Review of Frisina: The Unity of Knowledge and Action

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Readers of this journal will find Warren G. Frisina’s *The Unity of Knowledge and Action* fresh and exciting for at least two reasons. First, it is an exemplary foray in global philosophy — that is, philosophy undertaken with an openness to the perspectives and contributions of philosophical traditions from around the globe. It goes beyond simple comparisons to engage in cross-cultural philosophical construction. Indeed, Frisina writes that “the very idea for this book was inspired by the philosophy underlying the Neo-Confucian scholar Wang Yangming’s famous slogan *zhi xing he yi* (the unity of knowledge and action)” [4].ii Second, the fact that Frisina engages with a Neo-Confucian thinker is itself rather unusual. Classical Chinese thinkers have received at least some attention in the Western philosophical world, if not their full due, but Confucian philosophers from the Song Dynasty to the present have been hardly noticed outside the world of Sinology. Frisina thus offers us the prospect of opening up important new ground.

The book delivers impressively on its promise, and while Frisina’s reading of and engagement with Wang Yangming will surely be controversial, I find myself largely persuaded and in Frisina’s debt for the clarity and insight he has brought to his subject. After a summary of the book’s structure and argument, I will focus in this review on Frisina’s interpretation of Wang and on Wang’s specific contribution to the book’s goals. My discussion will revolve around the type of continuity Wang sees between humans and the cosmos, the question of “creativity” in
Neo-Confucianism, the nature of *liangzhi*, and what in the end is meant by the unity of knowledge and action.

Perhaps the core notion behind any representational theory of knowledge is that subjects are separate from the objects that their “beliefs” or “ideas” seek to represent. This typically leads to a distinction between “facts” — the accurate representation of the way things are outside us — and “values,” which are in one way or another subjective. In opposing representational theories of knowledge, therefore, Frisina means to be stalking far more than epistemological game. He is at least as concerned with metaphysics, and furthermore he agrees with Charles Taylor that the history of the West’s understanding of the self has involved a “progressive disengagement from the immediacy of lived experience” [24]. This is more than a philosophical problem: the state of being “strangers to ourselves and to the world around us” is a moral and spiritual crisis as well [27]. Rather than isolating and privileging cognitive functions, as representationalism would have us do, we need to find a way to discern the intermingling of the cognitive with the practical, moral, and aesthetic.

Frisina articulates the problem and points toward solutions in three steps. In Part I, he argues that we can see signs of a “quest for a nonrepresentational theory of knowledge” in a wide range of 20th century philosophical movements, but for the most part these have been hamstrung by an inability or refusal to take adequately bold metaphysical steps. Davidson and Rorty make important contributions in helping us to see the self as “directly responsive to the world, without the need for an intermediate level of subjective activity” [33]. Dennett’s “multiple draft” theory of consciousness is also constructive, and emblematic of ways in which research in cognitive science contributes to the quest. All three of these thinkers, though, resist the metaphysical move
that Frisina will come to label the “organicist turn,” and thus fail to complete the quest for a genuine nonrepresentational theory.

In Part II, Frisina moves to three thinkers he thinks come much closer to a satisfactory nonrepresentational theory, because they either start from very different metaphysical premises (Wang Yangming) or actively seek to build an alternative metaphysics to the Western mainstream (John Dewey and Albert North Whitehead). In each case, though, Frisina does not rest content with current dominant interpretations. I will discuss Frisina’s reading of Wang in detail below. With respect to Dewey, Frisina’s main concern is that we see how plausible and important it is to take his metaphysics seriously. Frisina also argues for a more pragmatist reading of Whitehead than has been common, and urges that we appreciate the ways in which Whitehead is trying to work out the deepest metaphysical consequences of the quest for nonrepresentationalism.

