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Virtue: Confucius and Aristotle

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My aim in this essay is to compare Aristotle's conception of virtue (*arete*) with Confucius' key notion *ren*—which has also been interpreted as “virtue”¹—in order to make explicit whether and to what extent they correspond. The issue is of current interest given the distinction between ethics and morality in the contemporary revival of Aristotelian virtue ethics.² Confucius has been interpreted as a thinker who concentrated on ethics or moral philosophy. Now, with regard to the distinction between ethics and morality, we may ask on which side Confucius lies. Is *ren*, understood as a virtue, the sort of virtue that should be treated as standing in contrast to morality? I hope that the following synoptic comparison of these two complex notions will be helpful not only in achieving a mutual illumination but also in bringing Confucius' thinking into the framework of contemporary virtue ethics.

Structural Similarity

The word “virtue” is a transliteration of the Latin *virtus* (from *vir*, literally “manhood”), which was in turn employed by Latin authors to translate the Greek *arete*, originally referring to excellence of manly qualities. The word *ren* was employed in the *Book of Poetry* (a text earlier than Confucius) to describe noble hunters. Some scholars therefore speculate that the concept of *ren* means, in a sense, “manly” or “manhood.”³ If that is true, an etymological parallel between *ren* and virtue (*arete*) comes to the surface.

But they come to be used differently. The term *ren* consists of two components, meaning, respectively, “human” and “two,” and points toward human relationships. It is this sense that figures in Confucius' basic teaching that by learning to be good one becomes a person of *ren*. In Athenian philosophy, the word *arete* is associated with *aristos* (excellent, best) and means the goodness of a kind of thing (it is therefore also translated as “excellence”). For Aristotle, “something's virtue [or excellence] is relative to its own proper function (*ergon*)”,⁴ that is, the characteristic activity peculiar to something or its distinctive mark.⁵ A virtuous X is an X that fulfills its *ergon* well. Any kind of thing can be said to possess its (specific) virtue by performing its function well. As far as human beings are concerned, virtue is human excellence or goodness with regard to human function. As Aristotle says: “the virtue of a human being will likewise be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his function well” (1106a23–24). Hence, philosophically, *arete* is related to human function, while *ren* to human relations.

Confucius does not furnish a unified definition of *ren*. Of various utterances recorded in his *Analects*, two remarks characterizing *ren* have

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禮 been thought to be fundamental: “to love man”⁶ and “to return to *li*” (12:1; the translation of *li* ranges from “rites” to “propriety,” “ceremony,” “decorum” and “manners”). What, then, is the relation between *ren* as love and *ren* as returning to *li*? Which one of these two determinations should be considered as central? In the prevailing interpretation, *ren* as love is taken as the fundamental meaning, and the two aspects of the notion of *ren* in question are described as the relation between *ren* and *li*. This is certainly supported by the following remark: “What can a man do with *li* who is not *ren*?” (3:3). The conformity to *li* without inner feeling can only be a formality, without any human goodness. Nevertheless, given the fact that love is a natural property, how can that determine what moral goodness is? A man might love his parents, brothers, and friends, but he may still be a bank robber, a drug smuggler, or even a brutal murderer. Confucius is not unaware of this gap between love and human good. He explicitly claims that to be “fond of *ren* without being fond of learning is liable to lead to foolishness” (17:8; cf. 8:2). Learning means to learn *li*, to recognize it and embody it in one’s behavior. Hence *ren* as love is not identical with human goodness, and needs to be constrained by *li*. “To return to *li*” turns out to be equally basic for being good, that is, being a person of *ren*. If neither *ren* as love nor *ren* as returning to *li* can be a complete notion of human goodness, what is *ren* in such a sense?

Confucius sometimes views *ren* as a particular quality, along with being clever, trustworthy, forthright, courageous, unbending, and so on. However, there are also many passages in which *ren* is described as a comprehensive virtue, including all the above and other moral qualities and determining their goodness. The distinction between *ren* as exclusive and inclusive is well recognized.⁷ How, then, is this distinction related to the distinction between *ren* as returning to *li* and as love? Is there a unified notion to cover all these aspects?

While Confucius’ concept of *ren* involves a tension between *ren* as returning to *li* and *ren* as love, there is also a tension at the heart of Aristotle’s notion of virtue. According to his *ergon* argument, human virtue is the good performance of human function. And human function is, literally translated, “the soul’s activity that expresses reason” (*kata logon*) or “not without the reason” (*me aneu logou*)⁸ (1098a5–6). *Kata logon* and *me aneu logou* refer to two parts of the soul that distinguish a human being from other kinds of animals. The former is the part that has reason in itself, and the latter is the part that is nonrational but obeys reason (cf. 1102b14–1103a1, 1198a4). Aristotle then divides virtue into two kinds: that which corresponds to the part of the soul that has reason in itself is intellectual virtue (*dianoetike arete*, or excellence of intelligence), and that which corresponds to the part of the soul that is nonrational but obeys reason is ethical virtue (*ethike arete*, or excellence of

ethical character). It follows that intellectual virtue is the excellence of exercising reason, while ethical virtue can be understood as the excellence of obeying reason.⁹ “The human good,” for example *eudaimonia* (happiness, or well-being), Aristotle concludes, “turns out to be the soul’s activity that expresses virtue” (1098a16).

Aristotle’s *ergon* argument immediately faces a challenge. Reason as a natural property may distinguish humans from other animals but does not seem to be the criterion that distinguishes human good from human evil. Acting rationally and acting well ethically do not seem to be identical. If one performs or obeys one’s rational function well, we would say that one is intelligent or clever rather than that one is good in the ethical sense. For intelligence may be put to the service of evil actions. A clever bank robber or a thief with sophisticated skills at stealing is “good” as a robber or as a thief, but is unlikely to be accepted as being good ethically. There is a gap between rational excellence and social respect.

For Aristotle, however, there is another dimension of human nature: “Man is by nature a political [social] animal.”¹⁰ A person cannot live in isolation from some community and must participate in and share the life of society. Ethical virtue, which is the soul’s activity in obeying reason according to the *ergon* argument, is, in a more direct sense, concerned with character (*éthos*) (1103a17), which is informed by social and cultural customs and habits (*ethos*). It is the disposition or quality to feel and act in ways admired by the society. This kind of stable, settled, and long-lasting disposition forms a state (*hexis*, which in Greek is related to “to have”).¹¹ In terms of the claim that a human being is a social animal, Aristotle avoids Socrates’ extreme position of intellectualism, and expands the area of ethics from the study of moral knowledge and reasoning to the study of development of good habits of feeling and action.

Aristotle’s distinction between intellectual virtue and ethical virtue is hence not only based on the two parts of the soul, but corresponds to the dual dimensions of a person’s human nature as a purely rational animal and as a social animal. There are various debates regarding how to reconcile these. In Aristotle’s ethics, they lead to two seemingly incompatible notions of *eudaimonia* (happiness). *Eudaimonia* is the activity that expresses virtue (1098a16). According to the *ergon* argument, the best life should be that which most fully exercises one’s rational activity, and that, for Aristotle, is the life of contemplation (*NE* X, 7 ff.). On the other hand, *eudaimonia* as the most desirable sort of life needs to include all intrinsically worthwhile activities and, in addition, external goods (1099a31–b6).¹² The issue that is more essential to our current purpose is this: is ethical virtue determined more fundamentally by the established habits and customs of the particular cultural and historical context into which one happens to be thrown, or by human rationality, which belongs to any self-determining agency? Intellectual virtue includes

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theoretical wisdom, and practical wisdom (*phronesis*).¹³ While theoretical wisdom does not involve action, practical wisdom is “concerned with action about what is good or bad for a human being” (1140b4–6).

