Learning from Chinese Philosophies

Ethics of Interdependent and Contextualised Self

Karyn Lai

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ASHGATE

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To my parents,
Yap Soh Hua and *Lai Teong Seng,*
For three years of loving care … and much, much more.

"孩提之童, 無不知愛其親"
– Mencius 7A:15 (孟子: 盡心章句上")

'Revising the old in order to realise the new . . .'

温故而知新

-孔子論語為政第二

(Kongzi's *Analects*, Book Two 'Concerning Government')

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Introduction

> The Master said, 'Reviewing the old as a means of realising the new – such a person can be considered a teacher.' (*Analects* 2:11)

In this book, I seek to elucidate and relate conceptions of moral cultivation, self and community within Confucian and Daoist philosophies in order to furnish a fuller picture of what Chinese philosophy has to offer to contemporary understanding in these topic areas. I also set out the argument that the Confucian and Daoist traditions provide insights of continuing value, particularly in their distinctive ways of thinking about self-realisation, ethics and the human condition.

Reviewing the Old: Philosophising in Ancient China

The adverse circumstances during the Spring and Autumn period, *Chunqiu* (722–479 BCE), followed immediately by the Warring States period, *Zhanguo* (479–221 BCE), precipitated the formation and development of the hundred schools of thought (*baijia*) during the fifth to third centuries BCE.[1] Existing feudal states were dramatically reduced in number by internecine warfare, from fifty-five to ten, among which seven were pre-eminent. The continuing conflict between these states, combined with their attempts to stave off the advance of the Qin state, proved fatal. In 221 BCE, the Qin conquered all of them, bringing an end to the extended Zhou dynasty (1122–221 BCE).

Men belonging to aristocratic families were socially displaced when they lost their property, possessions and standing. In their quest to earn a living, one of the most obvious wares these gentlemen could offer was their learning. In the throes of the war, a new revolution had begun: education, up until then, had been a prerogative only of the nobility and the well-born. It was now available on the streets; some of these educated men, like Kongzi himself, were willing to teach students who were poor (*Analects* 7:7).

However, one should not overemphasise the availability of education during this period. Though many were now publicly peddling their opinions, that is not to say that there was a public education system. These wandering

[1] See Fung, 1952, pp. 132–69.

gentlemen sought, first and foremost, patrons – men of power and status – who would take them on as advisors and allow them to put their ideas into practice. Some of Kongzi's conversations in the *Analects* reveal glimpses of his life as one of those itinerant scholars – one of frustration, as few patrons shared Kongzi's idealistic insights (see *Analects* 1:16; 2:21; 9:13).

According to Yu-lan Fung, philosopher and intellectual historian of Chinese thought, Kongzi (551–479 BCE) himself would have had little intellectual challenge from those presenting different or opposing views, other than some 'recluses' he may have met.[2] The Mohist challenge was possibly the only significant one to Kongzi's ideas. However, by the time of Mengzi (385?–312? BCE), a prominent thinker of the Confucian school, adherents of the different schools frequently engaged in debates and expressly attacked the ideas proposed by their opponents.

The famous Jixia Academy was set up to encourage intellectual debates and functioned largely as a think-tank for the ruler of Qi. It was reputedly set up by King Wei of Qi (357?–320? BCE), who gathered many intellectuals of the day as advisors. There was active support for lively controversy as the intention was to gather those of different persuasions. Many notable thinkers including Xunzi (310?–219? BCE) and Shen Dao (350?–275 BCE) served at the Academy. The men associated with the Academy were given ranks and honours and appointed senior grand officers so that they might deliberate and propound their viewpoints.[3] It is worth noting that these men were not given political roles; they held only advisory capacities. Is this an indication that there was a conscious separation of political and administrative power?[4]

This socio-political background of the formation of the *baijia* is significant in another way. Many of these wandering scholars, being burdened with the unrest, offered their visions for rectifying society. The urgency of the matter dictated in large part the ruminations of these learned gentlemen. Much of the thought arising during this period is characterised by a focus on morality, political society and good governance. Thinkers were keen to offer their views on how social upheavals should be rectified. There was plenty of debate amongst these thinkers regarding socio-political utopias, methods of government, and its aims. Indeed, the phrase '*baijia zhi xue*' (hundred schools of

[2] Ibid.

[3] There was a rapidly increasing social mobility of a group of scholar-officials, the *shi*, during the Warring States period. While the *shi* originally served as soldiers and were characterised by loyalty to their respective patrons, by the end of the *Chunqiu* period (481 BCE), they had developed into a distinct social and cultural elite. Particularly during 512–464 BCE, the *shi*, having established themselves in their learning, began to play more active roles than rulers (Hsu, 1965, p. 8). Kongzi and many of his pupils belonged to this *shi* class (ibid., pp. 34–7). Competition between the many warring states brought to light the need for those in power to select capable functionaries (Hsu, 1999, pp. 572–83).

[4] Nivison, 1999, pp. 769–70.

thought) was used in the *Zhuangzi* text to express dismay at the multiplicity of solutions that were being offered and the resulting confusion:

> The empire is in utter confusion, sagehood and excellence are not clarified, we do not have the one Way and Power ... There is an analogy in the ears, eyes, nose and mouth; all have something they illuminate but they cannot exchange their functions, just as the various specialities of the Hundred Schools all have their strong points and at times turn out useful. However, they are not inclusive, not comprehensive; these are men each of whom has his own little corner. (*Zhuangzi* 33; trans. Graham, 2001, p. 275)

The tone of this passage from the *Zhuangzi* text is consonant with its general tenor that rejects the narrowness of each proposal. More importantly, the suggestion that the prescriptions of the hundred schools lack comprehensiveness, pre-empts later criticisms of the nature of Chinese philosophy. The ruminations of thinkers during this precursory stage have also been described by later scholars as not being sufficiently theoretical or philosophical. In particular, Yu-lan Fung responds to the challenge that the ideas of the Chinese thinkers had a primarily this-worldly focus, and did not include higher-order reflection of significant religious or transcendent dimensions.[5] Of course, while the focus on this-worldly concerns would have been due in large part to the originating background of the hundred schools, Fung highlights elements of reflectiveness and suggestiveness in many of the early texts. Most notably, he asserts that 'systematic, reflective thinking on life' is their core philosophical activity, which is also at the heart of all religions.[6] Here, I take a leaf from Fung's book, systematically to reflect on the deliberations of these early philosophers. I seek first to review the old, then to draw upon their insights in addressing a number of contemporary philosophical and ethical issues.

Kongzi and the Early Confucian Tradition

Kongzi's vision was a socio-political utopia that involved a reinstatement of the feudalistic hierarchy that flourished during the earlier part of the Zhou dynasty known as the Western Zhou period (1112–771 BCE). In the Confucian *Analects*, compilations of Kongzi's conversations, Kongzi specifically acknowledges this source of his inspiration (*Analects* 3:14; 7:5; 7:19). It is perhaps in view of his appeal to a previous historical period that Kongzi appears knowingly to assert that he is only a transmitter of teachings and ideas, and not an innovator (*Analects* 7:1).

[5] Fung, 1948, pp. 1–15.
[6] Ibid., pp. 2–3.

Kongzi draws on an existing stock of concepts including *ren* (traditional meaning: goodness or morality), *xiao* (filial piety), *li* (traditional meaning: sacrificial rites) and *junzi* (cultured gentleman). He then proceeds to apply them to the urgent issues of the day. This is perhaps why Chad Hansen argues that Kongzi does little more than present the 'baseline': 'the focus at the early Confucian baseline is not on metaphysics, but on guidance.'[7] Hansen asserts that Kongzi does not attempt to provide justification for his views, but simply presents his recommendations as ethical prescriptions:

> Confucius is less concerned with the criteria of morality than with its efficacy ... In this preliminary sense, then, we can see the point of Fingarette's and Rosemont's claims that Confucius has no moral theory.[8]

There are, however, important considerations that should not be neglected in an understanding of early Confucianism. First, Kongzi may also be considered an innovator in that he dramatically modified those concepts such that little of their original meanings remained. He gave the concept *ren* a central place in his philosophy and widened its scope to include uprightness of character and a capacity for enriching others (*Analects* 6:30). He also understood *li*, norms of social interaction, as corollary to *ren*. These behavioural norms gave full expression to a concern for humanity in lived ordinary contexts.

Kongzi identified *xiao*, filial piety, as a basic constituent in moral development, and saw that it provided the groundwork for one's later participation in the life of political society. According to the Confucian vision of government, deference and trust (*Analects* 12:7) were cultivated by the common people (*min*: see *Analects* 8:9) as a complement to the heightened responsibility of the ruler. At the apex of this moral hierarchy was the sage-king, the benevolent patriarch of the nation-family. In the *Analects*, we find a statement of confidence in political leadership that has guided the Chinese for many generations: 'the excellence of the exemplary person is the wind, while that of the petty person is the grass. As the wind blows, the grass is sure to bend' (*Analects* 12:19; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998).

Amongst Kongzi's innovations, the most radical one was the transformation of the concept of *junzi* (lit.: son of a prince). The phrase had referred to men belonging to families of respectable ancestral lineage, alluding to notions of seniority and respect.[9] The origins of the Confucian tradition are heavily steeped in *Ru* culture: the *Ru* were a social group of trained, educated men who

[7] Hansen, 1992, p. 86.
[8] Ibid., p. 83.
[9] The *Shuowen Jiezi* explains the association of *junzi* with *zun* (尊), a term indicating respect of seniority (p. 57). See Morton, 1971.

cultivated themselves in the traditional ritual arts such as music, dance and ceremonial behaviour[10] but Kongzi relocated the source of seniority in the cultivated moral character of these gentlemen.

The *Analects* unambiguously makes the point that moral cultivation is a prerequisite of social and political leadership. This view would have posed a direct challenge to those who held positions of power then. Kongzi's modification of the basic distinguishing criterion of social and political power is strikingly humanistic: regardless of status at birth, all had the capacity to learn to be human (*ren*).[11] Mengzi and Xunzi, two prominent thinkers of the early Confucian tradition, maintained the accessibility of self-cultivation to all men as a central theme in their philosophies. The realisation of *ren* and the flourishing of humanity within the communal context became a pivotal and distinguishing theme in the Confucian tradition. Is Kongzi really only a transmitter? Did he not engage reflectively with the issues at hand? Here, we note the comments of David Nivison, a contemporary scholar, who asserts that '[t]he repertory of Chinese philosophers begins with Confucius'[12] because:

> There was a more or less anonymous literary tradition in this time reaching back at least five centuries (in an already archaic language), and a tradition of history, institutions, concepts, and customs stretching back much farther than that, that people like Confucius were beginning to do more than just take for granted: to be aware of, consciously study or neglect, treasure or disregard.[13]

Another feature of early Confucian philosophy that is relevant to our discussion here concerns how one *reads* the Confucian *Analects*. The details of its composition are obscure, although it is certain that Kongzi was not its author. The text may best be understood as anecdotal recollections, a representation of Kongzi's ideas as he is remembered by his disciples and their disciples. The passages of the *Analects* are thus not authoritative and, as reconstructions of what Kongzi may have said, cannot be used as a basis on which to judge the quality of Kongzi's deliberations such as his intellectual rigour, or thoroughness of his justifications. Such evaluations are further confounded by the discovery in 1973 of a variant version of the *Analects* in Dingzhou, in Hebei Province. The *Dingzhou Analects* has been ascribed a date prior to 55 BCE, which means that it predates the extant version of the *Analects*.[14] In addition to the inherent interest in the variations between the

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[10] Hansen, 1992, pp. 57–8. There is debate on how much Kongzi and his disciples saw themselves as part of this group (see Hsu, 1965, esp pp. 34–7; and De Bary and Bloom, 1999, pp. 41–2).

[11] This phrase 'learning to be human' is from Tu, 1985, Chapter 3.

[12] Nivison, 1999, p. 746.

[13] Ibid., pp. 746–7.

[14] See Ames and Rosemont, 1998, 'Appendix I: The *Dingzhou Analects*', pp. 271–8.

Dingzhou and other extant versions, the discovery has increased awareness both of the different versions of the *Analects*, and of other texts associated with the *Analects*, from which ideas may have been drawn. It follows that, even though the *Analects* is the most extensive and reliable source of Kongzi's ideas, we cannot expect it to embody the same level of systematic consideration of issues as if it were a sole-authored piece.

The process of interpreting Confucian philosophy begins right at the start. The disciples of Kongzi and their students began a tradition of recollecting, examining and understanding Kongzi's ideas. Benjamin Schwartz suggests that Kongzi's first disciples were already embroiled in divisive debates regarding the conception of self-cultivation.[15] Disciples of the school, including Kongzi's grandson Zisi, as well as Mengzi and Xunzi, were also challenged by thinkers of other affiliations to justify Kongzi's claims. For example, Mengzi dwells at length with the topic of human nature – defending its innate goodness – in order to provide support for the Confucian idealistic vision of community.

Mengzi was a staunch defender of a number of Confucian themes, most notably that self-cultivation involved the realisation of the heaven-endowed mind-heart through the extension of compassion and concern for family members, to others outside the family. Recorded in the *Books of Mencius*, Mengzi's defence of early Confucian doctrine was so ardent that his idealism is more acutely palpable than that of the *Analects*.

Among the texts of the early Confucian period, it is the *Works of Xunzi* that best exemplifies an awareness of reflective philosophical activity. Xunzi had had extensive experience of philosophical debate as he was a senior scholar at the Jixia Academy, and possibly, for a period, the Head of the Academy. Xunzi's deep involvement with scholars from different schools meant that his defence of the Confucian faith had to be more rigorous. Also, in contrast with Mengzi, he seemed more willing to draw ideas from his opponents, defending what he believed was the *true* Confucian doctrine. Among other reasons, this readiness of Xunzi to absorb and adapt doctrines from other schools of thought has doubtless contributed to the general tendency to view Mengzi's philosophy, rather than Xunzi's, as carrying on the orthodox Confucian line.[16]

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[15] Schwartz, 1985, pp. 130–34.

[16] In the subsequent history of the Confucian tradition after the Han period (206 BCE–221 CE), Mengzi's view came to be regarded as the orthodox one, due perhaps to the psychological unease of the early Chinese with Xunzi's austere theory, or perhaps because Xunzi's beliefs were rather too unorthodox. Many also made some connection between Xunzi's views, and the consolidation of Legalist philosophy and power, given that Xunzi was the teacher both of the influential Legalist thinker Hanfeizi (d. 233 BCE) and of the prime minister of the tyrannical and legalist Qin state (221–206 BCE), Li Si (d. 208 BCE) (Chan, 1963a, p. 115). The influential Neo-Confucian thinker, Zhuxi (1130–1200 CE), was emphatic that Mengzi rather than Xunzi carried through the early Confucian orthodoxy. More recent commentators take the same polemic against Xunzi's philosophy,

The analysis of early Confucianism in this book focuses essentially on the ideas associated with Kongzi, Mengzi and Xunzi. Together, they represent the origins of Confucian philosophy: first exposition, persuasion, defence and interpretation. In spite of the subtle and important differences in the thoughts associated with each of these three thinkers, their ideas are unified in the affirmation of ethico-political leadership and its enriching effects on human community.

Early Debates on Dao, the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*

The *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* texts are widely accepted as the representative texts of early philosophical Daoism[17] (*daojia*: *dao* school of thought; coined by later Han scholars), though not without debate. Clearly, the two texts alone do not encapsulate the breadth of the debates and the diversity of ideas we may classify as 'Daoist'. The many strands of thought, some of which are expressed in the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*, include metaphysical speculation, mysticism of a religious and at times reclusive kind, and ruminations about political methodology, as well as cultural and social issues. Furthermore, unlike the elite *Ruist* thinkers, who shared and debated ideas with those of similar philosophical convictions under the rubric of a 'school' of thought, Daoist thinkers did not belong to any organised school as such, and hence were a much more amorphous group.

Of the two texts, it is only the 'inner chapters' (*neipian*) of the *Zhuangzi* text to which scholars can more confidently ascribe an author, Zhuang Zhou (between 399 BCE and 295 BCE). The origins and authorship of the *Daodejing* text are as elusive as its cryptic passages, and this is due largely to its composite authorship. Contemporary scholars no longer hold to the view that the text is associated with one author, Laozi, traditionally identified as an older contemporary of Kongzi.[18] Linguistic and philological analyses demonstrate that the *Daodejing* was most probably a compiled text composed over a significant period of time. The view that the *Daodejing* may have been

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associating it with the dark ages of legalist Qin rule: 'The logical outcome of Hsüntze's position was the stiff legalism which followed only a few decades after his death ...' (J. Leighton Stuart, foreword to Dubs, 1966, p. xv).

[17] This should be distinguished from the later development, during the Han dynasty, of a religious Daoism which was effectively an organised religion, incorporating elements of revelation to Celestial Masters, 'doctrines, rituals, gods, and the ultimate goal of ascension to the heavens of the immortals' (Kohn, 1996, p. 52; see also Robinet, 1997).

[18] This view was dominant because it was articulated by the influential historian Sima Qian (145?–86? BCE) at the beginning of the first century BCE in the *Shiji* (*Records of the Grand Historian*). There, Sima presents Laozi as a historian in charge of archives. Kongzi meets with Laozi and, following their conversation, describes the latter in reverential terms, as a 'dragon' (*Shiji*, 63).

composed during the sixth century BCE has also been dispelled, with the debates now focusing on whether the text was composed any earlier than the third century BCE. As is the case with the *Analects*, the discovery of older versions of the *Daodejing* – at Mawangdui in 1973 and Guodian in 1993 – have added to the difficulty of interpreting the text, and further intensified its studies.[19]

With regard to the relation of the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*, it had been widely held that the *Daodejing* is expressive of a Daoism that is in its early formative stages, while the *Zhuangzi* captures the tenor of a developed, mature Daoist philosophy. Han thinkers classified the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* as the two definitive texts, amongst others, of one unified early Daoist philosophical tradition (*daojia*). But certainly the tendency to treat the two texts as espousing a homogeneous point of view must be avoided. Historically, the date of composition of the *Daodejing* is indeterminate; some of its ideas may have been drawn from *Zhuangzi*, or some themes in both texts may share a common source.[20] Philosophically, there are important differences in the subject matter, the treatment of issues and the method of argumentation in the two texts. To suggest that one is a sequel to the other is to run the risk of brushing aside their significant differences.