Part III turns to consequences of the emerging nonrepresentational views and to a defense of the “panpsychism” that they entail, as against the widespread belief (most prominently articulated by Rorty) that the time for such speculations has passed. Frisina argues that panpsychism — that is, the claim that subject and object are in some way continuous — does not lead to representationalist consequences, as Rorty fears. Frisina also maintains that panpsychism in fact underwrites some of the most exciting work being done in cognitive science and related areas, and is also required for any plausible development of Dewey’s ideas, pace Rorty’s effort to produce a purely historicist Dewey. The book’s penultimate chapter then turns to political and moral consequences of pansychism. Frisina argues that we should resist Rorty’s claim that there is no “comprehensive philosophical outlook [that would] let us hold self-creation and justice, private perfection and human solidarity, in a single vision” [178]. To Frisina, this “feels like an
intellectual failure of nerve, an unwillingness to accept the burden of trying to create conceptual orders that hold together both private pleasure and public responsibility, even though we know that any particular order will ultimately be less than it proposes” [179]. In particular, he argues that although Rorty is correct to stress the contingency of our language and the self, Rorty draws the wrong conclusions “about what it means to be human in an open, fully contingent world” [180]. In the final chapter of Part III, Frisina looks at two thinkers who have embraced the “organicist turn,” Mark Johnson and Robert Neville. Frisina suggests ways in which both Johnson and Neville point toward a future in which knowledge and action are understood to be one thing and we have come to accept a nonrepresentational approach to knowledge.

Rather than delving in any greater depth into these contemporary thinkers, I now want to turn to Frisina’s understanding of Wang Yangming. The crux of Frisina’s interpretation is that Wang was working to bring what we might call Confucian epistemology into line with the distinctive metaphysical insights of the Neo-Confucian tradition. Neo-Confucian metaphysics “requires that we think of mind and knowledge in ways different from those in which common sense would lead us” [77]. Frisina thus begins with an explication of five key facets of Wang’s metaphysical picture, and then turns more directly to the unity of knowledge and action, which he fleshes out principally in terms of Wang’s famous notion of liangzhi (innate knowledge).

The five aspects of Wang’s metaphysics on which Frisina focuses are (1) the dynamic and continuous character of being; (2) yin/yang and the idea of patterned change; (3) li as both generic and specific ideas of harmonic pattern; (4) forming one body with all things; and (5) cheng as “the ideal manner in which humans participate in the creative processes of the universe” [86]. All five are inter-related. For instance, when discussing the dynamic nature of
being, Frisina emphasizes that we are included: “the xin’s [i.e., heart/mind’s] movements are a subset of the overall dynamic activity that constitutes the universe…. The ‘knowledge’ xin produces must be understood from within this dynamic continuity” [80]. The dynamism, change, and “unceasing growth” of the universe is not random, but patterned. Furthermore, Frisina says that “each entity is what it is through the relations or harmonies its own patterns set up within a world that is nothing but patterned movement” [81]. Therefore, “the sage can form one body with all things because his own existence is also a pattern of yin/yang alternations. The boundaries that divide the world into discrete entities are overcome by the sage who recognizes his continuity with all things and adjusts his own yin/yang patterns in ways that maximize their potential for harmonic integration” [82].

Frisina’s claim that Neo-Confucian metaphysics rests on the idea of a continuity of patterned change should be uncontroversial to specialists, though it is certainly important. Two aspects of his development of these ideas require comment. First, when he characterizes the sage’s goal in terms of maximizing the “potential for harmonic integration,” or as it he puts it elsewhere “maximizing the harmonic possibilities within any given situation” [85], Frisina is deploying concepts not made explicit by Wang. I find Frisina’s interpretation extremely illuminating, though, and furthermore agree with him that it is well grounded in Wang’s text. For instance, Frisina cites Wang as follows: “The man of humanity regards heaven and earth and all things as one body. If a single thing is deprived of its place, it means that my humanity is not yet demonstrated to the fullest extent” [Wang 1963, 56].