The question, then, is about the relation between practical wisdom and ethical virtue. On the one hand, ethical virtue must be the excellence of obeying reason, and Aristotle claims that a full virtue “cannot be acquired without practical wisdom” (1145a16). On the other hand, he says: “practical wisdom, the eye of the soul, cannot reach its fully developed state without virtue” (1144a30–31); and it is his recurring remark that “virtue makes the goal correct, and practical wisdom makes what promotes the goal.”¹⁴ We seem to be caught in a cycle between ethical virtue and practical wisdom (1144b31–32).

This essay intends to argue that a complete notion of virtue in Aristotle lies in an interplay between the two determinations of intellectual virtue and ethical virtue. Similarly, a complete notion of *ren* in Confucius lies in a synthesis of the two determinations of *ren* as love and *ren* as returning to *li*. On this basis, I try to provide an answer to each of the questions raised above. Both *ren* and Aristotle’s virtue are concerned with how a person should live within a society. While Aristotle’s virtue hinges on practical wisdom, *ren* is contingent on filial love. This is because while Aristotle emphasizes how a person as a self-determining being can live, Confucius’ *li* is an ideal social system, and hence his concern is how a person can comply with *li*, rather than what we should comply with. Finally, I will show that different conceptions of virtue also lead to different pictures of the cultivation of virtue.

Li, Ethos, and Practical Wisdom

Let us start with Confucius’ *ren* as returning to *li*. *Li* originally refers to the rules concerning rituals or ceremonies involved in religious affairs. In the *Analects* it is conceived far more broadly, containing both abstract principles and detailed forms of social regulations. It prescribes not only what the relations between ruler and subject should be (3 : 18, 3 : 19) and what one ought to do in supporting one’s parents, in holding a funeral, and in paying for a sacrifice (2 : 5), but also what kind of ceremonial cap one should wear, and even when one should prostrate oneself before ascending steps in to see a king (9 : 3). This latter prescription is like the rule that requires one to wear a black tie to a fellows’ dinner at Oxford. Both are cultural norms rather than moral demands. In 12 : 1, Confucius claims that returning to *li* means that one should follow the guidance of *li* in “looking,” “listening,” “speaking,” and “moving.” “One has no way of taking his stand unless he knows *li*” (20 : 3). *Li* is thus the totality of socially acceptable behavior patterns and lifestyles, including both moral and non-moral norms. It corresponds to Aristotle’s *ethos* (social custom),¹⁵ that is, the traditional social mores and cultural settings.

When Confucius claims that *ren* means to return to *li*, he is asking each agent to act in conformity with social values, and thereby become accepted and respected by the society or tradition he or she is in. To be a person of *ren* is first of all to be a social person, equipped with what Aristotle calls “excellence of character” or “ethical virtue.”

Yet Confucius’ *li* immediately turns out not to be *ethos* or custom as such (in Chinese: *feng su*). He is not a commonsense moralist. *Li* is an object that Confucius requires us to “return to” (*fu*) rather than simply to “conform with.” The word “return” in Chinese means to go back to what we have deviated from. *Li* thus has a particular reference, the *li* of the Zhou dynasty (from ca. 1122 B.C.). Confucius has a profound commitment to the Zhou *li*: “The Zhou had the advantage of surveying the two preceding dynasties. How resplendent is its culture (*wen*)! I follow Zhou” (3:14). He even claims that this set of *li* would not be changed for more than a hundred generations: “Should there be a successor to the Zhou, even a hundred generations hence can be known” (2:23).

In Confucius’ time, the Zhou dynasty collapsed into many small states that had been warring against each other. Chinese society underwent a turbulent period of transition during which there was little order and stability. When the Zhou house overthrew its predecessor, the Shang dynasty, it claimed that the Shang had forfeited the *Tian Ming* (Mandate of Heaven) or *Tian Dao* (Way of Heaven) through its misrule, while its own social institutions conformed to the will of Heaven. Yet they were now broken. Where, then, could be found the Way of Heaven to order the state and guide people’s lives? This is the basic problem for pre-Qin Chinese philosophy. Confucius’ answer is that the social turmoil of the times was due to the loss of the traditional values of the Zhou culture. He therefore requires us to “return” to the social framework of that ideal state. *Ren* as returning to *li* means to be a person acceptable according to the Zhou *li*.

Although the *Analects* does not present a blueprint of the Zhou *li*,¹⁶ its core turns out to be a humane social hierarchy modeled on family relationships. “Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son” (12:11). A society is governed by a network of names each of which reflects a status which has a prescribed set of duties. An ordered society is that in which names are “rectified.” If each person played a role suitable to the personage he assumed in society, the society would be pacified and harmonious.

Confucius’ upholding of the Zhou *li* has been interpreted as testimony to his radical conservatism or traditionalism; hence, those scholars who would uphold Confucius generally tend not to clarify that his *li* is the Zhou *li*. However, Confucius’ conservatism is not necessarily a fault. His beliefs were generated by his reflection on the brutal social reality of his time. This might be compared with Edmund Burke’s conservatism,

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the result of his reflection on the violence of the French Revolution. It does sometimes seem that Confucius fails to distinguish clearly between fundamental principles and the trivial regulations in the Zhou *li*, and his frequent emphasis on regulatory detail conveys an impression of rigidity. Nevertheless, what he really embraces is the spirit and essence of the Zhou *li*. When he claims that the Zhou *li* will not change for a hundred generations (2:23, 3:14), he is not saying that none of the detailed regulations of the Zhou *li* is changeable. As a matter of fact, he does endorse some changes. For instance, frugality is preferred to extravagance in ceremonial practice (3:4), and a ceremonial cap of linen can be exchanged for a cap of black silk for reasons of economy (9:3).

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Confucius fully realizes that the Zhou *li* itself is a development from the preceding two dynasties, incorporating a variety of good elements from them (15:11). The idea of social development is not alien to his thinking. What should remain unchanged, however, is the deep meaning of the Zhou *li*, the truly radical alteration of which can only lead to calamity. As his disciple Zi-Xia says: "If one does not overstep the bounds in major matters, it is of no consequence if one is not meticulous in minor matters" (19:11). Confucius admires the Zhou *li* because he believes that this must be the ideal of social regulation, and this is the context within which humanity can find its full expression. *Li* is thus the Way, or *logos*.¹⁷ To "return" is not simply to go back, but to hold onto the authentic. A person of *ren* should embody the authentic spirit of a culture. Chinese civilization is the longest-lived of historical traditions, and it is generally believed that Confucianism is what has generated the cohesive force behind this civilization. And the strength of Confucianism is its insistence on traditional values.

