Family Love and Its Extension
A Comparative Evaluation

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This essay examines the relationship of family love and universal caring through a twofold approach. First, it compares relevant thoughts in Christianity, Confucianism, and modern scholarship to highlight their respective positions on this relationship. Second, it argues that, as far as the attainment of universal caring is concerned, classical Confucianism provides us with a fairly realistic and coherent notion in secular form. This notion consists of two components. Descriptively, it reveals a natural affection that universally exists in human life. Prescriptively, based on the knowledge of this nature, it develops a system of moral imperatives, which takes an all-embracing attitude toward humans in the world, viewing all of them as members of the same moral community. This notion was valuable historically for promoting a better relationship among people in China proper and in East Asia as a whole, and is still relevant today for those who wish to ground the availability of universal caring on a non-religious foundation.

1. Family Love in Christianity

In the *New Testament*, Jesus claimed, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?" (Matt. 7:11).

According to Reinhold Niebuhr, this passage is significant in the sense that "Jesus . . . discovers symbols of the character of God in man's mundane existence, in the tenderness of parents toward their children."[1] It shows a pattern of family in which God and humans stand in a relationship analogous to that of a loving father toward his children.

Many Christian theologians hold that God's love of people comes from His nature; what makes us believe in its presence is not any logical argument or reasoning, but our religious faith. This is, in Niebuhr's words, a "vertical love" distributed universally and equally among all individual humans. However, philosophers and religious sociologists may have a different account. When discussing Ludwig Feuerbach's contribution to the studies of Christianity, Karl Marx wrote, "Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-alienation, of the duplication of the world into a religious world and a secular one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis."[2] In terms of this understanding, the existence of the sacred family should be explained by that of secular one; the trustworthiness of God is based on our trust of our own fathers; the universal love of God is essentially a generalization of the secular love that we have respectively experienced in our daily lives. This generalization at the same time satisfies two conditions that ensure the theoretical coherence of universal love. First, God creates or fathers all humans. God loves them universally because that they are all his children and all share with him a divine soul or holiness. Second, God's resources for implementing love are unlimited. This ensures that God will never face the difficult choice: to whom should the last piece of bread go? It is guaranteed for beneficiaries of his love that they will be treated equally not only in spirit, but also in material supplies.[3]

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1 Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 24.

2 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton & Company, 1978), 144.

3 The satisfaction of two conditions is not unique to Christianity. For instance, in *The Lotus Sutra*, a Mahayana Buddhist classic, the Buddha said through a rich person's mouth: "These little boys are all my sons and I love them without partiality. I have countless numbers of large carriages adorned with seven kinds of gems. I should be fair-minded and give one to each of them. I

What is the relationship between God's vertical love and the horizontal love in mundane humans? Or how can the former be transformed into the latter? In principle, the answer is that Christians receive God's love and, in the meanwhile, need to be responsible for their own words and deeds. Among the virtues they are obliged to adopt is "horizontal love" toward people in the world. Theologically, there are two reasons for its application. First, Christians should emulate what God does to them, conveying the same love to others, relatives and non-relatives, the familiar and the strange, the good and evil. Jesus said:

> You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rains on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:43–48)

According to Jesus, people are to be loved not because they are equally divine, but because God loves them equally; and they are to be forgiven because all individuals are equally far from God and in need of his grace.[4] In this sense, all humans deserve the same love from God, as well as from other people.

Second, humans all belong to the same sacred family with God as the Father. In this family, they are all brothers and sisters to each other. As in the mundane family, where brothers and sisters naturally love and care for each other, the same should be the case among members of the sacred family. In essence, this shows a horizontal expression of a family pattern.

In contrast to his attitude toward the sacred family, Jesus is rather

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should not show any discrimination. Why? Because even if I distributed these possessions of mine to every person in the whole country I would still not exhaust them, much less could I do so by giving them to my sons!" (William Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, comp., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1, *From Earliest times to 600* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1999], 449).

4 Niebuhr, *An Interpretation*, 30.

critical of the mundane family. He said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:25). In another context, his words sound even harsher:

> Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matt. 10:34–37)

Jesus' ruthless stance toward the mundane family and the intimate feeling among its members came from a profound concern. As Niebuhr explains, "He had a sacramental conception of the family relation. Yet family loyalty is seen as a possible hindrance to a higher loyalty."[5] In terms of this account, the mundane family and sacred family are two entities with different, even contradictory interests. The stronger the former is, the weaker the latter becomes, and vice versa. To put it bluntly, the formation of a universal sacred family and the closeness of its members must be at the cost of the dismantlement of the mundane family.

When Christian missionaries endeavored to spread their doctrine in pre-modern China, this position met furious resistance from Confucian intellectuals, as well as from the majority of Chinese people. This is still the case today. I will show the reasons why by presenting the Confucian notion of family, family love, and its extension in what follows.

