In the wake of the recent trends toward an increasing “businessification” of the university, the humanities have had a particularly difficult time proving their worth. When the university increasingly evaluates the worth of particular departments and programs through cost-benefit analysis, or with regard to “real-life job skills”—a notion often defined by commercial abilities—the infamously “impractical” but eminently valuable disciplines of literature, history, and philosophy departments struggle to survive. It is difficult to prove a direct link between, for example, excelling as a lawyer and proficiency in a challenging class on Plato. Simply put, humanities do not communicate well in the language that increasingly dominates discussions about academia. (This should not be surprising, considering Allen Bloom’s diagnosis of this issue decades ago in his 1986 best seller *The Closing of the American Mind*.)

There are, however, ways for the humanities to communicate in this transforming system. These departments can attempt to appeal to paying customers, who will (hopefully) ultimately influence the market and affect the way university directors, CEOs, and board members make decisions about what types of merchandise and services should be offered (to maximize profits, of course). For philosophers who choose this path, it may be wise to model Michael Sandel’s Harvard course “Justice”—an outlandishly popular class on political philosophy that attracts hundreds of consumers every fiscal year. The corresponding publication, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?*, remains at a top-ten position in political philosophy and ethics on Amazon.com.

Unfortunately, mimicking a Sandel-style service in a course that draws on more unfamiliar traditions, such as Chinese or Japanese, is difficult to achieve in North American and Western European markets. Consumers here are less aware of the philosophical discourse and stakes that shape these arguments. This makes it difficult...
for them to participate with the same type of vigor seen in Sandel’s class. Recognizing the challenges of getting students to engage in Asian, comparative, or “nontraditional” (“non-Western”) philosophy, teachers who specialize in these areas, and are at the fringes of an already marginalized discipline, are feeling the additional pressure of consumer appeal. They have begun banding together to explore ways to increase demand for their products and services. More and more conferences, including the SACP at the University of Hawai’i in 2016, and the Pacific APA in 2017, are hosting panels on teaching comparative and Asian philosophy. Additionally, there is an entire society, “the Society for Teaching Comparative Philosophy,” made up primarily of young teachers, devoted to this project.

A good role model for a successful course in comparative or Asian philosophy can once again be found at Harvard University. Michael Puett’s class on Chinese ethical and political philosophy is the third most popular for undergraduates at Harvard. His recent book with Christine Gross-Loh, The Path: What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us About the Good Life, tops Amazon.com charts as well. It is perhaps the most successful and academic “best seller” monograph on Chinese philosophy that has ever graced the English language. According to the New York Times it “has been bought by publishers in 25 countries, including China” (Ian Johnson, “A Harvard Scholar on the Enduring Lessons of Chinese Philosophy,” The New York Times, 7 June 2016). These facts, in and of themselves, should make The Path alluring to any teacher whose business suffers due to lack of consumer interest.

The short preface makes a somewhat standard, albeit bold, claim: Chinese philosophy will teach readers something about the art of living. This claim is immediately narrowed through rebuffing the belief that we live well when we live according to our true self, or the self we are meant to be. The title of Chapter 1 identifies the mentality of our times as “The Age of Complacency.” Everyday contemporary notions of authenticity are debunked as Puett and Gross-Loh examine the associated myths of “the age of freedom,” autonomy, and a “true self.” Chinese philosophy is proposed as offering “counterintuitive notions about the self and its place in the world” (8)—not as something radically new or different for readers, but rather as highlighting those aspects of things “we already do” that we “just don’t do … well” (13). Chapter 2, “The Age of Philosophy,” applies this argument to the “East-West” divide. It begins with museums as an analogy. In North America and Western Europe major sections are often devoted to civilizations that occupied Europe, with smaller wings offering smatterings of India, China, Japan, and maybe even other ancient cultures. However, a museum which was organized by era, where “a Roman silver denarius coin, a bronze coin from China’s Han [漢] dynasty, and a punch-marked coin from India’s Mauryan Empire” (15) would be displayed together, “would present a more accurate portrayal of how this history unfolded” (16). The implied argument is that philosophy too should be displayed in this manner.

In Chapter 3 the targeted study of ancient Chinese philosophers begins, unsurprisingly, with Confucius, rituals, and relationships. Describing “as-if rituals” as the crux of moral education, cultivation, and transformation, Puett and Gross-Loh add a unique twist to a familiar discussion. “As-if” speaks not only to Confucius famously sacrificing “as-if” the spirits were present (Analects 3.12), but more generally, and more radically, to the “short-lived alternative realit[ies],” the “as-if world[s]” we constantly engage in (30). These worlds are created through our interactions with others, which follow specific though loosely-regulated guidelines—in a word, rituals. The key is that in

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