The *Daodejing* deals with a broad range of topics pertaining especially to government. Here, we have deliberations about the aims and method of government, with particular focus on the concept of *wuwei* (non-coercing action) (*Daodejing* 3, 48, 63, 78). On the other hand, the seemingly relaxed nature of Daoist government seems at odds with the references to a premeditated strategy of lying low in order to conquer (*Daodejing* 61, 66). The text also deals more generally with existing ethical values and pursuits, and seeks to reject or overturn those (*Daodejing* 2, 12, 18, 19, 20) through the endorsement of both polarities in each pair of opposites (*Daodejing* 22, 26, 36,

[19] For example, the bamboo strips on which the Mawangdui texts are inscribed are arranged in such a way that the final 44 chapters (of 81) of the received text, the *De Jing* (*De* classic), are placed first. This challenges the organisation of the extant version, which until then had been classified by scholars as the *Dao Jing* (*Dao* classic) comprising 37 chapters, and the remaining 44 as the *De Jing* (for example, Lau, 1963). To acknowledge the textual differences in the two versions, a translator of the Mawangdui *Daodejing* has labelled his translation the '*Dedaojing*' (Henricks, 1989). There are subtle but important differences in the versions, and some existing scholarship on the *Daodejing* has been thrown into disarray as new considerations have arisen regarding the issue of originality. Some balance needs to be struck regarding the relative importance of these versions. On the one hand, the positioning of the text in Chinese intellectual history is important in its interpretation. On the other, however, an earlier version does not guarantee authenticity. There would have been a tradition of copying texts for studying and memorisation, and both versions could in fact be approximations of the original – if, indeed, there was one 'original' and authentic *Daodejing* (Hansen, 1992, n. 7, at p. 400).

[20] Schwartz, 1985, p. 186.

43). In this sense, it appears to reject many of the concerns in Confucianism including cultivated status, the propagation of norms and active political leadership that is deliberate in its application of paradigmatic force in setting the prevailing standards (*Analects* 12:19). Some of its passages suggest a reversal of then contemporary norms and methods while others seem to gesture at an elusive primordial reality.

In comparison with the themes in the *Daodejing*, the subject matter in the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* text is much more unified. The inquiry has a conspicuously playful tone, yet it is carefully executed so as not to trivialise the subject matter. There is, in the *Zhuangzi*, an overall sense of detachment from the whole range of human pursuits: social, ethical, political and epistemological. The critical disinterest in the *Zhuangzi* stems from its scepticism about claims of universality, absolutism, objectivity or an Archimedean perspective that sees the 'view from nowhere'. It cleverly wonders about conventional notions of power, right and wrong, wisdom and knowledge, throwing these to the wind. It proposes instead the irreducibility of individual perspectives and in doing so influences its readers humbly to realise the limitations of their viewpoints.

The analysis in this book relies on the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* texts, not because they are unified in ideas but rather because the two together capture the essence of early Daoist philosophical thought and form the core of its early ideology.

Reviewing the Old and Realising the New

The book is organised in two parts. The first, comprising Chapters One to Four, is essentially expository. The chapters in Part II, Chapters Five to Eight, engage Confucian and Daoist ideas in a number of contemporary philosophical debates.

A novel approach used here is to present the interplay of respective themes in the two traditions, articulating their responses to each other. In the debates during the period of the hundred schools, Daoism posed the greatest challenge to Confucianism in that it not only questioned foundational ideas in Confucianism, but also problematised existing core values of Chinese society as it then was. Confucianism and Daoism are often seen as oppositional to each other. The analysis in this book is built upon the view that one gains deeper insights into these two philosophies when the respective concepts of each are scrutinised in the light of the other.

The method of engaging the two traditions highlights the nature of philosophy as a reflective and reflexive activity. As a reflective activity, it

examines key ideas in each tradition, the justification for them and how they are utilised in the relevant texts, and how they relate to other concepts within the tradition. Reflective activity understood in this way is introspective. By contrast, reflexive activity is not inward-looking; it uses the other as a mirror in order better to understand the self. Reflexive activity allows for the uniqueness of each tradition and their distinctive concepts, themes and perspectival frameworks, to be accentuated. In undertaking reflexive activity, we pause to consider how concepts within a tradition might have been received by another with opposing views. This is a key aspect of the dialectical method articulated and exemplified especially in Zhuangzi's philosophy.

As the emphasis is on what can be drawn from the insights of early Confucian and Daoist philosophies, the exposition and analysis of ideas will to some extent be determined by the creative adaptation of some of their teachings to address issues in the contemporary world. The texts are read as philosophical treatises, rather than historical records. My aim is not to present an accurate account of Chinese intellectual history during the Chunqiu and Zhanguo periods; there are many existing and noteworthy texts that aim to fulfil this objective. The selection of texts for examination – the *Analects*, *Books of Mencius*, and *Works of Xunzi* in the Confucian tradition – are representative of early Confucian *philosophical* thought, but by no means exhaustive of the rich Confucian literature of that period that has profound historical and sociological significance. Likewise, the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* texts are the most important Daoist philosophical works from that period and for that reason have been selected for study.

Insights are drawn from early Confucian and Daoist philosophy especially to support a conception of interdependent and embedded self. I argue that, in both philosophies, the individual is construed as essentially interdependent with others. The discussions in the chapters explore the nuances and complexities of this general theme as they are articulated in the two philosophies. In Confucian philosophy, the notion of interdependent self is articulated most clearly in a relational ethic. Self-cultivation, a major theme in Confucian philosophy, focuses centrally on the negotiation of relationships that require skills in balancing competing demands, loyalties and obligations. Because aspects of relationality are morally weighty, moral deliberation is not driven ultimately by considerations of value, rules or correct application of principles. The fundamental concern in Confucian ethics may briefly be described as the application of right action by cultivated individuals who are mindful of their relational commitments.

The Daoist picture of self has a subtly different focus. I argue that both the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* texts support a picture of self that is fundamentally embedded in its larger environmental context. Also, from Zhuangzi's point of view, contextual embeddedness is a necessary feature of all proposals and all knowledge claims. Every perspective, whether human, bird or fish, is lodged in

such a way that no one perspective can ever attain the status of universality or objectivity. The ethical implications of lodged perspectives include a heightened awareness of the specific details of individual needs and interests. Where the Confucian thesis emphasises interdependence of related selves, Daoism highlights the embeddedness of individuals in their particular environmental contexts.

Notwithstanding important differences in Confucian and Daoist philosophies, both philosophies endorse the importance and irreducibility of particular relational and circumstantial features in morality. They also share the view that the essence of morality lies in its concrete and particular instantiations. The notion of interdependent self in Chinese philosophy stands in stark contrast to the self as detached and independent in a number of western philosophical streams.

This picture of a relationally-constituted and embedded self in Chinese philosophy has important implications for how we might understand ethics, government and society. For example, moral cultivation – or, more generally, the development of the self – is a complex process of self-definition within particular contextual and relational boundaries. This conceptualisation of self-realisation shatters the theoretical dichotomy of self and society, commonly assumed and unquestioned, in moral theories in the western philosophical tradition. Accordingly, important ethical issues in Confucian and Daoist philosophies include the cultivation of skills for negotiating and balancing competing demands and obligations, and the inculcation of ethical sensitivity to others and to morally salient circumstantial features. I apply these insights from Chinese philosophy to key issues in contemporary ethical and political debates. I continue in the interpretive tradition to examine discussions of personhood, gender, identity, autonomy, ethics, moral cultivation, government, tradition, change, freedom, conflict and compromise, with a view to forging a realistic and unified picture of ethics and human personhood.

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I
Reviewing the Old

CHAPTER ONE

Self and Society in Confucian Thought

Human Nature and the Sources of Self: *Ren*

The concept *ren* was in use in pre-Confucian texts such as the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing*) and the *Book of Poetry* (*Shijing*), although it had a narrow referent.[1] In the former, for instance, *ren* refers to the benevolent attitude of the ruler (King Tang) to his subjects; in two hunting poems in the *Shijing*, *ren* denotes a manly or virile quality, in the case of two huntsmen who were 'handsome and *ren*'.[2]

There is general consensus amongst scholars that the scope and depth of the concept underwent dramatic change in the *Analects*, where *ren* is mentioned in 58 of its 499 passages. Nevertheless, readers are often disconcerted by its lack of proper definition and this leads in part to its diverse translations into English as benevolence, humanity, sympathy, compassion, magnanimity and human-heartedness and, more recently, as 'authoritative [personhood]'.[3]

Etymological analysis of the Chinese character – on the left half, the character signifying 'human,' and on the right half, 'two' – suggests that *ren* pertains to human relatedness. The *Shuowen* lexicon, the earliest surviving Chinese dictionary, compiled in 90 CE by Xu Shen, identifies *qing*, human sympathy and closeness, as a meaning of *ren*. It also refers to the term *xiang*, which denotes mutuality and cooperation (*Shuowen jiezi*, p. 365).

In the *Analects*, *ren* is not to be equated with effectiveness in any one single sphere (*Analects* 5:8). It is associated with virtues or moral capacities such as deference, tolerance, making good on one's word, diligence and generosity (17:6); uprightness, courage, resoluteness (17:8); and honesty and trustworthiness (13:27). It is not reducible to any one quality or virtue, or even a set of them. It is realised in different contexts: deference at home, respect in handling public affairs, and doing one's utmost in interactions with others (13:19); and, perhaps of paramount importance, a person committed to *ren* does no wrong (4:4).

Ren is often coupled with practical wisdom (*zhi*), the two capacities working together, and sometimes in tandem with other ones (*Analects* 6:22; 6:23; 9:29; 15:33). In its coupling with *zhi*, *ren* refers to an attitude manifest both in speech

[1] Chan, 1955.
[2] Schwartz, 1985, pp. 75f.; see also Chan, 1955, p. 295 at nn. 4 and 5.
[3] Ames and Rosemont, 1998; and Hall and Ames, 1987, pp. 110ff.

(12:3) and action (4:22; 14:27). It is associated with a commitment to hard work (6:22) and its realisation is an overwhelmingly difficult task, arduous (15:10), and perhaps even life-threatening (15:9). The cultivated Confucian gentleman, the *junzi*, cleaves to *ren* at all times; 'never for a moment does a gentleman part from [*ren*]; he clings to it through trials, he clings to it through tribulations' (*Analects* 4:5; trans. Leys, 1997, p. 15).

The embodiment of *ren* as an attitude which guides decisions and behaviour is most clearly articulated in a seemingly simple statement that the *ren* person is not anxious (*Analects* 9:29 and 14:28). Yet, the profundity of being at ease in one's environment is conveyed in the statement that the *ren* person is calm and composed in a range of situations.

The Confucian paradigmatic person (*junzi*), who is also the embodiment of *ren*, is at ease. He is 'calm and unperturbed; [while] the petty person is always agitated and anxious' (*Analects* 7:37, trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 119; see also *Analects* 13:23 and 15:2). Confucian scholar Antonio Cua aptly expresses the enviable disposition of the man of *ren*: '[h]is *easeful* life is more a matter of attitude and confidence in his ability to deal with difficult and varying situations, rather than an exemplification of his infallible judgment and authority'.[4]

What are the training processes involved in attaining such composure? One should learn widely, yet being focused in purpose, inquire earnestly yet reflect closely at what is at hand (*Analects* 19:6). In *Analects* 4:6, the ultimate importance of *ren* and the difficulty of fully embodying it are clearly articulated:

> The Master said, 'I have yet to meet people who are truly fond of authoritative conduct (*ren*) and who truly abhor behaviour contrary to it. There are none superior to those who are fond of authoritative conduct. . . . Are there people who, for the space of a single day, have given their full strength to authoritative conduct? I have yet to meet them. As for lacking the strength to do so, I doubt there are such people – at least I have yet to meet them.' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 90)

Kongzi here presents a problem with his *ren* ideal. The problem is one of motivation and commitment rather than a lack of ability to pursue that ideal. However, this passage also raises more questions than it answers. Are we looking for a commitment to pursue *ren* or is it an inborn capacity? Does *ren* admit of degrees such that it may be possible for one to embody *ren* only partially? If so, how is it manifest in stages of progression? It is to some of these questions we now turn.

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[4] Cua, 1971, p. 47.

Human Nature in the Analects

Kongzi upheld an optimistic humanism in his conceptualisation of the ideal community. The tenor in the *Analects* regarding human nature suggests – though it is never explicit – that there is an innate disposition in all humans toward the good. Kongzi remarked that 'If a *junzi* lived among [the barbarians] there would not be vulgarity or corruptness' (*Analects* 9:13, trans. mine; see also 4:25; 13:16; 8:2; 13:19).

There is some attempt in the *Analects* to provide justification for an innate ethical disposition rooted in transcendent *tian* (colloquially translated 'heaven') (*Analects* 7:22; 7:23; see also 2:4 and 18:8). On the whole, however, this line of argument is simply too ambiguous and imprecise as there were many diverse meanings of *tian* during that time.[5] Discussions of *tian* in the *Analects* seem to focus on the *continuing* development of a heaven-endowed nature, rather than the justification of the idea. In this regard, fulfilling the mandate of heaven (*tianming*) was understood to be an important part of human self-realisation. Kongzi claims in *Analects* 2:4 that he had come to understand it at fifty – that is, only in his mature years – and had his ear attuned, presumably to this mandate, at sixty.

This ethical cosmology of humans and *tian* in partnership persisted in the continuing development of Confucianism through to the Neo-Confucian period. It provided justification for two key fundamental Confucian themes, that in every human being lies the potential for self-development, and that the ultimate fruition of human self-cultivation was to be realised in human society. Hence, it is hardly surprising that in the *Analects*, there is considerable focus on how human nature might be developed (1:12; 3:19; 4:13; 6:25; 8:8; 15:32; 20:3), though scant evidence that Kongzi had attempted to define human nature. The few discussions of human nature (*xing*) in the *Analects* focus only on its development. *Analects* 17:2 rushes quickly through the notion of *xing* to focus on its cultivation or practice, *xi*: 'By nature [*xing*] men are nearly alike, by practice [*xi*], they get to be wide apart' (trans. Legge, 1991a, p. 318).

The lack of definition of *xing* in the *Analects* has resulted in a wide variety of interpretations regarding its meaning.[6] It does appear that dwelling on the

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[5] Yu-lan Fung identifies five different senses of *tian* in early Chinese thought. These are: a material or physical sky; a ruling or presiding order; a fatalistic dimension, incorporating the notion of fate; a naturalistic conception of the natural world; and an ethical source (Fung, 1952, pp. 30–31). In the *Analects*, *tian* is a cosmic force, responsible not only for the existence of all things (*baiwu*) but also for the natural course of events, such as the four seasons (see *Analects* 17:19, and especially *Zhong Yong*, 1:1; 17:3). In addition, *tian* is also portrayed as having supernatural powers to which humans had access through prayer; *tian* was a protector of the righteous (*Analects* 3:13; 7:23; 14:37).

[6] For instance, James Legge, an early interpreter of Chinese thought and translator of the Chinese classics, argues that the term *xing* used here refers not to moral constitution alone but

'correct' understanding of *xing* in the *Analects* may be pointless and indeed misguided as we are told that Kongzi himself did not discuss it (*Analects* 5:13). If we are to mirror the emphasis in the *Analects* on the cultivation of (human) nature rather than dwell on its precise definition, we would agree with Angus Graham's remark that the passage *Analects* 17:2 is really a sociological observation rather than a philosophical point.[7] What can be gleaned from the passage is that there is an inherent nature shared by individual human beings. This incipient moral goodness is subsequently overshadowed by habits or everyday practice, or improved through cultivation. The debate on the cultivation of human nature developed much further both within and outside the Confucian school. Yet, within the Confucian school itself, the disagreements between Mengzi and Xunzi have been a focal point for those attempting to understand Confucian philosophy.

Mengzi: The Cultivation of Innate Human Nature

Mengzi's optimistic assessment of human nature is captured in a short, cryptic phrase: 'human nature is good' (*xing shan*) (*Books of Mencius* 6A:6). He pauses to consider different pictures of *xing*:

> Kung-tu Tzu said, 'Kao Tzu said, "There is neither good nor bad in human nature," but others say, "Human nature can become good or it can become bad, and that is why with the rise of King Wen and King Wu, the people were given to goodness, while with the rise of King Yu and King Li, they were given to cruelty." Then there are others who say, "there are those who are good by nature, and there are those who are bad by nature. For this reason, Hsiang could have Yao as Prince, and Shun could have the Blind Man as father, and Ch'i, Viscount of Wei and Prince Pi Kan could have Tchou as nephew as well as sovereign." Now you say human nature is good. Does this mean that all the others are mistaken?' (*Mencius* 6A:6; trans. Lau, 1979b, p. 247)

The different conceptions of human nature are offered as contrasts to Mengzi's own, include the following:

(a) There is no morality (or immorality) inherent in human nature;

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includes the complex combination of material, animal and intellectual characteristics of humanity. There is a split between three of its faculties, the material, animal and intellectual, with the fourth one, the moral. The first three work together to lead the moral faculty astray (Legge, 1991a, p. 318). Yet other retrospective, Neo-Confucian interpretations align *xing* with human physical nature (see Chan 1963b, who notes (at pp. 45–6) that this definition of *xing* was defended by a number of Neo-Confucian thinkers). The *Shuowen Jiezi* associates *xing* with a sense of moral goodness (*shan*), at p. 502.

[7] Graham, 1990, p. 18.

(b) Humans are born as blank slate, a *tabula rasa*. They become good or bad, depending on the influences around them;
(c) Humans do possess inherent moral quality, though it is not a universal feature of all to be born intrinsically good; some humans are born good, and others are born bad.

Asked to clarify his position that human nature is good, Mengzi begins with the refutation of Gaozi's (Kao-Tzu) view that the capacity for goodness is not inherent or intrinsic in human nature.[8] In his extended responses to Gaozi's views, Mengzi situates the source of morality in the mind-heart (*xin*), which is the seat of compassion, shame, respect and right or wrong. Not only is *xin* an intrinsic feature of humanity, it also distinguishes humans from other animals (*Books of Mencius*, 2A:6; 4B:19; 6A:8). However, *xin* cannot at the same time be a determining force that drives all human actions toward goodness; this would have defeated the Confucians' stance on the necessity of self-cultivation. Mengzi also wants to say that humans must persist in *becoming* good (*weishan*), and that this venture is grounded in their possession of the mind-heart (*xin*). But many scholars agree that Mengzi does not properly refute Gaozi's argument. Indeed, Mengzi's refutation consists primarily in an emphatic assertion of his view.

