

CONFUCIAN PERSPECTIVES ON FREEDOM, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND JUSTICE

Henry Rosemont, Jr. Brown University

*What follows is the basic text Professor Rosemont read at the 2002 ASIANetwork Annual Meeting in Lisle, IL when asked to fill in for Eliot Deutsch. In expanded form, and with notes, the paper will appear in **Confucian Alternatives** by Henry Rosemont, Jr., forthcoming from Open Court Publishing Co., 2003.*

My talk this evening is in two parts. First I will briefly sketch some major themes in contemporary Western moral, political, and legal philosophy, and some facts about the world today, with the aim of suggesting that certain values deeply rooted in Western culture, especially those pertaining to equality and justice, cannot be realized so long as we continue to more highly esteem other values, especially those pertaining to freedom and liberty.

In the second part, I will sketch an alternative vision for ordering our values, the vision of the classical Confucians, with the aim of suggesting how and why we must rethink what it is to be a human being, and what the good society might be, if the twenty-first Century is to be a more peaceful and humane one than the twentieth. Both of these themes deserve far closer scrutiny than I can give either of them in the compass of a single talk; what I hope to do is outline what direction the scrutiny might take.

In contemporary Western moral philosophy, political theory, and jurisprudence, the concept of freedom is central. The challenge of the question "Why did you do that?" has no moral force unless it is presupposed that the interrogated was free to have done otherwise. Most political theorizing, even if undertaken behind a veil of ignorance, still begins with the Hobbesian concept that human beings are fundamentally free (in a "state of nature" or otherwise), and then attempts to justify subservience to a state (government) which restricts that freedom. And in jurisprudence, the demands of justice can seldom be addressed, either in civil or criminal law, without due consideration of the freedom, couched in the language of rights, of the parties involved. The concept of freedom is no less central in practice than in theory, as is clearly evidenced by all three branches of the U.S. government, where freedom has achieved almost sacred status, in name if not in fact. By law, felony convictions based on confessions are overturned if it can be shown that the convicted were not told they were free to remain silent. A legislator promoting a welfare bill defends it on the basis of enhancing the freedom of opportunity of the poor, which, with respect to woman and minorities, is also the justification for much anti-discrimination legislation. These bills will be opposed by those who see redistributive wealth measures as an infringement of the freedom of the affluent to dispose of their wealth as they see fit, and/or an infringement of the freedom of majorities to act in accordance with their beliefs. And a great deal of U.S. foreign policy is regularly justified as furthering freedom (and its cousin, democracy) in different parts of the world, even when the instruments of the policies are bombing raids on other countries, from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to Libya, Iraq, Kosovo, and the rest of Serbia.

We can see the philosophical importance of the concept of freedom in another way: it is an integral part of a larger Western concept-cluster, the terms for which, "liberty," "rights," "democracy," "justice," "choice," "autonomy," "individual," and so

forth, cannot be clearly defined without also using "freedom." Absent this lexicon, it would be virtually impossible for English-speaking people to discuss morality, politics, or the law today. Now given that both those who endorse and those who oppose any particular judicial decision, piece of legislation, or aspect of foreign policy will do so by invoking freedom, it must be the case that freedom is seen not only as fundamental, but also as an unalloyed good. It is something we have simply by virtue of our being human; we are born free. And differing moral, political, and legal theories are defended and attacked significantly on the basis of the extent to which they do or do not maximize human freedom.

Freedom is not, however, singular; there are many freedoms, and differing rank orderings of them is what largely distinguishes different moral, political and legal theories from each other. To fully defend this claim it would be necessary to do a long and detailed comparative analysis of the several theories in all three areas, but for present purposes it may suffice to focus on a single theme which implicates all three, and at the same time is of immediate concern and a major source of conflict in the United States and in the world today: human rights, which are grounded in the concept of freedom as a defining characteristic of human beings.