The second thing to notice here is more implicit, but comes out when one contrasts Frisina’s gloss on “forming one body” with that found in P. J. Ivanhoe’s important discussion of Wang Yangming. Ivanhoe writes that the morally cultivated person “feels [all things’] pain and
imperfections as his own, and he does so because they are all aspects of a single universal mind”; and furthermore, that “one was to ‘lose’ a sense of oneself as a person apart from other people and as existing as a being distinct from other things. The moral life involves realizing one’s fundamental identity with all existence” [Ivanhoe 2002, pp. 27, 29]. Ivanhoe, in other words, reads Wang’s “forming one body” doctrine as entailing a quite strong sense of identity among all things. Frisina, on the other hand, emphasizes both fundamental continuity and on-going differences through his talk of “harmonic integration” rather than “identity.” Now Ivanhoe’s main point is to contrast Wang with Mencius’s much more limited sense of connectedness, which is confined to humans and relies on a family metaphor, rather than a “one body” image. Ivanhoe is certainly right to see an important difference between the two. However, the evidence that he cites does not support quite as strong a difference as I hear him articulating.iii That is, while Wang’s vision of connectedness is broader and deeper than Mencius’s, it does not reach all the way to “identity.” In addition to the passage Frisina cites from Wang that speaks of each thing being in its proper place, further support for the “harmonic integration” idea can be found in the famous passage from Wang’s Inquiry on the Great Learning in which he distinguishes among the sorts of feelings our benevolence engenders, depending on the sort of thing with which we are forming one body (commiseration for people, but regret for broken tiles, for instance).iv

I find myself in agreement with Frisina, in short, on the question of what sort of continuity is entailed by Wang’s metaphysics. Let us now turn to Frisina’s discussion of the nature of li and the vexed issue of creativity. Following many commentators, Frisina sees in
Wang two quite different notions of \( li \), though Wang uses one and the same character for both.

Frisina describes the difference thus:

One the one hand, \( Li \) is self-sufficient, unified, and cannot be augmented. Viewed this way, \( Li \) is harmony-itself, the barest patterning that all other patterns presuppose, and the ultimate source of all patterning. From this perspective \( Li \) is the unchanging container and generator of all harmonic principles, a never-ending fountain of \( li \) (patterns), which arise in conjunction with the dynamic activity of \( qi \) in the constitution of new entities. On the other hand, \( li \) is also the specific pattern that defines each entity. For purposes of clarity I capitalize \( li \) when referring to its universal sense, and leave it lowercase when referring to individual instances of \( li \). [83]

Frisina recognizes that there are other interpretations of \( li \) within the Neo-Confucian tradition, but suggests that this reading of \( Li \) as an unchanging, generic pattern that serves as a “fountain” of specific \( li \) fits best with Wang’s text and other commitments. His strongest textual support is the following passage:

I asked about Mencius’s saying, “Holding to the mean without allowing for special circumstances (quan) is like holding to one particular thing.” The Teacher said, “The mean is nothing but the Principle of Nature (tianli); it is the Change. It changes according to the time. How can one hold it fast? One must act according to circumstance. It is difficult to fix a pattern of action in advance. Later scholars insist on describing principles in their minute details, leaving out nothing, and prescribing a rigid pattern for action. This is the exact meaning of holding on to one particular thing.”

Frisina concludes that “Since even the patterns themselves are interdependent, there can be no perspective from which a mind could apprehend a static, objective order” [84], and that patterns “are not preexisting, or permanent. They are created within concrete situations” [82]. The “ontological task” of the sage is therefore the “cultivation of more complicated harmonic patterns,” which Frisina describes as a “creative response to the world’s prompting” [Ibid.].

It is crucial to see that while Frisina emphasizes the creation of new patterns, he sees this creativity as guided by one’s \( xin \) and its ability to measure or adjudicate harmonic possibilities. Frisina relies on the distinction between \( Li \) and \( li \) to explain how this works, and to gloss Wang’s famous assertion that “\( xin \) is \( Li \)”: [vi]
Because *Li* as harmony itself is indeterminate with respect to specific harmonies, the identification of *xin* with *Li* is functional rather than isomorphic.... In other words, *xin* functioning as a harmonizing element within the universe, *is* harmony itself. This does not mean that *xin* contains all of the specific harmonic principles ever created, but rather that it can take account of all forms of harmony” [91].