2. Family Love in Confucianism

According to Confucianism, love originates from family life; people derive their affection of love from intimate contact with their own family members first. This is a natural process. The emergence of love begins with the warm interaction between a "father" (a gender-biased way of referring to parents) and his children. The baby feels safe, comfortable,

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5 Ibid., 31.

and pleased from the first eye contact with its father. Along with his/her growth, this sense becomes clearer and stronger, being gradually internalized in his/her heart as a dear affection toward the father. The classic Confucians, especially Confucius and Mencius, conceptualized this affection as "love" (*ai* 愛).[6]

In their mind, love is not only an issue related to the individual family but also contains a wider social significance. Confucius summarized the connection between family love and a harmonious society in saying:

> Those who are filial toward their parents and fraternal toward their elder brothers are seldom inclined to offend against their superior. And as for such people creating disorder, no instance of it has ever occurred. The noble person concerns himself with the root. When the root is established, the Way (*dao* 道) will grow. Being filial and fraternal—is this not the root of humaneness (*ren* 仁)?[7] (*Analects* 1:2)

Here family life and family love are described as the "root"; they bring about all the good things in human society, such as people's good behavior and harmonious human relationships, as naturally as a firmly established root leads to the growth of branches and leaves. Hence it is imperative for people to care about their family life, to foster the affection of love, and therewith to contribute to the formation of a harmonious society.

Along the same lines, Mencius discusses the relationship between familial affection and moral virtues:

> The seed (*shi* 實) of humaneness consists in serving one's parents; the seed of rightness (*yi* 義) consists in obeying one's elder brother; the seed of wisdom (*zhi* 智) consists in knowing these two and not departing from them; the seed of propriety (*li* 禮) consists in regulating and adorning them; the seed of music (*yue* 樂) consists in rejoicing in them. (*Mencius* 4A:27)

In the Confucian tradition, humaneness, rightness, propriety, and wisdom have been regarded as the four major virtues (*si de* 四德). They are the

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6 See, for example, *Mencius* 7A:15.

7 Translations from the Chinese are mine unless otherwise noted.

foundation of the entire Confucian ethical system, as well as the guidelines for people's social behavior and moral evaluation. By means of the "seed" metaphor, Mencius emphasizes an idea similar to what Confucius contended before: these virtues originate from family life and are directly related to family affection. This also implies that the protection of family and the strengthening of closeness among its members are the conditions for the prevalence of virtues in society and for encouraging children to be sincere, upright, and trustworthy.

As for Confucians, the basic unit of a society is not the individual person but the family. This point was further developed as a part of the imperial ideology in pre-modern China. For instance, Emperor Zhang of the Han dynasty (r. 76–80 CE) once called a conference of scholars to discuss varying interpretations of the classics, with the emperor himself attending and acting as final judge in the controversies. Ban Gu (32–92 CE) recorded and compiled its outcome in a work entitled *Bai hu tong*. It includes the following passage:

> A son may remonstrate with his father [if the father has done wrong]. Even if the remonstration is refused, still the son cannot leave [the family]. It is because the father and son are different parts of the same body. There is no way to separate them from each other.[8]

Similarly:

> A wife may remonstrate with her husband [if he has done wrong], because they are of the same body, sharing the same glory and shame. . . . Even if the remonstration is not accepted, still the wife cannot leave her husband. It is because that a man's marriage with a woman is not for the purpose of remonstration.[9]

Here the members of a family are conceived as various parts of an integral body. To hurt one part is to damage the body itself; a pleasant feeling in one part means pleasure for the whole body.

Furthermore, Confucians conceived society itself as a big family. The

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8 Ban Gu 班固, *Bai hu tong* 白虎通 [Discourses in the White Tiger Hall], in *Bai hu tong shu zheng* 白虎通疏証, ed. Chen Li 陳立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 234.

9 Ibid., 233.

audience Mencius addressed was mainly the ruler, someone who occupied a position of superiority over his people and had material resources to satisfy their needs. The Chinese term "parent-official" (*fumu guan* 父母官) reflects both the obligation of ruler and the expectation of his people. This looks like a secular form of the Christian pattern of family, with the ruler as father and people as his children. Nevertheless, it is not a universal love as seen in God, since the ruler, no matter how powerful, wealthy, and compassionate, still cannot satisfy the two conditions described above. In essence, it is a love with gradations, or a "graded" love.[10] Originating from one's family, it extends horizontally to the people in a state, and to strangers in remote places. In this process, each anterior group has a priority to the posterior one. Concretely, a limited amount of bread would go to one's family members first, and then, step by step, to other people in different gradations. I will discuss this doctrine further in the final section.

Despite all the strengths it possesses, the Confucian notion of family love contains in itself an unresolvable contradiction between family affection and social regulation, or between "heavenly principle" (*tian li* 天理) and "national (positive) law" (*guo fa* 國法). Ultimately, this contradiction is rooted in the Confucian concept of "father." It is an empirical fact that all humans have fathers, and presumably all fathers love their children. This makes it predictable that all humans may expect to enjoy family love. Provided with sufficient living conditions and proper education, it follows further that they may be capable of understanding and practicing the four virtues out in society. As far as his presumably unexceptional presence in each family is concerned, this "father" is a universal concept; it is an abstraction derived from all particular fathers. In terms of this analysis, there appears a kind of similarity between the abstract "father" and the Christian Father. Borrowing Feuerbach-Marx's view mentioned in the first section, we may regard the former as being the ground on which the conception of God or sacred Father was established.