Mengzi must also resist the position in (c), that innate moral characteristics or propensities are variable and different across individuals. The claim that goodness is a universal human quality or capacity is a fundamental theme in Mengzi's optimism regarding the moral efforts of humanity and the potential perfectibility of all humans, regardless of hereditary status.[9] He sets out a lengthy argument in his attempt to establish that *xin* is universally possessed by all humans, boldly proclaiming: 'The sage and I are of the same kind' (*Mencius*, 6A:7; trans. Lau, 1979b, p. 249). The *irrelevance* of hereditary status to moral cultivation (and, ultimately, to involvement in good government) was an important underlying theme in Kongzi's and Mengzi's philosophies. Both, common men without noble birthright, had undertaken to provide advice on good government to those already in power, on the basis of their moral cultivation and ethical commitments.

This discussion of Mengzi's views on human nature is rather fluid; it slips from a discussion of *xing*, human nature, to *xin*, the moral mind-heart of humanity. However, this slippage is intended as it captures and reflects the plasticity in Mengzi's concept of human goodness. Benjamin Schwartz notes

[8] Kwong-Loi Shun presents a detailed analysis of Mengzi's discussions with Gaozi, including philosophical details of their debates (1997, pp. 87–94). Little is known of Gaozi's background and associations. Shun discusses a number of theses regarding his philosophical affiliations at pp. 123ff.

[9] Chad Hansen is correct in noting that Mengzi's view of human nature is far more optimistic than that set out in the *Analects* (1992, pp. 71f.).

that 'the center of Mencius' problematique in dealing with man is really *not* the nature [*xing*] but the heart/mind [*xin*]'.[10]

An instance of this coterminous usage of nature, *xing*, and mind-heart, *xin*, appears in Mengzi's attempt to justify human goodness:

> For a man to give full realization to his heart is for him to understand his own nature, and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven. By retaining his heart and nurturing his nature he is serving Heaven ... (*Mencius* 7A:1; trans. Lau, 1979b, p. 287).

To realise the aims of one's *xin* (*jin qi xin*) is to comprehend one's nature (*zhi qi xing*). Comprehending one's nature, in turn, is the ultimate affirmation of the service of *tian* in the fulfilment of its matters (*suoyi shitian*). Mengzi's view of *xing* should be understood in its intellectual environment which emphasised an expectant, religious unity between the cosmic forces of Heaven and Earth, effected by the capable sage-ruler.[11] However, as it is with the *Analects*, Mengzi's primary emphasis is not to explore the cosmic or superhuman bases of humanity but simply to use them as a transcendent grounding for his optimistic view of human capacities and potential.[12] In addition to the ambiguity of the concept *xing*,[13] Mengzi's discussions of it provide rich – though at many points puzzling – ideas which embrace debates in anthropology, philosophy and moral psychology. An important focus regarding *xing* centres on whether the concept of 'original' goodness is to be understood as an innate disposition toward goodness, or the possession of capacity for goodness which requires further development.

The first and stronger assertion, that goodness is innate, is suggested in Mengzi's example of how *any person* would feel distress at seeing a child about to fall into a well, and that this is not due to considerations of profit or advantage (*Books of Mencius*, 2A:6; see also 6A:10). This interpretation that there is some spontaneous desire to select the good suggests a naturalistic and deterministic account of goodness.[14] Defenders of this view would be hard-pressed to provide reasons for greed, selfishness and evil. On the other hand, it

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[10] Schwartz, 1985, p. 266.

[11] This strategy of Mengzi's to ground *xing* in *tian* resonates with the themes espoused in the *Zhongyong* (the *Doctrine of the Mean*). The *Zhongyong* is a classical Confucian text reputedly written by Kongzi's grandson Zisi, although some of it appears to have earlier origins. Other parts of it date from as late as the early Han period. Tu Wei-ming presents a metaphysical and religious interpretation of Confucian self-cultivation based on the *Zhongyong* (Tu, 1976).

[12] Ahern, 1980, p. 183.

[13] See Schwartz, 1985, pp. 288ff.; Ch'en, 1953; and Graham, 1967.

[14] See, for example, Creel, 1975, p. 88.

is difficult fully to dismiss this interpretation because Mengzi seems at times to be suggesting that people are predisposed to act morally.[15]

The second, weaker, interpretation holds that humans possess a *capacity* for goodness which must be developed; if it is not properly cultivated, it will easily be overcome by the adverse influences in society. In the famous discussion of the trees of the Niu Mountain, Mengzi draws an analogy between moral cultivation and the nourishment and care that the trees should have (*Books of Mencius*, 6A:8). This conception of *xing* provides a clear justification for the need for self-cultivation.[16]

Because there is support in the *Books of Mencius* text for both interpretations, there is some consensus amongst scholars that *xing* embodies a dual, though not necessarily dualistic, meaning.[17] Hence, *xing* has sometimes been metaphorically described as a 'seed'. In its first sense, *xing* refers to an inborn or inherent capacity for goodness. Secondly, *xing* points to the need for cultivation in order to nurture, develop and actualise the original capacity. Philological considerations are somewhat relevant in the justification of this interpretation. A.C. Graham notes the etymological origins of the term *xing*, which takes half its character from the term *sheng*, meaning growth.[18] Graham also appeals to the dynamism in Chinese concepts to justify the two-pronged meaning of *xing*:

> Mencius in particular seems never to be looking back towards birth, always forward to the maturation of a continuing growth. This accords with one's general impression when groping towards an understanding of early Chinese concepts, that often they tend to be more dynamic than their nearest Western equivalents, and that English translation freezes them into immobility.[19]

In Chapter 6A:6, Mengzi is explicit that the four sprouts of human virtue require further development. The suggestion that humans are born with a capacity for goodness and should work to see the fruition of that goodness, would have been an optimistic and encouraging proposal, offered in response to the socio-political strife during the Warring States period.[20] Mengzi began

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[15] Shun, 1997, pp. 136–49 and 91–94.

[16] Ch'en, 1953; and Lau, 1979b, 'Introduction', at pp. ix–xlviii.

[17] Schwartz, 1985, p. 266; and Hwang, 1979, pp. 201–9.

[18] Graham, 1990, pp. 7ff. The *Shuowen Jiezi* also emphasises the derivative meaning of *xing* from *sheng*, growth. Further, it states that the term derives from *xin*, the heart-mind (at p. 502). These derivatives taken together suggest a cultivation, a continual growth, of the *xin*. This could indicate the influence of Mencian philosophy in the *Shuowen*'s explication of *xing*.

[19] Graham, 1990, p. 7.

[20] Many analyses of Mengzi's thought are critical of its idealism and lack of empirical support. Chad Hansen, however, seems correct in suggesting that one problem in Mengzi's theory of human nature is not that the four shoots of goodness are not universal features of the human psyche, but,

with a positive evaluation of human nature, pronouncing an optimistic vision for the flourishing of humanity. Although many aspects of Mengzi's philosophy are open to interpretation and riddled with questionable analogies, the tenor of his ideas and the aspiration toward a humane, benevolent government would have had much popular appeal in the climate of war and terror then prevailing.

Xunzi: The Social Regulation of Human Nature

In contrast to Mengzi's positive assessment of *xing*, Xunzi's views are notably pessimistic, his treatise on *xing* being specifically entitled 'Human Nature is Evil' (*xing e*). In direct opposition to Mengzi's well-known example of how any individual would immediately respond to stop a child from falling into a well (*Books of Mencius*, 2A:6), Xunzi presents his empirical example of brothers vying for property, who are self-serving and lack consideration for the other. Noting that such selfishness is pervasive, Xunzi presents an urgent case for the necessity of self-cultivation within a regulated socio-political context. He begins with a bleak postulation about the severe lack (of moral goodness) in original human nature:

> Man's nature [*xing*] is evil; goodness is the result of conscious activity. The nature of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit ... He is born with feelings of envy and hate ... Man is born with the desires of the eyes and ears, with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds ... Hence, any man who follows his nature and indulges his emotions will inevitably become involved in wrangling and strife, will violate the forms and rules of society, and will end as a criminal. (Trans. Watson, 1963, p. 157)

Xunzi does not merely assert that *xing* is ambivalent toward good acts or behaviours. He emphasises the *actively* negative character of *xing*. The unregulated human being is self-serving and profit-seeking. It is also not entirely clear what Xunzi means by '*e*', often translated 'evil' by commentators. Xunzi's use of the concept seems to refer to basic selfishness rather than malevolent intentions.

The disagreements between Mengzi and Xunzi generate important philosophical and ethical implications. Scholars have debated the difference between Mengzi's and Xunzi's different uses of *xing*. Some focus on the scope of *xing*, arguing that the difference in the views may be attributed to different

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rather, that they are far too *specific*. Hansen writes: 'The empirical problem is not that his theory is implausibly *optimistic* as much as that it is implausibly *specific* about the *innate judgments of what counts as good*' (Hansen, 1992, p. 168). According to this account, Mengzi appears to have not adequately provided a rationale for the selection of certain traits as innately human.

facets of human nature included in *xing*.[21] Others argue that *xing* in the respective philosophies is actually two different concepts.[22]

The *methodology* of moral cultivation, a pedagogical issue, is one of the themes dividing Mengzi's and Xunzi's philosophies. It has been suggested by Chad Hansen that the philosophical distance between the two philosophies has persisted through to Neo-Confucian thought.[23] There are, on the one hand, the innatists (like Mengzi) – for whom moral cultivation is essentially a drawing-out of an innately good nature – and, on the other, the traditionalists (like Xunzi) – for whom moral cultivation requires constant practice. Philip Ivanhoe has also pointed out the different learning strategies implicated in each philosophy. Mengzi's mode of cultivation involves an expectant reflective contemplation.[24] By contrast, self-cultivation in Xunzi's case would involve an arduous struggle to learn from sources external to the self.

Xunzi builds upon his grim prognosis to justify the need for the external regulation of moral behaviour through *li* (ritual propriety), *yi* (standards of rightness) and *fa* (punishments):

> Now the nature of man is evil. It must depend on teachers and laws [*fa*] to become correct and achieve propriety [*li*] and righteousness [*yi*] ... The sage-kings of antiquity, knowing that the nature of man is evil, and that it is unbalanced, off the track, incorrect, rebellious, disorderly, and undisciplined, created the rules of propriety and righteousness and instituted laws and systems in order to correct man's feelings, transform them, and direct them ... (Trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 128)

Yet, on the other hand, Xunzi's projections for a society of people tempered by *li*, *yi* and *fa* are propitious: moral training and development can effectively overcome tendencies toward selfish indulgence. Burton Watson comments on Xunzi's contrast between original nature and its subsequent development: 'To this dark initial thesis Hsün Tzu contraposes the almost unlimitedly bright possibilities for improvement through study and moral training'.[25] His proposal for external regulation of behaviours does, in some ways, weigh favourably against the idealism in Mengzi's inherent capacity for goodness. Mengzi assumes that the task of moral persuasion does not require external regulation (though it might require guidance) but instead lies in understanding the problem with the lost *xin* (mind-heart) and how it might be restored (6A:11,12). Hence, Mengzi states explicitly that the office of *xin* is to reflect and contemplate (*si*) (6A:15).

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[21] Ch'en, 1953; and Ahern, 1980. See also Munro, 1969.
[22] Graham, 1967; and Graham 1989, pp. 250f.
[23] Hansen, 1992, p. 380 at n. 16.
[24] Ivanhoe, 1990.
[25] Watson, 1963, p. 5.

It seems that, in their responses to the socio-political unrest, Mengzi and Xunzi began from opposite ends. Mengzi sought to build upon an embryonic suggestion in the early Confucian school that goodness is inherent in humanity. He optimistically projected that human society would flourish if these sprouts of goodness were nurtured, the process initiated by capable leaders using appropriate resources. Xunzi, on the other hand, seems to have postulated original selfishness to justify his recommendation for standards and measures such as *li*, *yi* and *fa* to be enforced.[26]

If behaviour is to be other-regarding and altruistic, it will have to be channelled and regulated by external guidelines and restrictions. Thus, Xunzi's proposed methodology for ethical cultivation has a more behaviouristic focus than Mengzi's. Xunzi's thesis relies heavily on the need for concerted human effort because there is nothing in the human constitution to guarantee the correct moral development in each person. Accordingly, it has been suggested that, for Mengzi, self-cultivation is a path of self-discovery and a *development* of one's moral sensibility while, for Xunzi, it is a learning process that one does not necessarily feel enthusiastic about.[27]

While the differences between Mengzi's and Xunzi's theories of human nature are not unimportant, it is nevertheless significant that they share in common an emphasis on self-cultivation. *Analects* 16:9 emphasises the centrality of self-cultivation with a palpable sternness:

> Knowledge acquired through a natural propensity for it is its highest level; knowledge acquired through study is the next highest; something learned in response to difficulties encountered is again the next highest. But those among the common people who do not learn even when vexed with difficulties – they are at the bottom of the heap. (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 199)

That humans are perfectible is a theme held by the early Confucians. Xunzi was no exception. In concordance with Mengzi's assertion that 'the Sage and we are the same in kind' (*Books of Mencius* 6A:7; trans. Lau, 1979b, p. 249), Xunzi states unambiguously that self-cultivation is a real possibility for all humans. His articulation is so filled with conviction that the passage is worth quoting at length:

> The man in the street can become a Yu. What does this mean? What made the sage emperor Yu a Yu, I would reply, was the fact that he practiced

[26] This realism carries through to Xunzi's views on government. According to Burton Watson, 'unlike Mencius, he was willing to compromise with the frailty of his age to the extent of describing other easier and less ambitious ways of ruling than simply that of the ideal king, the ruler of perfect virtue' (1963, p. 6).

[27] Ivanhoe, 1990.

> benevolence and righteousness and abided by the proper rules and standards ... Any man in the street has the essential faculties needed to understand benevolence, righteousness, and proper standards, and the potential ability to put them into practice. Therefore, it is clear that he can become a Yu. (Trans. Watson, 1963, pp. 166–7)

Both Mengzi's and Xunzi's commitment to the perfectibility of the common man would have been radical within a social environment that was highly conscious of socio-economic status. Both blatantly assert the equality of all human beings. The notion of equality held by Mengzi and Xunzi not only discredited the belief in *natural* inequality (that is, inequalities due to birthright or nobility) but also attacked the basis for existing inequalities. They challenged hereditary authority; many of the chapters in the *Analects*, the *Books of Mencius* and the writings of Xunzi are explicitly critical of existing socio-political structures and of those then in power.

Mengzi and Xunzi, and, of course, Kongzi as well, were looking towards a humanistic government that regarded the needs of the people as its first priority. They shared a devotion to learning and cultivation as well as a commitment to human perfectibility within the socio-political environment. The ideal society would be a nurturing one, built upon the exemplary and paradigmatic commitment of the government to the people. In turn, this dedication to the good of the people drew from the model of affectionate concern in families, an essentially protective environment within which members develop relationships of trust. Familial relationships were rooted in the care of parents for children, necessitating the appropriate response from their children, that of filial piety (*xiao*). According to *Analects* 1:2, *xiao* is the root of humanity.

Filial Piety (Xiao), *the Root of* Ren

Xiao is most simply portrayed in *Analects* 2:5 as not acting contrary to the prescribed social norms (*li*) of honouring one's parents. In *Analects* 2:7 and 2:8, the meaning of *xiao* runs deeper: it is not mere external compliance such as supporting one's parents or extending to them simple courtesies. *Xiao* must be accompanied by respect (*jing*); this distinguishes parent–child attachment from service of others, which even animals are capable of. Perhaps the most significant remark on *xiao* is found in *Analects* 2:6, whereby Kongzi is said to have made the comment that 'parents are anxious lest their children should be sick' (trans. Legge 1991a, p. 148). There is a variant reading of this passage, that it is the *children* who should worry when the parents are sick (Chan 1963a).[28]

[28] Yet another translation is 'Give your father and mother no other cause for anxiety than illness' (Lau, 1979a, p. 64).

The latter reading points to a concern of children for their parents' well-being, and this is resonant with the sentiments in *Analects* 2:7 and 2:8. The former interpretation, that parents worry about their children's illnesses, provides a different perspective on filial piety. It suggests that the onus of fulfilling the requirements of *xiao* does not fall entirely on the children. Parents have responsibilities as well – perhaps the *initial* responsibilities – to express and demonstrate to their children the concern and love appropriate to the parent–child relationship.

The *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*),[29] a text by either Zengzi (Kongzi's disciple; see *Analects* 1:4; 1:9; 8:7; 19:17) or another member of his school, asserts the priority and primacy of *xiao* as the foundation of moral education in its opening chapter: 'Confucius said, "Filiality is the root of virtue and the wellspring of instruction"' (trans. De Bary and Bloom, 1999, p. 326). The *Xiaojing* outlines the functions of *xiao* in a range of contexts applicable to people of different ranks and status, including the Son of Heaven, the prince, higher and lower officials and the common people. These effects are felt not merely within familial contexts but also in socio-political domains. Chapters 12 through 14 are explicit about the *extension* (*guang*) of the effects of *xiao* in order to ensure good governance. While the text is primarily didactic, brief, and shows many gaps in argumentation, it elaborates unequivocally on the positive effects of inculcating *xiao*. In Chapter 9, *xiao* is associated with a range of affective emotions and attitudes including love (*ai*), affection (*qin*), respect (*jing*) and reverence (*yan*). The depth and richness of the Confucian methodology to draw upon the bonds of human affection should not be underestimated: 'For teaching people love and affection, nothing is better than filiality ...' (*Xiaojing* Chapter 12; trans. De Bary and Bloom, 1999, p. 328).

Xiao is fundamental in Confucian philosophy because it is the basis from which all other virtues arise. Humane government (*renzheng*), one of the most distinctive themes in Confucianism, is built upon a successful extension of affection, loyalty and obligation first developed with one's family members. This is explicitly noted by Mengzi. Passage 1A:7 in the *Books of Mencius* describes a conversation between Mengzi and King Xuan of Qi, in which the compassion of a king for an ox is indicative of his empathy with the people. Mengzi also cites from a passage in the *Book of Poetry* regarding the effective rule of King Wen: he had the empire in the palm of his hand because he took his mind-heart *here* (in his relations with his wife and brothers) and extended its application *there* (to his interactions with others).