The creativity of *xin* is not unconstrained, but rather is the creation of harmonic patterns, like its functional equivalent, *Li* itself. What our *xin* enables each of us to do — especially as *liangzhi*, about which I will say more below — is to act as a partner with broader cosmic processes in the creation of new harmonies. Frisina writes that “as partners with Heaven and Earth, we find ourselves thrown into open-ended situations, and we respond by creating new values, new orders, new harmonies, new forms of determinateness, which are ultimately a genuine contribution to the whole of things” [177].

An understandable response to all this talk of newness and creativity might be: Frisina has developed a fascinating philosophical position here, but is it really Wang’s? After all, doesn’t Wang complain about those who “advance their own opinions, valuing what is novel and strange, in order to mislead the common folks and gain fame”? [Wang 1963, 19] Is Frisina here committing precisely the sin against which critics of global philosophy inveigh, namely trying to force a foreign voice (probably Dewey’s) to speak through Wang’s words — and in the process, doing violence to the actual meaning of the text?

I want to respond to these concerns on two levels. The first is to defend the instinct to engage in constructive philosophy. Suppose for the moment that Frisina’s account is not fully convincing as the best historical and contextual interpretation of Wang’s ideas. But let us also suppose that the cross-pollination of *Wangian* ideas with those of (e.g.) Dewey and Whitehead has produced an exciting, plausible philosophical position, on the basis of which current philosophers working in various traditions — perhaps including some who identify themselves...
as contemporary Confucians — believe that further progress can be made. Then as philosophers, we should welcome Frisina’s work. Indeed, Wang himself was very much a philosopher in this sense, drawing openly on various traditions of thought as he sought to make the best sense of these traditions and his own experience.

The second level on which I want to engage with Frisina is to work through the considerable evidence for his reading, for in fact I find his interpretation plausible and stimulating. To begin with, it is helpful to think about different ways in which we might be “creative.” (1) There may be no antecedently existing rule governing one. Situations can be novel. This can be true even if the solutions resemble old ones (i.e., the ancient sages’ solutions) in many respects. (2) Responses to situations might need to be articulated based on one’s own, unique contribution to the situation. No two of us are exactly alike, so what we bring to situations will also differ in some ways. (3) One might be creating new patterns themselves. Depending on how we understand li (and/or Li), we may be able to say either (1) or (2) without additionally saying (3).

It is clear that Wang endorses (1). Consider the following passage, in which Wang is speaking about the ancient sage-king Shun, who agreed to marry the sage-king Yao’s daughters without first getting permission from his own parents. He knows his parents would have denied permission, since they were intent on seeing Shun’s younger stepbrother prosper, rather than Shun himself:

As for Shun’s marrying without first telling his parents, was there someone before him who did the same thing and served as an example for him, which he could find out by looking into certain records and asking certain people, after which he did as he did? Or did he search into the innate knowledge in an instant of his mind’s thought and weigh (quan) all factors as to what was proper, after which he could not help doing what he did. [Wang 1963, 109-10]
The conclusion of this passage — that upon weighing all factors, Shun “could not help doing what he did” — is certainly relevant to an understanding of Wang’s “unity of knowledge and action” doctrine. My principal interest at the moment, though, is in the appearance of conflict and the explicit statement that no resolution is spelled out a priori. Should Shun ask his parents’ permission, or should he marry in order to provide them with grandchildren? Wang insists that neither prior texts nor exemplars could answer this for Shun. Elsewhere in the same passage, Wang puts a related point this way: “Innate knowledge (liangzhi) is to minute details and varying circumstances as compasses and measures are to areas and lengths. Details and circumstances cannot be predetermined, just as areas and lengths are infinite in number and cannot be entirely covered” [Ibid, 109]. In other words, Shun can neither look to an explicit past rule, nor does he find within his xin specific “knowledge” telling him what to do. As Frisina says, the xin does not contain “all of the specific harmonic principles ever created, but rather … it can take account of all forms of harmony.” Thus it does seem like Shun’s reaction to his novel situation is creative.

