

Chapter 10

Cultivating the Self in Concert with Others

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The teachings attributed to Confucius and embodied in the *Analects* raise central issues in moral psychology and moral cultivation.¹ Confucius' successors in the Chinese philosophical tradition, such as Mengzi 孟子, Xunzi 荀子, ZHU Xi 朱熹, and WANG Yangming 王陽明, addressed these issues in ways that from the perspective of Western analytic philosophy can be more readily grasped as arguments and positions taken on the goodness or badness of human nature, the role of special relationships in moral cultivation, and the relative roles of feeling, reflection, and reasoning in moral perception, judgment, and cultivation. But the teachings in the *Analects* do not take such a familiar form. They rather can be treated as a series of glimpses into how Confucius and his students engaged in their own projects of moral self-cultivation, or how (given the uncertainty of the provenance of the text and its possibly many layers from different sources) those projects might have been envisioned by others in the philosophical tradition. This chapter seeks to describe the way in which the outlines of a moral psychology arises from the text and how the text poses issues that came to be central to the Chinese philosophical tradition. It will be argued that the text provides exemplars of moral self-cultivation, that it makes emotion central to virtue and therefore makes emotional self-cultivation a central focus of moral development, that it highlights the relational nature of moral cultivation as a process that is conducted with others, that it raises difficult and crucial issues about the relation between intuitive and affective styles of action on the one hand and on the other hand action based on deliberation and reflection, and that it has some useful approaches to the problem of situationism that has been raised for virtue ethics.

¹ This chapter employs the Ames and Rosemont 1998 translation of the *Analects*.

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The *Analects* as an Enacted Project of Moral Cultivation

The *Analects* gives its readers glimpses into the lives of men who aspired to high public offices or to influence those in such offices. They believed that the decline of legitimate political and social order could only be reversed through a moral restoration of the character “of rulers and of those who served them. Such a restoration would be marked by the exercise and demonstration of *de* 德 (virtue), ethical excellence of such a charismatic power that it draws people to its possessors. Because the project of redeeming the kingdom is a project of moral and spiritual renewal, it is intertwined with striving after an individual spiritual ideal (Slingerland 2003b: 67).

Zilu 子路 asked about exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子). The Master replied, “They cultivate themselves by being respectful.”

“Is that all?” Asked Zilu.

“They cultivate themselves by bringing accord to their peers.”

“Is that all?” asked Zilu.

“They cultivate themselves by bringing accord to the people. Even a Yao 堯 or a Shun 舜 would find such a task daunting” (14.42).

Confucius and his students are carrying out their projects of moral cultivation in relation to each other. Confucius is of course the Master, and the others look to him to learn and also to learn how to learn in ways to be discussed shortly. But Confucius does not present himself as having no more to learn from his students. When one of his students points out that the Master has misjudged the character of Duke Zhao 昭公, Confucius wryly remarks, “I am so fortunate. If I go astray, others are certain to notice it” (7.31). Even a sarcastic rebuke he delivers to a censorious Zigong 子貢 takes advantage of Confucius’ self-presentation as someone who is seeking to learn: “It is because Zigong is of such superior character (*xian* 賢) himself that he has time for this. I myself have none” (14.29). In a remark about his favorite student that seems joking and affectionate but is perhaps also directed to the more sycophantic of his followers, Confucius remarks that YAN Hui 顏回 is of no help to him because there is nothing he says that YAN Hui does not like (11.4; see Harbsmeier 1990: 146). When Zigong observes that YAN Hui knows ten things upon learning one thing whereas he (Zigong) knows only two things upon learning one thing, Confucius remarks, “You [Zigong] are not his match; neither you nor I are a match for him” (5.9).

The special relationship between YAN Hui and Confucius helps to shed light on the relational nature of the moral cultivation conducted by Confucius and his students. The two share a deep and abiding love of learning, widely construed to include study and application of what one has learned (1.1). In suggesting what Zilu could have said about Confucius to the Duke of She 葉公, Confucius says, “Why didn’t you just say to him: As a person, Confucius is driven by such eagerness to teach and learn that he forgets to eat, he enjoys himself so much that he forgets to worry, and does not even realize that old age is on its way?” (7.19). When he does worry, Confucius names failing to carrying four things: to practice virtue (*de*), to

practice what he learns; to attend to what is right or appropriate in the circumstances (*yi* 義), and to reform conduct that is unproductive (7.3). The placing of learning and its practice in that list makes clear its centrality to the project of moral cultivation, especially that kind of learning and practicing that can transform the self. When Confucius singles out YAN Hui as the one student who truly loved learning, it is instructive how he amplifies that remark: YAN Hui never took out his anger on others and never made the same mistake twice (6.3). In a passage that resonates with Confucius' self-characterization as a person who sometimes forgets to eat in his eagerness to teach and to learn, the Master characterizes YAN Hui as of such a character (*xian*) that his joy is not affected by having only a bowl of rice to eat, a gourd of water to drink, and a dirty little hovel to live in (6.11).

AS SHUN Kwong-loi 信廣來 has pointed out, YAN Hui's joy (*yue* 樂) that is not affected by extreme poverty is not of the exuberant kind (Shun 2011). It rather connotes a movement with the ebb and flow of fortune and events beyond one's control. Starting with the correlative links between 樂 as joy and 樂 as music, we might say that YAN Hui's joy is like moving with the rhythm of whatever music that Heaven (*tian* 天) is playing in the situation. It is the kind of joy that ensures constancy of effort in the face of obstacles. Love of learning is a crucial quality for a successful project of moral cultivation because it provides for such constancy of effort. The *Analects* makes clear in various places why strong and constant motivation is needed in the face of resistance not only from circumstances but also from the self. At one point, with hyperbole that perhaps reflects Confucius' appreciation for and frustration with the magnitude of the motivational problem, he declares that he has yet to meet a person who is more fond of virtue than sex (9.18)! No wonder, then, that Confucius singles out YAN Hui among all his students for being able to go for 3 months without departing in his thoughts and feelings from *ren* 仁, the trait of the *junzi* 君子 sometimes associated with loving others (*ai ren* 愛人; 12.22), but most often treated as the all-inclusive and comprehensive virtue that includes all the particular virtues.

Their shared love of learning helps to account for Confucius' abandoned grief upon YAN Hui's death. He responds to his students' expression of concern about the extremity of his reaction by saying, "If I don't grieve with abandon for him, then for whom?" (11.10). When the other students gave YAN Hui a lavish burial, Confucius disapproved not only because it was improper for someone of YAN Hui's social station, but because Confucius wanted to bury him like a father would bury a son (11.11). In fact, Confucius and YAN Hui had a father-son like relationship. The father guided the son in his difficult journey to follow the father's teachings: "The Master is good at drawing me forward a step at a time; he broadens me with culture (*wen* 文) and disciplines my behavior through the observance of ritual propriety (*li* 禮)" (9.11). But the son serves as inspirational example for the father in his love of, and quickness in, learning, and in his ability to focus on *ren*.

This relationship of teaching and learning, mutual support, example, and inspiration fits the definition of Aristotle's character friendship, the highest form of friendship, in which friends value the moral excellence of each other's character and desire each other's well-being for their friend's sake (Aristotle 2002: Books 8 and 9).

However, there are three respects in which the portrait of Confucius and YAN Hui's relationship complements and goes beyond Aristotle's discussion of character friendship. First, it provides a vivid and concrete sense of how two character friends can appreciate each other's moral excellence. While Aristotle supplies a theoretical and abstract description of what character friendship is, Confucius and YAN Hui exemplify and enact that conception. They value each other especially for particular forms of moral excellence. Secondly, their relationship illustrates how character friends mutually support and sustain one another in their projects of moral cultivation. As indicated earlier, the sustained motivation to engage in moral cultivation is perhaps the central element necessary for any degree of success. Its rarity is a sign of the strength of the other motivations that oppose it. Is it any wonder, then, that two people whose moral excellence is especially notable for this necessary motivation should forge a deep bond of mutual commitment and support? Is it any wonder, moreover, that Confucius, upon losing his beloved YAN Hui, would grieve with abandon, having lost, using Aristotle's felicitous characterization of character friendship, "another self"?