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Confucius does not present detailed justification for why the Zhou *li* is the basis for the ideal ethical and political order. He seems to believe that it has a divinity that is derived from the Heaven (*Tian*) and *Dao*. The fact that the Zhou *li* had declined in his time he ascribes to the fact that *Dao* had not prevailed in the empire (16:2, 5:6). To illustrate the relation between *Tian* and *li*, we must here introduce another major notion of Confucius: *de*. While *ren* is referred to as virtue, *de* in various translations is also defined as virtue. The identical translation for these two concepts could be justified on the ground that *de* in Chinese is derived from "to get" and in Confucius can be understood as the consequence of returning to *li*. It is hence a counterpart of ethical virtue in Aristotle. If a culture (*li*) acquires the spirit of *Dao* (or Heavenly *Dao*), it is endowed with "*de*." It is in this sense that Confucius says that the *de* of Zhou "can be said to have been the highest" (8:20). If a person lives in accordance with *li*, then he has *de*. Sometimes Confucius makes the direct claim that heaven is the author of *de* (7:23; cf. also 9:5), and sometimes he justifies *de* in terms of the operation of Heaven. For instance, in Chinese

culture, clever talk or loquacity is not considered as a *de* (15:27, 17:17). Why is this? Confucius explains: “What does Heaven ever say? Yet there are the four seasons going round and there are the hundred things coming into being. What does Heaven ever say?” (17:19). Confucius takes the Zhou *li* as the full embodiment of *or *logos*.*

He further distinguishes the “*de* of the gentleman” from the “*de* of the small man,” but never says what the ground is for this distinction, thus giving rise to some confusion in understanding this concept. Such a distinction seems to suggest precisely the distinction between the Zhou *li* (*ethos*) and *ethos* in general. If *de* is cultivated out of the Zhou *li*, it is a *de* of the gentleman, and if it is a habitual quality out of the prevailing but non-authentic *ethos*, it is the *de* of the small man. He says: “The village worthy is the ruin of *de*” (17:13). But the existence of the village worthy is no doubt a kind of tradition. A good person should neither be liked nor disliked by all in the village, but should be liked by those who are good and disliked by those who are bad (13:24).

While Confucius’ ethics is confined to the sacred Zhou *li*, Aristotle’s *ethos* is simply the prevailing social customs and conventions. Aristotle believes that a human being must be a social animal, and accordingly must conform to social norms. Nevertheless, like Confucius, he does not feel that to cultivate ethical virtue is simply a matter of passively complying with the existing customs and rules, whatever they may be. It is possible that the existing ends are in conflict, and are not even good. Within the same social context, there are rival lists of virtues and different definitions for the same virtues. This situation is not exceptional within the *polis* of Athens in the fifth century, as Plato’s early dialogues attest. For example, Aristotle distinguishes between “a good man” and “a good citizen” (1130b28, *Politics* 1276b34). Social norms, constitutions, and forms of government change, and the meaning of a “good citizen” changes accordingly. “There is not one single virtue of the good citizen that is perfect virtue” (*Politics* 1276b32–33). In contrast, there is a single perfect virtue for human beings as human beings, namely their reason. Aristotle’s humanity lies both in his maintaining himself as a self-determining person and as a person self-determined by the social norms. But since his ethics concerns more what a good *person* should be than what a good *citizen* should be, reason becomes the ultimate determinant. “For it is our decisions to do what is good or bad, not our beliefs, that make the character we have” (1112a4).

Hence, while one cannot live in isolation from society, one must maintain a reflective attitude toward *ethos* in order to be a good person. This reflective function is one’s practical wisdom (*phronesis*). First, practical wisdom helps one to understand why the ways of behavior that one has learned are really noble and true. One therefore proceeds from knowing “that” (*oti*) to knowing “why” (*dioti*). A person of experience

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sometimes can do better than a person of knowledge, but knowledge is still superior to experience because it grasps the cause, while experience does not.¹⁸ A person of practical wisdom (*phronimos*) performs a virtuous act because it is really virtuous, rather than a simulacrum of virtue.

Second, practical wisdom does not merely provide a person with a more articulate opinion as to why the instructed behavior is good, but is also required to compare various views of what goodness is, and then also to grasp the true conception of what ends are really good and should be pursued in conflicting situations (1143b21–22).¹⁹ This clarification of existing ends is itself also the process of achieving a new end. For Aristotle, practical wisdom is concerned with the conception of the good life in general, and the *phronimos* deliberates well “about what promotes living well in general” (1140a27–28).

Third, practical wisdom has a dimension of contextuality or particularity. Aristotle acknowledges that the subject of ethics is indeterminate, and that universal principles are not flexible enough to cope with various particular situations (1098a26 ff., 1103b34). Practical wisdom is concerned with actions, and actions are always about particulars. Hence it has a dimension of perception, that is, practical intuition, for determining what should be done or can be done well in certain particular circumstances: “For nothing perceptible is easily defined, and [since] these [circumstances of virtuous and vicious action] are particulars, the judgement about them depends on perception.”²⁰ A practical perception recognizes the salient features of the particulars and is aware of the limits of the universal principles in application. Practical wisdom thus enables one to reach an equilibrium between the universal and the particular and to be aware of what should be done in accordance with the good end in a concrete situation.

Aristotle then develops the topics related to practical wisdom, such as choice, deliberation, responsibility, incontinence (*akrasia*), and so on. In contrast, Confucius says little about these issues.²¹ This is largely because his *li* is not something toward which we are required to maintain a critical attitude. We have a choice only between following *li* and falling into disorder. For Confucius, “a good man” and “a good citizen” should not be different, and indeed it is as a good citizen that one can be a good person. Aristotle does agree that in the best form of society a good person and a good citizen would be the same, but the best form of society is to be found through the science of politics. Both Aristotle and Confucius are concerned with what a good person should be and connect this with social culture and tradition. However, while Aristotle suggests an attitude that is not one of blind compliance with tradition, Confucius insists on the continuity and authenticity of tradition. It is out of this belief that Confucius devotes much of his life to the transmission of the ancient classics, which record the *li* or civilization of Zhou.

Nevertheless, the lack of an Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom turns out to be the weakness in Confucius' thinking. Here we need to discuss another of his important notions: *yi* (which is generally translated as "righteousness," "meaning," or "morality"). In one instance, he says: "In dealing with the world the gentleman is not invariably for and against anything. He is on the side of *yi*" (4:10). What, then, is *yi*, and what is its relation to *li*? *Yi* appears in the *Analects* twenty-four times without a unified definition or elucidation. More often, this term is used in opposition to personal advantage or profit (—also *li*): "The gentleman understands *yi*, the small man understands what is profitable" (4:16; cf. also 19:1, 7:15, 14:13). *Yi* in this sense means the principle of right behavior, in contrast to egoism. It is something like the principle of justice or what action one should follow or conform to. This sense is in fact not far from *li*.²²

The relation between *li* and *yi* can be understood as follows. As we mentioned earlier, *li* has both its detailed forms and its spirit. Its detailed forms cannot cover all the possible and complex situations in our actual life. When such a situation occurs, we should act in accordance with the spirit of *li*, the rightness agreed to and believed in by the community. *Yi* is thus close to the convention of what is morally binding.²³ Accordingly, Confucius is saying, in the passage at 4:10 (quoted above), that when a particular act lacks the guidance of the concrete form of *li*, we must follow the right (*yi*). And the source of the right is the spirit of *li*, or authentic tradition.

