PHILOSOPHY 151: Moral Philosophy

CONFUCIUS: Confucius and Kant: The Ethics of Respect

Summary

1. The Quest for the Moral Life in Confucius
   1. Respect is the root of any system of ethics
      1. *Jen* is where concept of respect is expressed
         1. What *ought* to occur when two people come together
         2. The term to convey the essence of Confucius’s moral philosophy
         3. Many possible translations like love
         4. Serves as the thread which underlies all virtues in the Confucian system of ethics and is a social version of Kant’s respect for persons
      2. The social framework defines the accepted range of respectful conduct toward others
   2. Respect is due to persons in accordance with dynamic social roles, as encompassed in the Five Relationships
   3. Moral conduct stipulates a respectful attitude hierarchically
   4. Respect is the unifying thread as the very core of all positive social interaction
2. Respect for Personae in Family and Social Roles – *Li* 
   1. *Li* provides the context of social stability
      1. Encompasses the convention that defines the form and possibilities of moral actions
      2. A symbol of one’s worthiness for respect through a commitment to underlying
      3. Meaningless when divorced from its moral intention
   2. Family is the primary organ for instilling rules and drawing the lines for socially acceptable behavior
   3. Confucius considered intellectual cultivation of little worth if not accompanied by emotional balance
   4. Universal love
      1. Mencius criticized universal love concept as both unnatural and unworkable
      2. Rejected as a moral principle and judged to be a principle of immorality
   5. The conduct of the individual fulfills the requirements of the social role or persona
3. Respect for the Moral Law/Tao: *I*
   1. *I* is our acquired sense of right
      1. The Mean itself is identifies through *i*
      2. It is the actual import to *jen* and *li*
      3. Tao represents both a concrete way of life and an abstract principle of conduct
         1. *I* seals our preference for *tao*, while delight comes with the fullness of *jen*
         2. Two components of *i*
            1. Subjective self-knowledge of good truth (or the way)
            2. Potential action or situation which needs a fitting action to make it a moral state or situation
   2. *I* adds an essential dimension to respect
   3. Flexibility is the key to the *I*
   4. The Ching ch’uan epitomizes this flexibility and search for appropriateness in conduct
   5. The practice of *i* develops an individual of “creative insights”
      1. Capable of responding appropriately to concrete situations of moral import
      2. Able to preserve the totality of goodness and justice
4. The Personification of Jen/Respect: The Chun-Tzu
   1. Chun-tzu
      1. Where the full flowering and fruit of the Confucian system of ethics is found
      2. The concrete model of moral conduct
      3. Six essential qualities:
         1. Resoluteness
         2. Mildness
         3. Sense of Balance
         4. Faithfullness
         5. Self-criticism
         6. Autonomy
   2. *I* makes it relevant
      1. But the ultimate standard of relevancy can be none other than *jen* itself, the virtue of virtues, as “an awarenss of self-realization and self-justification”
      2. *I* is fully evidenced in the chun-tzu ideal
      3. *Tao* occupies the attention of the chun-tzu
5. The Synthesis of Confucian and Kantian Ethical Theory
   1. The imperative of ethics to respect others derives from our shared rational nature – reason confers personhood
   2. Moral conduct stipulates a respectful attitude respectfully
   3. Concepts personified in the chun-tzu of Confucius is also realized in Kant’s ideal of good will
      1. Each serving as the model of virtue in its respective system
         1. Social being for Confucius
         2. Rational being for Kant
6. Respect for Persons: The Community of Rational Beings
   1. Reason and *li*
      1. Rationality provides the common context of human interaction for Kant, just as *li* does for Confucius
      2. Reason also is able to identify the content and method of approach in morality
   2. Adherence to duty demands dual considerations:
      1. Acting according to duty
      2. Acting from duty
   3. Moral necessity constitutes the sense of obligation accomplished by *li* in Confucian thought
   4. Respect must be directed toward human beings
   5. Confucius and Kant share the concept of universality of respect for human beings in accordance with their guiding model
7. Respect for Moral Law: The Categorical Imperative
   1. Categorical imperative is a regard for the “oughtness” of a situation
      1. Entails a non-utilitarian commitment as well as the pivotal element of judgment
      2. Like *tao*, Kantian Moral Law elicits moral Respect
      3. The most telling distinction between Kant’s Moral Law and Confucian *tao* is the alienation of the former from the nature
   2. Kant is clearly aware of the role of judgment as the vital link between theory and practice
      1. For Kant, judgment is a natural gift
      2. Kant would seem to be either deficient in judgment himself or merly dealing with an incomplete theory in denying the cultivation of judgment
   3. For Confucius, human nature is at one with itself, that is *jen*
   4. The autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of duties conforming to them
8. The Ideal of the Good Will: The Principle of Humanity
   1. The culmination of respect as a functional principle of positive social interaction comes in the moral role model
   2. Respect for others is conjoined with self-respect
   3. Ethical theory becomes practical and relevant to the dynamic movement of the society
      1. Combining the recognition of social roles offered by *li* with the universality of reason in Kant, the roots of an organic theory-practice continuum receive a firm grounding
      2. Respect is directed to both persons and personae
      3. Respect for Moral Law, as *tao* or the Categorical Imperative, conveys the essential nourishment of these roots
   4. In a realistic assessment of human nature or *jen*, Confucius acknowledges the complexity of human life
      1. Requires more than an appeal to reason alone
      2. The guidance of social institutions and interpersonal experiences supplement rationality
   5. Implementation of the principle of humanity protects human dignity on both a personal and universal scale.