If I am essentially free, and it is irrelevant here whether this is to be taken descriptively or prescriptively, then it would seem to follow that no one, and especially no government, should curtail my freedom to say whatever I want to say, associate with whomever I wish, accept any set of religious beliefs I hold true, and dispose of any land or material goods I have legally acquired as I see fit. In the U.S., these are the most basic of rights (freedoms), without which I supposedly cannot flourish, and therefore I must be secure in their enjoyment, entering only the caveat that I do not infringe these same rights of others.

For Americans, these rights, these freedoms, are protected by the Bill of Rights. They are civil and political in nature, and are now commonly referred to as "first generation" rights. Much of the plausibility of seeing these civil and political rights as the most basic of freedoms is the concomitant view of seeing human beings as basically rational individuals. And if we are indeed such, we must also be capable of self-governance, i.e., we must be autonomous. But rational, autonomous individuals must also be free, or else they could not realize the potential of that which makes them uniquely human.

The U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, however, goes far beyond civil and political rights. It declares that human beings also have fundamental economic, social, and cultural rights ("second generation" rights). First generation rights are often described as negative, which can be misleading. But they are surely passive, in that they secure freedom *from* coercion. Second generation rights are active: they are intended to obviate social and natural impediments *to* the full exercise of freedom: the right to an education, a job, health care, and so on; without these rights, the argument runs, the concept of freedom becomes hollow. Noam Chomsky has put this point succinctly: "Freedom without opportunity is a devil's gift."

"Freedom from" and "freedom to" are clearly distinct, and "freedom from" can loom large in our political thinking if our major concern is focused solely on the threat of authoritarian governments. But if we combine moral and political considerations, and ask what it means for each of us, not governments, to respect the rights of others, things look

rather different. That first generation rights are basically passive can be seen from the fact that 99% of the time I can fully respect your civil and political rights simply by ignoring you; you surely have the right to speak, but no right to make me listen.

Second generation rights, on the other hand, are active in the sense that there are things I must do (pay taxes, at the least) if you are to secure them. Schools, jobs, hospitals, and so on, do not fall from the sky; they are human creations. And herein lies a fundamental conflict in differing conceptions of freedom as expressed in the discourse of human rights: to whatever extent I am obliged to assist in the creation of those goods which accrue to you by virtue of having second generation rights, to just that extent I cannot be an altogether autonomous individual, enjoying first generation rights, free to rationally decide upon and pursue my own projects rather than having to assist you with yours.

That I, too, have the second generation rights to these goods is of no consequence if I believe I can secure them on my own, or in free association with a few others, and thereby keep secure my civil and political rights. It is equally irrelevant that I can rationally and freely choose to assist you in securing those goods necessary for the positive exercise of your freedom on my own initiative, for this would be an act of charity, not an acknowledgement of your rights to them.

Arguments for second generation rights have a special force in developing nations, but apply as well to the highly "developed" United States. What value is the right of free speech if, unschooled, it is difficult for me to say anything intelligent, or I am too sick to say anything at all? What good is the right to freely dispose of what I own if I don't own anything? What good is the right to freely choose a job if there aren't any?

These questions lead to another: What might it take for me to see that you do indeed have positive rights, and that it is not generous feelings but a moral/political responsibility that I must have to assist you in securing them? What is required, I believe, is the rejection of the view of human beings as basically autonomous individuals; rather must we see, feel, and understand each other as co-members of a human community.

No one would insist, of course, that we are either solely autonomous individuals or solely social beings, but it should be clear that in contemporary Western moral, political, and legal thinking, free, autonomous individuals have pride of place, and are the basis for virtually all theorizing in these three areas. And it should be equally clear that in these theories, and in legal fact, first generation rights consistently "trump" second generation rights; individual liberty is purchased at the expense of social justice.