If we should adhere to *yi* in a situation where the concrete regulations of *li* are not available, we need a way to judge and elaborate what is the right (*yi*), that is, what constitutes the deep spirit of *li* or the enduring *dao* and what is peripheral to the authentic tradition. We need to reflect upon what concrete forms of *li* embody the authentic spirit of the tradition and what should be emended, revised, and even partly rejected. We must identify when the *Dao* or Way prevails or when it is hidden. Confucius' notion of *yi* seems to open the door for an Aristotelian practical wisdom, but he fails to work it out. He has a major virtue called "wisdom" (*zhi*), but it must also be based on conformity to *li*. "How can the man be considered wise who, when he has the choice, does not settle in *ren*?" (9:1). Yet he says nothing further about how *zhi*, based on *ren*, can determine what *yi* is.²⁴

Filial Love and Self-love

The main problem addressed by Aristotle's ethics is how one should live. When Confucius claims that a person of *ren* is to live in accordance with *li*, he seems already to have provided an answer to this question. He then needs to deal with how it is possible for a person to "return to" or "comply with" *li*. For, unlike Mencius after him, Confucius is not a uto-

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pian concerning human nature. he does not believe that human nature is innately programmed to comply with *li*. Instead, he has a deep suspicion that it is naturally attracted to *ren*: "I have never met a man who finds *ren* attractive or a man who finds not-*ren* repulsive. A man who finds *ren* attractive cannot be surpassed" (4:6). When he claims that *ren* is "to return to *li*," the more complete expression is "to overcome oneself and to return to *li*." Accordingly, in returning to *li*, one must first of all discipline the "self."

Of course, one could be forced to accept the requirements of *li* through punishment. Yet in that case one "will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame" (2:3). Confucius' *li* might be normative, but in contrast to both Kantian ethics and utilitarianism, it is not something external that one ought to obey without regard to one's inner motivation. For him, ethics is not a matter of how we should be bounded (*obligare*), but of how we can follow social rules willingly and naturally. It is against this background that Confucius introduces his other major interpretation of *ren*: "*Ren* is to love humanity" (12:22).

Ren as love is based on the feeling one has toward one's own parents and brothers. "Filial piety and brotherly love are the roots of *ren*" (1:2).²⁵ In Confucius' view, these roots have the most important ethical value: "The gentleman nourishes the roots, for once the roots are established, the *dao* will grow therefrom" (1:2). If family love is the basis for *dao* to prevail, given the relation between *dao* and *li*, *ren* as love becomes fundamental for *ren* as returning to *li*. Filial love as natural sentiment is inborn and not culturally specific. What is required is to cherish and nurture it.

Filial love is crucial because Confucius believes that gratitude and affection toward one's parents enable one willingly to accept parental authority and the hierarchical relation between parent and child. Such an ingrained and intimate relation is given as justification for the practice of the three-year mourning period after a parent dies: "A child ceases to be nursed by his parents only when he is three years old. Three years' mourning is observed throughout the Empire" (17:21). To repay three years with three years might appear too formal, but the idea here is that filial love might inspire an internal feeling that causes one willingly to carry out the responsibility toward one's parents. Kinship involves a natural hierarchy and through it is established natural authority relations, while its extension/expansion to other social relations naturalizes the idea of hierarchy and authority in the wider society. By the same token, the feeling toward one's brothers makes one agreeably altruistic. A family may not be a democratic forum or provide a context for equality, but it is a place one loves to be in.

The idea of *ren* as love is the expansion of the roots of filial love. This expansion consists in the transferring of the family relations of hierarchy

and fraternity to the larger society. As a good father makes a good ruler, a good son makes a good subject. A person of *ren* starts with loving the parent, and then gradually expands the circle of love. "The young should behave with filial piety at home, and with brotherly love abroad" (1 : 6); eventually, "All within the Four Seas are his brothers" (12 : 5). "A man who possesses filial piety and brotherly love is unlikely to transgress against his superiors, and to incline to start a rebellion" (1 : 2).

Hence, the determination that "*ren* is to love man" serves to justify the inner basis of returning to *li*. Earlier I mentioned, but without discussion, that there is a well-recognized but unspecified distinction in Confucius between *ren* as complete virtue and *ren* as particular virtue. If my argument thus far is sound, this distinction can be set on an intelligible foundation. While *ren* as love seems a particular virtue, *ren* in its complete sense is a synthesis of *ren* as love and *ren* as returning to *li*. Neither is dispensable. On the one hand, the conformity to *li* must be based on *ren* as love: 'What can a man do with *li* who is not *ren*?' (3 : 3); on the other hand, *ren* as love itself must be regulated by *li*: being "fond of *ren* without being fond of learning [i.e., *li*] is liable to lead to foolishness" (17 : 8). One can be fully good only when one conforms to *li* out of love. Although Confucius does not specify, it does not seem far from his mind that such an interplay or synthesis underlies all admirable characteristics, that is, particular virtues. For instance, courage cannot be characterized as a virtue if it does not contain this unity of *ren* as love and *ren* as returning to *li*. It will become unruly if not regulated by *li* (8 : 2, 17 : 8), but if it is not motivated by love it will also lead to unruly behavior (8 : 10). Even filial piety as a virtue is determined by such a unity. On the one hand, filial piety needs to conform to *li*: "When your parents are alive, comply with *li* in serving them; when they die, comply with *li* in burying them and in sacrificing to them" (2 : 5). On the other hand, it requires a feeling of love in serving one's parents; otherwise "Even hounds and horses are, in some way, provided with food. If a man shows no reverence, where is the difference?" (2 : 7).

Ren as love not only keeps the compliance with *li* from being a matter of externally imposed limitations, but also provides an inner ground for altruism. Virtues can be either self-regarding or other-regarding or both. It has been a central concern for virtue ethics to provide the rationale for altruism, that is, other-regarding virtue. Confucius' insight is that if we want to nurture altruism, then filial love serves as a root or an innate spring.²⁶

Like Confucius, Aristotle fully acknowledges the intrinsic goodness of love. *Philia*, which is generally translated as "friendship," is the central topic in several treatises.²⁷ Human beings are political or social animals, "tending by nature to live together with others" (1169b17), while "The will to live together is friendship (*philia*)" (*Politics* 1280b38). *Philia* in-

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cludes every kind of social relation involving mutual loving and liking, and hence “love” seems a better translation.²⁸ It exists not only within family members and fellow citizens, but also in various associations of individuals who share a common interest in utility, pleasure, or virtue. The former kind is natural, while the latter is voluntary.

For Aristotle, it is friendship that creates “family connexions, brotherhood, common sacrifices” (*Politics* 1280b37), and it is “the greatest good of states” (*Politics* 1262b8) to have and to preserve friendship. At a personal level, friendship is necessary for happiness (*eudaimonia*). It is not merely the “greatest” and “most necessary” of external goods (1169b10, 1154a4–5), but also intrinsic to a happy life. For one needs it in all circumstances and in every period of life. A man without friends cannot be happy (1155a5–6, 1169b8–10, 1169b16–17). It creates an arena for one to realize and express one’s virtue. The natural love or friendship within the family is also highly valued by Aristotle. A parent loves his children because he regards them as “something of himself,” and children love their parents because they regard them as the “source of origin” (1161b18–19). Brothers love each other because they are from the same parents.