However, the coin has also another side. What exists in real life is not an abstract "father," but a great number of concrete fathers. Being human individuals, they father only their own children, and the naturalness of

10 See, for example, *Mencius* 3A:5.

their love is bound to their own families. It is more troublesome that these fathers all have their own limits in both natural and social resources. For these two reasons, when facing the choice of giving the last piece of bread to their own children or to the neighborhood children, they will spontaneously choose the former. In fact, based on similar reasons, Confucius himself elevated "love for elder brother" (*ti* 悌) above other loves, such as love between friends and even that between husband and wife. In his mind, brothers share a common blood-tie with the same father. A man can choose to marry or divorce a woman, but he cannot choose his brothers. Based on this observation, we may have to go with Mozi to name the Confucian notion as a love with "partiality."[11]

The co-existence of universality and partiality in fathers causes a tension in the Confucian notion of family love itself; it leads to a conflict between heavenly principle and positive law when entering into the sphere of society. Roughly speaking, the heavenly principle for Confucians encompasses both the regularities in nature and the persistently practiced and widely accepted norms in human society. As for nature, it may include routine movements or events such as water always flowing from high to low, or fish always laying their eggs in a certain season. In the human realm, it may include norms such as no stealing from or no killing of other people. These regularities and norms possess the common quality of naturalness and universality: they either exist naturally or function universally. This commonality brings people an idea that both natural regularity and human norms are issued from Heaven, and therefore are endowed as the highest authority by which we humans must abide. Accordingly, any human conduct opposed to it should be regarded as a crime against Heaven and must be punished accordingly.

The above description may be helpful for grasping the essence of the conflicts in the following cases. In Confucius' *Analects*, it says:

> The Duke of She told Confucius, "In our part of the country there is an Upright Gong. His father stole a sheep, and the son bore witness against him."
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> Confucius replied, "In our part of country, the upright are different from

11 See, for example, de Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 70.

that. A father is sheltered by his son, and a son is sheltered by his father. Uprightness lies in this." (*Analects* 13:18)

Confucius' response might surprise many contemporary readers since it seems to praise openly a behavior ignoring and even disdaining positive law. However, a review of his notion of family love discussed above may make it more understandable, or at least less objectionable. In the first place, the family is the basic unit of society; family, and its security, is the root of social harmony. To encourage father and son to bear witness against each other will cause distrust among family members. This will hurt the root and eventually make social harmony impossible. Secondly, this case involves an unfortunate conflict between heavenly principle (family love) and positive law (the protection of private property). It forces people to choose one over the other since there is no chance to maintain both at the same time. The unequivocal response from Confucius shows his preference for the former and, as a matter of fact, started a Confucian tradition concerning the conflict and its resolution.

Han Fei (d. 233 BCE), a profound thinker of Legalism, examined a similar case. Being a fierce critic of Confucianism, however, he recommended a solution precisely opposed to that of Confucius. Here is his story. In the state of Chu there was a man named Upright Gong. When finding his father stealing a sheep, he reported it to the authorities. The local magistrate pondered over the case, concluding that the man was honest in the service of his sovereign but a villain to his own father. Thereby he passed his sentence: "Put him in death!" On this case Han Fei commented that "A man who is an honest subject of his sovereign may be an infamous son to his father. . . . The magistrate of Chu executed the man and, as a result, felonies in the state were never reported to the authorities."[12] It was his belief that, as for the construction of a strong and orderly state, the universal applicability of positive law is more important than the maintenance of family integrity.

Mencius continued Confucius' tradition with his discussion of two parables concerning Shun, a legendary sage king. One is about his evil brother Xiang, another about his murderer father, the "Blind Man." Compared with

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12 Hanfeizi 韓非子, in *Han Feizi ji jie* 韓非子集解, edited by Wang Xianshen 王先慎 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 449.

the case in Confucius, these two look more complicated, because what is involved here is not a common "upright" person, but a "sage-king" who, according to the definition of the term, conducted his self-cultivation perfectly and had full power to run his empire. Apparently, his decision would set a standard for people to act in similar situations. To avoid unnecessary repetition, I examine only the second case. The *Mencius* states:

> Tao Ying asked, "When Shun was Emperor and Gao Yao was the judge, if the Blind Man had killed a man, what would have been done?"
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> "The only thing to do would be to apprehend him."
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> "In that case, would Shun have tried to stop it?"
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> "How would Shun stop it? Gao Yao had authority for what he did."
>
> "Then what would Shun have done?"
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> "Shun looked upon casting aside the Empire as no more than discarding a worn shoe. He would have secretly carried the old man on his back and fled to the edge of the sea and lived there happily, never giving a thought to the Empire." (*Mencius* 7A:35; D. C. Lau's translation)

Presenting three interrelated points, this dialogue provides readers with a paradoxical solution. First, being authorized as the judge, Gao Yao would have been responsible for implementing positive law and so would be obliged to have a man who killed another one arrested and punished in terms of the penal code. Shun himself would not have stopped him even though this killer was his own father. Gao Yao and Shun's postulated actions would promote the notion that the law must be respected as the only authority and that all people should be equally treated before the law. Second, the killer was Shun's father. Due to the heavenly endowed relationship between them, Shun would have no choice but to protect his father's well-being. Doing otherwise would send people a message that it was not absolutely necessary to defend family love and protect family members. This would hurt the root from which the four virtues grow and even cause the virtues to be groundless. Third, since Shun could neither justifiably stop Gao Yao from doing his job nor bring his father to justice, he had to find a third way to escape from the predicament. By means of a measurement of flexibility, he could secretly resign from his position as emperor, carrying his father on his back to a place where the law that Gao Yao implemented was not applicable. It would have been his hope that

this might ensure the safety of family love and, at the same time, reduce the harm caused by his compromise to the lowest possible degree.