In a world of even a roughly equitable distribution of wealth and property, protecting the freedom and liberty of these individuals and corporations would be morally, politically, and legally of the utmost importance, infringements thereon to be guarded against at all times. Unfortunately, the real world is rather different. According to a recent U.N. survey, for example, "The richest fifth of the world's people consume 86 percent of all goods and services while the poorest fifth consume just 1.3 percent. Indeed, the richest fifth consumes 45 percent of all meat and fish, 58 percent of all energy used, and 84 percent of all paper, has 74 percent of all telephone lines and owns 87 percent of all vehicles." And at the pinnacle: "The world's 225 richest individuals, of whom 60 are Americans with total assets of \$311 billion, have a combined wealth of over \$1 trillion — equal to the annual income of the poorest 47 percent of the entire world's population."

With statistics like these, it is easy to see why so many U.N. members endorse second-generation rights: 137 countries have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, but the United States is not among them (and is the only developed country not on the list).

Closer to home, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that 20% of young children in the U.S. live in families whose income is below the poverty line. A quarter of our children have no health insurance. We have a homeless population of 1.5 million, almost as many people as those whose homes are prisons; the U.S. has one of the highest per capita incarceration rates in the world.

What I am suggesting here is that our preoccupation with maintaining and enhancing the formal freedom and liberty of autonomous individuals is at least partially to blame for our failure to achieve greater equality and justice in a capitalist society. Consider the following statement from the well-known theoretical economist Mancur Olson: "A thriving market economy requires, among other things, institutions that provide secure individual rights. The incentives to save, to invest, to produce and to engage in mutually advantageous trade depends particularly upon individual rights to marketable assets on property rights."

One among numerous examples of how this reasoning plays out in practice involves the transnational British Petroleum company, which recently closed a plant in Lima, Ohio, not because it was losing money, but because it wasn't considered *profitable enough* for the corporation. Being the town's major employer, BP's decision has been devastating for the entire community. A spokesman for the company acknowledged the suffering and dislocation, but defended the decision to close the plant, and to refuse to sell it either to the town or the local union, by saying "Our first responsibility is to our stockholders."

Never mind that at the time of this statement the largest stockholder in BP was the government of Kuwait, which thereafter sold a number of its shares at a larger profit. Never mind that it is now widely acclaimed that 50% of the American people have a stake in the stock market; 90% of those stocks are held by the wealthiest 5%. These are important facts, but not my present point, which is conceptual: If no one can abridge my freedom to do whatever I wish with what is mine, then British Petroleum was only claiming its legitimate first generation rights in closing the plant. But if the Lima workers had a right to security in their jobs so long as they competently performed them, and the company was making a profit, then BP's action was morally suspect, and would, in a just society, be illegal.

By challenging first generation human rights based on freedom and liberty in this way, it may seem that I am at least implicitly championing one form of totalitarianism or another, Stalinist or Fascist. But these are not the only philosophical alternatives. The dichotomies between selfish and altruism in the moral sphere, and between individualism and collectivism in the political sphere, have been much too sharply drawn, in my opinion, making it difficult for us to entertain very new, or very old ways of envisioning the human condition. One such very old vision is the Confucian one, to which I now return. The doctrines gathered under the heading of "classical Confucianism" were set down in four texts written and edited roughly between 450-150 BCE: The *Analects of Confucius*, the *Mencius*, the *Xun Zi*, and the *Records of Ritual*. These works are by no means in full agreement on all points, and there are several tensions within each work