The discussion of friendship or love earns Aristotle credit for putting friendship and family attachment as important, intrinsic items into the ethical sphere. This is regarded as a significant advantage of his ethics over modern moral theories that focus instead on impartiality and the impersonal point of view. Aristotle’s discussion of friendship, especially of family love, corrects Plato’s radical anti-family position in the *Republic*.

Both Confucius and Aristotle advocate the ethical status of love, but their discussions differ in certain significant aspects. The family love that Confucius emphasizes is filial love, the love of children toward their parents. Filial love is prior to virtue and is the root of the latter. We nurture this root to the effect that society is seen as an enlarged family. All social sympathy or love is derived from filial love and can be reduced to it. On the other hand, the family love Aristotle emphasizes is parental love. He believes that parental love toward children is more intense than the other way round. This is because parents know children better and have a stronger sense of possessing, and also because their love toward their children starts right from their birth, “while children become fond of the parent when time has passed and they have acquired some comprehension or perception” (1161b27). Since a parent is an adult and has already established a stable character, parental love cannot be a starting point for the formation of virtue and is not associated with the notion that a state is an enlarged family. Hence, when Aristotle distinguishes between natural family love and voluntary social love, he never says that the latter is derived from the former. He draws a clear-cut distinction between household and political life, and claims that it is mistaken to

think that families and city-states are different only in size rather than in kind (*Politics* 1,1). He truly acknowledges the importance of family and social sympathy in ethics, but, unlike Confucius, he fails to appreciate family love as an ethical value that is the basis for other social regulations.²⁹ In dealing with family and emotional commitment, Confucius goes much further than Aristotle, for he not only does justice to these ethical phenomena but also considers them an Archimedean point for his ethics.

For Aristotle, social love and friendship are an extension of one's love of oneself rather than an extension of filial love: "The defining features of friendship that are found in friendship to one's neighbours would seem to be derived from features of friendship toward oneself" (1166a1–2). All forms of love must be understood in the context of self-love. Such an analysis of the essence of friendship is associated with Aristotle's view that a human being is essentially a rational being. He declares that "The good person must be a self-lover."³⁰ He distinguishes two kinds of self-lovers: one is a base egoist who does his best to gratify appetite and the nonrational part of the soul (1186b17, 1168b22–23); the other pursues the gratification of the rational part of the soul, for reason is, above all, "what each person is, and the decent person likes this most of all."³¹ The good man as a self-lover is the latter kind, who is obedient to the voice of reason within himself and sets his life in accordance with rationality.

We once again face the relation between Aristotle's dual dimensions of human nature. A human being as a social animal requires love, but as a rational being explains the nature of love. The love of others is grounded in the love of self. It follows that a human being is, first of all, a rational being rather than a social being, albeit the latter status is indispensable.

Aristotle is charged with leaving little room for altruism in his ethics. He fails to explain why a rational person needs to cultivate other-regarding virtues. A good person will perform actions in other people's interests, but that is for the perfection of one's own character. If so, when there is a conflict with other agents in pursuing the development of their own characters, it is rational for a moral agent to develop his own, rather than curtailing it. Furthermore, according to Aristotle's ethics, one should only pursue the actions that are relevant to one's development of ethical character. Aristotle's virtuous person could certainly be altruistic out of habituation, but a rational self-love account seems not to be sufficient to justify this tendency. In discussing the paradigm case of friendship, that is, the friendship based on virtue, or what Cooper called "character friendship,"³² Aristotle keeps remarking that those friends "wish good to their friend for the friend's own sake" (1156b10–12; cf. 1156a17–18, 1156b10; cf. also *EE* 1244b15–22, *Rhetoric* 1385a18–19). Many commentators accordingly interpret the virtue of friendship as a supplement

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or modification of Aristotle's egocentric ethics. But this hardly stands up under close scrutiny. Aristotle still explains this form of altruism in terms of rational self-love: "In loving their friend they love what is good for themselves" (1157b33). A virtue friend is "another me" or "another self." We care for friends because a friend is a mirror by which I can contemplate myself better.³³ What we seek in this kind of love is the friend's rationality and persistent traits of character, rather than the friend's accidental properties. By experiencing that character we enrich and develop our own ethical characters. In the final analysis the love of one's virtuous friends is still self-oriented.³⁴

Confucius' *ren* as love provides a sort of justification for altruism. Nevertheless, his altruism is graded. Love is certainly universal, for we are required to treat all people under heaven as brothers. Yet this does not mean that a man of *ren* should love everyone equally. The expansion of love is hierarchical and makes distinctions. This idea is explicitly defended by Mencius in criticizing the Moist type of impartial universal love. This graded love has been accused of partiality. Nonetheless, it is intrinsic to Confucius' thinking. Love must be rooted in family love because the latter involves an inherent intimacy between affection and ethical training. Denial of this intimacy will destroy the Confucian ground of complying with *Li*, in particular the inner ground of other-regarding virtue. Such a graded love seems to be echoed in contemporary sociobiology and evolutionary ethics, which suggest that we have a gene-determined altruistic tendency as a human adaptation in evolution, but, everything being equal, we are biologically determined to cooperate first of all with our close kin and others whose reciprocation is expected. It is also echoed in contemporary environmental ethics, which extends the scope of moral community beyond human beings to animals and even to nature itself.

An equal and impartial universal love is definitely more desirable, but as the highest ethical virtue it requires an independent source of justification. The central concern of modern moral systems is such a justification. But neither deontology nor utilitarianism is thought to fulfill this task satisfactorily. Both are accused of holding an impersonal point of view. As a matter of fact, one's affection toward other, unknown children cannot be as intense as toward one's own. Williams' famous problem of whether a rescuer is permitted to rescue his wife first³⁵ will present a dilemma for an advocate of impartial love, but not for Confucius.

Given its fundamental status, Confucius protects filial love strongly from any harm. This is illustrated in the case of a father who steals a sheep. The governor of the village believes that the son who testifies against such a father is an example of a "straight" person. On the contrary, Confucius claims that "Fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. In such behavior is straightness to be found as a

matter of course” (18:18). What he is saying is that the father might be open to punishment for his wrongdoing, but it is not his son’s position to take responsibility for seeing that justice is done.³⁶ Family love itself is certainly subject to the regulation of *ethos* or *yi* (rightness), but if an *ethos* encourages the disruption of filial love, it is, for Confucius, the greatest evil.

Cultivation

For Confucius, *de*, the acquired *ren*, is “to get,” and for Aristotle, ethical virtue is connected with “*hexis*” (having). Both “to get” and “to have” require a process of ethical training and cultural refinement. For Confucius, this is a process of expanding one’s filial love to society so that one may willingly accept the constraints of *li*; for Aristotle, this is a process of the habituation and development of practical wisdom. But both believe that such a process of cultivation is lifelong, and virtues are eventually internalized as second nature. According to Confucius, he himself set his heart on learning at fifteen, but not until seventy could he follow his heart’s desire “without overstepping the line” (2:4). That amounts to saying that at that time the disposition was well entrenched and was a *hexis*, or second nature in the Aristotelian sense (1103a31–b21).