[29] The transmission of the *Xiaojing* text has been a protracted and tumultuous process. Along with many other texts, it was ordered to be burnt by the Qin emperor Shi Huangdi (259–210 BCE). As a result, there are various versions of the texts, some reputed to be pre-Han and others arising from the Han period. There are also numerous commentaries on the text, which contains instructional directives from Kongzi to Zengzi regarding *xiao*.

The Confucian emphasis on *xiao* and family relationships was at odds with Mohist teaching. Mozi (479–438 BCE) objected to the priority accorded to particular family relationships. He warned that preferential treatment for those in one's family would result in disharmonies between families. Society built upon such a basis, he argued, would be a fragmented loose collection of families, with energies essentially and selfishly directed at maintaining family units rather than at social cohesion. On a larger scale, this self-serving philosophy served only to promote war between nations:

> the attack on the small states by the large ones, disturbances of the small houses by the large ones, oppression of the weak by the strong ... these are the misfortunes in the world ... Therefore Mo Tzu said: 'Partiality should be replaced by universality.' But how is partiality to be replaced by universality? I say that when everyone regards the states of others as he regards his own, who would attack the others' states? Others would be regarded like self. (Trans. Fung, 1952, pp. 91–2)

Mengzi was vehemently opposed to the proposal of the Mohists that the ideal society was founded upon an indiscriminating concern of each person for everyone else. He was deeply antagonistic to the fundamental themes of both the Mohists and the Yangists and was unambiguous in expressing his disagreement:

> Sage-emperors have ceased to appear. Feudal lords have become reckless and idle scholars have indulged in unreasonable opinions. The words of Yang Chu and Mo Ti fill the world. If the people in their opinions do not follow Yang Chu, they follow Mo Ti. Yang advocated egoism, which means a denial of the special relationship with the ruler. Mo advocated universal love, which means a denial of the special relationship with the father. To deny the special relationship with the father and the ruler is to become an animal ... (*Books of Mencius* 3B:9; trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 72)

The contrast between Confucian *xiao* and Mohist *jianai* cannot be more pronounced. What was for Mengzi a deep conviction regarding human-heartedness was seen by the Mohists as irrelevant and even detrimental to social cohesion and altruism. *Jianai* served in the realisation of the larger, utilitarian common good; it was to apply unconditionally and impartially to all human beings, regardless of their relationship to the moral agent.[30]

Mozi may not be fully correct in identifying partiality as the problem with Confucianism. Mengzi's response to Yangzi in *Books of Mencius* 3B:9

[30] See *Mozi*, Chapter 17, and Jochim (1980). A.C. Graham is correct in suggesting that the phrase 'universal love' is both too warm and too vague to capture the Mohist *jianai*. According to Graham, the Mohist *ai* is 'an unemotional will to benefit people and dislike of harming them' (1989, p. 41).

demonstrates that familial relationships are not an exclusive preoccupation. There are other responsibilities in one's extra-familial associations that should not be entirely eclipsed by familial relationships. In other words, affection toward particular others within one's family and loyalty to them are not a priori incompatible with modes of service and loyalty toward others outside the family context. In fact, if we are to understand the early Confucian classics correctly, the family context is the first and basic training ground for the individual's future ethico-social interaction (*Analects* 1:2).

It seems that Mozi may not have understood the wider, socio-political implications of *xiao*. He narrowly construed *xiao* to refer only to loyalty and allegiance to those within one's family. This narrow understanding of *xiao* would have fuelled the concern which Mozi had, that Confucian ideas not only encouraged partiality towards those in the family but also bred hostility toward those outside familial boundaries.

An important question that arises from this debate concerns how *xiao* might appropriately be extended to apply in relationships outside the family. In other words, what is instilled in or cultivated by individuals in their training within the family context that equips them for interaction with others in the larger social environment? Is it a set of norms or values, skills, an approach, or an attitudinal perspective?

The early texts do not provide the level of detail required such that readers may identify the essence of what is being transferred from family to social context. Is it, for instance, submissiveness and compliance, as suggested in *Analects* 1:2?

> Master You said: 'A man who respects his parents and his elders [*di*] would hardly be inclined to defy his superiors. A man who is not inclined to defy his superiors will never foment a rebellion. A gentleman works at the root. Once the root is secured, the Way unfolds. To respect parents and elders is the root of humanity [*ren*].' (Trans. Leys, 1997, p. 3)

Is there some suggestion that *xiao* is a methodology of inculcating subordination in the common people? On this view, *xiao* is a political tool, used to manipulate the people. Additionally, this (in)famous passage in *Analects* 13:18 has sparked many discussions regarding the demands of *xiao*:

> The Governor of She in conversation with Confucius said, 'In our village there is someone called "True Person." When his father took a sheep on the sly, he reported him to the authorities.'
>
> Confucius replied, 'Those who are true in my village conduct themselves differently. A father covers for his son, and a son covers for his father. And being true lies in this.' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, pp. 166–7)

While the term *xiao* is not explicitly mentioned here, the endorsement by Kongzi of concealment of a crime is a cause for concern. It should be noted that the concealment works in both directions: the father covers up for the son, and vice versa. Hence, the criticism that *xiao* demands a suspension of the child's sense of right or fairness is perhaps one-sided.[31]

More pertinent philosophical questions arise regarding the status and scope of *Analects* 13:18. Does the passage essentially point to a sense of ethical relativism in the *Analects*?[32] Does concealment apply only to less severe crimes (if sheep-stealing may be considered such)? Or is it intended as a universalisable rule or principle? In sum, these questions suggest many difficulties associated with the extension of *xiao* from the family context into the larger, public domain.[33]

On the other hand, there are many positive lessons to be inferred from the Confucian focus on cultivating effective family relationships. Cultivation in the family context provides training for important skills in negotiating with and responding to others, and for understanding a range of obligations and responsibilities that arise from one's particular relational attachments. In familial relationships, one learns the significance of, as well as the difficulties encountered in, engaging with others. While particular affective emotions within the family context (such as maternal love) are not universalisable, the skills required in effective relational interaction will be applicable in familial and non-familial contexts. From a Confucian perspective, the family context is also important because it situates individuals within a nexus of relationships. The structural framework of families – typified by loving and caring relationships – allows for the nurture and expression of human emotion and relationality.

[31] Kongzi's remark must be understood within its historical context. There was strong emphasis on the family-clan (*zu*) and on the boundaries of protection of those within one's clan. Indeed, Chinese law seems to have adopted *Analects* 13:18 in permitting concealment of the crime of a close relative; this occurred as early as 66 BCE (Ch'u, 1965, pp. 70–74). Ch'u also discusses how, even much later in Chinese history, during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, punishment for crimes, say, for theft, were decided in part according to relational attachment. Hence, punishment for stealing from a relative was one degree less than that for stealing from a non-relative. Ch'u explains that this was because '[t]he closer the relationship between the two individuals involved, the greater the obligation for mutual aid and the less the responsibility of the thief' (p. 68). Nevertheless, these observations should not replace an inquiry into the moral reasoning underlying *Analects* 13:18.

[32] Hansen, 1992, pp. 82–3.

[33] Lai, 1995; and Lai, 2003b.

Shattering the Dichotomy of Self and Society

The self in Confucian thought is not viewed as an independent entity, either at the theoretical, conceptual level, or in its account of ethics and human interaction. The full range of themes in Confucian philosophy is built upon its ultimate commitment to individuals as related selves and to society as a successful engagement of these selves. The practical commitment to others is a point for reflection in one's daily, critical self-evaluation:

> Master Zeng said: 'Daily I examine my person on three counts. In my undertakings on behalf of other people, have I failed to do my utmost? In my interactions with colleagues and friends, have I failed to make good on my word? In what has been passed on to me, have I failed to carry it into practice?' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 72)

One distinctive aspect of the Confucian picture of self is that it does not embrace a fundamental distinction between self and society. It is only within the lived social context that humanity can attain its fullest significance. Hence, self-cultivation is effectively the ethico-social realisation of the individual within its networks of relationships. It follows that each relationally-constituted self will have different experiences of social environments and relationships; these differences will contribute to the making of individual identities.

The Confucian interdependent self deserves serious consideration. It locates the realisation of the self within its networks of relationships. This concept of interdependent self breaks the artificial dichotomy of society as antithetical to self. Furthermore, it is a realistic account of self, one that has important implications for notions of action, intentionality, responsibility, accountability, choice and morality.

Self and Other: Zhong *and* Shu

> The Master said, 'Zeng, my friend! My way is bound together with one continuous strand.'
> Master Zeng replied, 'Indeed.'
> When the Master had left, the disciples asked, 'What was he referring to?'
> Master Zeng said, 'The way of the Master is doing one's utmost (*zhong*) and putting oneself in the other's place (*shu*), nothing more.' (*Analects* 4:15; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 92)

The two key concepts in this passage, *zhong* and *shu*, are drawn together in the 'one continuous strand', or 'one thread' (*yi guan*), suggesting a unified central theme in Kongzi's thinking. There has been much debate regarding how *yi guan* is to be understood, with significant variation in Confucian intellectual

history. Furthermore, the meanings of *zhong* and *shu* are open to interpretation.[34]

Zhong has been translated as 'conscientiousness,' referring to a person's commitment and/or sincerity in his pursuit of *ren*.[35] It has sometimes been understood from a Neo-Confucian and Mencian perspective to denote a commitment to cultivate one's original nature; and it has also been translated as 'loyalty', to capture the commitment of the scholar-official to his ruler. In all these interpretations of *zhong*, there is a common element of commitment. What is unclear is the ultimate nature of the commitment, whether it be to the self, one's original nature or the ruler.

The meaning of *shu* is also broad, although there is a more definitive element here. *Shu* is described in *Analects* 5:12 in terms of the golden rule: do not do to others what you do not wish to be done to yourself. This Confucian version has at times been dubbed the 'silver rule' because it is framed in negative terms. *Shu* is commonly translated as 'reciprocity', although this is problematic as it may express an expectation of reciprocal equality. In other words, 'reciprocity' can be taken to mean that an action requires a response of an equal or similar nature. However, this does not sit well with Confucian thought because many relationships are not equally reciprocal. For instance, a particular action by a son might require a *corresponding but different* response from the father. Therefore, it is more appropriate to translate *shu* as 'mutuality'. It seems that mutuality best captures the sense of response and responsiveness to the other, as well as the idea of mutual responsibility for the ongoing development of the relationship. Summarily, the term seems to refer to engagement with the other, which includes the ability to exercise one's moral imagination in empathy.

Zhong and *shu* are correlative concepts which come together as a unified theme (*yi guan*). They capture the essence of Confucian philosophy in expressing the centrality of the concept of relational self. To express this in another way, mutual responsiveness with the other is at the core of the Confucian commitment. Of course, the commitment to the other is grounded in one's attitude toward the other. Essentially, *zhong* and *shu* are about how one perceives and appreciates the other. This is how Antonio Cua understands

[34] Wing-tsit Chan writes: '... Confucianists have not agreed on what it means. Generally, Confucianists of Han and T'ang times adhered to the basic meaning of "thread" and understood it in the sense of a system or a body of doctrines. Chu Hsi, true to the spirit of Neo-Confucian speculative philosophy, took it to mean that there is one mind to respond to all things ... All agree, however, on the meanings of *chung* and *shu*, which are best expressed by Chu Hsi, namely, *chung* [*zhong*] means the full development of one's [originally good] mind and *shu* means the extension of that mind to others' (1963a, p. 27). Contrary to Chan's assertion, the terms *zhong* and *shu* are also rather indeterminate in the early Confucian texts.

[35] Ibid.

the cultivation of *ren* as an expansion and expression of one's commitment to the other:

> *Jen* as an ideal theme in part pertains to the psychological condition of responsive agency. Methodologically, the practice and development of *jen* begins at the personal level ... What is personal from the Confucian viewpoint can, and ultimately must, have a public or interpersonal import. *Jen*, as an ideal, involves relation between men rooted in the agents' conscientious and continuing effort at self cultivation.[36]

What is the practical involvement associated with such a commitment? How might one engage in interdependent relationships without losing a sense of self?

The Relational Self in Confucian Thought

A philosophy that recommends both the cultivation of self and the cultivation of relationships must also explain how these two processes stand in relation to each other. *Analects* 17:26 expresses the importance of acceptance by others. There is a ring of humour coupled with seriousness:

> The Master said, 'If by the age of forty a man is still disliked there is no hope for him.' (Trans. Lau, 1979a, p. 148)

However, in *Analects* 13:24, there is a sense that popularity and mere approval are not the criteria upon which to base judgments of one's character:

> Tzu-kung asked, ' "All in the village like him." What do you think of that?'
> The Master said, 'That is not enough.'
> ' "All in the village dislike him." What do you think of that?'
> The Master said, 'That is not enough either. "Those in his village who are good like him and those who are bad dislike him." That would be better.' (Trans. Lau, 1979a, p. 122)

There are two important issues arising from a comparison of the two passages. *Analects* 17:26 relates to the ability of a person to engage successfully with others: if he still cannot achieve that at forty, there are real doubts about his accomplishments. He is the kind of person who is not at ease because he is constantly worrying about where he stands in relation to others (*Analects* 9:29).

The other issue, discussed in *Analects* 13:24, is not centrally about successful engagement with others, but about maintaining personal standards which may or may not meet with broad approval. The focus is an ethical sense of self

[36] Cua, 1979, p. 57.

which the good (*shanzhe*) are comfortable with and the bad (*bu shanzhe*) dislike. This stronger sense of personal identity applies especially in the case of the Confucian gentleman, the *junzi*. The *junzi* is presented as one who is independent of the status quo: he seeks what is within himself while the small man, by contrast, looks to others for guidance (*Analects* 15:21; see also 15:22). In the description of Kongzi's own developmental path in *Analects* 2:4, it is clear that the stages of progress involve the cultivation of inner resources quite independent of the then contemporary norms. In *Analects* 13:23, we are told that the *junzi* does not seek to be similar to other people, although he aims to be harmonious with them:

> The *chun tzu* [*junzi*] seeks to be harmonious (*he*) but does not attempt to be similar (*tong*). The small man, by contrast, seeks to be similar and is not harmonious. (Trans. Lau, 1979a, p. 122)

In contrast, the small man relies on popularity. The subtle but important differences between being similar, on the one hand, and harmonious, on the other, are highlighted here. Tu Wei-ming emphasises that social harmony – or superficial agreement – is not the ultimate goal of self-cultivation:

> The self as the center of relationships has always been the focus of Confucian learning. One's ability to harmonize human relations does indeed indicate one's self-cultivation, but the priority is clearly set. Self-cultivation is a precondition for harmonizing human relations; if human relations are superficially harmonized without the necessary ingredients of self-cultivation, it is practically unworkable and teleologically misdirected.[37]

Tu alleviates the concern that Confucian self-cultivation is merely a socialisation or an acculturation process. Yet, we must be careful not to fragment the concept of self-cultivation by identifying first- and second-order priorities, where the first is the self, and the second the other. In response to a question raised previously: the cultivation of the self *is* the cultivation of relationships. It is only when these two processes are seen as one, that the concept of interdependent self attains its true meaning.

Self-cultivation is the development of the self within the social environment. The interdependent self is aware of and familiar with existing norms, but at the same time able to attain critical distance where necessary. This effectively breaks the dichotomy of self and other. Tu Wei-ming makes this important point by locating the Confucian debate at the crossroads of self and society:

[37] Tu, 1985, pp. 55–6.

> Confucian self-transformation is based on neither isolated self-control nor collective social sanction. It is in what may be called the 'between' that its basis really lies ... the main issue in Confucianism is never conceived of in terms of an 'either-or' proposition. Rather, to be an authentic man is to be truthful to *both* one's selfhood and one's sociality.[38]

The Confucian self is clearly not a fully autonomous, self-creating, independent individual. Yet, on the other hand, he or she is not denied creativity or innovation. What are the advantages of this view of relational individuality?

First, it avoids overemphasis on the status quo and, secondly, it veers from the unrealistic abstraction that selves are detached and independent. Although these two conceptions of self stand at the society–self extremes, both share a philosophical commitment to dichotomy between society and self. Neither extreme sufficiently captures the lived reality of human persons *in their relationality*. The key to traversing this self – society dichotomy lies in a fuller understanding of relationships, the relevant emotions, and their associated obligations and responsibilities. Confucian philosophy provides richer insights into human interaction.

Conclusion

The Confucian concept of the related self, rooted in the human capacity for morality, *ren*, has important implications for ethics and social and political philosophy. Here, three particular points will be discussed.

The theme of related self challenges many existing conceptions of morality which deny or fail to capture relationality as a basic feature of human life. For instance, versions of utilitarianism which focus on maximising happiness will at some point require the denial of an individual's obligations arising from a particular relationship. In his analysis of the notion of impartiality and its centrality in contemporary western moral philosophy, John Kekes makes the point that:

> The more impersonal a relationship is, the more impartial it ought to be. But, it seems to me, the corollary is also true. The more personal a relationship is the less role there is for impartiality. Indeed, impartiality destroys intimate relationships.[39]

The *Analects* focuses on the importance of distinguishing between different relationships. A careful analysis of Kongzi's responses in the *Analects* in different situations will expose the complexities – as reflected in lived reality –

[38] Tu, 1972, pp. 192–3.
[39] Kekes, 1981, p. 302.

of working out one's competing responsibilities and obligations, whether as friend, parent, niece, teacher or colleague. From the Confucian point of view, it seems naive to insist that all should be treated equally or related to on equal terms.

It follows from this picture of the related self that responsiveness to others is an important theme in morality and moral development. The individual must be understood within its webs of interdependence. The cleaner the distinction between self and society, or self and other, the more it will be the case that relationships fall through the net. Those theories that morally require impartiality, stoical altruism and consistent self-sacrifice assume that individuals are frequently or always in competition with others. The effects of a false dichotomy drawn between self and other will seep into many areas of moral philosophy, resulting in misunderstandings and misrepresentations of morality. Confucian philosophy presents a convincing case for the interrelatedness of persons to be taken as a fundamental feature of morality and moral theory.