itself; nevertheless, in conjunction with a few other texts that came to be classics, the *Books of Changes, Poetry, and History*, these texts do present an overall coherent view of the good life for human beings. This good life is an altogether social one, and central to understanding it is to see that Confucian sociality has aesthetic, moral, and spiritual no less than political and economic dimensions, and politeness is the way sociality is effected in all these areas, and is a major means of their integration. None of the early texts address the question of the meaning of life, but they do put forward a vision and a discipline in which everyone can find a meaning-in-life. This meaning will become increasingly apparent to us as we pursue the ultimate goal of being human; namely, developing ourselves most fully as human beings to become *jun zi*, "exemplary persons," or, at the pinnacle of development, or sages. And for Confucians we can only do this through our interactions with other human beings. Treading this human path (*ren dao*) must be ultimately understood basically as a religious quest, even though the canon speaks not of God, nor of creation, salvation, an immortal soul, or a transcendental realm of being; and no prophecies will be found in its pages either. It is nevertheless a truly religious path; Confucius definitely does not instruct us about the Way (*dao*) strictly for the pragmatic political consequences of following his guidance. For Confucius we are irreducibly social, as he makes clear in the *Analects*: "I cannot run with the birds and beasts. Am I not one among the people of this world? If not them, with whom should I associate?" (18:6)

Thus the Confucian self is not a free, autonomous individual, but is to be seen relationally: I am a son, husband, father, teacher, student, friend, colleague, neighbor, and more. I live, rather than "play" these roles, and when all of them have been specified, and their interrelationships made manifest, then I have been fairly thoroughly individuated, but with very little left over with which to piece together a free, autonomous individual self. While this view may seem initially strange, it is actually straightforward: in order to be a friend, neighbor, or lover, for example, I must *have* a friend, neighbor, or lover. Other persons are not merely accidental or incidental to my goal of fully developing as a human being, they are essential to it; indeed they confer unique personhood on me, for to the extent that I define myself as a teacher, students are necessary to my life, not incidental to it. Note in this regard also that, again, while Confucianism should be seen as fundamentally religious, there are no solitary monks, nuns, anchorites or hermits to be found in the tradition. Our first and most basic role, one that significantly defines us in part throughout our lives, is as children; filial piety is one of the highest excellences in Confucianism. We owe unswerving loyalty to our parents, and our obligations to them do not cease at their death. On unswerving loyalty:

The Governor of She in conversation with Confucius said, "In our village there is someone called 'True Person.' When his father took a sheep on the sly, he reported him to the authorities." Confucius replied, "Those who are true in my village conduct themselves differently. A father covers for his son, and a son covers for his father. And being true lies in this." (13:18)

On constancy:

The Master said: "A person who for three years refrains from reforming the ways of his late father can be called a filial son." (4:20) And the demands of filial piety are lifelong: While [the parents] are alive, serve them according to the

observances of ritual propriety; when they are dead, bury them and sacrifice to them according to the observances of ritual propriety. (2.5)

From our beginning roles as children, and as siblings, playmates, and pupils, we mature to become parents ourselves, and become as well spouses or lovers, neighbors, subjects, colleagues, friends, and more. All of these are reciprocal relationships, best generalized as holding between benefactors and beneficiaries. The roles are thus clearly hierarchical, but each of us moves regularly from benefactor to beneficiary and back again, depending on the other(s) with who we are interacting, when, and under what conditions. When young, I am largely a beneficiary of my parents; when they are aged and infirm, I become their benefactor, and the converse holds for my children. I am benefactor to my friend when she needs my help, beneficiary when I need hers. I am a student of my teachers, teacher of my students. Taken together, the manifold roles we live define us as persons. And the ways in which we live these relational roles are the means whereby we achieve dignity, satisfaction, and meaning in life.

The difference between Western autonomous individuals and Confucian relational persons must be emphasized. In the first place, while autonomous individuals have general moral obligations which they must meet in accordance with some set of universal principles, they have no *specific* moral obligations save those they have freely chosen to accept: toward spouses or lovers, their children, friends. But we have not chosen our parents, nor our siblings and other relatives, yet Confucius insists that we have many and deep obligations to them, and they to us. That is to say, unlike individual selves, relational selves must accept responsibilities and ends they have not freely chosen; there is a good for human beings independent of individual conceptions of it.

