

Dai Zhen on the Common Affirmability of Ethical Judgments



Justin Tiwald

Professor
Department of Philosophy
The University of Hong Kong

September 20th
HKT 10 a.m.

LI-4409



Abstract

DAI Zhen 戴震 (1724-1777) is famous for arguing that ethical judgments should be assessed against a standard of common affirmability, a position later scholars regard as one of the more distinctive and “modern” features of his thought. But Dai’s common affirmability criterion has been subject to many mis-readings and criticisms. In this talk, I will offer what I take to be the first fine-grained philosophical account and defense of the criterion, arguing that he saw it as a regulative ideal which required some insight from empathetic perspective-taking but could be applied more loosely to justify a variety of epistemic practices that strive to bring our personal opinions closer to what concerned parties would commonly affirm. I reject a variety of simplistic interpretations of the criterion, and also reject the contractualist interpretation, but defend a qualified version of the view that Dai was trying to make his moral epistemology more democratic.

About the Speaker

Justin Tiwald is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hong Kong. He has published widely on Chinese thought. His particular areas of study include Confucian, Daoist, and Neo-Confucian accounts of moral psychology, well-being, and political authority, as well as the significance of Confucian views for virtue ethics, individual rights, and moral epistemology. Notable publications include *Neo-Confucianism* (with Stephen C. Angle, 2017) and *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Philosophy* (forthcoming in 2024). He is also co-host of *This Is the Way* (a podcast series on Chinese philosophy) and series co-editor of *Oxford Chinese Thought* (a translation series with Oxford University Press).