Wang does not say anything that specifically addresses aspect (2) of creativity, namely one’s individual contribution to the situation. Contemporary interpreters of Neo-Confucianism more broadly seem to differ on the importance of individual contributions. Responding to Irene Bloom’s assertion that unlike Buddhists, Zhu Xi does not advocate “the dissolution of the consciousness of individual self or the abandonment of the vital intuitions of discreteness, diversity, or personality” [Bloom 1985, 311], Donald Munro writes:

It is true that Neo-Confucians recognized that there must be many paths to sagehood because of the wide variety of individual personalities. Zhu Xi quotes one of the eleventh-century Cheng brothers on several well-known figures: ‘Confucius was quite clear and pure of disposition. Yan Zi was happy and at ease. And Mencius was quite a vigorous debater.’ The descriptions of sage-like characters are fairly rich in remarks about variation in their styles…. But I would argue that in Confucianism the common traits of the sage-like types stand out as the ideal features for people to copy…. Difference is a fact of life to be coped with and changed if possible. [Munro 1985, 4-5]
It is certainly true that Neo-Confucians, Wang included, did not celebrate individuality and eccentricity. But if we accept that we each are necessarily different from one another, with different strengths and weaknesses, then it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the best way to maximize the harmonic possibilities in a given situation will depend on these individual characteristics, and thus be unique.

We have now seen two reasons to accept Frisina’s claim that when we respond appropriately to the world, we are “creating new values, new orders, new harmonies, new forms of determinateness.” Wang speaks favorably about the ancients as models, but he also explicitly recognizes “government has to be adjusted to the times” [Wang 1963, 22]. Still, he hastens to add, “while their governments were different, the principle (li) is the same with them all” [Ibid.]. Where does this leave us on what I have labeled as the third aspect of creativity, namely whether we actually create li? Frisina holds that we do not create Li, harmony itself, but we are at least co-creators, with other processes of cosmic change, of “new patterns (li)” [91]. So long as we are not dualists — believing that li, complete down to the smallest detail, exists in some sense independently from qi — then I believe we should basically agree with Frisina. And I see no evidence that Wang is such a dualist, though some of his predecessors may have been. As Wang himself has emphasized, there was no pre-existing right answer to how Shun should have responded to Yao’s offer of his daughters as brides. This is not to say that there was no right answer. There was, and since Shun saw that answer, “he could not help doing what he did.” However, we should be especially cautious about the word “create.” Shun’s action might be more felicitously described as “articulating” the maximally harmonious pattern that could be generated out of his situation. The correct answer, that is, emerges out of the unique situation. In
seeing it and responding correctly, Shun demonstrated imagination and creativity, but he most certainly did not create out of whole cloth.

There is still a good deal that must be said about how this process takes place and what, exactly, this all has to do with the unity of knowledge and action. The “how” is tightly related to what Wang calls liangzhi, often translated as “innate knowledge,” though Frisina mostly leaves it untranslated. Frisina draws on the following passage to spell out his understanding of liangzhi. Responding to a student’s letter, Wang writes:

…You spoke about following one’s feelings (qing) and thoughts (yi), and acting according to these as though they were liangzhi, rather than according to the real liangzhi. This shows you have already located the danger. Thought and liangzhi should be clearly distinguished one from the other. Thought arises out of response to an object, and may be either good or bad. Liangzhi is that which can distinguish between good and bad in the thought. When one follows one’s liangzhi, all that one does cannot be wrong. [Wang 1972, p. 114]