A second contribution of Confucian thought lies in its conceptualisation of the elements and processes central to moral reasoning. There is considerable focus on the cultivation of the self as an ongoing process. Within such a framework, discussions of deontology and ethical prescriptivity take second place to those concerning the cultivation of virtues and traits. Confucian self-cultivation is a process involving the acquisition of skills and expertise which enable one to act, react and interact well within one's socio-cultural environment. These skills are developed and tested through one's handling of day-to-day affairs rather than in abstract theorising guided by impartiality and rationality. This view is expressed by a number of Confucian scholars:

> For Confucius himself, the process of forming an ethical vision bears little relation to the rationalization process. He does not search for principles that overarch the various rule-regulated contexts in human society. Instead he asks that one should remain open to the experience of authoritative humanity (*jen*); one must be sensitive to the manner in which humaneness depends upon actualizing the self-in-the-moment at the intersection of action and circumstance, the harmony of which depends upon and is an expression of *yi*.[40]

and,

> Moral life is displayed not as a set of court-judgments on specifiable actions but rather as the development of relationships, skills, and ongoing virtues that make it possible to affect things for the better at the right time and in the right way. The power of this point derives from its contrast to the usual Western mode of moral thinking. Perhaps because of the pervasiveness of

[40] Hall and Ames, 1984, p. 107.

> the juridical model, Western philosophers have looked at the judgeable action as the proper unit of moral worth.[41]

There are profound implications for moral philosophy if it is to take into account not only issues relating to norms and values, but also to those concerning processes. An advantage of a process-oriented approach to moral cultivation is that it deals with the dynamics and structures of the various moral developmental phases. These dynamics remind us of the need to recognise and adopt different measures of appropriateness in evaluating moral action. A process-oriented approach allows for morality to be understood as a living phenomenon, deeply intertwined with the sphere of personal and social relations, and vibrant and dynamic as existing cultures and traditions evolve.

Finally, the idea that members of society participate in its moral life through the enrichment of each other has significant implications. At one level, this suggestion may sound as idealistically simplistic as Mengzi's characterisation of human nature and society. However, on closer scrutiny, one cannot deny the importance of Confucian *learning* about mutuality, affect, loyalty, concern, cooperation, obligations and competing demands within the familial context, and subsequently *extending* those to one's relationships and engagements outside the family.

Here, the fluidity in the Confucian notion of self is significant: it is fundamentally important that individuals work to develop relationships with different people in the quest for collective well-being. The nature of cooperation and collaboration within Confucian society has important parallels with musicians playing in concert: every member of the ensemble has an important role to play, and a good performance is assessed not merely with reference to the technical competence of each of the players, but also how well the musicians play together.[42]

The Confucian vision relies on the interest of individuals in their shared well-being. Kongzi and Mengzi in particular believed that the basic feature of this shared vision, *ren*, would serve as the impetus toward attaining the good life for the individual and for improvement in the quality of the human condition. Herbert Fingarette captures the sense of human attachment that is at the basis of the Confucian image of social life:

> To become civilized is to establish relationships that are not merely physical, biological or instinctive; it is to establish human relationships, relationships of an essentially symbolic kind. ... 'Merely to feed one's parents well ... even dogs and horses are fed' (2:7). To be devoted to one's parents is far more than to keep the parents alive physically ... to serve in

[41] Neville, 1986, p. 191.
[42] Sartwell, 1993; Fingarette, 1983; and Lai, 2003b.

> the human community, to do this out of one's own heart and nature – this is to be a true citizen of one's community.[43]

The Confucian thesis, though at times seemingly simple and commonsensical, is an important one. Mengzi sought to convince others that, in spite of the turmoil during the Warring States period, there was much to look forward to, beginning with the rectification of humanity. There, he put forward an optimistic theory that all the required resources resided in human individuals. Xunzi, perhaps as optimistically, argued that the resources lay in socio-political organisation. A truly distinctive element in the Confucian vision is the idea that human attachment is a central constituent of one's successful engagement with others in society.

[43] Fingarette, 1972, p. 76.

CHAPTER TWO

The Situated Self in Daoist Philosophy

The Ineffable *Dao* and the Sources of Dis-ease

> The Tao that can be told of is not the eternal Tao ...
>
> (*Daodejing* 1; trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 97)

This opening phrase of the *Daodejing* is well known. What may be transmitted, taught or discussed is not the ultimate or real *dao*. There are two senses of *dao* here: in its first occurrence, *dao* is accessible and transmitted although that is an inaccurate approximation to the second, actual, *dao*. Some scholars understand this statement to refer to a metaphysical appearance–reality distinction. According to this view, that which should be sought after, the real *dao*, is also that which eludes characterisation.

A metaphysical understanding of the *dao* and the postulation of a deeper reality is generated also by its translation into English. The insertion by translators of an article before the subject, *dao*, is required by the rules of English grammar. But the use of 'the' (*dao*) rather than 'a' (*dao*) leads to drastically different philosophical understandings of the concept, as we shall see later.

Whether or not one understands this opening phrase to encapsulate an appearance–reality distinction, there are important ethical overtones. The *Daodejing* expresses dissatisfaction with the ethical, social, political and cultural norms of the day. The popular goals and common pursuits in all of these domains appear shallow and inadequate, missing the mark of the actual *dao*.

This restlessness, and perhaps scepticism, is compounded by the suggestion that what this actual *dao* is, we are ironically not to know or at least unable properly to articulate. The *Daodejing* specifically proposes *dao* (way, teaching, method) that stands in contrast to existing pursuits and goals. It advocates a teaching that is subtle and profound (*xuan*), sometimes understood as mysterious.[1] There is antipathy regarding the deeper, fundamental sources of these erroneous standards and values. The energies and resources directed

[1] The translation of *xuan* as mystery is aligned with a religious interpretation of the *Daodejing*. The understanding of the *Daodejing* advanced by Heshanggong (a pseudonym or legendary figure depicted as a teacher to the Han Emperor Wen (179–157 BCE)) was rooted in the Han intellectual context that fused together elements of cosmological, political and religious thinking. During the

toward the acquisition of material comforts, the maintenance of social and political institutions and the preservation of cultural and historical artefacts as objective realities are carefully scrutinised. Some of its scepticism is associated with a critique of language as inadequate. Language merely communicates beliefs and attitudes without questioning the many human projects that are woefully shallow in intent and purpose.

The careful scepticism of the *Zhuangzi* is similarly critical of the narrowness of singular perspectives. It is primarily through suggestive imagery and allegories that the *Zhuangzi* challenges a wide range of human activities and concerns. In its treatment of issues associated with mortality, political involvement, philosophical argumentation, social organisation, ethical action and personal identity, *Zhuangzi* exposes the weaknesses of focus and emphasis in human thought. It offers intriguing and fascinating analyses of these issues. It spoofs human self-importance by alluding to the perspectives of monkeys, chickens, fish, wildcats, weasels, rats, yaks, cicadas, quails and even mushrooms. In these explorations one point is clear: there is little justification for a dominating, singular paradigm over a noticeably vast range of realities and possibilities in natural kinds. There is an interesting combination in the *Zhuangzi* of a critical detachment from existing norms and practices and a stark realism in its observation and endorsement of non-human realities. In this light, debates regarding norms and values – particularly those assertions of one correct standard – are parodied as they are compared with the chirping of chickens. Also in the *Zhuangzi*, language is the main vehicle for the transmission and inculcation of values and attitudes and as such reflects the petty biases of those asserting the superiority of their own perspective.

There are common themes in the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* in their scrutiny of existing norms and values. They share both a suspicion of anthropocentric attitudes as the basis of these inadequate values and detachment from language as a tool further to propagate those values. These two issues warrant further inquiry.

Rethinking Humanity

In their discussions of government, material well-being and status and knowledge, the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* attempt to transcend a human-centred emphasis. Daoist philosophy holds many misgivings about human society and the domination of weak by powerful in the wide range of human projects and activities. The ideals of non-assertiveness, quietude and the like in the

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Tang dynasty (618–906) his was the authoritative interpretation of the *Daodejing*. Heshanggong interprets *xuan* as 'the dark one, ... heaven', though the usage is linguistically inappropriate (Erkes, 1950, p. 14).

Daodejing challenge the structures and assumptions of existing ethical systems. The *Zhuangzi*'s scepticism of contemporary norms is again subtly different. It throws up issues regarding the determination of right and wrong and appears not to have value commitments, unlike the *Daodejing* which aligns itself with the weak and meek. Indeed, the argument in the *Zhuangzi* is so careful to dissociate itself from particular value commitments that, at points, it seems to be arguing in favour of relativism (*Zhuangzi* 2, 'The Sorting that Evens Things Out' [*Qi Wu Lun*]).

The texts also share a disregard for goals and methods of contemporary government. The *Daodejing* rejects the narrow focus of Confucian *ren* and promotes its own vision of good, *wuwei* (non-conditioning) government. In this way, the text does not necessarily transcend a human perspective or human concerns. The *Zhuangzi*, by contrast, notes the ultimate pointlessness of debates about government.

Daodejing 5 registers the concern regarding a human-centred attitude and methodology, and sets up the Daoist one in contrast:

> Heaven and Earth are not humane (*jen,* [*ren*])
> They regard all things as straw dogs.
> The sage is not humane.
> He regards all people as straw dogs.
> How Heaven and Earth are like a bellows!
> While vacuous, it is never exhausted.
> When active, it produces even more.
> Much talk will of course come to a dead end.
> It is much better to keep to the center (*chung*).
>
> (Trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 107)

That Heaven and Earth are *bu* (not, non-) *ren* is open to interpretation. The remark may suggest that Heaven and Earth work *contrary to* human interests and purposes, or more moderately, that they do not operate according to methods or goals set out by humanity. It may also be an observational statement relating to the natural environment, that the changes and directions therein have no special regard for humanity. All of these readings share in common a denial of an anthropocentric or exclusively human perspective.

The interpretation of the phrase also depends on what '*ren*' is taken to mean, whether it refers to humanity in general or to the distinctively Confucian conception of morality. Heaven and Earth, which are transcendent and cosmic, do not act in accordance with those assumptions and the principles devised by humanity, nor do they grant human interests exclusive consideration. The naturalistic interpretation provided by Wang Bi describes the processes of the natural world which are quite different from the way of human benevolence and its associated norms. According to Wang Bi's characterisation, the way of the Daoist sage focuses on the interdependencies between the myriad things

and hence does not seek to manage them according to a one-sided, 'benevolent' manner. The commentary is worth quoting in full as it effectively captures the cumulative effects of the (human) imposition of norms and the creation of expectations resulting from it:

> Heaven and Earth leave what is natural (*Tzu-jan*, Self-so) alone. They do nothing and create nothing. The myriad things manage and order themselves. Therefore they are not benevolent. One who is benevolent will create things, set things up, bestow benefits on them and influence them. He gives favors and does something. When he creates, sets things up, bestows benefits on things and influences them, then things will lose their true being. When he gives favors and does something, things will no longer exist completely. When things can no longer exist completely, (heaven and earth) will not be able to cover and carry everything. Animals eat straw, though the earth does not reproduce it for them. Men eat dogs, though (heaven) does not produce dogs for them. If nothing is done to the myriad things, each will accord with its function, and everything is then self-sufficient. If one builds up favors, it will be impossible to leave things alone.[2]

Daodejing 5 points to the unjustifiability and inappropriateness of an ethical stance that takes the human perspective as universal or basic. The issue of straw dogs also sheds some light on this discussion of anthropocentricism. Wang Bi translates the phrase as 'straw and dogs', referring to the different categories in the natural world and how they are interdependent. According to this view, nothing is immune from the forces of external change, not even humanity. In this sense, the *wanwu*, the ten thousand things, are at par.

It is also possible to understand the phrase 'straw dogs' to denote a sacrificial item associated with the conduct of a particular rite. D.C. Lau notes that '[i]n the *T'ien yün* chapter in the *Chuang tzu* it is said that straw dogs were treated with the greatest deference before they were used as an offering, only to be discarded and trampled upon as soon as they had served their purpose'.[3] In Lau's interpretation, the straw dogs have their proper significance within a restricted domain. The fate of the straw dogs is understood in the context of the unfolding of natural events whereby all things have their moment and pass on when their moment passes. In the cycles of nature, nothing is eternal or preferred.[4]

[2] Wang Bi (trans. Rump, 1979, p. 17). Wang Bi's commentary on the *Daodejing* as compared with that of Heshanggong's, offered a more metaphysical and philosophically defensible interpretation. Hence, it was the dominant interpretation in philosophical scholarship. Alan Chan (1991) compares the two commentaries in a detailed and authoritative monograph.

[3] Lau, 1963, p. 61, translator's note.

[4] Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 85.

Could this be a warning about the adverse effects of human-centredness? The straw dog allegory exposes the unjustified assumption of human priority. It also hints at the resulting fragmentation if such assumptions are endorsed.

Yet, on the other hand, this does not mean that everything is viewed only in functional terms. The true measure of the straw dogs lies in their place in the environment and the relations in which they stand to others within that environment. This assessment of the straw dogs transcends the debate about intrinsic and instrumental value. The value of each of the ten thousand things is neither intrinsic nor instrumental, but contextual.

According to this interpretation, value derives from the context–interdependence nexus. As with all other beings and entities, humanity must be understood within its larger environmental context, together with the relations that hold. This context–interdependence nexus is not different from the field-focus framework suggested by Roger Ames and David Hall, in which the context is the field wherein individuals, the focal points, are interdependent.[5] There seems to be a dark, ominous warning regarding the artificial detachment of humanity from its webs of interdependence, and moving it outside its proper context. There may be a criticism both of pervasive human selfishness that elevates the self over all others, and of anthropocentric narrowness commonplace in human thought. Both these will lead to ruin.

Human egocentricity is made light of by Zhuangzi. By means of a witty device that compares the Confucian and Mohist disagreements with the chirping of chickens, Zhuangzi at the same time elevates the status of chickens in order to parody the self-importance of humanity. But Zhuangzi's concerns about anthropocentricity, if they may be described in these terms, must be understood in its wider philosophical environment. Existing goals, policies, principles and methodologies are part of the catch upon which the sceptical net is cast.

Amongst its philosophical foci, the *Zhuangzi* is sceptical about the inadequacy of individual perspectives. But more to the point, the concern is with the assumption that one's own perspective is all-encompassing and inclusive, or that it is generalisable and shared by all others. Chapter 1 of *Zhuangzi*, 'Going Rambling Without a Destination' (*Xiao Yao You*), challenges the insularity and restrictiveness of individual perspectives. The fish Kun and its place in the ocean, the large bird Peng and its place in the skies, the colour of the skies, whirlwinds, wingspans, boats, clouds, flight, the seasons, the passing of time and the like are all reminders of life beyond humanity and the immense expanse of the world. From their respective

[5] The details and methodology of field-focus thinking are clearly articulated by Roger Ames and David Hall in a number of their publications. One of their most successful treatments of the topic is in the introduction to their translation of the *Zhongyong* text (Ames and Hall, 2001).

positions, the cicada and turtle dove laugh at the immensity of this bird and its capacities; constrained by their own limitations, they cannot fully comprehend Peng:

> What do these two creatures know? Little wits cannot keep up with great, or few years with many. How would we know that this is so? The mushroom of a morning does not know old and new moon, the cricket does not know spring and autumn; their time is too short. (Trans. Graham, 2001, p. 44)

So also, of course, is the human perspective similarly limited. The inquiry moves on to address problems with one's preoccupation with worldly success:

> Those, then, who are clever enough to do well in one office or efficient enough to protect one district, whose powers suit one prince and are put to the test in one state, are seeing themselves as the little birds did ... (ibid.)

The overrating of human enterprise and projects is also reflected in heated discussions about what is correct, and what wrong. The Confucians and Mohists are each convinced about their own correctness and the other's wrongness. Their proclamations on how best to rectify the socio-political unrest are based on misplaced assumptions that there is one way – the *correctly human way* – to resolve concerns about government. Notwithstanding the exaggeration of Peng's stature and capacities, we are reminded of the microscopic focus in our human preoccupations. However, it is not only the incompleteness of human perceptions that worries Zhuangzi. It is also the pursuit of that one solution, a mindset that generates polemic, division and hostility. In another of his allegories, Zhuangzi dismisses such debate:

> The speaker has something to say, but what he says is not final. Has something been said? Or has something not been said? It may be different from the chirping of chickens. But is there really any difference? Or is there no difference? (*Zhuangzi* 2; trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 182)

To what end are the birds chirping? Who is to say that what is being communicated is trivial? If their chirping is mere noise, what can we say about (human) debates? To say that humans are the sole possessors and assessors of value begs the question regarding value and significance. Zhuangzi's reference to the chirping birds jolts the basic assumptions of human superiority. The underlying attitudes that spur such hostile debates are the issue here. As with the debating men of old, the Confucians and Mohists each assumed they had arrived at the one correct answer. But as Zhuangzi notes specifically, 'The lighting up of "That's it, that's not" is the reason why the Way is flawed' (*Zhuangzi* 2; trans. Graham, 2001, pp. 54–5). Knowingly, Zhuangzi refuses to

get drawn in to these debates of right and wrong. Is anything really complete or flawed, he asks, or is nothing really complete or flawed?

Using Language: Has Something Been Said?

Discussions regarding right and wrong (*shi-fei*) are communicated through language. Language transmits the deliberate and conscious nature of human projects. As the primary tool of communication, it is implicated in making discriminations, setting boundaries and casting value judgments.

Daoist philosophy is most concerned with shared, spoken language,[6] although this does not rule out its dissatisfaction with behavioural conformity as well. Chad Hansen advances the thesis that linguistic scepticism is the primary project of the *Daodejing*. He proposes a psycho-social theory of language in the *Daodejing*. According to him, the *Daodejing* is sceptical regarding conventional norms because 'learning social distinctions typically involves internalizing society's preferences … we learn names by mimicking their use in guiding choices in ordinary contexts'.[7] The *Daodejing* is sceptical of conventional and unquestioned attitudes and values embodied in language. These acquired attitudes and values shape perspectives and colour the perceptions, tastes, and desires of individuals; hence, the message has important ethical implications (see *Daodejing* 2, 12, 19 and 20).

If Hansen is correct, the *Daodejing* offers insightful criticisms of the unexamined life as being narrow and prosaic, common and uncreative. Language assists in the process of social indoctrination. The resultant socio-political situation is one that perpetuates a unitary set of core values and breeds those in its own likeness in endorsing the strong, powerful, cultivated and learned:

> Mine is indeed the mind of an ignorant man,
> Indiscriminate and dull!
> Common folks are indeed brilliant;
> I alone seem to be in the dark.
> Common folks see differences and are clear-cut;
> I alone make no distinctions.
> I seem drifting as the sea;
> Like the wind blowing about, seemingly without destination.
> The multitude all have a purpose;
> I alone seem to be stubborn and rustic …
>
> (*Daodejing* 20; trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 134)

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[6] More intuitive modes of communication are frequently endorsed. See *Daodejing* 23 ('Nature Rarely Speaks'), and the debating men of old and Gaptooth's question to Wang Ni in *Zhuangzi* 2. The well-known chapter, 'Knowledge Wanders North' (*Zhuangzi* 22) alludes to the 'irrational' methodology of grasping the incommunicable and impenetrable *dao* and *de*.

