This anthology of essays is volume 4 in the series “Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy.” It includes an Introduction, 16 essays, an Index of names and subjects, and an Index Locorum of passages from the Analects and the Mencius. The essays are divided into three groups, but the division seemed fairly artificial to this reviewer, so no more about that. There are many very fine essays in this anthology, and anyone seriously interested in the Analects should consult this volume. There is space in this brief review to discuss only a few of the most interesting contributions.

In their masterful “History and Formation of the Analects,” KIM Tae Hyun and Mark Csikszentmihalyi note that even early Chinese accounts (e.g., that of BAN Gu 班固 in the Han 漢 dynasty) suggest multiple sources for the Analects (viz., the notes of Confucius’s various disciples), and identify at least three competing versions of the work then in existence. Later, beginning in China with the Ming 明 dynasty and in Japan with the Tokugawa 徳川 era, text-critical studies focused on formal differences among books: ITŌ Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 argued that there was a division between the “lower” (1–10) and “upper” (11–20) sections, while CUI Shu 崔述 suggested books 16–20 were later than the rest. Recently excavated manuscripts indicate that “the text was widely circulated in something close to its present form in the 1st century BCE” (32). However, an excavated text of the 4th century BCE (now held at the Shanghai 上海 Museum) has versions of some Analects passages that vary substantially from the received text (32–33). All this evidence points toward the conclusion that the received Analects is a composite text of the Han dynasty and may only contain a few sayings (which we have little hope of definitively identifying) from the historical Confucius.

Kim and Csikszentmihalyi conclude that the Analects cannot legitimately provide support “for those who wish to use the text to dig down to an original layer of Confucianism, or use it as a transparent window onto the identity of a major religious and philosophical founder” (35). However, they note that this conclusion “should have very little impact on readers interested in questions of historical reception of the Analects or those intent on using it constructively” (35). These latter tasks are what many of the other contributions to this anthology set out to do.
The historical reception of the Analects is explored in “The Commentarial Tradition,” by John B. Henderson and Ng On-Cho. Part of the essay is an overview of the diverse commentaries on the Analects. This survey helps inoculate us against the notion that there is such a thing as the (unique) traditional reading of the Analects. However, this essay also illustrates Henderson’s fascinating suggestion that commentarial traditions in diverse cultures share commitments to the comprehensiveness, coherence, and profundity of their canonical texts. (This view is developed in more detail in: John B. Henderson, Scripture, Canon, and Commentary [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991].)

Turning to constructive appropriations of the received Analects, Hagop Sarkissian, David Wong, and Stephen Angle show (in their respective essays) how the Analects can engage with contemporary trends in Western philosophy and psychology. In “Ritual and Rightness in the Analects,” Sarkissian notes that contemporary psychological research shows that “[c]hildren first acquire emotions in concrete episodes during childhood,” when “one is taught by one’s family what is appropriate to feel in a wide range of specific roles” (97). This fact helps to both explain and justify the function of Confucian li (rituals, rites), compliance with which “not only shapes the emotional life of the child but also instills habits of personal comportment that reflect exemplary forms of conduct” (98). In his “Cultivating the Self in Concert with Others,” Wong cites empirical evidence that accounts for some of the ways in which cultural conditioning can guide emotions, even in adults: “Confucius … emphasizes the overriding importance of demeanor in serving one’s parents (2.8). Interestingly, facial expressions have been shown not only to express emotion but also to induce the emotion they normally express…” (183). Wong acknowledges that there is a legitimate concern that the effort to regulate one’s own emotions is impractical because of the empirical evidence that “the exercise of willpower drains a limited supply of mental and physical energy” (194). However, he explains that “more recent work has revealed that affirming a value that is important to oneself counteracts the depleting effects of activities that require self-control” (194). In other words, wholeheartedly affirming an ideal, such as the Confucian Way, can activate sources of motivational strength. (Wang’s discussion of this point reminded me of Mencius’s comments in 2A2 about the motivational power of the “floodlike qi”)

Angle’s “The Analects and Moral Theory” is a thoughtful and erudite overview of the debate over whether Confucianism is best understood as deontology, virtue ethics, or role ethics. Angle notes that interpreters appeal to one of four types of argument in defending their approach: that we find in the text an “explicit contradiction” of alternative views, that their approach offers the “best explanation” for the text as a whole, that it shows “interpretive fruitfulness” in suggesting intriguing issues and solutions, or that it manifests “dialogical fruitfulness” by encouraging constructive crosscultural discussion and debate (248–249).

The essays by Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee and Amy Olberding are also constructive appropriations of the Analects, but in a more “existential” manner. In “Why Care? A Feminist Re-appropriation of Confucian Xiao,” Rosenlee writes movingly of her decision to look after her terminally ill mother-in-law, despite the “liberal social convention [that] I have no obligation, moral or otherwise,” to do so (312). She explains, “…my eventual commitment to caring for my mother-in-law is, by and large, propelled by my understanding of Confucian xiao [孝, filial piety], a moral vision that sees human interdependency as a strength in, and not a distraction from, human