The third respect in which the *Analects* portrait of Confucius and YAN Hui's relationship goes beyond Aristotle's discussion of character friendship has to do with how these two men are different. Friends not only share deep affinities, but can also bring at least different strengths to their relationship, such that each can contribute to the other's moral excellence in ways the other could not have achieved without that friend. Amy Olberding has deployed François Jullien's notion of the bland to suggest that YAN Hui's dullness as a character—he has no dramatic and attention-capturing traits such as Zilu's bull-in-a-china-shop's boldness, for example—is precisely one of his great strengths, in that it results from all one's qualities held in a kind of balance such that no one quality predominates. This balance or equanimity makes the bearer open to determination, ready to absorb the requirements of the situation and to respond accordingly (Jullien 1993; Olberding 2004).

Confucius' character is so different from YAN Hui's salutary blandness that one is tempted to call it "spicy." As Christoph Harbsmeier has pointed out, Confucius often comes across in the *Analects* as earthy, often self-deprecating, impulsive, given to outbursts that are often harsh or sweeping criticisms of politicians and of his students, but possessed of a short memory of his negative feelings and who is capable of appreciation and fondness for the strengths of the same students he criticizes (Harbsmeier 1990). An example of the earthiness and penchant for sweeping criticisms is the aforementioned 9.18, in which he says he has yet to meet a person who loves virtue more than sex. An example of a harsh criticism appears when Confucius observes Zaiwo 宰我 sleeping in the daytime. He says, "You cannot carve rotten wood, and cannot trowel over a wall of manure. As for Zaiwo, what is the point in upbraiding him?" (5.10). Confucius then says that Zaiwo taught him to hear what people have to say and then watch what they do, rather than assuming they would live up to what they say. But on the other hand, Zaiwo's eloquence is mentioned by Confucius in a context that presents it as a distinctive strength (11.3).

Confucius' persona is most appropriate for the "Master," one who has not only the authority and charisma but also the temperament to direct frank and if need be

harsh criticisms of those engaged in cultivation. At the same time, Confucius' humor, often self-deprecating, defuses what might otherwise be the alienating effects of his criticism of students. They know he is not only prepared to be criticized, but invites it through his own affectionate critique of YAN Hui as never disagreeing with him. Thus the way in which Confucius takes joy in questing after *ren* is not the same as YAN Hui's, and it is not the same in a way that is suitable to his role as a teacher and father figure to YAN Hui. While there might be a balance among the Master's traits, it is more like the balance achieved between strong and complementary flavors that retain their vividness and distinctness even as they combine to produce a whole that is attuned and responsive to the situation. If his outbursts appear intemperate, they are in fact suited to the situation. Or at least, this must be so of Confucius in the later stages of his life, if we accept the short autobiography of 2.4, in which Confucius says that at 70 he could give the desires of his *xin* 心 (heart-mind) free rein without overstepping the boundaries. The achievement of being able to give free rein to one's *xin* is great, considering that Confucius is often called upon to guide his students and hence take a more active stance designed to produce changes. He is an acute judge of others, as well as of his own strengths and weaknesses, and he guides each individual according to his assessment of that person's character. This is the thrust of 11.22, where he is described as telling the impulsive Zilu to consult father and elder brothers before acting upon something he has learned, and telling the diffident Ranyou 冉有 to go ahead and act.

The *Analects* thus shows a group with Confucius at the center, engaged in moral cultivation, each with a different configuration of strengths and weaknesses, not theorizing about it or giving philosophical justifications for it, but rather through their interactions providing a basis and inspiration for subsequent theorizing and justification by Confucius' successors in the Chinese philosophical tradition. The way in which Confucius and his students interact partly constitutes the character of the moral cultivation they are engaged in. In effect, then, the *Analects* provide an *exemplar* of the process of moral cultivation and of the way it is conducted in relationship with others—an exemplar of moral character emerging from interaction with others.

Exemplarism

Sor Hoon Tan has pointed to the number and vividness of the persons in the *Analects* who serve as moral exemplars (Tan 2005). The text invites us to exercise our imaginations in envisioning what these people might have been like and what we ourselves might become in trying to emulate them. Use of the imagination, she points out, draws our attention to the particularities of virtue and engages our emotions and desires. Amy Olberding develops the notion of exemplarism into a Confucian epistemology, according to which we get much of our important knowledge by coming into contact with the relevant objects or persons (Olberding 2008).

Upon initial contact, we may have little general knowledge. But the encounter is so compelling that we seek to know more about the particular object or person. And this encounter may be the basis for more general knowledge we acquire. Confucius served as an exemplar to his students. Confucius pointed to YAN Hui as an exemplar of love for and astuteness in, learning. The interactions between Confucius and his students served as exemplars for Mengzi and Xunzi in their theoretical developments and defenses of Confucianism. Still later Chinese philosophy, and more recently a growing community in Western philosophy, has followed in this tradition.

Confucius' status as the primary exemplar of the *Analects* explains the intense interest in the small details of his demeanor and behavior, especially in Book 10. Some of the most interesting passages in that book convey Confucius' affective attitude in response to events and occasions:

10.11: Even with a simple meal of coarse grains and vegetable gruel, he invariably made an offering, and did so with solemnity.

10.17: When his stables caught fire, the Master hurried back from court and asked, "Was anyone hurt?" He did not ask about the horses.

10.25: On meeting someone in mourning dress, even those on intimate terms, he would invariably take on a solemn appearance. On meeting someone wearing a ceremonial cap or someone who is blind, even though they were frequent acquaintances, he would invariably pay his respects.

On encountering a person in mourner's attire, he would lean forward on the stanchion of his carriage. He would do the same on encountering an official with state census records on his back.

On being presented with a sumptuous feast, he would invariably take on a solemn appearance and rise to his feet.

Other the passages in Book 10 go to great lengths in describing the style with which Confucius performed certain ceremonial actions:

On grasping the jade tablet as the lord's envoy, he would bow forward from the waist as though it were too heavy to lift. He would hold the top of it as though saluting and the bottom of it as though offering it to someone. His countenance would change visibly as though going off to battle, and his steps were short and measured as though following a line (10.5).

But here again, the preoccupation with the way Confucius did things is of a special kind: it conveys an impression of the attitudes he brought to these ceremonial occasions. Consider 3.12:

The expression "sacrifice as though present" is taken to mean "sacrifice to the spirits as though the spirits are present." But the Master said, "If I myself do not participate in the sacrifice, it is though I have not sacrificed at all."

Confucius is "present" to the sacrifice in the sense that he takes the emotional stance that would be appropriate were the spirits actually to be present.

Confucius as an exemplar of virtue cared immensely about the moral cultivation of his students, and would not spare their feelings in expressing disappointment when he thought it was merited. He took each meal, whether a sumptuous feast or simple food, as an occasion for expressing gratitude. On each occasion of meeting

another person, he would take note of signs that the other was undergoing an event or experience of personal or communal import, and he would signal his respect. This is a man who strove for moral excellence in the smallest details of everyday life, and many of those details concern the ways in which he makes appropriate affective connection with others or takes the affective stance appropriate for the occasion. The way in which Confucius exemplifies virtue contrasts with the moral hero who acts rightly in singular or dramatic moments. Confucius' moral excellence is embedded in everyday life and requires the utmost constancy.

