

Book Reviews 【書評】

Paul Woodruff: *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*  
(New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)

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This is an important book by an important writer on an important theme. A well-known classicist, Paul Woodruff, Mary Helen Thompson Professor of the Humanities at the University of Texas in Austin, has given us a significant book of one notion in two cultures. To my knowledge, this is the only book on reverence we have today, and it is the only multicultural book by a classicist who dips into both Confucius and classical Greece. It is a first step in the right direction of world intercultural, focused on the crucial notion of "reverence."

The author is good at telling stories of today and weaving contemporary significance into classical stories and notions, as the chapter titles show – "Introducing reverence," "Without Reverence," "Music and Funeral Finding Reverence," "Bare Reverence," "Ancient Greece: The Way of Being Human," "Ancient China: The Way of Power," "Reverence Without a Creed," "Reverence Across Religions," "Relativism," "The Reverent Leader," "The Silent Teacher," and "Home." As the book goes on, though, it becomes harder to see connection-transition of sense of one chapter to another.

The book is good in many ways. It is lively, quite readable and down to earth, persuasive in arguing by stories for how essential reverence is to election, family, ecological awareness, neighborhood meeting, playing a game, military cohesion, music, funeral, etc. (chapter 2, 3). At times mumbling vaguely, the book is always relevant to today, always ready with colorful stories often from ancient Greece, to argue for reverence from human mortality (chapter 5). He uses the concrete word

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"bare" to explain "essence" or "universal" (chapter 4), reminiscent of C. S. Lewis' "mere" for the essence of Christianity. His explanation of "feeling" is also instructive, all over (6, 24, 30, 61-65, 66, 69, 70, 73f, 88, 104-107, 190, etc.), and is fitting for "reverence." Etc. The threefold contribution to reverence, that it is intercultural, that it is mutual, and that it is ubiquitous in life and history, is to Woodruff's credit.

That this book is significant and good does not mean it is perfect, however. It is one thing to relevantly rove around under a cohesive theme; it is quite another to ramble randomly in the uncertain terrain of reverence, voluptuously collecting stuff from the two world traditions, ancient Greece and ancient China; he simply collates them just to stress widespread impacts of reverence on life. Loose ends are everywhere in need of tying up. Let me do some in his-our spirit of mutual respect. I have four examples among many others: the superior respecting the inferior, relativism as inter-learning, religion as reverence, and the ubiquity of reverence.

ONE: The "superior" (teachers, rulers) must respect their inferior (students, people ruled), says Woodruff, and proposed its why in our being all human, teacher and ruler included, limited in perspective and in knowledge. This point is derived from the Greek idea of human limitations. I would add that the positive rationale for the superior respecting the inferior lies in respect-as-letting people freely develop, that is, for the superior to facilitate people's free growth into humanity. This rationale is shared by both Confucius and Chuang Tzu.

What about respect of the unworthy superior? Woodruff is dead-set against paying respect to the tyrants (5, 165), unaware of how Confucius turns reclusive in days of tyranny, and how Chuang Tzu (4/55-64) handles tyrants as handling killer tigers, by respecting their nature, until they come to fawn on us. This respectful handling of tyrants shows the ubiquity of reverence, in and out of season. See below.

TWO: I agree with Woodruff's critique of "relativism," "I am right, you are right, too," somewhat as a liar's paradox in dead-end, unable to affirm or deny its own position. He remains critical of such relativism as irrelevant to reverence; it is

hard to see then why this chapter is included in a book on reverence. I would add that a relativist can respect the opponents to learn from them, even from "abominations." 1 Woodruff says that "even the ancients were shocked" at "sex, violence, and conflict among the gods" (137); so what happened to Greek reverence to gods? In contrast, Freud used these immoral Greek divinities to elucidate our psychic "complexes." Ancient Christians were shocked at Baal's sexual worship and then, learning from Hosea (dead-set against it) who announced God to be the Husband of Israelites, saw Christ as Husband of the church. Shocked at Moloch's baby-sacrifice, the Christians then saw Christ's death as God sacrificing his own Son. Greek slavery system was absorbed by Paul calling himself "Christ's slave," being proud that he is in as high a status as his Lord's "high family," and "slave to all," adopting the convention that the lord's authority derives from being enslaved to the people he lords over.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, slaves as human chattels are tacitly dissolved.

THREE: I agree that religion has three aspects, doctrinal, ritualistic, and institutional, that the core of religion is reverence, but then Woodruff went on to insist that reverence has nothing to do with religion, for some religions are not deserving of "religion." This move creates more problems than it solves, and must be related to his curious omission of Socrates' daimon, the uncanny Beyond whose voice was unconditionally obeyed; if this is not "religion" I don't know what it is. Being eager to stress the impact of reverence, Woodruff stresses reverence as means for social stability and forgets to go deep into what reverence is.