From the context in which Mencius argues for Shun's decision, readers can sense that he was painfully struggling between positive law and heavenly principle. His tone does not sound fully confident, and his argument itself is not as eloquent as on other issues. He knew that Shun's solution was not really justifiable in terms of positive law, and it might even result in a kind of social disorder. If the people with evil family members all modeled themselves on Shun, what would happen to the other people and to the society as a whole? Nevertheless, this was the decision he had to make because it meant to him distinguishing and choosing the best from the worst. In the meanwhile, this decision-making also proved that Mencius and the entire Confucian tradition were actually prepared to take the side of heavenly principle if it unavoidably contradicted positive law.

The above analysis shows that, when entangled in the conflict, people have to make a choice between the two. Yet, either choice, no matter how smart it seems to be, must bring about a certain undesirable consequence. Put differently, no matter what people choose, they definitely lose in this or that way. Hence, the real question for Confucianism is not how to make a good decision within the predicament but how to avoid falling into the predicament. Because of this concern, Confucian thinkers since Mencius have written a great number of essays and family admonitions on youth education. Among these, the most influential is *The Great Learning*, especially its chapter regarding the "regulation of family" (*qi jia* 齊家). These works convey to their readers both warning and expectation at once: you should make all efforts to assure the good behavior of your family members if you would not want to be entangled in the conflict between heavenly principle and positive law. This can partially explain why Chinese families and the Chinese culture in general have placed so much emphasis on youth education then and now.

3. Adam Smith's Position on Family Love

Adam Smith is important for our study on the relationship of family love and universal caring in two senses. First, he analyzed mundane family love, explored the cause of its naturalness, and described its horizontal

extension. Second, he set an empirical limit for the expansion of this love, and therewith distinguished his doctrine from both Christian universal love and Confucian graded love. According to Smith:

> Every man . . . is first and principally recommended to his own care; and every man is certainly, in every respect, fitter and abler to take care of himself than of any other person. Every man feels his own pleasure and his own pains more sensibly than those of other people. The former are the original sensations—the latter the reflected or sympathetic images of those sensations. The former may be said to be the substance—the later the shadow.[13]

In contrast to Confucian thinkers, Smith's analysis does not start with the family in which a baby is born and grows up but with individual members in a family who are fully conscious, mature, and able to take care of themselves. According to Smith, one's love of oneself is the "substance," while one's feeling toward people in one's family and society is just its "shadow," or reflection. Because of the feeling transferred from the former to the latter, we humans acquire the affection of "sympathy." From the point of view of the genesis of sympathy, or compassion, I feel that a start with family itself, which the Confucians always held, may be more reasonable and convincing. Before growing to be an adult and care-giver, we must first be a baby and be a recipient of care. It is not true that one develops one's feeling of love by and for oneself first, and then projects those feelings toward other members of one's family. Instead, the feeling of love is developed in the interaction between family members, especially between parents and children. The fact that the care-giver and care recipient both participate in the creation of the same affection of love ensures that it is a two-way affection, an affection shared and experienced by both sides.

Nevertheless, Smith continued his line of discussion, saying that "after himself, the members of his own family, those who usually live in the same house with him, his parents, his children, his brothers and sisters, are naturally the objects of his warmest affection." The next is the "children of brothers and sisters." They are "naturally connected by the friendship which, after separating into different families, continues to take place

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13 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Kapaau, HI: Gutenberg Publishers, 2011), 220.

between their parents." Still next is the "children of cousins."[14] Finally, this family affection may be further extended to our neighbor [15] and the people in our country.[16]

Two points in this passage link Smith with Confucian thinkers. First, the acquisition of family love is a natural process, which involves no formal educational training. Second, the affection of love will extend from immediate family members to the people in one's own country, although "the affection gradually diminishes as the relation grows more and more remote."[17] His idea of gradation is close to Confucian "graded love" which was introduced in the last section.

Furthermore, Smith offers a clear answer to the question, "where does the naturalness of family love come from?" In terms of his understanding, it mainly results from two factors: the guidance of "the moral" (namely, cultural customs and ethical norms) and the frequency of "physical connection" between family members. He even further claims, "I consider what is called natural affection as more the effect of the moral than of the supposed physical connection between the parents and the child."[18] To Smith's list, contemporary evolutionary social psychologists add one more element: the "gene." As Stephen Pinker argues, "The effect of being raised in the same family is smaller than the effect of the genes. . . . We are shaped both by our genes and by our family upbringing: how our parents treated us and what kind of home we grew up in."[19] Pre-modern Confucians, I believe, would be pleased to accept the contents demonstrated in Pinker's list, even without a concept similar to the contemporary gene.