This is not to say he lived a mundane life. The Confucian notion of what it is like to live a fully good life has an aesthetic dimension that might look odd and unfamiliar to a contemporary Western audience. In part, this may result from a certain narrowing of the domain of the moral in contemporary culture to the prohibition of harm and the protection of rights. In part, it may result from a primarily deliberative model of moral action, according to which general principles of right action are applied to the situation and then acted upon. Neither factor would leave much room for less formalized and concrete reflection, much less the expression of ethically appropriate attitudes toward others in a graceful, often automatic and non-conscious manner, proceeding from a "second nature" resulting from assiduous moral cultivation. Such stylized action could be said to possess a moral beauty. The moral beauty lies in the gracefulness and spontaneity of what has become a natural respectfulness and considerateness. The recipients of such action might be "graced" by action that flows so easily from the agent, and to the extent that the recipient can reciprocate in kind, we might have what Herbert Fingarette might call in his seminal work on Confucius a "holy rite" in which the ultimate object of reverence is human community (Fingarette 1972: 7–17).

The *Analects* provides exemplars of crucial features of moral cultivation: of personal qualities that contribute to moral excellence or lack thereof and of the relationships that in part constitute the process of cultivation. The necessary qualities include affective concern for others combined with reliable judgment as to how to express it in action. The concern is so reliably expressed that it becomes second nature for the person who has reached that high stage of moral cultivation, as indicated by Confucius' self-description of being able to "give[his] heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries" (2.4). How that stage is reached is the subject of the next section.

***Ren* as Comprehensive Moral Excellence Viewed Under the Aspect of Affective Concern and Respect Towards Others**

Ren 仁 appears in the *Analects* as the primary trait of moral excellence. As might be expected under an exemplarist epistemology, it is not explicitly defined but is associated with a wide array of desirable traits and behaviors: deference, tolerance, making good on one's word, diligence, and generosity (17.6), loving others (*ai ren*)

(12.22), ritual propriety (*li*) (12.1, 3.3), reaping successes only after having dealt with difficulties (6.22), establishing others in seeking to establish oneself and promoting others in seeking to get there oneself (6.30), a heavy charge that scholar-apprentices (*shi* 士) take on (8.7), and the identifying trait of the exemplary person (*junzi*) (4.5). *Ren* is sometimes approached by asking whether certain qualities are sufficient for becoming *ren*, and Confucius' typical reply is that he does not know (14.2). *Ren* is featured prominently in Book 4. It is said in 4.1 that in taking up one's residence, it is the presence of authoritative persons that is the greatest attraction. *Ren* draws people into its neighborhood, and is probably related to the charismatic force of virtue, or *de*. In 4.2 the Master says, "Those who are not authoritative are neither able to endure hardship for long, nor to enjoy happy circumstances for any period of time." Those who are authoritative feel at home with themselves. Those who are not have trouble being with themselves, uncomfortable in their own skin. That is why they are not even able to enjoy happy circumstances for any period of time. Here *ren* is characterized by what it feels like to have it or its effects on others.

It is significant that a thread running through many of the remarks about *ren* have to do with love, care, deference, and tolerance of others, that is, with attitudes that demonstrate affective concern and respect for others. The unity of *ren* as a comprehensive virtue that includes all the particular virtues lies in the fact that the component virtues manifest affective concern and respect. The project of cultivating *ren* in oneself, therefore, requires fashioning one's emotional dispositions. Concern and respect, for example, need to be informed by sympathetic understanding of others. Zigong asks Confucius if there is one expression that can be acted upon until the end of one's days. Confucius replies that there is *shu* 恕, "do not impose on others what you yourself do not want" (15.24). This saying is expanded, quite plausibly, as requiring one to imagine what one would want were one in the place or the circumstances of others, since it would hardly be an effective way of being sensitive to what others want without noticing the relevance of their circumstances. One of the functions of study of works such as the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) is to become acquainted with the various ways of the human heart, so that one is better able to recognize them as one encounters them in one's interactions with others.

The centrality of emotion in Confucian ethics is one of the main reasons why contemporary moral philosophers across a wide range of traditions and philosophical approaches are and should be interested in studying the *Analects*. Much recent empirical and theoretical work in psychology emphasizes the power of unconscious emotion over judgment action. In one of Paul Rozin's classic experiments (Rozin et al. 1986), subjects were reluctant to drink a sugary liquid that they knew perfectly well to be harmless, apparently deterred by a "poison" image on the label, even though the image was preceded by a "not" in front of it. In this case, the power of unconscious emotion triggered by an affectively charged image is linked to the phenomenon of "automaticity:" that human beings process much information from the world very quickly and beneath the level of consciousness (Bargh and Chartrand 1999). Emotions very often involve this fast processing, which takes

the form of a unconscious assessment or appraisal of something or someone in terms of what matters to the agent (e.g., fear of an something as posing danger), along with changes in physiological state (e.g., facial expression, quickening of pulse) that serve as signals to others and/or as preparation for appropriate action (e.g., flight or fight). In his pioneering studies of brain lesions, Joseph LeDoux has demonstrated that fear can be elicited in reflex-like fashion through a “low road” in the oldest (in terms of evolution) parts of the brain (a subcortical pathway directly to the amygdala) and bypassing the neo-cortex, the part of the brain associated with higher-level cognitive functions (LeDoux 1993). One plausible construal of the nature of these fast, automatic, and unconscious appraisals is that they are “seeing” things “as” this or that or “under the aspect of” this or that. One perceives features of things as salient and under some category that expresses evaluation in terms of what matters to the agent. Such perception is not the product of judgment formed through activity of the neo-cortex, which explains why it influences behavior independently of conscious belief and reasoning. Furthermore, contemporary moral psychology has come to an increasing recognition of the power of unconscious emotions over moral belief. Disgust over the thought of incest in a specific case can motivate the judgment that it is immoral even when the harms usually cited as the basis for condemning it (e.g., genetic defects, emotional damage, social disapproval) are explicitly removed by the description of the case (Haidt 2001).

However, a slower, deliberate, and conscious mode of processing also can occur in the process of having an emotion. It can co-occur with the initial fast response to something or someone, and can result in a reappraisal of the object of emotion, in the form of specific discriminations of the way or the degree to which the object is something to be feared, for example. It may involve complex forms of reflection involving the self (“Why am I feeling this way?” or “What’s out there that’s causing me to react like this?” “Is it reasonable for me to feel this way?”). This slower track can result in conscious choice of an action or a modification of an action that is tightly connected to the fast response (e.g., an involuntary startle response to a loud bang may lead to scanning of the environment for possible sources of threat and to a decision to take cover).

A critical question for moral psychology is to what degree such conscious and reflective processes can bring under control unconscious and automatic affective processes. But this is just the subject addressed in the Confucian project of the *Analects*: because *ren* is comprehensive moral excellence viewed under the aspect of moral respect and concern, cultivating the self to become *ren* is a matter of deliberately, and at some level consciously, transforming the self and especially its emotions. Consider *Analects* 1.15: being poor but enjoying the way (*dao* 道) or rich but loving ritual propriety is associated with the verse from the *Book of Odes* that says, “Like bone carved and polished,/Like jade cut and ground.” The self is carved and polished, cut and ground, and in significant part this is done through the proper observance of ritual. When YAN Hui asks about *ren* in *Analects* 12.1, the Master replies, “Through self-discipline and observing ritual propriety one becomes authoritative in one’s conduct [*ren*]. If for the space of one day one were able to accomplish this, the whole empire would defer to this authoritative model.”

The Relation Between *Ren* and Observing Ritual Propriety

The passage from 12.1 poses the issue of what precisely is the role that observing ritual propriety plays in becoming *ren*. In the *Analects* ritual includes ceremonies of ancestor worship, the burial of parents, and the rules governing respectful and appropriate behavior between parents and children. Later the word came to cover a broad range of customs and practices that spelled out courteous and respectful behavior of many different kinds. One of the most distinctive marks of Confucian ethics is the centrality of ritual performance in the ethical cultivation of character. For example, while Aristotelian habituation generally corresponds to the Confucian cultivation of character, there is no comparable emphasis in Aristotle on the role of ritual performance in this process of character transformation.