[7] Hansen, 1992, p. 213; see pp. 196–230.

Hence, the Daoist sage learns to be unlearned, and to decrease in those forms of knowledge. If Hansen's thesis is plausible, the *Daodejing* would be wary of indoctrination processes facilitated by language use. There are two detectable lines of response in the *Daodejing*. The first is to abandon language and learning altogether and perhaps to replace that with more intuitive and mystical methods of attaining enlightenment (*Daodejing* 20, 48). The second is to manipulate language in order to overturn existing values. In this case, the norms of masculinity, power, wealth, strength, wisdom, and moral cultivation must be replaced with those of femininity, non-assertiveness, quietude, and softness. Language will be employed to inculcate attitudes predisposed toward the latter set.

Both responses are problematic, however. They seem unable to transcend the *Daodejing*'s scepticism about language and are irretrievably lodged within its continued use. The second is more difficult to defend as it requires additional justification for its proposed set of values. To say that these alternatives are to be upheld because they happen to be the opposites of conventional norms is a weak argument for many reasons. Surely, the *Daodejing* should not persist in the unjustified dualism; endorsing opposite terms simply reinforces the existing dichotomy.

A scepticism about language is also palpable in *Zhuangzi* 2:

> Tao is obscured by petty biases and speech is obscured by flowery expressions. Therefore there have arisen the controversies between the Confucianists and the Moists, each school regarding as right what the other considers as wrong, and regarding as wrong what the other considers as right. (Trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 182)

However, there are different reasons for the linguistic scepticism in the two texts. The *Daodejing* concerns itself with language as a social phenomenon that misdirects people in their aims and pursuits, while the *Zhuangzi* is critical not so much of the use of language, but of the assumptions associated with its use. For instance, much (undue) importance can be ascribed to trivial matters whilst denied to some weightier issues. The attribution of right and wrong, and the adjudication of truth, are made from personal viewpoints and hence are tainted with personal bias.

The *Zhuangzi* has a different response to language because it has identified a different set of problems. How do we deal with controversies? Zhuangzi endorses a perspectivalism that at points appears to approach relativism.[8] He seems almost to dismiss the differing opinions in the form of a rhetorical

[8] Hansen is often noted for his interpretation of Zhuangzi's philosophy as advocating relativism (see Ivanhoe, 1996; and Roth, 2001). However, Hansen seems committed only to the view of perspectival pluralism, which does not necessarily lead to relativistic conclusions (see 'The

question: 'Is there proof of the distinction?' Yet, he immediately moves to cast doubt on his own question, 'Or isn't there any proof?' The expression of the legitimacy of each perspective is best captured in 'Autumn Floods', one of the chapters in the *Zhuangzi* believed to have been authored by Zhuangzi's disciples:

> The Overlord of the Northern Sea said, 'You can't tell a frog at the bottom of a well about the sea because he's stuck in his little space. You can't tell a summer insect about ice because it is confined by its season. You can't tell a scholar of distorted views about the Way because he is bound by his doctrine ...' (*Zhuangzi* 17; trans. Mair, 1994, p. 153)

The words we use in language are not absolute concepts. Their meanings are not static but always changing relative to their usage by individuals: 'There is no this that is also not the that.'[9] Language is irreducibly perspectival because it is the vehicle for human thought. Nevertheless, it is possible that Zhuangzi does not advocate abandoning language.[10] The linguistic scepticism in the *Zhuangzi* is more mature in that it recognises the practical import of language use and hence does not seek simply to abandon it:

> A road becomes so when people walk on it, and things become so-and-so [to people] because people call them so-and-so. How have they become so? They have become so because [people say they are] so. How have they become not so? They have become not so because [people say they are] not so. (*Zhuangzi* 2; trans. Chan, 1963a, pp. 183–4)

The scepticism regarding language in the early Daoist texts points to an inescapable feature of human life that is manifest in language. There is a relentless vicious cycle in the propagation of prescriptive norms, coupled with their internalisation by individuals, who in turn teach and require others to abide by them. It would not be inappropriate to suggest that the Confucian norms of appropriate behaviour, *li*, are also the targets of this criticism.

Refutation of Absolute Monism (Primitive Daoism)', in Hansen, 1992, pp. 285–92). For instance, Hansen quite clearly refutes the suggestion that, for Zhuangzi, Hitler would have been 'just fine' (at p. 290).

[9] It is perhaps the suggestiveness of the *Zhuangzi* text rather than its explicit statements, that points to mystical antilanguage silence. Zhuangzi often ends his discussions with 'Is it X?' thereby implying disagreement. Yet, these questions are immediately thrown into doubt when he asks 'Is it not X?' The interlocutor or reader is immediately humbled: is there an adequate response to both questions? Could it be that the only appropriate response is not to say anything?

[10] Hansen maintains that the *Zhuangzi* is demonstrably not antilanguage, as it is critical of the Mohist antilanguage stance (1992, pp. 282ff. and pp. 279–80).

Through continued practice of *li*, norms are internalised and behaviours simply become habit.

It is noteworthy that Xunzi would probably have little disagreement here with Zhuangzi regarding the instrumentality of language in the inculcation of attitudes and beliefs. Where they part, of course, is that where Xunzi advocates the *use* of language to regulate behaviour – in the theory of the rectification of names – Zhuangzi resists such regulation. For the Confucians, success within society is measured in part by adherence to specific behavioural norms in the right contexts. What makes for ease in relating to others is a body of shared norms and expectations which the majority of people abide by.

From Zhuangzi's perspective, however, the forced conformity of regulated behaviours simply neglects important perspectival differences between individuals. A shared language reflects a unity of perspectives or agreement and the Daoist texts are keen to take this reasoning further back. They note that uniformity of opinion may be superficial: it may be taught or coerced. Perspectivalism in the *Zhuangzi* – whether one deems it relativistic or not – upholds a cacophony of voices. Paradoxically, however, all effective communication through language assumes a basic shared framework. Zhuangzi's perspectival self is not a free-floating autonomous entity. It is lodged within a larger environmental context, in which it occupies a small corner.

The Interdependent and Contextualised Daoist Self

There are many Daoist metaphors which suggest that the self is essentially an interdependent and contextualised entity. This means that interdependence of self is seen as a fundamental feature of an individual's existence. Notions of development, self-fulfilment and meaningful action are embedded in the conceptual framework of interdependence.

Interdependence is manifest in a number of ways in the *Daodejing*, including in its embrace of both contrastive terms in each set of opposites. Opposite terms are interdependent: long–short, heavy–light and weak–strong implicate each other, in their very definition (*Daodejing* 2, 22, 26, 36). In the extreme case, the good and bad, and trustworthy and untrustworthy, are treated equally (49, 23). The *Daodejing* passages do seem to exhibit a commitment to a metaphysical oneness. This has various implications, but it is often associated with the identification of *dao* as the source, origin or provider of everything (34, 40, 42).[11] Imagery of the simple (*pu*) uncarved block further evokes the sense of a metaphysical, primordial unity (15, 25, 28, 52). All the ten thousand things

[11] See Fu (1973) for a range of interpretations of *dao*, including as origin and source.

come together in this primordial and final interdependent unity. It is even possible to detect a hint of teleology in some of its chapters where fragmentation is finally to be overcome.

That the *Zhuangzi* promotes metaphysical oneness – an 'absolute monism', as dubbed by Chad Hansen[12] – is debatable and not as clear as in the case of the *Daodejing*. There are various interpretations regarding the main message of the *Zhuangzi*, including that of a 'great(er) knowledge',[13] spiritual transformation,[14] 'intraworldly mysticism',[15] a unified perspective, and perspectival pluralism. Some of these positions are predicated on an assumption of ultimate unity while others like Hansen's clearly reject it.

A commitment to monism is not the only difference between the two texts. The *Zhuangzi* is more often seen as an epistemological rather than metaphysical treatise. It pushes at the boundaries of unquestioned assumptions and conceptual frameworks; critically, it challenges assertions of correctness, impositions of normative standards and reliance on purportedly absolute or universal viewpoints. An epistemological challenge of this sort is in many ways more effective than the postulation of a metaphysical monism. This is because the former does not require justification of a particular configuration of underlying reality.

The *Zhuangzi* endorses a multiplicity of perspectives, at many points suggesting that different perspectives have equal validity. One perspective – the frog in the well – is as good as another – an insect in summer – because each is lodged within the conditions and context of its surrounding environment. In the final analysis, right or wrong can only be ascertained *according to where and how each individual stands within its environment*.

The following sections investigate the themes of interdependence and contextualisation in the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* texts respectively. In the examination of the *Daodejing*, the orientation is toward metaphysical enquiry, whereas the emphasis in the *Zhuangzi* is epistemological.

Interdependence and Integrity: Dao–De

Interpretation of the different meanings of *dao* in the *Daodejing* must give due consideration to its associations with various other terms. *Dao* is variously associated with subtlety, emptiness, water, infinity, boundlessness, tranquillity, impartiality, everlasting, beginning, greatness and spontaneity. Additionally, the paradigmatic *dao* of Heaven is inclusive (*Daodejing* 73) and adopts a

[12] Hansen, 1992, pp. 285ff.

[13] Lisa Raphals argues that this is associated with '*ming*, "illumination", *dao*, and *jue*, "awakening"' (1996, p. 30).

[14] Allinson, 1989b.

[15] Yearley (1983) argues for an interdependent participation with the natural world.

holistic perspective, standing in contrast to the tendencies of the human world to create inequalities:

> The way of *tian* [heaven] is also to let some go where there is excess
> And to augment where there is not enough.
> The way of human beings on the other hand is not like this at all.
> It is instead to take away from those who do not have enough
> In order to give more to those who already have too much.
> Who then in having too much is able to draw on this excess to make an offering to the world?
> Perhaps only those who are way-making (*dao*) ...
> (*Daodejing* 77; trans. Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 196).

The *dao* of Heaven is 'to benefit [*li*] others and not to injure' (*Daodejing* 81), like water (8, 34). The Daoist sage, modelling himself on *dao*, takes on the perspective of the whole; his mind forms a harmonious whole with that of his people, taking their ideas as his own (49). *Dao* is also more closely aligned with non-being (*wu*). *Wu* in the *Daodejing* has at least three meanings. It could refer to the empty part of a thing (11), to the state before or after a particular thing existed (2), or to the highest origin that transcends all particular things (14).[16] The boundaries between these different senses of *wu* are hazy. For instance, Wei-hsun Fu proposes an understanding of it that combines *wu* in its second and third senses. According to Fu, *wu* is 'ontologically non-differentiated' and 'metaphysically prior to the beingness (*yu*) of the universe'.[17] A range of implications can follow from this understanding of *dao* as a reality which is an undifferentiated totality of all things, prior to their manifest existence. The coming-together of all things in this ultimate condition suggests a metaphysical holism and possible oneness. In sum, the concept *dao* seems to suggest a metaphysical holism that is concerned to reject fragmentation, dualism and artificiality.

There are concerns about holism as a philosophical grand theory because it might be seen to imply that individuals are required to surrender their needs and interests to those of the whole. In this light, the range of Daoist metaphors may be understood to require submission of individuals. Collectively, the images of the infant (*Daodejing* 10, 20, 28, 49, 55), water, rivers and seas (8, 66,

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[16] Zhang, 2002, pp. 151–2.

[17] Fu, 1973, p. 378. For Fu, *wu* does not refer to non-existence prior to existence, but rather to the character of un-differentiatedness (of nature). In other words, before the use of names, *dao*, the totality of all things, was undifferentiated. Here, the epistemological and metaphysical issues are drawn together: whatever is ontologically non-differentiated (*dao*, reality) is also epistemologically undifferentiable (*dao*, nameless). Conversely, whatever is named (differentiable) is also differentiated in its manifestation (being, *you*) (p. 373). Hansen treats *wu* (lack) and *you* (have) as part of a linguistic theory of distinction-making (1992, pp. 219–22).

78), the female (6, 10, 28, 61, 66) and the valley (6, 15, 28, 39, 41) exemplify the qualities of softness (*rou* – 10, 36, 43, 76, 78), weakness (*ruo* – 36, 52, 55, 76, 78), quietude (*jing* – 15, 16, 26, 37, 39, 45, 57, 64) and non-assertiveness (*buzhen* – 8, 22, 66, 68, 73, 81). It may be that these characteristics make virtue of submissiveness in order to facilitate a realisation of a harmonious whole. On such a view, the integrated whole is achieved at a cost to individuals: at times they are required to be non-assertive, still or weak. On this interpretation, Daoism would collapse in a heap of trivial and implausible holism.

Yet, on the other hand, it is explicitly stated that *dao* embodies a nurturing approach rather than one that masters (*Daodejing* 34). In their comments relating to this passage, Ames and Hall describe how such a nurturing framework operates in order that individuals are not submerged within the whole:

> … the system is merely a function of the flourishing of each participant, with the importance residing in these constituents. In fact, with each participant being a holograph of the system, there is no superordinated system at all, but only the associated living of the participants. On the other hand, the thriving of each participant is dependent upon a conducive (rather than a controlling) environment that allows for its uninterrupted growth. It is this positive absence of control that is vital in sustaining the system. Less is indeed more.[18]

The justification for *dao* as a contextualising environment, within which particular individuals come together, is especially apparent when *dao* is referred to in conjunction with *de*. For instance, in passage 51:

> Tao produces them and [*de*] fosters [the ten thousand things].
> They rear them and develop them.
> They give them security and give them peace.
> They nurture them and protect them.
> (Tao) produces them but does not take possession of them.
> It acts but does not rely on its own ability.
> It leads them but does not master them.
> This is called profound and secret [*de*].
>
> (Trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 190)

The nurturing emphasis is repeated in *Daodejing* 10 and 2. Individual things (*wanwu*) are produced (*sheng*) by *dao* but not taken possession of (*you*), they are led (*chang*) by *dao* yet not mastered (*zai*) by it.

Sheng is an important concept in Chinese philosophy, with the dual meaning both of life and growth. It symbolises a shoot sprouting out of the ground.

[18] Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 131.

According to Dainian Zhang, this imagery is significant (as contrasted with the mammalian birth process in western thinking) as it encapsulates a subtlety in the sprouting process of a shoot. Zhang rightly notes the centrality of this theme in Chinese cosmological thinking, expressed in 'the slow emergence or generation of the myriad things from the primal cosmic soup'.[19] Hence, although *sheng* in *Daodejing* 59 applies to the quest for longevity, it may also refer to the continuing nurturing of life.

Wing-tsit Chan understands *dao* as the ontological source from which all things derive their existence. *De* refers to the particular instantiation, the essence, so to speak, of each existing thing. According to this metaphysical take on Daoist philosophy:

> *te* is Tao endowed in the individual things. While Tao is common to all, it is what each thing has obtained from Tao, or its *te*, that makes it different from others. *Te* is then the individualizing factor, the embodiment of definite principles which give things their determinate features or characters.[20]

In *Daodejing* 54, the respective function of each individual thing is domain-specific, and *de* generates different ends in each of these contexts:

> When one cultivates [*de*] in his person, it becomes genuine [*de*].
> When one cultivates [*de*] in his family, it becomes overflowing [*de*].
> When one cultivates [*de*] in his community, it becomes lasting [*de*].
> When one cultivates [*de*] in the world, it becomes universal.
> (Trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 54)

Although the term *de* was commonly translated to mean virtue in the conventional sense,[21] most scholars now agree that that is a retrospective Confucian understanding of the term. A philosophically fruitful way of understanding *de* derives from philological considerations. The traditional meaning of *de* is related to its homophone, *de* (to obtain or appropriate) (*Shuowen Jiezi*, p. 274).

On this view, *de* is the concept that articulates the distinctiveness of individuals in their particular contexts. In brief, *de* is what each thing has obtained from their common source, *dao*.[22] *De* refers to the *virtue* of being a particular thing – in other words, to its integrity. This conception of *de* and *dao*

[19] Zhang, 2002, p. 108.
[20] Chan, 1963b, p. 10.
[21] Giles, 1959, pp. 26–32. Chan states that 'there is nothing wrong with the common translation "virtue"' (1963b, pp. 10–11).
[22] Lau suggests the idea of *de* as 'getting' (1963, p. 42).

furnishes a complex parts–whole ontology in which all things embody their distinctive natures *in and through their common origin*, *dao*.

This conception of *de* may be likened to the classical Greek '*virtus*' – 'a latent power, a virtue inherent in something'.[23] Max Kaltenmark's analysis of *de* draws on the idea of potency, which may be good or bad from a human perspective. Quoting Marcel Granet's study of Chinese thought, Kaltenmark states that *de* is 'the ideal efficacy that becomes particular as it becomes real'.[24] This is manifest in existence in the following way:

> [*te*] always implies a notion of efficacy and specificity. Every creature possessing a power of any kind, natural or acquired, is said to have *Te* . . . [*te*] is a virtue or potency enabling a man to accomplish particular actions . . . *Te*, then, has varied meanings ranging from magical potency to moral virtue. But the latter is a derived meaning, for originally *Te* was not necessarily good: a man who has *Te* of an inauspicious kind brings misfortune down on himself and others. Nevertheless, *Te* is generally used in the good sense: it is an inner potency that favorably influences those close to its possessor, a virtue that is beneficent and life-giving.[25]

Kaltenmark's articulation of the concept *de* expresses the idea of potentiality and its realisation for each individual. *De* is that distinctiveness, integrity or excellence of each individual thing that can be realised only in the context of the whole, *dao*. Within this framework, all things are interdependent and embedded in their environments.[26] The relationally and contextually constituted self provides an interesting alternative model to that supplied by an essentially individualistic, atomistic ontology. Within this Daoist structural framework, individuals can only achieve full realisation in the context of their interdependence with others.