Now, we need to examine Smith's position on universal caring itself. Smith writes:

> The love of our own country seems not to be derived from the love of mankind. The former sentiment is altogether independent of the latter, and seems sometimes even to dispose us to act inconsistently with it. . . .

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14 Ibid., 220–221.

15 Ibid., 225.

16 Ibid., 229.

17 Ibid., 221.

18 Ibid., 224.

19 Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate* (New York: Viking, 2002), 378.

> We do not love our country merely as a part of the great society of mankind—we love it for its own sake, and independently of any such consideration.[20]

Here the love of our relatives and countrymen stands as qualitatively different from the love of strangers in remote parts of the world or that of humankind in general. Essentially, these are two categories of love, or two heterogeneous kinds of love. The first has an empirical ground, namely "the moral and physical connection" which ties me practically to the objects of my love. I love them because there is a commonality among us by which I may recognize myself through seeing them, and because I am sure that this love is reciprocal—it will invoke the same affection in return. However, this experience-based love cannot automatically be extended to humankind in general. The reason is that there may not be a "moral and physical connection" among all humans. A universal caring for strangers in remote parts of the world may need a love with a quality of transcendence, since there exists neither the commonality on which we and the stranger recognize each other nor the guarantee of "reciprocity" by which we and strangers are beneficial to each other.

Smith continues to differentiate the two kinds of love, saying that, "The state and sovereignty in which we have been born and educated, and under the protection of which we continue to live is the greatest society upon whose happiness or misery our good or bad conduct can have much influence."[21] "Though our effectual good offices can very seldom be extended to any wider society than that of our own country, our good will is circumscribed by no boundary, but may embrace the immensity of the universe."[22]

With the two terms of "effectual good offices" and "good will," Smith characterizes respectively the forms and scope of the two loves. The largest scope of the first love is the "country" in which we live. It has an effectual influence in the sense that people within the scope will materialistically benefit from the action ignited by my love. In contrast, the scope of the second love is the "universe" which accommodates not only my

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20 Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 231.

21 Ibid., 229.

22 Ibid., 236.

countrymen, but also remote strangers. As for the strangers, what they can expect from my love is not any empirical or practical assistance but a moral "will," although that is "good."

A comparison with universal love in Christianity may further clarify the essence of the second, or transcendent, love. It seems to me, as far as the scope of its extension is concerned, transcendent love is similar to the universal love of the Christian God. They both treat the entire world and all humans in the world as the objects of their love. In the meanwhile, they are substantially different in terms of implication. Universal love has rich content, containing God's actual effort of loving, as well as the beneficial result that it brings to the recipients of this love. In contrast, the implication of transcendent love is much simpler. It contains neither actual effort nor tangible outcome, but only "good will." What it can contribute to remote strangers is nothing but moral sympathy and compassion at the most.

Smith's distinction between empirical and transcendent love reflected and strengthened at once a popular tendency or mentality prevalent especially in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It emphasized the supreme value of the nation-state, encouraging people to care mainly about the interest of the nation-state to which they belonged. Under the same flag of patriotism and with the same slogan of loving their own countries, the European powers confronted each other, launching a series of catastrophic wars. Against this bloody background, transcendent love, the "good will" toward people from other nation-states, not to mention those from remote parts of the world, sounded fragile and insignificant. Essentially, they were just empty, even hypocritical, words. They could not serve as the theoretical foundation for universal caring in a secular form. This point may become more convincing after a comparison and contrast with Mencius' idea in the next section.

4. Nepotism and Generalized Love

Donald Munro correctly indicates, "Child care-giver love, normally beginning in the family, is the root of altruism."[23] To his statement I would like

[23] Donald J. Munro, *A Chinese Ethics for the New Century: The Chi'en Mu Lectures in History and Culture, and Other Essays on Science and Confucian Ethics* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005), 51.

to add one more point: family love is a sufficient, but not a necessary, condition for the development of universal caring. Put differently, it is impossible for a person to develop a strong feeling of universal caring if he or she has no experience of family love. Nonetheless, sheer family love may not necessarily, naturally, or automatically assure a person of having the feeling of universal caring. The acquisition of universal caring may come from the interaction of both family love and some social factors.