The translation of 12.1 by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. suggests that the role of observing ritual propriety is at least that of a necessary condition for realizing *ren*. The controversy is whether and what manner it might be more than a necessary condition. The crucial passage, “*keji fuli wei ren* 克己復禮為仁,” is rendered by Edward Slingerland as “Restraining oneself and returning to the rites constitutes goodness [*ren*]” (Slingerland 2003a: 125). Such a translation might be thought to suggest that observing ritual propriety constitutes the *whole* of being *ren*, or that it in fact *defines ren*.² However, Chenyang Li points out that the word translated by Slingerland as “constitutes”, *wei* 為, can have several distinct meanings, the most relevant of which is “make.” The ambiguity of the reference of “make” is precisely between a causal relation (in which case it is interpretable as “*shi* 使 or *ling* 令 cause” or “*ze* 則 result in”) and a constitution relation (in which case it is interpretable as “*shi* 是 is” or “*biancheng* 變成 become”) (Li 2007).

Though *Analects* 12.1, especially when “*wei*” is read as “constitutes,” provides some support for the definitionalist interpretation, it is difficult to sustain that interpretation in the end. For one thing, Confucius in *Analects* 9.3 seems to distinguish permissible from impermissible variations on traditional ritual forms by the content of the attitude these forms express. The current custom of using a more frugal silk rather than hemp ceremonial cap is permitted; however the current custom of bowing after ascending the hall expresses hubris in comparison to the traditional form of bowing upon entering the hall. This idea fits with the interpretation of *ren* as comprehensive moral excellence viewed under the aspect of affective concern and respect. And it is difficult to see how observing ritual propriety, no matter how assiduously, could define *ren* in this sense. It seems implausible that affective concern and respect is created *ex nihilo* from observing ritual propriety. Rather, it seems that one must already have at least some “raw substance” of emotion and give it form, or more form, or alter its form, through observing ritual propriety. In 3.3, the Master asks, “What has a person who is not *ren* got to do with observing ritual propriety? What has a person who is not authoritative got to do with playing music?” The attitude or feelings that might animate one’s performance of

² See Shun 2002 for his influential characterization of the “definitionalist” interpretation of *ren*.

ritual seem to be given priority in 3.4, where response to a question about the roots of observing ritual propriety the Master says that it is better to be modest than extravagant and in mourning better to express real grief than to worry over formal details. The roots here seem to be the emotions that ideally inform the ritual forms. It is the opposite of what we today might often think of something when we call it a ritual, which is that it has become mechanical and devoid of feeling. In 3.8, the Master comments on a poem by saying that the application of colors comes only after a suitably unadorned background is present. His student Zixia 子夏 says, “so it is observing ritual propriety that comes after.” After what? Perhaps after native emotions such as reverence upon which the rites build. Rites refine, and there must be something prior to them to refine.

Furthermore, observing ritual propriety cannot exhaust the affective or behavioral content of *ren* because much of human intercourse falls outside the scope of ritual propriety; also, the demands of propriety may conflict; and deciding what to do in such cases requires a skill not reducible to rule-following or following established customs (Sarkissian 2010a). *Analects* 12.2 associates *ren* with *shu*: “not imposing on others what you yourself do not want.” An illuminating interpretation of *shu* given by Philip J. Ivanhoe is that a sympathetic understanding of what it feels like to be in the position of others functions to guide the performance of one’s role-related duties to them (Ivanhoe 2008). While general norms and the dictates of ritual propriety may give one a sense of what one should do, one’s application of them can be informed and softened or mitigated by a sense of what it is like for *particular* others to occupy their social roles.

But if this line of reasoning is correct, then the problem lies in explaining why ritual propriety is so important, given that it is not wholly constitutive or definitional of *ren*. One plausible partial answer is based on the recognition that the intentional content and motivational direction of emotions is deeply influenced by upbringing, personal experience and culture. “Intentional content” refers to the content of the appraisal made, for example, when one reacts with fear. One may perceive something *as* dangerous without necessarily appraising it consciously. Whether conscious or not, some appraisals might be hard-wired. Human beings might be hard-wired to perceive a snake-shaped object making sudden movements as posing danger. Other appraisals are obviously learned and culturally derived, e.g., being afraid of a stock market crash. “Motivational direction” refers to action tendencies associated with an emotion. Again, some tendencies might be hard-wired and others are learned: e.g., the physiological changes preparing a person to flee or fight in response to the perception of danger versus moving one’s savings into gold.

One’s perception of what is dangerous, whether hard-wired or learned, might become more discerning through learning, e.g., learning which snakes are harmless to humans and which ones are poisonous. Motivational directions can be changed through learning. One might be taught not to try to kill a venomous snake since a snake is most likely to bite a human when attacked, or that moving one’s savings into gold is not ultimately prudent. The learning of cultural norms can have similar effects. Mauss et al. illustrate the effect of culture through the story of a woman

from Hawai'i driving in southern California, who was suddenly being cut off by another driver who then suddenly slowed down in front of her (Mauss et al. 2008: 39). Instead of becoming enraged, she remained quite calm and did not even have to exercise conscious restraint. Anger never crossed her mind, because in Hawai'i people do not simply display anger with other drivers. After spending more time in southern California, however, she began responding with intense rage at similar incidents. Cultural norms can influence the way people experience and express emotions even without their consciously making efforts at self-control in accordance with these norms.

In one experiment Mauss and her colleagues “primed” their subjects to control their emotions or to express them by having them perform sentence unscrambling tasks (taking word jumbles and making sentences out of them) (Mauss et al. 2007). For one group, embedded in the jumbles were emotion-control words such as “restrains” and “cool”. For the other group, embedded in the jumbles were words like “volatile” and “hot”. Then subjects in both groups participated in an event designed to provoke their anger. Participants primed with emotion-control words reported less anger experience after provocation than those primed with emotion-expression words. Mauss et al. interpreted the results to indicate that people have goals and cultural norms requiring emotional restraint and control that can be activated and then begin operation when the relevant situation comes along.

What might this have to do with Confucian self-cultivation? Slingerland has pointed out that part of the program of Confucian self-cultivation involves study of the classics, memorized and rehearsed until they become fully internalized and unconscious patterns of thought (Slingerland 2009). This is one characteristic pattern of Confucian self-transformation: one consciously, deliberately and assiduously undertakes a program that inculcates certain unconscious and automatic emotional responses and patterns of conduct. Confucian study of the classics, in Mauss et al.'s terms, might involve the inculcation and priming reinforcement of goals and norms having to do with the “self-discipline” mentioned in 12.1. We might indeed talk of a group “culture” formed by Confucius and his students, wherein they reinforce in each other such goals and norms.

Observance of ritual propriety constitutes an enactment of ethically required attitudes such as respect and concern, an “exercising” of emotional dispositions that strengthens them. As *Analects* 9.3 suggests, the exercising cannot be done mindlessly. It involves the effort to achieve a right fit between the form and substance of ritual, where the form is the physical gesture, bodily posture or pattern of conduct and the substance is the affective attitude. The form is deprived of its expressive meaning without the affective attitude it was meant to express. The form can be suited to the attitude or can be misaligned with it in varying degrees, and the implication of 9.3 is that the ill-fit can subvert the desired attitude. Taking a physical posture that is below another has a natural meaning of submission among various species of mammals (e.g., crouching by nonhuman primates and dogs and cats). It is easy to see how humans might have built on a genetically-based behavior and turned it into a signal of deference to authority. Thus in some cases, choosing the right form for the intended attitude involves both a reflective

awareness of what the intended attitude is supposed to be in the given ritual and a sense of which of the possible and available forms is most suitable for expressing the intended attitude. This includes not only the question of when and where to bow in relation to the recipient, but whether. Bowing is appropriate towards a superior, but Confucius would not bow on receiving gifts from friends, even those as lavish as a horse and carriage; the only exception was for a sacrificial gift (10.23). To make such judgments about ritual, one needs to learn their point or purpose. When Confucius entered the Grand Ancestral Hall, he asked questions about everything (10.21). When someone queried why a man who is supposed to know about observing ritual propriety is asking so many questions, Confucius responded that doing so is observing ritual propriety (3.15).