It follows, then, that *de* plays a crucial role in this conceptual scheme. It ensures an individual's integrity in the context of its relations with other individuals. Particularly within an environment where interdependence is emphasised, the integrity of individuals is important as it is necessary to

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[23] Waley, 1958, pp. 31–2. Waley also suggests that *de* is not unlike the Indian karma. See also Duyvendak, 1954.

[24] Kaltenmark, 1969, p. 27; citing Granet, 1934, p. 303.

[25] Kaltenmark, 1969, pp. 27–8.

[26] This suggestion resonates with the main theme in correlative thinking. Correlative thinking, a philosophical framework particularly prominent during the Han Dynasty, assumes an intrinsic relatedness between all things and beings, covering a wide sweep of all existence including cosmic forces, all species and natural objects, and even aspects of human life such as government. However, the suggestion that *de* might be connected to a notion of luck or fortune is suspect and is probably more prominent in lay Chinese thought and practice rather than in the ancient philosophical texts. A.C. Graham provides a most comprehensive account of correlative thinking in 'Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking' (1986).

prevent the obliteration of individual distinctiveness, interests and needs subsumed under the rubric of the whole.

These two themes – interdependence and integrity – are held in a finely tuned, yet dynamic, balance. The individual in interaction with others is determined in part by contextual factors, including its relations with these others. The individual attains meaning *within* contextual and relational boundaries and affiliations. However, if these are overly restrictive, the integrity of the individual will be diminished or eradicated. Hence, *de* is important in self-determination in context.

Roger Ames expresses a similar view of the *dao–de* polarity as opposed to dichotomy, evoking a process-oriented vision of existence. Ames appeals to the imagery of ingredients coming together in a stewpot:

> *te*, at a fundamental cosmological level, denotes the arising of the particular in a process vision of existence. The particular is the unfolding of a *sui generis* focus of potency that embraces and determines conditions within the range and parameters of its particularity ... Just as any one ingredient in the stewpot must be blended with all of the others in order to express most fully its own flavor, so harmonization with other environing particulars is a necessary precondition for the fullest self-disclosure of any given particular ... [The particular] can through harmonization and patterns of deference diffuse to become coextensive with other particulars, and absorb an increasingly broader field of 'arising' within the sphere of its own particularly. This then is the 'getting' or 'appropriating' aspect of *te*.[27]

Ames' stewpot metaphor identifies the integrity of individuals while simultaneously emphasising the importance of context and environment. However, while the individual may be restricted by various aspects of its environment and by its relations with others, this is not necessarily a negative condition. Ames makes the important point that the individual–environment nexus should not be seen as dichotomous.[28] A nurturing environment provides for the optimum conditions for the realisation of individuals. On the other hand, a nurturing environment is generated by interdependent individuals who

[27] Ames, 1986, p. 331.

[28] Ames' point expresses important differences between logic and reasoning in western philosophies and in Chinese philosophies. Ames takes issue with the fact that reasoning in Chinese philosophy is not reducible to, or cannot be subsumed under, existing models in western philosophies. Nevertheless, where the ideas in this paper might differ from Ames' is in the latter's suggestion that an aesthetic rather than logical order is fundamental in Chinese thought as contrasted with western science (ibid., pp. 320–26). While the distinction between aesthetic and logical order is meaningful and useful, Ames' assertion that the aesthetic order is the ground of Chinese cosmology may be limited in that it may neglect or omit other key aspects of organisation such as the moral, rational or reasonable.

understand the importance of mutual growth. The beginning point of this is neither the individual nor society but the interdependent, contextualised self.

Perspective and Contextual Embeddedness

There would be little dispute that the *Zhuangzi* text expresses a commitment to a multiplicity of perspectives. It is also clear that the presentation of multiple perspectives is closely related to Zhuangzi's scepticism. Many debates speculate on the object of his task, as Zhuangzi's points are far-reaching and his argumentation method suggestive rather than clear. For instance, he is critical of different aspects of Confucian and Mohist doctrines and sophist arguments. He challenges the absolutism in Confucian normativity and the realism in Mohist separation of (artificial) language and (real) structures of reality. He is even more preoccupied with debating his contemporaries, the Sophists Huishi and Gongsun Long. Zhuangzi rejects Huishi's paradoxes which expressly articulate a monist commitment.

The interpretation of Zhuangzi's project(s) is closely connected to an understanding of his methods of argumentation and sceptical strategies.[29] The text is consciously self-aware of its use of reasoning strategies.[30] One that is used frequently is the sort described as 'saying from a lodging place'. Graham notes that this relies on the format of *ad hominem* argument. This strategy was:

> the only kind of victory in debate which could have any point for Chuang-tzu. You temporarily 'lodge' at the other man's standpoint, because the meanings he gives to words are for him the only meanings, and he will not debate on any other basis.[31]

In the 'Sorting that Evens Things Out' chapter, Zhuangzi describes the assessment of disputation which often results in the pronouncement of one speaker being correct and the other wrong. But Zhuangzi takes this a step further: a third person is normally called in to adjudicate; this paradigmatic assessor is detached and disinterested. Is there one such assessor, is there any

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[29] Raphals, 1996, pp. 26–49.

[30] In Chapter 33, 'Below in the Empire', three methodologies are discussed: 'spillover' sayings, 'weighty' sayings and sayings 'from a lodging-place'. According to Graham, these three phrases are developed by Zhuangzi in his evaluation of argument strategies, though they were misunderstood (2001, pp. 25f.). Graham reads the three kinds of strategies in conjunction with Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi* in order to shed light on what Zhuangzi might have meant. 'Spillover' sayings are 'traditionally and plausibly supposed to be named after a kind of vessel which tips over when filled to the brim and then rights itself' (ibid., p. 26). The 'weighted' saying is what is said on one's own authority, backed by depth of experience. The third kind, 'from a lodging place', is discussed in detail here.

[31] Ibid.

one privileged perspective? Is not the perspective of the 'disinterested' assessor itself also lodged?

The situatedness of each perspective, that of the 'I' and of the 'other', is most effectively conveyed in Wing-tsit Chan's translation of the assumption of 'this' and 'that':

> There is nothing that is not the 'that' and there is nothing that is not the 'this.' Things do not know that they are the 'that' of other things; they only know what they themselves know. (*Zhuangzi* 2; Trans Chan, 1963b, p. 182).

The problem of perspectival narrowness is compounded by their insularity. It is not merely that one is unable to discern the thoughts of the other but also that one cannot comprehend the limitations of one's own perspective. These statements appear to reject *any* postulation of a monadic truth or reality. But is Zhuangzi ultimately advocating a multiplicity of perspectives or a unity of these multiplicities?[32]

There is considerable disagreement among scholars regarding Zhuangzi's treatment of perspectives. His scepticism may be understood as linguistic (a rejection of the absolutism and realism in language), epistemological (that knowledge – of the definitive, absolute sort – is not possible), metaphysical (a rejection of reality, or a monist reality) or some combination of these.[33]

But what might these debates mean for Confucianism? If we are to take heed of Zhuangzi's metalinguistic and meta-ethical scepticisms, the Confucian postulation of a universal human nature and a unitary human socio-political project must be revisited. If Zhuangzi is correct about the multiplicity of perspectives, Confucian ideals must be revised, for they rest on the presupposition of a distinctive and homogeneous human nature.

In Zhuangzi's discussion of the different parts of the body coordinated and working together, he argues that there is no one organ or faculty which is supreme (Chapter 2). Zhuangzi is aware of assumptions about the centrality of *xin*, the mind-heart. He notes that, 'each day we use that heart of ours for strife' (trans. Graham, 2001, p. 50). Zhuangzi's analysis of *xin* exposes many unjustifiable assumptions in Mengzi's theory of human nature. The identification of *xin* as the basis of meaningful human enterprise ignores the inescapable ontological fact that the heart is interdependent with other body organs and

[32] Hansen argues to the effect that internal consistency requires an understanding of Zhuangzi's view as *one amongst others*: 'Zhuangzi cannot *recommend* his metaperspective as more natural than the others' (1992, p. 284). Others argue that Zhuangzi's thinking exhibits a commitment to some version of mystical oneness (Roth, 2000; and Yearley, 1983).

[33] See the two collections of essays in Victor Mair (ed.), *Experimental Essays on the Chuang Tzu* (1983), and Paul Kjellberg and Philip Ivanhoe (eds), *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (1996).

parts. From these anatomical considerations, we may draw analogically significant philosophical conclusions.

The postulation that *xin* is the faculty of 'correct' decision-making correlates with the propagation of a universally applicable standard of correct action. Zhuangzi's criticisms operate at a few different levels. What is the basis of *shi–fei* (yes–no) distinctions? Why is *xin* the capacity or faculty for making these decisions? Additionally, why is the Mencian *xin*, or Kongzi's *ren*, a more 'correct' standard than others?[34]

The Confucian project of attaining a flourishing human condition involves the institution and practice of acceptable behavioural norms. The early Confucian thinkers were united on the issue of the centrality of self-cultivation to human realisation. This was especially the case for Xunzi, who denied an innate moral capacity or predisposition. For him, morality is very much a socially controlled process, with emphasis on the regulation of behaviours in order to curb the expression of selfish desires. Xunzi exploits the conventionality of names to institute prescribed standards for action:

> When sage-kings instituted names, the names were fixed and actualities distinguished ... [the people] single-mindedly followed the law and carefully obeyed orders. In this way, the traces of their accomplishments spread. The spreading of traces and the achievement of results are the highest point of good government. This is the result of careful abiding by the conventional meaning of names. (Trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 124)

Although Zhuangzi and Xunzi were in agreement regarding the conventionality of names, Zhuangzi would have gone to great lengths to avoid the prescriptivism in Xunzi's philosophy. As Zhuangzi points out, such attempts to unify humanity are ironically divisive. Multiplicity cannot be reduced. The Confucian perspective is after all a lodged one, merely one among many. From Zhuangzi's point of view, there are simply no grounds for preferring the Confucian programme. From a metaethical point of view, what is acceptable (*shi*), and what not (*fei*)? 'Is there proof of the distinction? Or isn't there any proof?' Perhaps such judgments are never possible.

The debate does not end here; does Zhuangzi have the final word? Why is Zhuangzi's theory of multiple perspectives 'better' or more plausible than the Confucian one? Why is the way of multiplicity better than a singular way? If the reason rests primarily in that this is the *way* the world is, then Zhuangzi is promoting an ontological-ethical determinism: the many can only (and should) be many. Is Zhuangzi advancing a theory of multiplicity as the correct approach? Or is he not?

[34] Hansen discusses Mengzi's *xin* in the light of Zhuangzi's theory (1992, pp. 277–80).

Confucianism and Daoism: Thinking About the Self

The Daoist challenge to early Confucian thought did expose a number of its weaknesses. I have focused on two main themes in Daoist philosophy in order to accentuate important aspects of self in Confucian and Daoist thought. The first concerns the Daoist criticism of narrow, human-centred projects that are perpetuated through language. The second relates to the situatedness of the self, articulated in the themes of interdependence and contextualisation.

Regarding the first point, it might be argued that the Confucian ethico-political programme appears unable to transcend the existing frameworks and norms in ancient Chinese society. From a comparative point of view, the Daoist criticisms of Confucian insularity are compelling. Terms and concepts are necessarily embedded in specific historical and cultural contexts, and inculcation in these serves further to entrench people in a prescribed set of attitudes and beliefs.

The Daoist critique draws together various criticisms advanced by the Mohists and the Legalists as well. According to them, Confucianism only reaffirms the voice of antiquated authority, reappoints familial and hierarchical networks and power, and focuses on the immediate (bonds of nearness) and particular (relationships). To put it strongly, the Confucian themes demonstrate a commitment to re-enact and revive the golden past; Kongzi appears to have said so in as many words (*Analects* 3:14; 7:5). From the Daoist point of view, it might be said that all these difficulties are symptoms of an inability of the Confucians to move beyond the immediate situation to think about the human condition and its priorities.

The *Daodejing* offers its own prescriptions for rectifying the existing socio-political unrest. In its advocacy of *wuwei* government, there are many allusions to *dao* as a holistic, super-human and all-encompassing point of view (see *Daodejing* 77). This understanding of *dao* is concordant with a metaphysical reading of *dao* as the whole contextual environment comprising interdependent particulars. Within this environment, particulars fulfil their potentialities in a maximally optimal way. According to this view, the Confucian perspective which invests in the conventional markers of human achievement is inadequate.

In the *Zhuangzi*, there is significantly less indication of a commitment to a monist view of reality. It is clear that Zhuangzi proposes the contextual embeddedness of each perspective. In itself, the multiple-perspective argument already poses some difficulties for Confucianism: it cannot claim universality as it is an argument arising from a particular, lodged, viewpoint. In so far as the method and aims proposed by the *Daodejing* are monist, Zhuangzi's theory may be described as pluralist. Hansen describes the difference between *dao* in the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* in the following manner:

> One shared feature of the *ru-mo* Confucian-Mohist debate was their appeal to the normative authority of *tian* nature: sky as endorsing their respective *dao*s. Daoists aver that nature does not authorize or endorse any *particular* social *dao*. This claim has two versions (pluralist & primitivist).[35]

The primitivist *dao* of the *Daodejing* sort advocates the way of nonaction (*wuwei*) and spontaneity (*ziran*). By contrast, the pluralist view – the Zhuangzi thesis as identified by Hansen – takes each *dao*, human or nonhuman, as one of many. It affirms the many.[36] The Confucian programme is only *one* human *dao*. Yet, it inappropriately and perhaps unconsciously proclaims its universality.

Where do we stand in the Confucian–Daoist debates? We might appreciate the philosophical rigour of Daoist philosophy. Yet, we must pause to ask whether it has meaningful practical import. In the case of Confucianism, the practical and ethical implications are unambiguous. We are made to feel, most palpably in Mengzi's account, that one's best chances for survival in a rapidly disintegrating society would be best secured through cultivating special relational bonds. Affection, obligation, loyalty, protection, mutuality and right action were manifest in and developed through relational interactions. The Confucians offered a practical action-guiding blueprint for the improvement of human relationships. In a time of such social strife, relational bonds were the best form of insurance for individuals.

Are the Daoist recommendations similarly practical? At a psychological level, reading the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* can effect real attitudinal changes in its readers. But the *Daodejing*'s *dao* is not, without further justification, a preferable goal to the Confucian *ren*. On the other hand, if Zhuangzi is understood to promote the unconditional embrace of *all* ways and paths, there are problems as well. In the world of practical realities, endorsement of multiplicity must have its limits as choices must be made. In other words, there are limits to the action-guiding capacities of relativism as a theory for action. Is the promotion of a singular, unified, way better? Or is it not?

Concerning the second point of discussion on the issue of interdependence, we see more accord between Confucian and Daoist philosophies. The concept of self in Confucian philosophy transcends simplistic dichotomies between self and other, and self and society. The concept of relational self underpins issues of identity, choice, decision-making and ethics. This concept of the relationally constituted self is amorphous and difficult to identify clearly and definitively. Decision-making is complex as it must take into account the concrete and

[35] Hansen, 2003.

[36] Does Zhuangzi suggest an ultimate unity of the many? According to the affirmative thesis, the *Zhuangzi* and *Daodejing* promote one line of thought, advocating a vision of ultimate oneness. However, if Zhuangzi is understood to promote an ultimate multiplicity, he would have to embrace relativism as well. It is significant for moral theory whether Zhuangzi's position implies relativism. Does Zhuangzi hold that there are many *dao*s, *and all of them are legitimate*? See Ivanhoe, 1996.

particular features of actual relationships. One who conceives of personal identity in the Confucian sense would also be less expectant to exercise autonomous, free will and perhaps more ready to deal with change and unexpected turns. The *Analects* provides some insight into decision-making that focuses on particulars.

I have argued that the concepts *dao–de* in the *Daodejing* support an understanding of contextual environment as the conceptual framework within which particular individuals are instantiated. Within this conceptual scheme, self-realisation must be understood in the light of interdependent relationships. The *Zhuangzi* gives somewhat different reasons for valuing context; it emphasises the multiplicity of individual perspectives.

Notwithstanding these subtleties, the overall picture of the embedded, contextual self in Daoist philosophy urges a reorientation of self-centredness. Within the Daoist conceptual framework, many occurrences – such as gusty winds and downpours – take place interdependently, yet spontaneously. The interdependent individual recognises that many elements affecting it are beyond its control and therefore attempts in the first instance to work with them rather than against them. In Daoist philosophy, the lines of cause and effect and of action and reaction are not clearly defined and perhaps will never be.

In the language of both the Confucians and Daoists, the postulation of self as independent or detached will only result in strife and fragmentation. The field-focus framework proposed by Hall and Ames is particularly suited to capturing the interdependence-context nexus as a basis for understanding the concept of self articulated here:

> the relations of 'part' to 'whole' are best characterized in terms of the notions of 'focus' and 'field.' A particular is a focus that is both defined by and defines a context – a field ... The particular focus [*de*] is not understood in terms of discrete and essentialistic self-nature; rather, it is a focus in the process of existence. When disclosing its uniqueness and difference, it is apprehended as a particular; when considered in terms of the full complement and consequence of its determining conditions, it is a field of existing things.[37]

It is not difficult to see how the field-focus scheme captures the essential elements of interdependent self. Although Daoist thought indulges in more theoretical considerations and Confucian thought favours the concrete realities of human relationships, both take the interdependent self as the basic unit of reality. Both are concerned with the place of the relational individual in its environment. In practical terms, the relevant ethical notions arising from such a conception of self include cooperation, interdependence, responsibility, mutuality, sensitivity and responsiveness.

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[37] Hall and Ames, 1987, p. 238.

CHAPTER THREE

Elements of Confucian Moral Thinking

In Confucian thought, successful interactions with others within the accepted normative and cultural codes are prerequisites of the good life. The philosophy accentuates an ongoing engagement others within the lived social realities of action-guiding norms imposed in particular through *li*.

One of the major issues arising from this picture of self and society concerns the expression of individuality. This is already nascent in the debate between Mengzi and Xunzi. For Mengzi, moral cultivation consists in the drawing-out and continual exercise of existing moral capacities. Moral action is the cultivated expression of the innate moral self.

For Xunzi, by contrast, the focus shifts from the cultivation of an innate morality to the institution of ethical conduct sanctioned by political society. Moral cultivation would consist essentially in compliance with standards for behaviour such as *li*, and with regulation (*fa*). Where there is room for creativity, it would not lie with the common people but with the enlightened sages who devise appropriate standards for behaviour and interaction.