It is my understanding that, according to its natural tendency, an unbridled family love may be more likely to result in nepotism rather than universal caring. Daly, Salmon, and Wilson write, "Evolutionary biologists now refer to any sort of social discrimination on behalf of genetic relation as nepotism, with no implication that such discrimination is reprehensible. It is simply what the evolved attributes of living creatures have been 'designed' by the natural selective process to achieve."[24] In what follows I will use the term "nepotism" in this neutral sense. With a more critical tone, Pinker argues for the same idea, "The most obvious human tragedy comes from the difference between our feelings toward kin and our feelings toward non-kin, one of the deepest divides in the world. . . . Family love indeed subverts the ideal of what we should feel for every soul in the world. . . . Nepotism is a universal human bent and a universal scourge of large organizations."[25]

It has been accepted by a great number of thinkers as common knowledge that family love possesses an attribute of naturalness, and that family-fostered love provides a sufficient condition for the development of universal caring. However, naturalness itself should not be regarded as something necessarily immune from any negative social consequence. Sexual desire must be restricted in a sphere circumscribed by ethical norms and societal law, although it itself is natural. Similarly, the natural tendency of nepotism that originates from family love should also be restrained and restricted. Otherwise the interest of out-groups and that of

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24 Martin Daly, Catherine Salmon, and Margo Wilson, "Kinship: the Conceptual Hole in Psychological Studies of Social Cognition and Close Relationships," in *Evolutionary Social Psychology*, ed. Jeffry A. Simpson and Douglas T. Kenrick (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997), 267.

25 Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 245.

society as a whole may be improperly compromised. As has been shown in the second section, the typical Confucian nepotism of "protecting your family by all means" has already imposed a societal cost—the conduct of stealing was protected, and the sage king abandoned his governmental responsibility. In fact, this stance, due to the historical and intellectual influence of Confucianism, has actually encouraged the prevalence of nepotism now and then in Chinese society and in East Asian civilization more broadly.

We humans are naturally endowed with two arms. They can be used to help other people or to harm them. Similarly, the naturalness of family love may also lead to two consequences. Negatively, it may become a ground on which people build up a nepotistic net, cultivating gain for their own family members at the cost of society. Positively, this naturalness may function as a root for the possible development of universal caring. In fact, both sides evidently co-exist in the thought of classical Confucians, especially Mencius. The most characteristic is that, in dealing with the relationship of the two, his strategy is to acknowledge and respect the former, while strengthening and promoting the latter. It is his plan to lead people going through "graded love" to the final goal of universal caring. To clarify this point, I would like to introduce Eric Uslaner's study of trust into our discussion.

Uslaner makes an important distinction between two pairs of concepts: moralistic and strategic trust, and generalized and particularized trust. According to him, "moralistic trust" values trust as a moral good, while "strategic trust" defines it as a strategy in social and political life. Putting faith in strangers is moralistic trust; having confidence in people you know is strategic trust. The latter depends on our experience, whereas the former does not. "Moralistic trust is not about having faith in particular people or even groups of people. It is a general outlook on human nature and mostly does not depend upon personal experiences or upon the assumption that others are trustworthy, as strategic trust does."[26] In the same vein, Uslaner distinguishes another pair of trust concepts:

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[26] Eric Uslander, *The Moral Foundation of Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 17.

> Generalized trust is the perception that *most* people are part of your moral community. Its foundation lies in moralistic trust, but it is not the same thing. Generalized trust is a measure of the scope of our community, and it is based upon both morals and our collective experiences. . . . *The central idea distinguishing generalized from particularized trust is how inclusive your moral community is.* When you only trust your own kind, your moral community is rather restricted. And you are likely to extend trust only to people you think you know.[27]

What needs to be investigated here is the relationship between the type of trust and the formation of moral community.

"Moral community" is a relative concept. Superficially, it may simply refer to a cultural or national community whose members share the same social customs and ethical norms. However, in essence, its constitution is often decided by what type of trust we have cherished. A person with an attitude of particularized trust will extend his trust only to the members of his family, kinship, tribe, country, or religion. Accordingly, the family, etc. become his moral community and all the out-group people are excluded as strangers. John Esposito illustrated this trust and its consequence with his analysis of what existed in many Muslim states. "According to Islamic law, non-Muslims belong to a second class of citizens, the *dhimmi* (protected), who constitute their own community."[28] In contrast, a person with the attitude of generalized trust will go out of his own family, etc. and enlarge his moral community to include as many other people as possible. Ultimately, particularized and generalized trusts represent two kinds of attitude toward people and world; they cannot be brought together through any theoretical reasoning.

Uslaner's distinction of the two types of trust is helpful for our understanding of Mencius' doctrine of "extension," although what Mencius directly deals with is not "trust," but "love." Mencius writes:

> What is possessed by humans without their learning is natural ability (*liang neng* 良能). What is possessed by humans without their deliberation is natural knowledge (*liang zhi* 良知). There are no young children who do

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27 Ibid., 26–27.

28 John Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 291.

> not love their parents, and when they grow up, will not know to respect their elder brothers. Loving one's parents is humaneness; respecting one's elders is rightness. What is left to be done is simply the extension of these to the world (*tianxia* 天下). (*Mencius* 7A:15)
>
> By treating the elders in one's family as elders should be treated and extending this to the elders of other families, and by treating the young of one's family as the young should be treated and extending this to the young in other families, the world can be turned around in the palm of one's hand. (*Mencius* 1A:7)

These two passages contain the core of Mencius' idea of extension. First, children's love of their parents falls into the category of "natural knowledge" and "natural ability," meaning that it is something that emerges naturally, or organically, in family life. Its natural existence prepares a "root" for the future development of moral virtues, or a foundation for love's further "extension." From the natural ground of family love, Mencius develops his theory of ethics into a systematic social program regarding horizontal love. It is an answer to the question: How should a person extend the love acquired from family life to the people outside of his or her family?