Demeanor on ritual occasions plays a major role in the detailed descriptions of Confucius in Book 10: his demeanor would change at a significant point during the occasion (10.3–10.5); and a number of contexts in which his demeanor becomes solemn are noted (10.25). Confucius also 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 (Strack et al. 1988; Hennenlotter et al. 2008; Salomons et al. 2008; Lewis and Bowler 2009). In other words, there is a “feedback loop” between the physical behavior and the emotion such that the causal arrow goes both ways. The fact that it does go both ways can perhaps explain why there are passages in the *Analects* conveying the idea that ritual and other cultural learning refines an emotional substance that is already given (3.3, 3.8) and other passages conveying that whatever is already there needs considerable restraint and alteration (12.1). Slingerland points out that recurring through the *Analects* are two different metaphors for self-cultivation: adornment and craft. The adornment metaphor occurs mainly in connection with the idea that human beings have the basic emotional substance that should inform the performance of rituals (e.g., 3.3, 3.4, 3.8). The craft metaphor occurs mainly in connection with the idea that observing ritual is necessary for restraining and reshaping the self, implying that the basic emotional substance must be transformed and not just adorned (e.g., 5.21, 12.1, 15.10, 19.7). Mengzi went on to emphasize in his theory of moral development the first idea; Xunzi emphasized the second, though it is arguable that both ideas are present in each of their theories.

In any case the more balanced position conveyed by Confucius in 6.18 is arguably the most reasonable one to adopt: “When one's basic disposition (*zhi* 質) overwhelms refinement (*wen* 文), the person is boorish; when refinement overwhelms one's basic disposition, the person is an officious scribe. It is only when one's basic disposition and refinement are in appropriate balance that you have the exemplary person (*junzi* 君子).” The mixed nature of human emotional substance makes it likely that some emotions will be of the sort that a sincere practitioner can and should bring to and inform his performance of ritual and that others will need to be curbed, restrained or redirected from harmful expression.

Observing ritual propriety, then enables the development of the appropriate affective attitudes that *ren* manifests in all its forms of moral excellence. If that were its only function, then its relationship to *ren* might be purely “instrumental,” to

use Kwong-loi Shun's term to characterize this interpretive possibility (Shun 2002): Observing ritual propriety might merely be a means to developing the appropriate affective attitudes that are manifested in all the forms of moral excellence. However, *Analects* 12.1 confers a kind of centrality on observing ritual propriety that is difficult to reconcile with its being purely instrumental. Yet neither is the relation definitional. Kwong-loi Shun has proposed that the relation is such that the rituals of one community "constitute" *ren* in the sense that mastery of the community's rituals is necessary and sufficient for becoming *ren*, but the concept of *ren* is not defined by that set of rituals because we can recognize that another community can have its own rituals that would, within *that* community, be necessary and sufficient for becoming *ren*. To clarify his proposal, Shun uses the analogy of the concept of marriage: in a particular community, performing one set of rituals is necessary and sufficient for getting married; however, the concept of marriage is not defined by these set of rituals because another community may have another set of rituals that would "constitute" or be necessary and sufficient for being married (Shun 2002: 62–63).

Shun's proposal is ingenious, but to see how it really would work, we would need to see how the concept of *ren* could have enough overlapping content across communities so that it could plausibly be regarded as the *same* concept, and at the same time, the overlapping content must be consistent with different sets of necessary and sufficient conditions for being *ren* across different communities. In the case of the concept of marriage, we might think of the overlapping content as involving a partnership between those who are married that is generally intended to involve activities such as pooling resources to maintain a household and raise children. We could think of different sets of rituals that might, in different communities, be necessary and sufficient for commencing such a partnership. We would need an explanation like this in the case of *ren* and observing ritual propriety, and it is not clear how to give it. There seems something of a disanalogy between being married and being *ren*: while the rituals are necessary and sufficient for having the status of being married, they do not really constitute the activities of being married. But for observing ritual propriety to constitute *ren*, it would seem that mastering the relevant rituals would have to constitute all the activities (at least within the relevant community) that go into being *ren*. Another problem is that there seems little textual basis for attributing to the *Analects* the presumption that different sets of rituals would constitute *ren* differently. Most importantly, the reasons that have come up earlier for not defining *ren* in terms of observing ritual propriety don't really seem to involve the difference in the rituals that communities have. It seems that one must bring some pre-existing emotional substance of the right sort to even begin observing ritual propriety in the way it should be. Furthermore, observing ritual propriety only enables one to become *ren* when we are able to correctly judge which ritual forms to use and when. This latter point involves the concept of *yi*, rightness or appropriateness, and to the ability to judge rightness or appropriateness in the situation at hand.

Chenyang Li has proposed a different interpretation, under which rituals would be a kind of cultural grammar and *ren* would be mastery of a culture (Li 2007: 317–322). Rituals stand to *ren* as grammar stands to language. The problem is that

the analogy to grammar and a language only goes so far in spelling out the exact relation between observing ritual propriety and *ren*, and the most natural way of carrying out the analogy doesn't seem quite right. For example, grammar stands to language in something like the way that form stands to content. Grammar determines what a well-formed expression in the language could be and what it could not be, but does not confer semantic content or specific meaning on well-formed expressions. But observing ritual propriety is not observing rules that leave meaning undetermined. It is not mere outward observance of prescribed patterns of behavior but also involves the expression of the appropriate ethical attitudes. It involves both form and the content of affective attitudes such as respect and concern.

Both Shun and Li seem right to look for a way that observing ritual propriety can be more than instrumental to realizing *ren* and yet not definitional. Is there a way to specify how that could be so? One key is provided by the composition of *ren* 仁 from the character for person 人 and two 二. Being *ren* involves relationship: not just in the sense of expressing affective attitudes toward others, but in the sense of acting together. Rituals of marriage, funerals, greeting, serving at meals, and giving gifts involve not just a single person expressing the appropriate attitudes towards others through the performance of certain customary patterns of actions, but at least two people whose actions toward each other express and enact reciprocal concern and respect. Rituals are especially suited for the partnered and reciprocal expression of these attitudes because they are conventionalized ways of communicating these attitudes. Convention coordinates expectation and exponentially increases the possible content of what can be communicated between people. Even actions having some natural meaning, such as bowing, become through convention much more specific in social meaning and are regulated by widely recognized specifications of when the actions are appropriate. Giving food to another is in some sense a natural action among human beings, but as governed by social conventions, it becomes a respectful serving of food to others (2.17). Fingarette construes ritual performance as an end in itself, as beautiful and dignified, open and shared participation in ceremonies that celebrate human community (Fingarette 1972). Ritual performance, internalized so that it becomes second nature, such that it is wholeheartedly, gracefully and spontaneously performed, is a crucial constituent of a fully realized human life. Observing ritual propriety is valuable for its own sake because it is the enactment of respectful and concerned relationship with others, made possible by human conventions that confer that kind of meaning on those inter-actions. Observing ritual propriety is not simply instrumental for realizing *ren* in oneself, but it is one's participation in a life with others that at least partially realizes *ren*. It is partly though not wholly constitutive of *ren* in that sense.

Such an interpretation of the value of *ren* also sheds light on the value of the aesthetic dimension of the Confucian ideal. From a contemporary Western perspective, the ethical value placed on graceful action may seem odd. But when someone does the right thing in a cold and unemotional fashion, or in an emotionally ambivalent way, it is arguable that much of the ethical value is lost. As noted earlier, when someone does the right thing with the ease that bespeaks wholeheartedness of

motivation, the action comes to possess a kind of moral beauty. For human beings to express concern and respect for one another through their actions is itself of ethical value, apart from whatever particular duties are thereby discharged. If they convey these attitudes to each other with grace, ease, and wholeheartedness, it makes our lives more fully and distinctively human.