Frisina says that liangzhi is a kind of “primordial awareness.” Based on the passage from Wang’s letter, he comments, “Liangzhi is the material out of which we construct good thought. It is not the encounter of a subject with an object, which implies a false dichotomy between self and world. Instead, liangzhi represents the primordial relationships that bind all things together in an underlying harmonious unity. To act in accord with it is to reaffirm and make manifest that underlying unity” [96-7]. In other words, liangzhi is something that takes place prior to the application of our categories to objects; elsewhere, Frisina calls it “a preconceptual attunement to the qualitative dimension of a given situation” [204]. In terms of Mencius’s famous example, liangzhi is the spontaneous, pre-reflective reaction we have when seeing a baby about to crawl into a well, rather than the subsequent thoughts and feelings we may have — for instance, getting pleasure from the imminent demise of the child of one’s hated enemy.
It will help to get clearer on what Frisina has in mind if we see how it might differ from an alternative view. Frisina writes that P. J. Ivanhoe flirts with reading Wang as asserting that “humans hold a priori knowledge about a transcendent ontological or moral order.” This is based on Ivanhoe’s statement that Wang believed in “an original, pure, and fully-formed inner nature, hidden beneath an impure physical nature” [Ivanhoe 2002, 58]. In response, Frisina argues, “It is not that we have a fully pre-formed moral mind capable of applying a fixed set of transcendent principles to any concrete situation. Rather, humankind awakes to find itself already in the process of creating new harmonies, and it is that indeterminate capacity to create new harmonies that [Wang] is trying to capture in the phrase liangzhi” [242n7]. In fairness, Frisina’s use of the word “flirts” suggests that he is not sure whether Ivanhoe’s view of Wang entails the notion of a priori knowledge of fixed principles, so it would be best to use this simply as a way of understanding Frisina’s own view. ix Let us ask, then: does the idea of liangzhi as an “indeterminate capacity to create new harmonies” square with the evidence?

“Indeterminate” is somewhat infelicitous. Frisina means that liangzhi is open-ended, applicable in non-predetermined ways to new situations. But — as seen in the case of Shun — in any particular situation liangzhi is perfectly determinate. x As I discussed above, we might also prefer to substitute “articulate” for “create.” Be this as it may, I find myself substantially persuaded by Frisina. Liangzhi comes from our connectedness with all things, and thus it extends to all things. It is not cognitive “knowing,” but seeing-and-feeling-as-connected, whether the reaction in question has the tone appropriate to a parent, a familiar animal, or a previously unknown roof tile. When liangzhi and one’s thoughts come apart, as they often will, Wang argues that we need to focus on the liangzhi and cast away whatever is generating the problematic thoughts. xi
Since Frisina’s interests here are primarily with metaphysics and epistemology, he does not pursue the details of how one should cultivate oneself. Instead, he is concerned to articulate the sense in which Wang could literally mean that knowledge and action were unified. His conclusion is that “knowledge is action because there is no dichotomy between the kinds of movements that constitute knowledge and those that constitute action. In a sense, knowledge is action, just as each individual xin is an aspect of the universal creativity that is Dao” [99]. The core of Wang’s view is a thorough application of the metaphysical principle of dynamic interrelatedness to all aspects of our life in the universe — and most especially to the idea of knowledge. Our knowings are fundamentally connected to our orientations toward and relationships with all of the myriad things that we encounter.

Frisina’s interpretation of and engagement with Wang represents a significant step in global philosophical engagement with Neo-Confucianism, and deserves our most careful study and reflection.\textsuperscript{xii} I think there is no question that Wang, among other Neo-Confucian philosophers, has much to contribute to philosophical conversations today. It is striking that the crisis of being “strangers to ourselves and to the world around us,” which Frisina draws from Taylor’s diagnosis of a distinctively Western development, could also have been uttered by Wang as he reflected on problems in his own day. This is not say that Wang’s world was just like our own. It was different in countless important ways, not least of which was the very different metaphysical tradition on which he was able to draw, as Frisina has emphasized. Still, the more we look, the more we find the similarities, resonances, and partial overlaps that make global philosophy possible.
Bibliography