Second, the procedure of "extension" is from the near to the far, and from immediate family members to remote strangers. It should be noticed that this is not a development from a "particularized" love to a "generalized" one, but "generalized" love in the strictest sense. As Uslaner says, "Particularized trusters assume that people unlike themselves are *not* part of their moral community, and thus may have values that are hostile to their own."[29] In contrast, "Generalized trusters have faith in a wide range of strangers. Placing a lot of faith in your in-group does not inevitably lead to a hostile attitude toward out-groups. If you like your in-group, you may well have favorable opinion of others."[30] The key to distinguishing particularized trust from generalized trust, in terms of his analysis, is an attitude of "hostility" toward strangers. In actuality, this is something absolutely absent in Mencius' passages; this is something to which Mencius was strongly opposed in his whole work.

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29 Uslander, *The Moral Foundation*, 27.

30 Ibid., 28.

Third, the scope to which Mencius' love extends is not Smith's "country," but the world itself.[31] This world accommodates, or more exactly is comprised of, all humans; it is the single "moral community" in which all of us are included. This community, according to Mencius, is founded on the same nature shared by all humans, namely the "four minds" (*si xin* 四心). Mencius says:

> One who has no mind of pity and compassion (*ceyin zhi xin* 惻隱之心) is not a human; one who has no mind of shame and aversion (*xiuwu zhi xin* 羞惡之心) is not a human; one who has no mind of modesty and compliance (*ci rang zhi xin* 辭讓之心) is not a human, and one who has no mind of right and wrong (*shif ei zhi xin* 是非之心) is not a human. The mind of pity and compassion is the beginning of humaneness; the mind of shame and aversion is the beginning of rightness; the mind of modesty and compliance is the beginning of propriety; and the mind of right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom. Humans have these four beginnings just as they have their four limbs. (*Mencius* 2A:6)

Thanks to the existence of the four minds, humans developed their "four virtues," and therewith set up a value system for their moral community. Mencius even further emphasized that, "All things of the same kind are similar to one another. Why should there be any doubt about humans? The sage and I are of the same in kind" (*Mencius* 6A:7). This means that all humans in the community are as perfectible as the sage, and all are equal in the sense of having the same four minds. This proves that what Mencius promotes is a generalized love, and what it leads to is a universal extension. It is Mencius' ideal to foster a positive attitude with which people treat the entire world as a big family and all humans therein as its members.

Finally, Mencius shows a way of fostering this attitude. Let me cite Uslaner once again. To the question, "Where does moralistic trust come

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[31] Donald Munro indicated that, as for the elite Chinese, "Prior to the nineteenth century, in both theory and experience, the world is the Chinese cultural world. Chinese relations with tributary countries and peoples, from the northern nomads and Tibetans to the West, to the Vietnamese and Koreans, were consistent with this view." *The Imperial Style of Inquiry in Twentieth-Century China: The Emergence of New Approaches* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1996), 2.

from?" he answers, "Mostly, though hardly exclusively, from our parents. Our parents are our first moral teachers. Children respect parental authority and they also follow parental guidance as a way of expressing their love."[32] This point is consistent with what Mencius contended two thousand years ago. Besides the influence of parents, Mencius also emphasized the importance of another factor: self-cultivation. "The difference between human and bird and beast is tiny. Ordinary people relinquish it, while the noble person retains it" (*Mencius* 4B:19). The "tiny" here refers to the "four minds," while the action of "retaining" is self-cultivation. In Mencius' view, the effort of self-cultivation does not mean to refine the "four minds," but to preserve them from any social pollution. It was his belief that the more a person conducts his self-cultivation, the farther his extension may reach and the more lasting it may become.

Mencius' idea of a universal "moral community" and universal caring was more clearly demonstrated in the *Western Inscription* of Zhang Zai (1020–1077), one of the representatives of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty:

> Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore, that which extends throughout the universe I regard as my body, and that which directs the universe I consider my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. The great ruler [the emperor] is the eldest son of my parents [Heaven and Earth], and the great ministers are his stewards. . . . Those who are tired and infirm, crippled or sick, those who have no brothers or children, wives or husbands, are all my brothers who are in distress and have no one to turn to.[33]

Both Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200) agreed with Zhang Zai on this idea, defending it firmly against accusations of its possible confusion with Mozi's "universal love" (*jian ai* 兼愛). In fact, it stands as a common doctrine among the Neo-Confucians, or a Neo-Confucian "manifesto" of a universal "moral community" and universal caring. It conceives the entire human world as a big family with Heaven and Earth as father and mother. All individuals, without any discrimination based on race,

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32 Uslander, *The Moral Foundation*, 26.

33 De Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 683.

gender, or age are its members. There exist common principles of morality in the family; its ruler and ministers are mainly responsible for the maintenance of its well-being; its members, since they are all brothers and sisters, need to care about each other. Obviously, this great imagery originates from the family love that we have all experienced. In the meanwhile, it enlarges this experience from a relatively small scope to the human world as a whole. In my opinion, this is the only philosophical basis on which the atheists and religious skeptics of the world can reasonably set an ideal and practice of universal caring.