Finally, insofar as *ren* is a set of activities with others, it should be noted that the way one performs ritual, the extent to which one expresses genuine and unforced emotions of the appropriate sort, even through minor stylistic details such as demeanor and tone of voice, one can influence the way others will act in subsequent activities (Sarkissian 2010b). One can get one's interactions off to a good start, or one may fail to do so through negligent or clumsy ways of ritualistically initiating those interactions. Insofar as being *ren* means influencing others for the better, both by drawing them into graceful and expressive performance of rituals and by the ramifying effects on them of such participation, then observing ritual propriety is in another way much more than an instrument for shaping oneself, though it is that too.

Is *Wuwei* 無為 Part of the Confucian Ideal in the *Analects*?

The idea that *ren* consists partly in what one does with other people brings us to the question of how one does it, and more specifically to the question of whether it involves *wuwei* 無為, variously translated as “non-action” or “effortless action.” The actual phrase is used only once in the *Analects*, where Shun is described as effecting proper order by simply assuming an air of deference and facing south (the ritual position of the king) (15.5). The other passage often cited in support of the idea that full moral excellence involves *wuwei* is the aforementioned 2.4, where Confucius describes himself at 70 as being able follow his heart's desires without transgressing the (socio-ethical) boundaries. Edward Slingerland treats *wuwei* as fully a part of the Confucian ideal in the *Analects* as it is in a Daoist texts such as the *Daodejing* 道德經. He also argues that its presence in the Confucian ideal creates unresolvable tensions between the effortless and unselfconsciousness of *wuwei* on the one hand and the effortful arduousness of the Confucian path to that ideal. It therefore becomes quite important to address to what extent *wuwei* really is part of the Confucian ideal, and to the extent that it is, whether it really creates unresolvable tensions within the ideal.

Since there is just a single explicit mention of *wuwei* in the *Analects*, Slingerland makes his case on the grounds that the concept of *wuwei* functions as a metaphor for effortless action with several different but related dimensions that are expressed by “families” of metaphorical expressions (Slingerland 2003b: 59–62). These dimensions include “following” (as in Confucius being able at 70 to follow his heart's desires without overstepping socio-ethical bounds), “being at ease” (here he cites, for example, 5.26, translating one of Confucius' stated aspirations as “bringing ease (*an* 安) to the aged”), and “unselfconsciousness” (7.19 is cited, where Confucius describes himself as the type of person who becomes so absorbed in his studies that he forgets to eat, whose

joy (*le 樂*) renders him free of worries, and who grows old without being aware of the passage of years), and “timeliness and flexibility” (9.3 is cited as indicating Confucius’ flexibility in practicing ritual as long as the crucial feeling is still expressed).

Slingerland is onto something when he points out that *wuwei* may correspond to several related “families” of metaphorical expressions. The thing about the kinds of metaphorical expressions cited, however, is that they blossom various meanings linked merely through association, not through logical implication. Hence they allow a speaker to attach a range of particular meanings to an expression belonging to a *wuwei* family without committing himself to the other meanings that have been or can be attached to that expression. For example, forgetting to eat or how old one is are fairly specific forms of self-forgetfulness. They do not logically imply that one forgets what one is doing in the sense of not being self-conscious about what one is doing. Furthermore, the various dimensions Slingerland attributes to the overall conceptual scheme of *wuwei* are not logically tied to each other. A thinker may evoke one dimension of *wuwei* without necessarily committing himself to evoking the other dimensions. That Confucius is described as being able to give his heart-mind’s desires free rein clearly indicates that wholeheartedness of ethical motivation is the ultimate goal of self-cultivation. And acting from such wholeheartedness, because it eliminates internal struggle between motivational elements, could create a sense of one’s action as being effortless. But wholeheartedness of motivation does not necessarily imply a lack of self-consciousness while acting. And when lack of self-consciousness *is* evoked in the *Analects*, it is far from clear that it is the kind that involves lack of awareness about what one is doing at the moment. To forget to eat while learning or not to notice one’s age as the years go by is not necessarily to lack a sense of what one is doing in relation to others, nor is it necessarily to be able to respond immediately and without deliberation to the demands of a situation that differs in significant details from what one has experienced in the past. In Confucius, it certainly does not indicate a lack of self-assessment and awareness of the kind of person one is, since he was the one who made these observations about himself!

These points are crucial to keep in mind when addressing the issue of whether the presence of *wuwei* in the Confucian ideal creates unresolvable tensions within the *Analects*. Because *wuwei* is not a clearly defined style of action with a unified set of features, it is tricky to sustain the claim that it conflicts with self-conscious deliberate and effortful action. Consider Slingerland’s various descriptions of the source of the conflict. One description refers to the tension between the long and arduous process of achieving *ren* and the effortless of *ren* once it is fully realized. How can something that requires constant watchfulness over one’s faults and being full of questions when at the Ancestral Hall result in the ease and naturalness of being able to act freely from one’s heart’s desires and not overstepping the bounds?

The question loses much of its paradoxical air if wholeheartedness is distinguished from the radical and sweeping form of unselfconsciousness that exempts one from ever having to think about what to do in unusual situations. One can be wholeheartedly for whatever turns out to be, on reflection, the right thing to do. Any puzzlement that needs to be worked through need not be puzzlement over one’s own motivations. One may simply need to reflect on what one’s motivations require

in the situation at hand. Moreover, as Chris Fraser has pointed out, much of the question's paradoxical air arises from taking a synchronic perspective on self-cultivation and its ultimate goal (Fraser 2007). From a diachronic perspective, the *process* might involve self-conscious monitoring and restraining refractory desires, but the *later result* is, say, the transformation of once-refractory desires and the mastery of the details of ritual action such that one need no longer pay conscious attention to that aspect of what one is doing and one is able to focus fully on the feeling toward and with others that is being expressed in ritual action.

Another way Slingerland describes the tension is in terms of the conflict between the adornment and the craft metaphors of self-cultivation. He argues that the idea behind the adornment metaphor—that we have the emotional substance of *ren* that only needs refinement—is supported by the “paradox of Virtue” as discussed by David Nivison (1996). The paradox is that realizing virtue is only possible if one wants to be moral, but wanting to be moral is the essential part of being moral, and so it appears that becoming virtuous requires that one already be virtuous.³ This thought, claims Slingerland, results in the adornment-related idea that we already have the basic right “stuff.” On the other hand, the craft metaphor corresponds to the appearance that most people are pretty far away from having virtue, and this gives rise to the idea that self-cultivation is a process of reworking oneself and one's emotional stuff.

Now there clearly is textual evidence for a *prima facie* conflict between the adornment and craft metaphors. The text does not settle the question of whether the conflict is irresolvable. It was suggested earlier that the adornment and craft metaphors alternate because self-cultivation is a causal process that goes both ways: One starts with some of the “right stuff,” some impulses for love, concern and respect, and this stuff is expressed and strengthened through observance of the appropriate rituals. Mengzi's doctrine of the inborn sprouts of morality that consists of feelings such as compassion, shame and dislike, deference, and a sense for what is to be done versus what is not to be done, is a crystallization of this direction of development in the *Analects*. This “right stuff” is refined and channeled through better judgment one acquires. At the same time, there is some “wrong stuff” such as desires to get ahead through flattery and toadying up to one's superiors. Such desires are restrained through the appropriate rituals. This is direction of development is crystallized in Xunzi's conception of human nature as containing feelings and desires that lead to moral conflict and destruction unless restrained and transformed. However, both thinkers acknowledge both directions of development even as they tend to emphasize one or the other. Mengzi acknowledges that if one indulges the “petty parts” corresponding to sensual desires, one will become a petty person. The heart-mind needs to reflect and then it will see that it should give priority to the greater parts of the self, the moral beginnings or sprouts (*Mengzi* 6A15; see Bloom 2009). In the chapter on ritual, Xunzi defends the traditional 3-year mourning period as more suitable than a shorter period, arguing that natural

³ See, e.g., 7.30: “How could *ren* be so far away? No sooner do I seek it than it has arrived”.

grief for the loss of parents requires a longer period. This suggests that there is no contradiction in using both the adornment and craft metaphors as long as one is not implying that either metaphor captures the whole of the process of self-cultivation.