Confucius views the process of cultivation as mainly a matter of education. Public education is an extension of family education. The Chinese word for “education,” *jiaoyu*, is composed of two words: “teaching” (*jiao*) and “nurturing” (*yu*), and this education is not merely for the purpose of conveying knowledge, but also for shaping correct behavior patterns and internalizing them as part of one’s character. In Hansen’s words, it is “character building.”³⁷ Such an education is carried out through a dual dialectic. On the one hand, a person is taught by his parents, teachers, and the noble people surrounding him what should be done and how to do it. He is required to respect all those who teach him as father-like. In Chinese culture, a teacher is traditionally called “teacher-father,” and the proverb goes, “A teacher of one day makes a father for all life.” Government officials, as the practitioners of *li*, are called “parent officers.” The head of the state is called “the state father,” and the first lady the “state mother.” On the other hand, a father supports his family, but more importantly should be seen as an educator, as is reflected in the proverb that “it is a fault for a father only to support but not to educate.” A teacher’s duty is not merely to teach, but also to serve as a model of ethical behavior. In China, the duty of a teacher is frequently described as “to be a teacher and model for others.” Furthermore, the function of a ruler is not only to order, but also, and even more importantly, to serve as a model of behavior for the people. The basic principle of governing is “to guide them [people] by *de*, and keep them

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in line with *li*” rather than “to employ punishment” (2:3; cf. also 2:1). This is because, in a sense, rulers are also teachers, and are also required to love their subjects as their own children.

Hence, the hierarchical relationship is a model-copy relationship of behaviors, and each form can be reduced to a teacher-pupil relationship, which is in turn reduced to a father-son relationship. The persons who are superior are supposed to establish themselves as the paradigm of humanity, that is, the model for juniors and inferiors to follow and catch up with. Society is an extended school as well as an extended family.

忠 恕 心 Confucius is reported to have remarked that there is a single thread pervading his *dao* (4:15), which is interpreted by his disciple as “*zhong* and *shu*.” The character “*xin*” (heart) is a component of both words. *Zhong*, traditionally rendered as “loyalty,” is better translated by D. C. Lau as “doing one’s best,” that is, in one’s relationships with others. *Shu*, etymologically related to “as,” is explained by Confucius to mean “Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire” (15:24), and its translation varies: “using oneself as a measure to gauge others” (Lau), “altruism” (Wing-tsit Chan), “consideration” (Waley), “reciprocity” (Dawson), and so on. *Shu* is intrinsically related to *ren* in its etymologically relational sense,³⁸ and in one instance Confucius considers *ren* the positive articulation of the principle of *shu*: “A person of *ren* helps others to take their stand insofar as he himself wishes to take his stand, and gets others there insofar as he himself wishes to get there” (6:30).

How to interpret this “single thread” has been a matter of considerable controversy. Given the relation between *shu* and *ren*, and given that the self of a *ren* person in Confucius is essentially embedded in his relations with his family members, I suggest reading the “single thread” as meaning that one should do one’s best to deal with others as one deals with one’s parents and brothers. Interpreted this way, Confucius’ “single thread” indicates how one can extend filial love to society; that is, it is a way of cultivating virtue. This seems to be confirmed by Confucius’ remark that “To be able to judge others by what is near to ourselves may be called the method of realizing *ren*.³⁹ One’s parents and brothers are certainly what are closest to a person. To make an analogy of them in deciding what one should or should not do in dealing with others is the art of acquiring virtue. In Chinese ethical training, a person is generally told “to think of him as your brother” or “to think of her as your sister” when deciding what you should or should not do in dealing with others. Even in the training of a self-regarding virtue such as diligence, a person is taught “to work hard to earn honor for your parents” or that “if you bear in mind your parent’s hardship in raising you, you will not be lazy.” The family-centered culture of the Chinese is essentially indebted to Confucius’ teaching.

Aristotle agrees with Confucius that human beings are not by nature

ethically good. As he says, “the many, especially the young, do not find it pleasant to live in a temperate and resistant way” (1179b34–35). Virtue does not develop spontaneously. The cultivation of moral virtue starts with habit. A virtue is acquired by doing good things repeatedly; in this way one can fall into the habit of doing them. The process of habituation essentially involves practice and repetition. “Character (*ēthos*), as the word itself indicates, is that which is developed from habit [*ethos*]” (EE 1220a39–b3). It is a process of moderating one’s desires and emotions and directing them toward appropriate objects. This requires that we should be brought up from our very youth “to find pleasure and pain as it is appropriate” (1104b11–13). Since a good upbringing is a matter of luck, Aristotle’s cultivation of virtue is dependent on luck.

A good upbringing implies that one has a good ethical-training environment, and there is a correct order of some sort to follow. Good instructions can come from the father: “a father’s words and habits have influence, and all the more because of kinship and because of the benefits he does; for his children are already fond of him and naturally ready to obey” (1180b5–7). But the role of a father or any other individual is limited, for “a father’s instruction” lacks “influence and compelling power.” It is the law that “has the power that compels” (1180a19–22), because many people fear penalties rather than shame. Accordingly, habituation is more an issue for the society rather than for the family. “Law must prescribe their upbringing and practices” (1179a35). A good upbringing mainly requires that one live under just laws, and Aristotle accordingly pays more attention to the function of legislation than of the family in moral education. The standard by which a good political system is distinguished from a bad one is whether it effectively facilitates habituation.

During the course of habituation, many people become accustomed to things that they used to find painful, and even come to take pleasure in doing such things. This kind of well brought-up person accordingly possesses “a character suitable for virtue, fond of what is fine and objecting to what is shameful” (1179b30–31). For Aristotle, people with such a nature are “like ground that is to nourish seed,” and only they can be taught through ethical argument and be proper students of his ethics, while other people without this nature continue to require brutish methods of constraint (1179b24–29). This is in contrast to Confucius’ view of a habituation that focuses on the expansion of filial love through an emulation of the models that surround one, rather than on the role of law and punishment. Confucius always adopts a negative stance toward litigation (12:13).

For Aristotle, cultivating habituation is a process of acting in accordance with the good instructions that one receives from one’s father and with the laws of one’s community, as well as a process of developing

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one's practical wisdom.⁴⁰ In the course of repeatedly performing actions said to be noble and just, one comes to realize why they are said to be good. One's dependence on other people telling one what to do diminishes, and one comes to see what is right for oneself. A person also comes to develop a practical perception of what should be done in a particular circumstance. The exercise of rational judgment becomes inherent in education. Confucius' picture of cultivation, in contrast, lacks the development of practical wisdom.

Earlier we mentioned that in Aristotle's concept of virtue there is a cycle between practical wisdom and ethical virtue. On the one hand, practical wisdom is not simply a matter of rational calculation; it is distinguished from such notions of capacity as deliberation (*bouleusis*) and cleverness (*deinotes*). It is not morally indifferent, but involves an essential reference to, or presupposes, ethical virtue (1143b11–14, 1144a30–31). Aristotle explicitly declares that "we cannot be a person of practical wisdom without being good" (1144a36), and he therefore rejects the idea that an incontinent person has practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is inseparable from ethical virtue and is embedded in the tradition. On the other hand, practical wisdom also reflects and criticizes the tradition, as we have indicated in the second section of this essay. Viewed from the standpoint of the dynamic process of cultivation, this cycle is not vicious. It is inherent in the process and promotes the fabric of character as well as the reformation of the tradition itself. The ethical virtue that provides the goal for practical wisdom is not the full virtue, for the goal it teaches derives from experience rather than from clear knowledge and a critical attitude. A human being as a rational animal cannot be merely a creature of habit. Without exercising rational activity a human being cannot be human in the fullest sense. Only when one develops one's own practical wisdom can one fully enjoy doing noble things. A full moral virtue, that is, one's second nature, cannot be acquired until one exercises one's own reason.