Conclusion

This essay examined three ideas of love, namely, Christian "universal love," Confucian "graded love," and Adam Smith's "effectual love." In addition, it introduced Uslaner's distinction between two pairs of trust to shed light from the perspective of contemporary sociology on the essence of Confucian love. Now I would like to end the essay with a critical evaluation of both Christian and Confucian love.

As described above, they both ground their love on family life—sacred or secular, holy or mundane—and both envision a universal scope to include all humans in the world. This ground is natural since its acquisition needs no formal education; it is fundamental since the family is the most basic human institution; it is universal since all humans have their own family and share a similar family life; and it is convincing since all humans learn the affection of love from family life first. This familial ground is the main explanation for the fact that Christian love and Confucian love both won the hearts of a great number of people from various ethnic groups and stood as central traditions respectively in the West and in the Chinese world over the past two thousand years.

A brief examination of Mozi's doctrine of universal love may help illuminate the point above. Mozi, a contemporary of Confucius, believed that the cause of human calamities was "partiality," an attitude of "hating others and trying to injure them" for the interest of one's own state and house.[34] For the benefit of every state, every household, and every indi-

[34] Ibid., 70.

vidual, we should replace it with "universality," or universal love. The core of this notion is that people should "regard the families of others as they regard their own" and "regard one's friends the same as oneself, or the father of one's friend the same as one's own."[35] This view is directly opposed to the Confucian doctrine of "graded love."

However, as Feng Youlan pointed out, "Although Mozi held that the doctrine of universal love is the only way to save the world, he did not believe that men through their original nature can love one another."[36] To persuade people to take his path, Mozi appealed to Heaven, an anthropomorphic deity. According to him, practicing universality is the character of Heaven. Whoever does as Heaven does will earn reward from Heaven; whoever goes against what Heaven does will be punished. A theoretical gap appears here. Why does Heaven love humans universally and equally? Or what is the empirical ground that ensures people to believe in the existence of Heaven and its love? Mozi made a great effort to fill the gap, but none of his explanations is truly convincing. What is lacking in his reasoning and argument is a father figure, like the Christian God or Confucian profane fathers. In other words, due to the absence of family structure, his universal love sounds just like a beautiful promise without any believable substance. This is one of the reasons why Mozi's doctrine was abandoned and his school perished more than two thousand years ago.

Compared with Mozi's Heaven, the notion of the Christian God has a clear advantage. Theologically, He is a Father with two traits: fathering all humans and possessing unlimited resources to satisfy their needs. To the people who have true faith in Him, his love is believable, and his assistance, spiritually and materially, expectable. However, as Jaspers said, this lofty doctrine also contains a disadvantage that there was no empirical evidence concerning the existence of God.[37] As a result, it is difficult to accept for atheists and religious skeptics. Furthermore, taking Feuerbach-Marx's view about the relationship between the sacred and secular family,

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35 Ibid.

36 Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 96.

37 Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 1.

they may have to conclude that the latter is actually the foundation of the former, or that the content of the former should be explained through investigating the latter.

In contrast, the Confucian doctrine provided its followers with an "upside-down" structure. Instead of a single Father, there appear a great number of particular fathers. Individually, none of them is able to satisfy the two conditions. Nevertheless, in normal situations, collectively they ensure that each child in the world has a father figure around, and each father provides the child with the means to meet his or her basic needs. In a certain sense, we may even claim that God's satisfaction of the two conditions is actually realized in those fathers' collective efforts.

For the issue of "nepotism" and its relationship with positive law, I would like to refer to Munro's recent essay, "Unequal Human Worth,"[38] believing that all of us will benefit greatly from reading his detailed analysis, strong argument, and profound conclusion. In my opinion, Confucianism did not create nepotism; Mother Nature did. Following its positive side, the Confucians forged their doctrine of "graded love," setting a reliable foundation for universal caring. To control its negative side, they introduced methods such as "self-cultivation" and "regulation of family." These two helped to foster people with a sense of "generalized love" and to prevent them from falling into the predicament between "heavenly principle" and "positive law."

The last is the issue of "extension." This term refers to both an ethical idea and a social program. As the former, it is, as Munro phrased, "honorable and worthy of promotion." However, as the later, it is problematic. In the Confucian tradition, the "extension" of love has been normally described as a natural process, like water's flowing or a plant's growth. The implication is that the "extension" will reach its final goal of universal caring as long as a person, typically a ruler, cultivates his heart and is willing to treat other people as he treats his own parents and children. In other words, Confucians rarely bothered themselves with the question, *how* is love extended, or *what* is the concrete procedure for assuring its

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[38] Donald J. Munro, "Unequal Human Worth," in *Effortless Attention: A New Perspective in the Cognitive Science of Attention and Action*, ed. Brian Bruya (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

success. Consequently, as Munro indicated, it "is unreliable in predictability and in quantity of resource to meet domestic and international needs."[39] Herein lies the real weakness of the Confucian doctrine of universal caring. For my understanding, it is a crucial question and a perennial challenge to Confucianism: how to build up a realistic and reliable network of extension on the solid and trustworthy foundation of family love?

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[39] Ibid., 149.

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