From this emphasis on filial piety it should be clear that at the heart of Confucian society is the family, the locus of where, how, and why we develop into full human beings. A central government is also essential to the good society, because there are necessary ingredients of human flourishing, especially economic, which the family (and local community) cannot secure on their own: repairing dikes, ditches and roads, distributing grain from bumper harvest to famine areas, establishing academies, etc. The early Confucians thus saw the state not as in any way in opposition to the family, but rather saw both as complementary; indeed, families collectively, together with the state, were usually portrayed as a family writ large, with titles for the emperors ranging from "Heaven's Son" to "Father and Mother of the People."

As an aside, we may note that if the goal of human life is to develop one's humanity to the utmost, then we have a clear criterion for measuring the worth and quality of our interactions with others in the groups (family, class, village, school, state) to which each of us belongs; we are not merely to accept them as unalterable givens. Rather must we consistently ask to what extent do these groups, and interactions conducive to everyone's efforts to realize (make real) their potential? That is to say, while deference, a key component of civility, had to be learned and practiced, remonstrance was obligatory when things were not going well. As the Master said:

To see what it is appropriate to do, and not do it, is cowardice. (2:24)

The ideal Confucian society is thus basically historical, with custom, tradition, and ritual serving as the binding force of and between our many relationships. The rituals described in the early classics and basic Confucian texts were largely based on archaic supernatural beliefs which were being questioned during the rationalist period in which

Confucius lived, and a part of the genius of the Master and his followers lies in their giving those ritual practices an aesthetic, moral, political, and spiritual foundation which was independent of their original inspiration. To understand this point, we must construe the term *li* translated as "ritual propriety" not simply as referring to weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, funerals, and so on, but equally as referring to the simple customs and courtesies given and received in greetings, sharing food, leave-takings, and much more: to be fully civil, then, a Confucian must at all times be polite and mannerly, following closely the customs and rituals governing these and numerous other interpersonal activities; to do so was to follow the "human way" (*ren dao*).

The authors and editors of the canonical texts all lived over two millennia ago, and were thus monocultural in their outlook. Consequently, they were regularly highly specific about the ways in which we should be civil—polite, mannerly, decent, courteous—to others, but we may nevertheless interpret them more generally, and come to appreciate what was foundational to them: interacting with others as benefactors and beneficiaries in an intergenerational context. Confucius himself was absolutely clear on this point, for when a disciple asked him what he would most like to do, he said: "I would like to bring peace and contentment to the aged, to share relationships of trust and confidence with friends, and to love and protect the young." (5:26)

Both within the family, and in the larger society beyond it, custom, tradition, manners and rituals are the glue of our intergenerational, interpersonal relationships. Even civility at a low level, performed perfunctorily, "going through the motions," is obligatory and politically essential to resolving conflict by non-violent means: two parties to a dispute who thoroughly dislike each other, Sharon to Arafat, can be brought together at a negotiating table only if each is assured that the other will treat them civilly; politeness matters.

But for the early Confucians, rituals, customs and traditions served other political functions as well. They did not believe laws or regulations were the proper way to govern society. The Master said:

Lead the people with administrative injunctions and keep them orderly with penal law, and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves. (2:3)

Even more strongly put, the Master said, "If rulers are able to effect order in the state through the combination of observing ritual propriety and deferring to others, what more is needed? But if they are unable to accomplish this, what have they to do with ritual propriety?" (4:73)

Thus the Confucians did not believe that society should be governed by monarchical fiat either; the good ruler was to reign more than rule. The Master said: "Governing with excellence can be compared to being the North Star: The North Star dwells in its place, and the multitude of stars pay it tribute." (2:1)