A state of character can be good because it aims at the mean state of feeling and actions (1106b28, 1109a20–30). This notion of a mean is not one of quantity but one of correctness.⁴¹ The mean is a state that "enables one to act at the right time, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way" (1109a20–23). This rightness is determined by correct reason (*orthos logos*), that is, practical wisdom (1144b28). Reason determines rightness differently in different situations. On this basis Aristotle derives his complete definition of ethical virtue: "virtue is a state (*hexis*) concerned that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason, i.e., to the reason by reference to which the person of practical wisdom would define it" (1107a1–3).

a synthesis of *ren* as love and *ren* as conforming to *li*, for Aristotle a full notion of virtue comprises virtue as a state of character as well as virtue as exercising practical rationality, and is an organic synthesis of these two aspects. It is the synthesis of these two that determines the mean state. Virtue as mean in turn determines the nature of all other ethical virtues.

It is interesting to note that, with regard to the concept of virtue, neither Confucius' synthesis nor Aristotle's synthesis has been fully respected historically. In the West, Aristotle's practical wisdom and ethical virtue have been separated since the Enlightenment. Philosophers contrast the authority of reason to tradition, and then try to establish universal and trans-cultural principles of morality in which virtue does not have any significant place. The current revival of virtue ethics is in a sense a "return" to Aristotle's interplay between reason and virtue, although with significant alterations.⁴² Correspondingly, in the East, the Confucian synthesis of *ren* as love and *ren* as returning to *li* is also severed in the later development of Confucianism. *Ren* as observing *li* comes to be more and more rigid and inflexible, and moves far from *ren* as love. *Li* was eventually accused, in the May Fourth movement, of "eating man."⁴³ The basic motivation of the May Fourth movement was to establish a sharp contrast between Chinese tradition and Western science and democracy, and then uphold the latter while rejecting the former. But the recent resurgence of Confucianism in East Asia emphasizes the value of Chinese tradition and criticizes Western individualist morality. This sounds like a tendency to "return" to Confucius' notion of *ren*. If the comparison in the present essay is sound, we would like to suggest that while an Aristotelian revival would do well to borrow the Confucian insight of filial love, a Confucian revival could hardly be constructive without developing an Aristotelian function of rationality in weighing and reanimating the tradition.

NOTES

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Abbreviations are used in the Text and Notes as follows:

EE *Eudemian Ethics*

NE *Nicomachean Ethics*

- 1 – *Ren* has been translated in a variety of ways, including “humanity,” “benevolence,” “love,” “virtue,” “manhood,” “authoritative person,” and so forth. James Legge calls it “complete virtue,” but he admits that “We cannot give a uniform rendering of this term” (*The Four Books* [New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp, 1966], pp. 2–3). Given this situation, I find it more convenient to keep it untranslated in discussion. *Arete* is translated as either “virtue” or “excellence,” but “virtue” seems more popular. Hence I adopt this conventional translation, despite the asymmetry I might create as I keep *ren* untranslated.
- 2 – Cf. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), p. 6. These two terms originally mean the same thing. “Ethics” is a transliteration of the Greek word *ēthikos*, and “morality” is from the Latin word *moralis*, which is the Latin translation of *ēthikos*. Currently, morality is characterized as dealing with an agent’s actions and their consequences, and as attempting to formulate legalistic moral principles and rules that are universally applicable to all moral actions. It emphasizes “obligation” and “moral rightness” and takes an impersonal point of view regarding moral agents. Morality in this sense denotes modern moral systems, in particular utilitarianism and Kantian deontology, and has been the target of the recent anti-theory or anti-morality movement. Williams even claims, with regard to such a morality, that “we would be better off without it” (ibid., p. 174). Ethics, on the other hand, is believed to concern, as the word “ethics” itself suggests, an agent’s character, or the kind of person an agent is, and treats the agent as culturally and traditionally embedded. Its central notion is “virtue,” or the excellence of character, and it takes personal commitment, attachment, and deep convictions into serious consideration. Hence the sphere of ethics is much broader than that of morality. This distinction is essentially a distinction between virtue and morality. An anti-morality movement seeks to replace morality with a virtue ethics, a tendency described as “from morality to virtue” (Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* [New York: Oxford University Press], 1992).
- 3 – Cf. Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 75.

- 4 – *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a17. Hereafter, all quotations from Aristotle without prefix are from (and cited as) *NE*. Unless otherwise specified, the translation is from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), with occasional alterations.
- 5 – For Aristotle, a function is also a thing's end (cf. *De Caelo* 286a8–9; *Parts of Animals* 694b13–15; *Eudemian Ethics* [EE] 1219a8) or what constitutes a thing's essence (cf. *Meteorology* 390a10–12; *Parts of Animals* 640b33–641a6; *Generation of Animals* 731a25–26; *Metaphysics* 1045b32–34; *NE* 1176a3–9; *Politics* 1253a23–25).
- 6 – *Lun Yu (Analects)* 12.22. Hereafter, all quotations of Confucius without prefix are from the *Lun Yu*. Unless otherwise specified, the translation is based on that of D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1979), with alterations. “Love” as a determination of *ren* is affection and emotional attachment that originate among family members and are then extended to the larger society. It carries the implication of neither romantic love nor sacred love. Love in Confucius is close to “care” or “concern,” and is similar to the Greek *philia* (see below, note 28). 論語
- 7 – For a list of the texts upon which this distinction is revealed, see Wing-tsit Chan, “The Evolution of the Confucian Concept *Ren*,” *Philosophy East and West* 4 (1955): 297–298.
- 8 – Following Urmson and Irwin, I prefer to translate “*kata*” as “expressing” rather than “in accordance with.”
- 9 – This point enables ethical virtue to connect to reason by definition, but this is not clearly enough expressed in the current literature, as it usually makes a general claim that the human function is reason. This creates the impression that (ethical) virtue has little to do with the *ergon* argument.
- 10 – *Politics* 1253a1; cf. *NE* 1097b9–11, 1169b18–19.
- 11 – *Categories* 8b27–28 (cf. also 9a8–13); *NE* 1100b11–17, 1105a32–33, 1152a30–33.
- 12 – There is no need in this essay to enter the long-standing dispute about whether Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* is intellectualist (dominant) or comprehensive (inclusive). Personally I am sympathetic to the position that the tension between these two notions is not as sharp as is generally supposed. A life of contemplation is an ideal for human beings. Aristotle advises us to seek to realize completely this ideal, as he himself did throughout his life. But he Jiyuan Yu

also acknowledges that it is beyond human capability. For this reason, although he remarks that the life of moral virtue “is happy only in a secondary degree” compared with contemplation, he affirms that “the activities expressing this virtue are human” (1178a8–10).