The process involves additional complexity. There can be a kind of bootstrapping that takes advantage of the bi-directionality of causation. The “right” stuff that is refined can provide motivational leverage for substantially transforming the “wrong” stuff. If one is able to nurture and strengthen one’s concern and respect for others through ritual, these affective attitudes may increase one’s sense of shame when one lets the more refractory motivational elements govern one’s actions. That is, if participating in ritual with others strengthens one’s connections with and responsibility to these others, one may feel shame when one lets them down. One may have increased motivation to do something about the motivations that prompt one’s failures. This may be part of the psychological mechanism that lends plausibility to the claim in *Analects* 2.3: Leading people with administrative injunctions and keeping them orderly with penal law will motivate them to avoid punishment but they will lack a sense of shame; if one leads them with excellence [or virtue] *de* 德 and keeps them orderly through observing ritual propriety, they will develop a sense of shame and order themselves.

Recognizing that the different dimensions of *wuwei* are significantly independent of each other and that each dimension admits of different degrees and kinds of realization (unselfconsciousness, for example, need not be a total lack of reflectiveness about what one is doing, and reflectiveness need not involve mechanical rule following but thoughtfulness about what the situation requires) allows a more productive exploration of the way that felt qualities of action such as spontaneity and effortlessness might in fact be combined with reflectiveness and good judgment. The latter qualities do not need to be confined to the stages in which a person is becoming but not yet *ren*.

The Cook Ding story in the third chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 is often taken as an example of the way in which supremely skillful activity does not involve thought about what one is doing but instead an intuitive and immediate responsiveness to the material and to the situation. Cook Ding has reached a level of skill in cutting up oxen that he is able to glide his knife through the spaces and joints without encountering resistance. What is often neglected in the story, however, is the Cook’s description of what he does when he comes to a difficult place in the ox: “I see where it will be hard to handle and cautiously prepare myself, my gaze settles on it, action slows down for it, you scarcely see the flick of the chopper—and at one stroke the tangle has been unraveled, as a clod crumbles to the ground” (Graham 2001: 64). This moment in the Cook’s story indicates not just that the flow of unselfconscious activity can be interrupted when the agent gets to a part of the activity that requires self-monitoring, but also that a continuous self-monitoring is operating at another level, perhaps pushed into the background of the subconscious or conscious when things are going smoothly, but present nevertheless in case self-conscious direction is needed in the foreground of consciousness.

Such complex layering is made possible by parallel processing involving different areas and circuits of the brain, with feedback mechanisms to enable coordination

between the two levels of intuitive and self-monitoring processing. To use another analogy, the master musician may achieve such a level of mastery over her instrument that she does not need to concentrate on what she is doing with her fingers, but on one level of consciousness she is monitoring how the performance is going, and ready to activate self-monitored action when the going gets tough. If she is playing with others, for example, she will need to adjust her playing to what she is hearing from others. Where inter-action with other human beings is involved, it is even more plausible that both intuitive and self-monitoring processing should both operate in skillful activity. Dealing with a difficult place in a dead ox is a far simpler task than reading how another person is reacting to one's words and actions and making adjustments in the course of a conversation in order to achieve one's goal. And that in turn is a simpler task when one is in the course of that conversation not trying to accomplish some pre-determined goal of one's own but is striving to reconcile one's interests with the other person's interests.

This is not to deny that intuitive action can play an important role in the Confucian ideal. Hagop Sarkissian has usefully related Antonio Damasio's somatic marker theory to the Confucian ideal of *wuwei*: emotional responses, whether of positive or negative salience, get associated with certain situational features through biological hard-wiring or through personal or cultural learning; these responses are bodily physiological changes that somatically "mark" these situational features and highlight them as highly relevant for choice-making (Sarkissian 2010a). The process is typically automatic and unconscious. Damasio holds that such markers are necessary for helping human beings manage what would otherwise be an unmanageable array of choices (Damasio 1994). Positively marked options are saliently choice-worthy; negatively marked options need no further consideration. On Sarkissian's view, Confucius' program of self-cultivation produces, in effect, countless somatic markers, facilitating a fast response to an increasingly wide range of life situations. But however thoroughly people go through a program of self-cultivation, it seems implausible that they will have "sOMATICALLY MARKED" all the situational features they will have to deal with in the future. It is implausible, in other words, that they will never encounter situations novel enough to require some deliberation or reflection. The very fact that *yi* or rightness is rightness in a particular context and can never be fully captured by a general rule (4.10) guarantees significant novelty. That is why a two-level theory involving both an automatic and unconscious level and a conscious, reflective level seems the most consistent with the total configuration of features of Confucian ethics as it appears in the *Analects*.⁴

⁴ See Tiwald 2010 for a discussion of DAI Zhen's 戴震 defense of the role of reflection in the Confucian ideal against Neo-Confucians such as ZHU Xi who emphasized the spontaneous.

The Influence of Situations and Confucian Ethics

The contemporary renewal of interest in Confucianism in the United Kingdom and North America has in part been fueled by a resurgence of interest in virtue ethics, and this resurgence has in part been fueled by disillusionment with modern, principle-based ethics such as utilitarianism and deontology. At the beginning of the modern era, there was hope that the principle of utility or the categorical imperative would provide precision and clarity as a guide to action or at least a higher-level justification of more familiar looking moral rules. A significant number of philosophers have been disappointed in that hope, and one result has been a renewal of interest in virtue ethics. But that renewal of interest has also prompted a more critical eye on possible failings of virtue ethics, and in particular the belief that a character ideal consisting of virtues could form the core of a viable ethic.

One of the more interesting criticisms is that the very notion of a virtue presupposes the illusion of global character traits. These are traits consisting of behavioral, perceptual, and dispositions that reliably manifest themselves across the wide range of situations in which they are ethically required or desirable. Critics such as Gilbert Harman cite psychological studies showing that people's behavior tends to vary in unexpected ways, affected by factors we do not expect to be so significant (Harman 1998–1999, 1999–2000; Doris 2002). For example, they cite the Milgram experiment in which the majority of subjects were willing to administer severe and dangerous electric shocks to others in an experiment, they were led to believe, that tested the effect of punishment on learning. The situational variable thought to be responsible for the surprising willingness to hurt others is the authority of the experimenter in charge (Milgram 1974). The experiment is disturbing because we might have expected, as Milgram did before he performed the experiment, that most people would have shown more ethical resistance than they actually showed to inflicting pain and very possibly harming others. In another experiment by John Darley and Daniel Batson, the most influential factor in whether seminary students stopped to help a person slumped in an alleyway was whether they were late to an appointment, even if the appointment was a lecture on the Good Samaritan! (Darley and Batson 1973).

Confucian ethics, perhaps more than other virtue ethics, should be in a good position to address this problem. David Hall and Roger Ames, and Henry Rosemont, Jr. have been influential in pointing out that Confucianism has a conception of the person that involves relationship to others (Hall and Ames 1998; Rosemont 1991). For example, Hall and Ames say that

The interlocking pattern of relationships, where focused and individuated, is the particular person, both psychic and somatic. The “field” that both constitutes and is constituted by these foci is the community (Hall and Ames 1998: 26).

There is a great deal of plausibility in what Hall and Ames say here, but it is also in need of clarification. Fields take on definition through individuals and their relationships and in that sense are constituted by them. However, it is more difficult to say how a field constitutes individuals. Hall and Ames sometimes suggest that the self is determined by the esteem with which one is regarded in community.

However, such determination cannot exhaust what the self is, since they speak of the self as having an agency that goes into constituting the field. In any case, it is unclear how the “one” who is regarded in community cannot have an existence independent of being regarded in this or that way. How else could there be a “one” to regard in the first place? If one’s self is a shared consciousness of one’s roles and relationships, there must be some “one” who takes these roles and stands in these relationships (see Wong 2004).