I on my part must cite Rudolf Otto's well-known characterization of our sense of the holy as *mysterium* (yielding to the Beyond, the other), *tremendum* (our self-realization of mortality and limitations), *et fascinans* (ubiquitous impacts on all aspects of our life). That's religion at its primal core. Of the three, the first, our yield-

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1 Chuang Tzu constantly learns from brigands as paradigms of sages (10/11-16, 23/76-77, 29/). "Child marriage" (155-158) can be channeled into schooling of young ladies in domestic economics and other subjects, perhaps in an engaged status, with the proviso that they could dissolve engagement.

2 Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990. Do we hear Jesus here saying, "the leader [must become] like one who serves" (Luke 22:26)?

ing to the mysterium of the Beyond and the other is most important. Artur Schnabel said "music is better than it can be played," as Chuang Tzu said (2/43) perfect music "plays not." We don't play music, but let music play itself through us, as we don't grow kids, but facilitate their growth, nor teach students but allow them to teach themselves. We stay out of interfering with them, to be part of them. That's reverence.

FOUR: Some practices of reverence may not be worthy, but this fact does not justify restricting reverence by distinguishing it from respect; sometimes "honor" is a more appropriate word than "respect" but we must guard against proliferating synonyms. Reverence is critical-evaluative but this aspect should not be allowed to restrict its impacts, as the Western mind tends to, for evaluation does not prevent reverence from being ubiquitous. Chuang Tzu said (22/45) the Tao to be revered is in shards, piss and dung. All above examples elucidate this ubiquity of reverence in the spirit of which we inter-learn as we inter-correct, thus incorporating evaluation in respect. This is a radicalization of reverence to resolve Woodruff's "paradox of respect (197-203)," i.e., universal respect is no respect (ubiquity does not spell senselessness, as elucidated above), respect is solely to the deserving (yet the superior respect the inferior).

The ubiquity of reverence is best exemplified in Socrates, who sincerely-respectfully examines-evaluates everyone to realize (and let us all to realize) that we all should be at the level of not-pretending to know (Confucius agrees [2/17], "to admit the unknown as unknown is to know" ), and then learn together. The Dialogue of Euthyphro where Socrates explores piety with Euthyphro ends significantly, "Another time, Socrates!", opening out to the future of co-learning. That's reverence before the mysterium of the Beyond. That's Socrates' pious obedience to the Delphic Oracle, to death, as he was accused of "impiety" (in the Apology).

Another concrete ubiquity is to honor one's elders, to care for one's youngsters, revering the past and respectfully nurturing the future to weave one's family, to reach people's elders and youngsters (Mencius 1A7), to spread the family of our

community toward the whole world the family of brotherhood within the Four Seas, which fulfills Plato's vision (200). Chuang Tzu (14/6) extends family-warmth even to tigers and wolves intimate among parents and cubs. Woodruff almost subscribes to this idea of universal family but stops short, claiming (205) that only those humans who are willing to practice home-ceremonies deserve to have "home." This stance cuts down on his reverence for the family. Not surprisingly, this last chapter has no China.

Tying up all above for Woodruff, I say we live by being with others beyond us, and reverence is our life-attitude to the Beyond, awe before the mysterium of the other as the other, inter-shocked (*tremendum*) to inter-learn (*fascinans*). Here is intercultural among different ways of thinking and behaving. Loss of reverence results in ennui, cynicism, and absurdity. Thus Woodruff rightly stresses the indispensable role of reverence in our society, especially, against the utilitarian-contractual view, to underscore reverence in politics the art of managing affairs of being with others. This practice of reverence is respect of past history the tradition, and respect of the future, as in Confucius' awe at later-comers (後生可畏) and respectfully ruling people-as-children (子民).

I have some more to say than above, but enough has been said on this crucial point, that it is thus that I critically continue what Woodruff commenced, mutual intercultural respect in our shared reverence to the other. We see now that Woodruff's view of reverence as evaluative impact on life is due to his Western penchant. He does not take reverence as unconditional respect of the other as the other (Confucius enjoying waters and mountains, Chuang Tzu enjoying nature as it is, thing-ing things 物物); he does not really learn from China but just cites its parallels (predominantly from Confucius) to his familiar Greek tradition. At the same time, China must also learn from what he cited from ancient Greece, viz., deep awareness of human limitations, warning against human hubris to play gods, and Socratic self-examination and evaluation of what is to learn. All this, I believe, describes what Woodruff rightly stressed though perhaps practiced insufficiently, that mutual rever-

ence is essential to our survival. I continue to press that reverence is ubiquitous and mutual, cosmic and intercultural – to the core.