

Conversation with Chi-keung Chan  
NECCT 3

**Bruce Brooks:** Chi-keung, thanks for your abstract, and your note. We are very glad to be able to make your abstract available for a wider audience, and perhaps to attract some prediscussion. I have linked your name on the Forum page to your E-mail address. Let me know if you get any responses. We are trying to find what works.

Your paper topic is interesting. Strictly speaking, Adam and Eve are not Christian, but Jewish, and perhaps one should start in analyzing that story by taking it from a Jewish perspective. Why is knowledge of good and evil a sin? One theme that turns up, in both Jewish and Christian commentary on that story, is that if you do not know a rule, you cannot be held responsible for breaking it. Notice that this theme also turns up in the Shū documents.

If we eliminate God from the picture (violating his commandments is a sin), and human lawgivers (violating their laws makes you guilty), what is left? Has anyone in philosophy given thought to the positive and negative reinforcements of behavior in, say, a band of wolves?

**Chi-keung Chan.** I am writing to report that I didn't receive any response from the Forum page. I also thank you for your thought-provoking comments on my brief paper abstract.

My original thought about why knowledge is a sin is this: Chinese philosophers believe that all things are one, evil arises when one starts to make a distinction, like the distinction between black and white people, rich and poor, man and women. Distinction and knowledge leads to discrimination. Therefore, making distinctions and acquiring knowledge will result in evil. But I think your point is also correct. Because we all possess 良知 (conscience; good/innate knowledge or sense of right and wrong) we do know the moral rule, and this makes us responsible when we make moral faults.

This is also the reason why the animals or natural world do not have the problem of good and evil. A tiger eats a sheep could not be regarded as evil, it is just its biological needs. The tiger just needs to eat to survive. In Neo-Confucianism, the natural system itself could indeed be regarded as the process or manifestation of ceaseless creativity. Therefore, I agree that the natural world itself does not have the problem of good and evil. The problem of good and evil is just a matter for human beings as moral agents.

**Bruce Brooks.** I still wonder whether animals have a sense of wrong. Of injury, yes, but the sense of wrong is additional to the perception of injury. Do wolves do anything that brings about the collective disapproval of the other wolves?

The Dào/Dé Jīng at one point takes the view that if there were no laws there would be no crimes. That is more or less definitional. But would there be no wrongs? Or from the human point of view, is there anything that a human can do to an animal that would count as wrong for the human? A dog may not be a moral agent, but the dog may be a moral recipient.

The Apostle Paul at one point says that the Gentiles (non-Jewish Christians) do not know the Jewish Law, but they do have a sense of natural law, based on the order of the universe and so on. Thus God has revealed the principles of moral right and wrong to them also, and they are therefore guilty of breaking that natural law. He goes on in this vein, to an audience of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, and he gets himself into terrible logical confusion. Is it worthwhile to dig him out of the confusion, and see where his argument ought to come out?

Part of education, at least as I recommend it, is to spend some time reading legal cases. One thing that comes out (and it can be the Kāng Gāu, though for this purpose it is rather limited), is that both knowledge and intention matter in determining legal guilt. If you did not know that your action would lead to an injury to another, or if you did not wish to cause injury (but inadvertently did so), you are normally not guilty of a major crime, though you can still be successfully prosecuted for negligence. The law has a lot of collective wisdom, and it makes sense (to me) to see what it thinks it has found out about human duty and liability.

Are animals careless? And does it matter? I have known some pretty clumsy ones, but this perhaps does not solve the whole question.