- 13 – Other translations of *phronesis* include “intelligence” (Irwin) and “Prudence” (Rackham).
- 14 – 1112b13. Cf. 1112b34–35, 1144a8–9, 1145a5–6, 1140b11–20, 44a34–b1, 1151a15–19; *EE* 1227b12–19. This remark leads to a reading that practical wisdom and ethical virtue constitute a relation between the end and the means, and consequently that reason has nothing to do with ends. This reading was initiated by J. Walter, *Die Lehre der praktischen Vernunft in der griechischen Philosophie* (Jena, 1874), and has had a number of supporters in this century. In opposition, many commentators tend to argue that the Greek phrase “means to the end” (*ta pros to telos*) indicates a wider relation than its English counterpart suggests. “Means” can be either constitutive (i.e., what pertains to the end) or instrumental (e.g., what is toward the end) (cf. *Metaphysics* 1032b27; *Politics* 1325b16, 1338b2–4; *EN* 1144a3), and what Aristotle means is the former rather than the latter. This is certainly right. However, once we notice the cycle between reason and ethical virtue, the interpretation becomes also one-sided.
- 15 – It also amounts to what Wittgenstein calls “form of life.” For an interpretation of *li* in terms of “form of life,” see Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 75 ff.
- 16 – *Analects*, book X, describes in detail *li* in daily life, yet this description is widely regarded as “inauthentic.”
- 17 – In this sense Herbert Fingarette is certainly right to call it a “holy rite” or “sacred ceremony” (*Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, Harper Torch Books [New York: Harper and Row, 1972], pp. 6–7).
- 18 – *Metaphysics* 981a29.
- 19 – This is, indeed, the task Aristotle ascribes to his ethics. His dialectical ethics shows that we need to examine the *endoxa*, the received views (1098b23–26), at least the most influential among them (1095a28–30), to discover the *aporiai* these views cause, and then decide which of them should be followed or what can be preserved (1146b5–6; *EE* 1235b15–18). Aristotle tries to draw the whole truth that other views capture only in part.
- 20 – 1109b22–23. Cf. also 1110b6; 1126b4; 1141b27–28; 1142a24–27; 1143a28–35, b6; 1147a3, 25–26, b5.

- 21 – In this sense, Fingarette is certainly right in remarking that Confucius lacks a proper moral psychology. Cf. Fingarette, *Confucius*, chap. 2, “A Way without a Crossroads.”
- 22 – Cf. 1:13, 2:24, 5:16, 7:3, 12:10 and 20, 13:4, 15:16, 16:11. On the notion of “*yi*” at the passage 4:10 under discussion, many translators tend to view it as something external and objective, and render it as “what is moral” (D. C. Lau) or “righteousness as the standard” (Wing-tsit Chan). In other senses, *yi* is sometimes related to the regulation of the character of courage (2:24, 17:23), which is again close to *li*, and is sometimes opposed to small cleverness (15:17). Confucius says: “The gentleman has *yi* as his native substance (*chi*), and by observing *li* puts it into practice” (15:18). Since native substance at 4:16 is in contrast to culture (*wen*), *yi* in this context seems to refer to natural character before cultural refinement.
- 23 – Schwartz (*World of Thought*, pp. 79–80) also distinguishes *li* from *yi*, but he claims that *yi* is simply what is right beyond the reach of the prescription of *li*, and thus makes *yi* an independent source of right behavior alongside *li*. Chad Hansen also sees the distinction between *li* and *yi* as the distinction between etiquette (social mores) and real morality. Nonetheless, he also remarks: “Given the nature of Confucius’ reference to *yi* (morality), we cannot tell if he distinguished between real morality and a community’s social mores,” and “the discourse in the *Analects* makes no distinction between moral *dao* and conventional mores” (Hansen, *Daoist Theory*, p. 82).
- 24 – This account of *yi* and its relation to *li* is in contrast to the interpretation of Hall and Ames (*Thinking Through Confucius* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987]), who claim that there is a long-ignored distinction between *li* and *yi*. While *li* is not “divinely established” (p. 89), the notion of *yi* reflects a capacity to import the agent’s significance into the world, a “flexibility for a person to interact with and integrate into ever new situations”; *yi* is particular, creative, and responsive, and it is a “central theme” in Confucius to “underscore the creative and novel dimensions of *yi*” (p. 95). Consequently, a person of *ren* is made by exercising his own judgment (*yi*) to adapt the tradition (*li*). Although the authors do not refer to Aristotle, it is interesting that their reading of Confucius is virtually an Aristotelian one. *Li* corresponds to undogmatic *ethos*, and *yi* to practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Since I have argued that Confucius insisted on the continuity of the Zhou *li*, and that *yi* is conventional on the basis of *li* rather than personal, their interpretation seems to me to be open to challenge. Nevertheless, it is insightful of the authors of this interpretation to draw our attention to the

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ignored notion of *yi*, which seems exactly the place for developing Confucius' thinking.

- 25 – Here I follow the translation of Wing-tsit Chan (*A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963], p. 20).
- 26 – Bertrand Russell seems to miss the point entirely when he says: "Filial piety, and the strength of the family generally, are perhaps the weakest point in Confucian ethics" (*The Problem of China* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1922], p. 40).
- 27 – *NE* VII; *EE* 7; *Rhetoric* 1380b33 ff.
- 28 – This is suggested by Martha C. Nussbaum (*Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], p. 354). Other translations include "social relation" (Urmson) and "social sympathy" (Barker).
- 29 – For Aristotle, the relations between father and son, between husband and wife, and between brothers are various. They can be either monarchic, aristocratic, and timocratic, or tyrannical, oligarchic, and democratic. Accordingly, family relation cannot be in itself a source of social justice.
- 30 – *Philautos* 1169a11; cf. also 1169b1.
- 31 – 1169a2; cf. also 1162a15, 1168b35, 1178a2–3.
- 32 – J. M. Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," in Amélie Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 308.
- 33 – *Magna Moralia* 1213a10–26; *EE* 1245a29–37; *NE* 1170b7.
- 34 – Furthermore, virtue friendship exists only between good people who are similar in their virtues. Hence virtue is prior to and necessary for friendship.
- 35 – Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality," in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 18.
- 36 – This was later recognized in Chinese imperial law. See I. J. McMullen, "Filial Piety, Loyalty and Universalism in Japanese Thought of the Tokugawa Period," in *Filial Piety and Future Society* (Songnam: Academy of Korean Studies, 1995), p. 640.
- 37 – Hansen, *Daoist Theory*, p. 78.
- 38 – For a useful discussion of their relationship, see Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, pp. 286–287.

- 39 – The translation is based on that of Wing-tsit Chan (*Source Book*, p. 31), whose paragraph number is 6:28, while Lau's is 6:30.
- 40 – There is indeed a traditional interpretation in Aristotle scholarship that the cultivation of ethical virtue out of habits is a purely non-cognitive process of habituation. But this has been convincingly rejected by Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good," Richard Sorabji, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue" (both articles are included in Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*), and Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 41 – The traditional discussion of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean focuses on its quantitative determination, and the doctrine is accordingly not highly valued. But this traditional approach has been rejected by Urmson, who argues convincingly that the mean refers to the mean disposition toward action, rather than a disposition toward the mean action. See Urmson, "Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean," in the *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1973): 223–230, reprinted in Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*.
- 42 – Alasdair MacIntyre asks, "Whose justice? Which rationality?" (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality* [Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988]), and Bernard Williams attempts to replace both theory and prejudice with "reflection" (*Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* [London: Fontana, 1985], p. 112).
- 43 – The remark is from Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* 魯迅 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

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