Endnotes

i My great thanks are due to my colleague Elise Springer, with whom I discussed this material repeatedly and who made many insightful comments on a previous draft.

ii For consistency, I have modified Frisina’s Wade-Giles romanization to Pinyin throughout.

iii Ivanhoe refers, for instance, to section 93 of Wang’s Record for Practice, on the basis of which he says that Wang sounds like Yi Zhi, the Mohist from Mencius 3:5. But I do not read section 93 as offering an endorsement of the “everyone is equal” idea. See [Ivanhoe 2002, 31-4], and [Wang 1963, p. 57].

iv See [Wang 1963, p. 272]. Addressing this specific passage, Ivanhoe writes, “It is not that he feels hurt to see them damaged — we might imagine Mengzi agreeing to that — he feels the hurt as his own, as a personal injury to his own body” [Ivanhoe 2002, p. 29]. Granting this difference with Mencius, the point is that there are many different kinds of hurts, just as one distinguishes among different parts of one’s body.


vi Since Wang himself does not make the “Li” versus “li” distinction explicit, Frisina’s rendering of “xin ji li” as “xin is Li” marks an important interpretive decision. I find his reasoning, given in the passage quoted immediately after this note, quite persuasive.

vii Antonio Cua agrees with Frisina: “The presence of conflicting elements is in experience a fact to be acknowledged. Acknowledgment brings with it a task of reconciliation.... Since the desired coherence of the moral order is not spelled out a priori, harmonization of the conflicting elements in experience is essentially a creative endeavor on the part of both the Confucian moral theorist and the agent” [Cua 1998, 124-5].

viii The Cheng brothers seem to be a clear case of dualism, as they took li in both the general and the specific senses to be fixed and exist outside time. See [Graham 1992, 14]. Zhu Xi has tendencies toward dualism, despite explicit statements denying it. “He said, for example, that the heart, the physical site for the mind, has empty spaces in it so that it can contain and store ways and li abundantly. His firm opposition to Buddhist doctrines of the void
(kong) and nothingness (wu) also reinforced this tendency, for it made him defend the reality and actuality of li, which could easily lead to the implication of separate existence of li” [Kim 2000, 27].

ix Evidence for something like Frisina’s reading of Ivanhoe comes in Ivanhoe’s discussion of li in his Confucian Moral Self Cultivation. He writes, “Since each thing possesses all the li, in theory at least, each and every thing is innately endowed with perfect knowledge…. This endowment, something like a complete set of innate ideas, is our basic nature” [Ivanhoe 2000, 47-8]. Admittedly, this comes in a discussion of Zhu Xi, but Ivanhoe seems to take it to apply to Wang as well; see [Ibid., 59-60]. However, it is not at all clear that Ivanhoe is here talking of the simple “application” of fixed principles. Ivanhoe writes that liangzhi “is much more like a faculty than a body of knowledge. It is a mode or capacity of the mind in itself which spontaneously responds to stimuli with the appropriate perception, judgment, intention, and action” [Ivanhoe 2002, 180n60].

x I take it that this is precisely what Frisina had in mind when he wrote, in a passage already discussed, that our xin creates “new determinateness.”

xi This is not to say that the entire thought-generating process — the impulse to engage cognitively with the world — must be cast away, but rather that no aspect of our engagement with the world can be allowed to be shaped by a selfish attachment to particular objects in the world. We can respond differentially, as already discussed, but not let selfish concerns lead us to see the world in a skewed fashion. See in particular [Wang 1963, 48-9 (sec. 70)].

xii Though I have not focused on it in this review, working out what to make of the differences among Wang, Dewey, and Whitehead is an important part of this project. Frisina notes some of the differences, but in general does not focus his efforts at either adjudicating among them, or at articulating a picture according to which (some of) their differences might be appropriate divergences owing to differences in situation.