If customs, traditions, "ritual propriety," can perform the same functions in the political realm as laws and regulations, or the orders of a despot, they can also serve in place of universal principles in the moral sphere. Confucian morality is particularistic in that it insists that at all times we do what is appropriate, depending on who we are interacting with, and when. This particularism is normally seen in Western moral

philosophy as decidedly inferior to universalism (Kant thought Confucius knew nothing of morality). But we may nevertheless make generalizations from the canon that are no less important today than two thousand years ago: when interacting with the elderly, be reverent, caring, obedient; when dealing with peers, treat them as you would be treated; with the young, be nurturing, selfless, loving, exemplary. Of course we do not learn these generalizations as moral principles when we are young. But it is on the basis of many and varied loving interactions with my grandmother that I learned to interact appropriately with other grandmothers. Now compared to most issues in contemporary Western moral philosophy: abortion, suicide, genetic engineering, etc., the importance of making birthday cards for our grandmothers seems incredibly trivial, not even deserving, probably, of consideration as a moral issue.

But as the early Confucian canon reveals with surety, these homely little activities are the basic “stuff” of our human interactions, and Confucius is telling us that if we learn to get the little things right on a day-in and day-out basis, the “big” things will take care of themselves. And in addition to grandmothers and other elders, the “little things” involve our deep interactions with peers, and those younger than ourselves, and in this way begin to bring home to each of us our common humanity. Hence early Confucianism is not liable to the accusation of, say, countenancing racism even if it has been customary in one’s family to do so; such upbringing is not conducive to our fullest development as human beings, and hence must be condemned. I can only fully realize my potential when I have learned from my interactions with my own grandmother that grandmothers share qualities, live roles, and interact with others such that, in one sense, when you’ve seen one grandmother, you’ve learned to see them all, despite differences in skin color, ethnicity, or other characteristics.

Put another way, if our task is to meet our obligations to elders, peers, and the young in ways that are both efficacious and satisfying, then the specific customs, manners and rituals we employ in our interactions must contribute to these ends; if not, they must be changed. The Master said: “the use of a hemp cap is prescribed in the observance of ritual propriety. Nowadays, that a silk cap is used instead is a matter of frugality. I would follow the newer accepted practice in this.” (9:3) This argument will undoubtedly still seem forced to those who would be justifiably skeptical that learning to be polite (civil) when young, absorbing customs and traditions, participating in rituals, could overcome racism, sexism, or any other form of oppressive behavior that has been all too customary and traditional in far too many families and communities. It is for this reason that I have insisted that the efficacy of ritual propriety for the early Confucians is not simply to be seen for its social, political, or moral effects, but rather must be understood spiritually as well. The rituals, even if only followed formally, are essential for social harmony, as noted earlier. But unless they are made one’s own, internalized, and become productive and satisfying, we can never realize our potential to be fully human.

Consider another statement on filial piety; “As for the young contributing their energies when there is work to be done, and deferring to their elders when there is wine and food to be had, how can merely doing this be considered being filial?” (2:8)

And relatedly, on rituals, the Master said; “In referring time and again to following ritual propriety, how could I just be talking about gifts of jade and silk?” (17:11) As we mature, then, we cannot simply “go through the motions” of following custom, tradition, and ritual, nor should we fulfill our obligations mainly because we have been

made to feel obliged to fulfill them, else we cannot continue to develop our humanity. Rather must we make them our own, and modify them as needed. Remember that for Confucius, many of our obligations are not, cannot be, freely chosen. But he would insist, I believe, that we can only become truly “free” when we *have* to fulfill our obligations, when we want to help others (be benefactors), and enjoy being helped by others (as beneficiaries).

We must also remember, again, that we are first and foremost social beings, relational selves, not autonomous individuals. Being thus altogether bound to and with others, it must follow that the more I contribute to their flourishing, the more I, too, flourish; conversely, the more my behaviors diminish others, by being racist, sexist, homophobic, etc., the more I am diminished thereby. In saying this, I must insist that I am *not* proffering here the Confucian view of selfless or altruistic behavior, for this would imply that I have a (free, autonomous, individual) self to surrender. But this of course would beg the question against the Confucians, whose views clearly show the supposed dichotomy between selfishness and altruism as a Western conceit, as well as the equally Manichean split on which it is based: the individual vs. the collective. Overcoming these deeply-rooted dichotomies in Western thought is not at all easy, but when it can be done, very different possibilities for envisioning the human condition present themselves.