Rosemont writes about the Confucian self:

[T]here can be no me in isolation, to be considered abstractly: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others Taken collectively, they weave, for each of us, a unique pattern of personal identity, such that if some of my roles change, the others will of necessity change also, literally making me a different person (Rosemont 1991: 90).

Again, there is a great deal of plausibility in what Rosemont says about the Confucian conception of the person, but it is also in need of clarification. If I am simply the sum of my relationships, then who or what is the entity standing in each of these particular relationships? (Wong 2008).

A way out of these difficulties is to take the one who stands in all the self’s relationships as a biological organism. We begin life embodied as biological organisms and become persons by entering into relationship with others of our kind (Wong 2004). This is true in several senses. It is true in the “developmental sense” that we become who we are in large part through the kinds of relationships we have with others. One reason Confucius grieved with abandon upon the death of YAN Hui is that a major part of himself was lost with YAN Hui. But it is also true in a “constitutive” sense because our identities are partially constituted by our relationship to others. Many of our constituting traits involve dispositions that are triggered by specific persons in specific social contexts. To say what these traits are, then, we must say which people, and in what context, trigger the relevant dispositions. I am the person I am in part because I am certain ways with my wife; certain ways with my daughter, and still other, different ways with my colleagues, and so on. In that sense, at least some of our constituting traits are relational, and to that extent, our identities are relational. Again, to use the example YAN Hui, important parts of Confucius’ practical identity was that of teacher of and father-like figure to YAN Hui, with whom he interacted in quite distinctive fashion; another part of his identity was the way he interacted with Zilu, and so on.

Relationally constituted identities may not just be a feature of the *Analects* or of Confucian philosophically thought generally. Some anthropologists and psychologists believe there is an East–west difference in the tendency to think of persons in terms of context-specific versus global traits. Westerners, and especially people in the U.S., tend to describe character in terms of global traits that manifest themselves across a wide range of contexts, while Asians tend to think of character in terms of context-specific traits. That people may act in certain distinct ways to family and close friends but different ways to those with whom they work is a fact that may be more salient to people in Asian societies such as China, Japan and Korea than it is to people in the U.S. (Choi et al. 1999; Hall 1976; Norenzayan et al. 2002).

Thus Confucian ethics may be grounded in a broad and ancient approach to thinking about the person that is comparatively more relational than in other traditions. Hall, Ames, and Rosemont are right about that. This is not yet to address the problem that Harman and John Doris raise, however, which is that human beings may not, or at least not enough human beings may not, be able to develop sufficiently robust character traits that qualify as virtues. To do that, they must be able to resist the influence of persons and other situational factors *when* such influence would prevent them from displaying the right conduct or attitudes. And to have virtues, they must be able to resist reliably.

However, what Hall, Ames, and Rosemont have pointed out is that being responsive to the situation, including particular others in the situation, need not be regarded in a negative light. In fact, given the conception of *yi* as rightness or appropriateness to the context, an ethically apt responsiveness to the context is morally required, and this requires one to act differently in relevantly different contexts. Several of the detailed descriptions of Confucius' behavior and demeanor in Book 10 convey exactly that impression: that he was different in different contexts, and appropriately so: in his home village, he was deferential, as though at a loss for words; and yet in the ancestral temple and at court, he spoke articulately, though with deliberation; at court, he was congenial with lower officials, and straightforward yet respectful with higher officials; in the presence of his lord he was reverent yet composed (10.1–10.2). As a teacher, he gave different advice to different students because they needed different things (11.22). The unique feature of *yi* as a robust character trait is that it is both relational *and* consistent across the very wide range of situations where its manifestation is required. It is relational in that it responds differently to different people and different situations; it is consistent in always being *appropriate* responsiveness. As *Analects* 4.10 says, the exemplary person is always on the side of what is right.

This capacity for consistency across a wide range of situations, as noted earlier, is based on a capacity for resisting undue influence from others and the situation. The latter is a power of the heart-mind (*xin*). In *Analects* 9.26, Confucius constructs both an analogy and a disanalogy between the heart-mind and the commander of the Combined Armies: both set directions, *zhi* 志, but the Armies can be deprived of its commander while peasants cannot be deprived of the directions they set for themselves. Tradition and particular others with whom one has relationship influence the substance of the self, but the heart-mind has the capacity to reflect on and criticize these influences, to the point where a person can totally reject the social order and seek to live outside it (18.5–18.6; see also Shun 2004: 188–190).

Thus Confucian ethics both recognizes the profound influence that tradition and one's relationship with others have in shaping and constituting the person, but also maintains the possibility of the self's critically reflecting on and controlling the effect of these influences, especially as they bear on developing the ability to reliably judge and act on what is appropriate for the situation at hand. Slingerland observes that Confucians have two ways of addressing the "high bar" challenge of overcoming the undesirable influence of situations (Slingerland 2011). The first is to train long and hard to jump higher, e.g., the forms of emotional training discussed earlier. Training

oneself in ritual both strengthens desired emotional dispositions and in contemporary psychological terminology “primes” unconscious and automatic activation of one’s goals for emotional self-regulation. This “priming” effect of ritual also illustrates Slingerland’s second way of addressing the high bar challenge, which is to “lower the bar” by manipulating features of the situation so as to make it easier for the agent to feel and do the right things. Through rituals, one embeds in one’s life, reminders and re-enforcers of one’s goals for self-transformation.

However, in accordance with the argument of the previous section, one should not neglect the possible effectiveness of conscious and more direct control of emotions. The Confucians believed in the power of the heart-mind to reflect on its own most minute workings and through awareness of these workings to redirect its own activities so as to orient them in an ethical direction (Shun 2004: 188). There is intriguing evidence in recent psychological studies pointing toward such a possibility. In his classic study of what made the difference between children who could control their own impulses and delay gratification for the sake of greater future reward (not immediately eating one marshmallow sitting in front of one in order to get two in 15 min), Walter Mischel found that the children with more self-control employed various mental strategies such as not looking at the marshmallow or singing to themselves (Mischel et al. 1989). By changing the focus of their thoughts, they could delay gratification longer than children who let their eyes and thoughts linger on the immediate reward. Moreover, children who displayed greater self-control on the marshmallow test later showed more social and cognitive competence and were more successful in school. From a theoretical point of view, we might expect such a result if in fact there are two tracks in emotional processes: not only a fast, automatic and unconscious track by which we assess and react to features in the world, but also a slow and reflective track by which we become aware of our immediate impulses, reflect on them, and possibly inhibit or change motivational directions by changing how we think of the intentional objects of our emotions. Confucianism might indeed have been an ancient program for enhancing the power of the more reflective track.

It might be thought that there is a limit on how much human beings can regulate their own emotional lives because the exercise of willpower drains a limited supply of mental and physical energy (see Slingerland 2009, citing Baumeister et al. 1998). However, more recent work has revealed that affirming a value that is important to oneself counteracts the depleting effects of activities that require self-control, perhaps in the service of that value (Schmeichel and Vohs 2009).

Finally, in considering why robust character traits that could qualify as virtues are so rare, we should consider the perspective that very much informs the self-cultivation projects of Confucius and his students. They were very much aware of the lack of virtue as a social and political condition and not merely as an individual condition that just happened to be widespread (Hutton 2006 makes this point). There is a reason why Confucius and Mengzi after him sought to have kings adopt their teachings. If in fact the achievement of robust virtues requires long and hard training, supported and guided by others who have taken similar paths before, and if as *Mengzi* 1A7 holds, people cannot engage in such training until they have the material security that enables them to take their minds off the sheer task of survival,

then it is no mystery at all why there are no such traits in societies structured to achieve very different goals. Ironically, the situationist psychological experiments do not take into account this underlying relational factor that might deeply influence the ability of people to form robust virtues, and neither do the philosophical critics of virtue ethics who rely on the situationist experimental evidence. This is one more thing we might learn from the *Analects*.

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