi* 31.10; cited in Harbsmeier, 'Conceptions of Knowledge in Ancient China', ibid., 18. The text *Xunzi* is attributed to the Confucian thinker, Xunzi (310? BCE – 219? BCE).

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Western epistemological focus on knowledge-that is not one to which philosophers *must* be loyal when setting out to reflect upon knowledge's nature. Contemporary practicalism, we suggest, should be encouraged by this aspect of these ancient texts.[36]

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