In summary, others are essential for leading a meaningful Confucian life. Herbert Fingarette put this point well when he said, “For Confucius, unless there are at least two human beings, there are no human beings.” By constantly doing what is appropriate we can come to see ourselves as fundamentally, not accidentally, intergenerationally bound to our ancestors, contemporaries, and descendants. All of our interactive relations, with the dead as well as the living, are to be mediated by the customs, traditions and rituals we all come to share as our inextricably linked personal histories unfold, and by fulfilling the obligations defined by these relationships we are following the Confucian Way.

This Way thus becomes personal, and not merely social, and by following custom, tradition and ritual we mature psychologically and religiously. This is what the Master meant when he said, “What could I see in a person who in holding a position of influence is not tolerant, who in observing ritual propriety is not respectful, and who in overseeing the mourning rites does not grieve?” (3:26)

Some, perhaps, will not grieve at funerals. Going through the rituals merely to “keep up appearances” is socially superior to flaunting them, but such persons are lacking some essential human quality. Confucius believed such people were few in number, however; Master Zeng said: “I have heard the Master say ‘Even those who have yet to give of themselves utterly are sure to do so in the mourning of their parents.’” (19:17)

The Confucian person must thus be seen as whole, as leading an integrated life. In addition to the aesthetic, social, moral, and political features attendant on following this Way, meeting our obligations to our elders and ancestors on the one hand, and to our fellows and succeeding generations on the other, the Confucian vision displays an uncommon yet religiously authentic sense of transcendence, a human capacity to rise above the concrete spatio-temporality of our existence, enabling us to form a union with all those who have gone before, and all those who will come after. This religious sense of feeling a oneness with all of humanity is not guaranteed to us if we follow the Confucian path. It is a gift of the spirit, which is why sages are relatively rare. But we can get a little

clearer about what this feeling might be like if we adopt Wittgenstein's summary account of *Das Mystische*: The sense that we are completely safe, a sense of belonging, of being a part of something larger than ourselves. If the Confucian vision still seems blurred, perhaps it is due to the Western lenses through which we attempt to see it, as free autonomous individuals, individuals who are strongly inclined to agree with Aldous Huxley that, "We live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves. The martyrs go hand in hand into the arena; they are crucified alone."

Everyone with eyes to see is aware of the manifold problems attendant on an altogether individualistic conception of the self, but we do not yet take those problems as seriously as we should, evidenced clearly by the fact that barren notions of freedom and autonomy remain foundational for virtually all contemporary, social, moral, and political theorizing. Ever since the Enlightenment at least, individualism has been deeply rooted in Western culture and philosophy, especially in the U.S., and in my opinion is significantly responsible for much of the malaise increasingly infecting it.

A final comment. It may strike some of you as paradoxical that while I have been championing a non-Western philosophical tradition, I have not invoked any arguments for relativism in the attempt. Thus the thrust of the paper appears universalistic, despite the cogent critiques of some postmodernists that universalism in the history of Western philosophy has too often been totalizing, confining, and oppressive. But these critiques, I believe, while largely correct, are directed at the wrong target. There is nothing wrong with seeking universalist values; indeed, that search must go forward if we are to see an end to the ethnic, racial, religious, and sexual violence that have so thoroughly splattered the pages of human history with blood and gore since the Enlightenment. Rather does the wrongness lie in the belief that we, or any single culture, are already fully in possession of those values, and therefore feel justified, backed by superior economic and military threats, in foisting those values on everyone else.

Classical Confucianism proffers an alternative vision, which all people of good will might endorse, and it is on this basis that I commend the careful study of their texts to your attention.

Reference from Bockover, which I got from the WEB.

_____. 2002. "Confucian Perspectives on Freedom, Human Rights, and Justice." *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 10, 16-22.