This debate between Mengzi and Xunzi has sometimes been characterised as the inner–outer (*nei–wai*) debate. The *Analects* presents some preliminary elements of this. For example, *Analects* 6:18 refers to the necessity of both an inner disposition (*zhi*) and refinement (*wen*). Here, Kongzi is seen to advocate an appropriate balance of the two and wittily to reject an improper overemphasis on either:

> The Master said, 'When one's basic disposition (*zhi*) overwhelms refinement (*wen*), the person is boorish; when refinement overwhelms one's basic disposition, the person is an officious scribe. It is only when one's basic disposition and refinement are in appropriate balance that you have the exemplary person (*junzi*).' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, pp. 107–8)

In the *Analects*, *nei–wai* philosophy is nested in the incipient tension between the concepts *ren* and *li*. As a concept designating the distinctive and universal trait of humanity, *ren* became the main protagonist for inner morality. The concept *li*, which referred to norms of social ritual and interaction, was alluded to in support of an externally imposed morality. References to *ren* and *li* in the *Analects*, however, are not conclusive in either direction of the debate; in some cases *ren* is presented as fundamental (*Analects* 3:3). Yet, in others, *li* is seen as

basic (*Analects* 12:1).[1] The *Analects* passages do appear to address issues confronting the developing self, including the extent of independent thought (15:36) and conformity to instruction or existing norms (2:9; 11:22). The paradigmatic person, the *junzi*, draws from elements within himself (12:1; 15:19; 15:21) as well as resources within his social environment: he learns from both the good and the bad and seeks close associations with persons who embody *ren* (7:22; 4:1).

The paradigmatic man is familiar and comfortable with the norms of society (*Analects* 14:29). Given that the Confucian concept of self is fundamentally a relational self, it is *only* in and through *li* that one's humanity can be realised. Yet, individuals are not entirely submerged within the prescriptions of *li* (9:3). The paradigmatic man is a creator of standards rather than a follower (2:1; 12:19) and he possesses a keen sense of moral discrimination (4:3). Moral achievement reaches its culmination in those who have attained the capacity to assess events and who, being attuned to *li*, embody a sense of rightness (15:18; 9:30).

Ethical Concepts in Confucian Thought

The lack of systematic organisation and coherent flow of argument in the *Analects* contributes to difficulties in its interpretation. Perhaps these deficiencies contribute to a disinclination among some of its readers to explore more creative ways of reading the text. According to an uninspired understanding of it, the *Analects* is a loose collection of the Master's sayings, primarily prescriptive in nature.

In this section, I work through a number of key Confucian concepts pertaining to ethical deliberation. These include the concepts *zhengming* (regulation of behaviour according to status), *li*, *ren* and *yi* (rightness). I weave together some of them to articulate the essential elements of moral decision-making in Confucian thought. This is the groundwork for my argument to follow, that the *Analects* should be read as a manual for moral decision-making.

Zhengming: *Regulating Society through Prescribed Titles*[2]

The theory of *zhengming*, most often translated the 'rectification of names', encapsulates the Confucian emphasis on fulfilling the obligations associated

[1] Conversations with, or utterances by, Kongzi's disciples Ziyou and Zixia reveal inclinations to the 'outer' school, while those with Zengzi, Zizhang and Yanhui show more commitment to the 'inner' school. Benjamin Schwartz discusses this division in the views of the early disciples (1985, pp. 130–34).

[2] The key ideas in this section are drawn from the discussion of Confucian moral thinking in Lai, 1995.

with particular titles. The *junzi*, the paradigmatic man, is one of those titles. The fuller idea of *zhengming* cannot be grasped without also understanding that it is an instrument of socio-political order (*Analects* 12:11). The well-regulated society is essential for the good life of the individuals that make up the society; a society that benefits all is possible only when people carry out their responsibilities as befitting their social places. Accordingly, it is only with the cooperation of individuals within the community that the common good can be attained.

There is overwhelming emphasis in many Confucian texts on not behaving in ways which are considered 'out of place' in relation to one's social status:

> A youth from the Que village would carry messages for the Master. Someone asked Confucius, 'Is he making any progress?' The Master replied, 'I have seen him sitting in places reserved for his seniors, and have seen him walking side by side with his elders. This is someone intent on growing up quickly rather than on making progress.' (*Analects* 14:44; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 183; see also *Analects* 3:1)

This youth has obviously been identified as a bright boy. But his attempts to assume equal status with people more senior than himself are considered inappropriate. The behaviour calls for reproach because such violations have the potential to undermine the finely tuned harmony in Confucian society.

The requirement for appropriate behaviour is especially emphasised in the case of paradigmatic men who, by virtue of their involvement in government, are highly visible and hence open to constant scrutiny by the common people:

> Zigong said, 'When exemplary persons (*junzi*) go astray, it is like an eclipse of the sun and moon. When they stray, everyone sees it, and when they correct their course, everyone looks up to them.' (*Analects* 19:21; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 223)

There is emphasis on the primary responsibility of the ruler not only to establish himself as a moral exemplar (*Analects* 2:1; 2:2) but also to promote those who are upright (2:19). This is because the effects of these exemplars are pervasive: the grass is sure to bend when the wind blows on it (12:19).

Analects 13:3 sheds some light on the fundamental importance of *zhengming* in Confucian political theory. Zilu fails to understand why *zhengming* is nominated as the first priority in good government, and here Kongzi sets out his reasons:

> Zilu said, 'The ruler of Wei has been waiting for the Master to administer his government. What should come first?' The Master said, 'What is necessary is the rectification of names.' Zilu said, 'Could this be so? The Master is wide of[f] the mark. Why should there be this rectification?' The Master said, 'How uncultivated, You! In regard to what he does not know,

> the noble person is cautiously reserved. If names are not rectified, then language will not be appropriate, and if language is not appropriate, affairs will not be successfully carried out. If affairs are not successfully carried out, rites and music will not flourish, and if rites and music do not flourish, punishments will not hit the mark. If punishments do not hit the mark, the people will have nowhere to put hand or foot. Therefore the names used by the noble person must be appropriate for speech, and his speech must be appropriate for action. In regard to language the noble person allows no carelessness, that is all.' (Trans. De Bary and Bloom, 1999, p. 56)

There is a pun in *Analects* 13:3 on the terms government ($zheng_2$) and rectification ($zheng_1$). The Chinese character for 'governing' is made up of two other characters, the one on the left being the term 'rectify' ($zheng_1$). *Zhengming* is not primarily concerned with abstract, theoretical issues pertaining to the connection between names (or titles) and reality. Nor is it about the modification of titles, as its common translation 'rectification of names' suggests. *Zhengming* is a semantic-ethical theory about the ethical meanings and implications of titles. It is about the *appropriate conduct* of those who bear those titles. In *Analects* 13:3 only a ruler with a commitment to the people will be able effectively to advance the affairs of the state. De Bary and Bloom's translation of the passage accentuates the mutuality between titles and the corresponding responsibilities associated with office. Indeed, *zhengming* may be seen as the focal point of Kongzi's criticism of existing corrupt officials (12:7; 19:10).

In *Analects* 12:11, Kongzi describes a well-governed society as:

> *jun jun* [*junzi*], *chen chen* [official], *fu fu* [father], *zi zi* [son]

Translation of this passage is difficult as the original Chinese is itself vague. Most translators consider the first term of each pair as the title or noun, and the second as verb; each noun-verb pair signifying that the people filling the various positions carry out their responsibilities in a way fitting their titles:

> Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son (Trans. Lau, 1979a, p. 114)

> The ruler must rule, the minister minister, the father father, the son son. (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 156).

The second term of each pair describes an activity: that of being a son, a father, an official or a *junzi*. In emphasising the correct application of titles, the point is that titles used to designate the range of roles in human relationships are not merely indexical or referential but also have normative significance. Hansen notes that this Confucian doctrine had a regulative function:

> The purpose of the rectification is to create an ideal language for moral discrimination, evaluation and action ... Thus while in early Western philosophy there is a kind of assumption that the primary role of language lies in describing the world and communicating ideas or beliefs about the world, Confucian ... 'rectification of names' operates on the presupposition that the primary function of language is to instil attitudes guiding choice and action. Language use should be manipulated as a means of social control.[3]

What is central to these titles is not their simple naming function but the normative codes associated with the range of socio-political positions. Closer inspection reveals that the *meaning* of the titles is co-extensive with their *moral requirements* (see *Analects* 2:19; 13:2). The prescriptive content of *zhengming* is best illustrated by analogy, as in an example Kongzi himself is said to have used:

> A cornered vessel without corners; a strange cornered vessel! A strange cornered vessel! (Trans. Legge, 1991a, *Analects* 6:23, p. 192)
>
> [lit. A *gu* that is not *gu*; a *gu* alas, a *gu* alas.]

According to Legge, a *gu* is a cornered drinking vessel used in pre-Confucian times. Philologically, of the separate characters which make up the term *gu*, the character on the left, *jiao*, means 'corner'. In Kongzi's time, the shape of the vessel had changed; it had become more rounded although its name 'cornered vessel' remained in use. Legge captures the sense of this passage aptly, stating that 'the name without the reality is folly'.[4]

Among the early Confucian thinkers, Xunzi appears most obviously aware of the instrumentality of *zhengming* in instilling socio-political order. In characteristic manner without appealing to transcendental or super-human authority, Xunzi acknowledges in Chapter 22 ('Rectification of Names') that these titles are 'fixed' by kings, their meanings and applications being merely customary:

> Names have no intrinsic appropriateness. One agrees to use a certain name and issues an order to that effect, and if the agreement is abided by and becomes a matter of custom, then the name may be said to be appropriate,

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[3] Hansen, 1983a, p. 77.

[4] Legge, 1991a, p. 192. Legge also suggests that, in making this remark, Kongzi may be seen as criticising the governments of his time, 'retaining ancient names without ancient principles'. It follows from this that the theory of *zhengming* was one way in which Kongzi sought to bring to the leaders of the community a realisation of their responsibilities. These titles had empty referents because existing governments were not fulfilling their responsibilities (see *Analects* 13:20, 4:6 and 2:7). The Brooks, in their investigation of the tradition of the *Analects*, suggest that *gu* may refer to *ren*, a disused entity in Kongzi's times (Brooks and Brooks, 1998, p. 36).

> but if people do not abide by the agreement, then the name ceases to be appropriate. Names have no intrinsic reality. One agrees to use a certain name and issues an order that it shall be applied to a certain reality, and if the agreement is abided by and becomes a matter of custom, then it may be said to be a real name. There are, however, names which are intrinsically good. Names which are clear, simple, and not at odds with the thing they designate may be said to be good names. (Trans. Watson, 1963, p. 138)

In Xunzi's account, there is no necessary or a priori connection between the names and their referent. The ultimate goal of *zhengming* is so that the king 'can carry out the Way and communicate his intentions to others, [so that] he may guide the people with circumspection and unify them'.[5] Perhaps for Xunzi, because human nature is cast in intrinsically negative terms, there is more responsibility attributed to the ruler and the leaders in society for the education of the people. The benefits of *zhengming* are only realisable if those in government rectify their behaviour as a matter of chronological and ethical priority.[6]

Li: *Norms of Social Interaction*

The term *li* was used in classical pre-Confucian texts such as the *Shijing* and the *Shujing* to denote ritualistic religious practices to induce supernatural protection and blessing.[7] Extensive details are provided of the involvement of these kings in ritual ceremonies, with their finely-tuned conduct of the ceremonies appropriately placed within the time of the seasons and calendar including the movements of the cosmic forces.[8]

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[5] The potential for an inept or immoral ruler to manipulate the common people utilising this formulation of *zhengming* is not insignificant. It is a possibility that Xunzi considers only briefly, arguing that those who exploit the tool by recklessly making up new names and casting out the old – hence causing people to be deluded and confused – 'is a terrible evil and should be punished' (ibid., p. 140).

[6] There is no clear distinction between those roles within the socio-political and others in personal or private domains. *Zhengming* applies not only to the obligations of those who take on the more 'public' socio-political roles, but to obligations in relationships which have a distinctly more personal and private aspect as well. There are interesting comparisons to be made with some discussions on role morality including those by F.H. Bradley (1927); A.I. Melden (1959); John MacMurray (1961); and Dorothy Emmet (1966). Role morality in these accounts is offered as an alternative system to traditional ones in Anglo-American moral philosophy that emphasise deontology, impartiality, detachment or consequentialism. But in Confucian philosophy, conducting oneself according to one's status role is not necessarily inconsistent with deontology or consequentialism.

[7] See Skaja, 1984.

[8] 'The Canon of Yao' in 'Part I: The Book of Thang'; and 'The Canon of Shun' in 'Part II: The Books of Yu', trans. James Legge, 1879.

In later sections of the *Shujing* and in the *Zuozhuan*, there are extensions in the scope of application of *li* to refer as well to the norms governing appropriate social behaviour. In the *Zuozhuan*, under the year 517 BCE, there is an explicit reference to *li* as the guiding standard of Heaven, Earth and humanity. Ritual ceremony in human life patterns itself on standards set by Heaven and Earth:

> I have heard our late great officer, Tzu Ch'an, say: 'Ceremonials [*li*] constitute the standard of Heaven, the principle of Earth, and the conduct of man. Heaven and Earth have their standards, and men take these for their pattern, imitating the brilliant bodies of Heaven and according with the natural diversities of Earth ...' (Trans. Fung, 1952, vol. 1, p. 38)

The focus on rituals in ordinary social interaction is a significant theme in Confucian thought. The Ruist tradition which was associated with the origins of Confucian philosophy emphasised ceremonial ritual in the petty courts of the numerous feudal states.[9] In these courts, there was particular attention on how guests of the state should be treated. This phenomenon of ceremonial court ritual spread into the ordinary life of the scholar-officials. There is a passage in *Zuozhuan* of 513 BCE that may have been articulated in defence of Ruist concerns:

> Chin is going to ruin. It has lost its (proper) rules (of administration) ... people will study the tripods, and not care to know their men of rank. And what profession can the superiors keep? (*Tso Chuan Chu-su*, 53, 6b–7a; trans. Legge, 1991b, p. 732)

Kongzi is said to have made this statement; he would have resisted this measure for two reasons. First, he objected to the use of penal law as a system of social control. Secondly, he rejected the standardisation of penal law for officials as well as the common people. This would have been based on a conviction that because the officials were men of honour, penal law and punishment should apply only to the common people. The *Liji* (*Book of Rites*) states, '*Li* is not applicable to the common people, punishment is not applicable to the *ta-fu* (officials)'.[10]

There is also in the *Analects* further extension of the scope of *li*. In its various uses, *li* refers to appropriate gestures and behaviours within a range of relational contexts, including the domestic (*Analects* 2:5). There are important

[9] Homer Dubs, in investigating the historical and intellectual influences of Xunzi's thought, describes the extension of the scope of *li* during the *Chunqiu* and *Zhanguo* periods (Dubs, 1966, p. 116).

[10] *Liji* Section 3, 3b, trans Legge, 1879, p. 90; cited in Ch'u, T'ung-Tsu, 1965, p. 172. See also Ch'u's detailed discussion of the privileges of the nobility through to the Han Dynasty (pp. 172–85).

and illuminating analogies between *li* in the older, ritualistic sense and its more general, social applications. First, one becomes adept at ritual behaviour through constant practice. This is indicated in *Analects* 15:4: Shun, a sage-king, had governed effortlessly and efficiently because of his skill in ritual performance. Through practice of social ritual in a range of situations, one acquires a *fluency* in conduct. This enables one to be at ease in different circumstantial contexts (*Analects* 14:30).

Second, both religious and social ritual have important social functions. For example, ancestor worship has ethico-religious significance as it is intertwined with conceptions of life and death, reverence and respect, loyalties within the family and ethical responsibility. These are important at the personal level, but they also contribute to the common socio-cultural heritage of the society. Much of social ritual has this two-dimensional meaning as well. At the personal level, one expresses his respect for others through *li*-forms. Collectively, instantiations of respectful behaviour by individuals within the community contribute to notions of respect upheld by the community as a whole.

Finally, a fundamental similarity between ritual and social interaction is the underlying or accompanying 'spirit' with which one performs that action. Henry Skaja, who understands *li* to have a primary place in Confucian thought, comments that 'by its essentially humanistic-religious and aesthetic origin, by its very nature an act of *li* is *expressive* and *indicative* of one's cultivated, native human emotion or feeling, which Confucius called *ren*'.[11] That *li* are ideally and ultimately rooted in appropriate human emotions is clearly indicated in many passages of the *Analects*.

Herbert Fingarette attempts to capture the breadth of the meaning of *li*, ranging from religious ritual to norms of social interaction.[12] He argues that significant elements in religious ceremonies, such as the attention to detail, the shared understandings between those participating in the ceremony, and feelings of awe and respect, have permeated Confucian thinking on ordinary social interaction. What is most important for Fingarette is the perpetuation of the element of sacredness from religious ritual into ordinary human interaction. In his book entitled *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, Fingarette presents *li* as having some 'magical' quality: ceremonies function smoothly because of the shared understandings and expectations of the people involved. This is seemingly magical as, without coercion, ritual behaviours flow smoothly, at times almost as if unthinkingly. Fingarette explores the underlying dynamics of a simple social ritual such as the handshake:

[11] Skaja, 1984, p. 51.
[12] Fingarette, 1972.

> I see you on the street; I smile, walk toward you, put out my hand to shake yours. And behold – without any command, stratagem, force, special tricks or tools, without any effort on my part to make you do so, you spontaneously turn toward me, return my smile, raise your hand toward mine. We shake hands – not by my pulling your hand up and down or your pulling mine but by spontaneous and perfect cooperative action. Normally we do not notice the subtlety and amazing complexity of this coordinated 'ritual' act. This subtlety and complexity become very evident, however, if one has had to learn the ceremony only from a book of instructions, or if one is a foreigner from a nonhandshaking culture.[13]

Fingarette is mindful of the apparently prosaic nature of his example. Yet, he maintains that its depth and complexity should not be too quickly dismissed. In support of Fingarette's view, it might be argued that it is exactly in such 'simple' social rituals that there are many shared assumptions at play – ones that are taken for granted and not fully appreciated. The shared codes and meanings in social interaction are unfortunately too often undervalued.

Fingarette's explorations into the concept of *li* reflect that, for Kongzi, the *li* were a necessary conduit for the expression of human feeling in a range of relational contexts. If humans are successfully to realise their shared humanity, social ceremony is the basic way – perhaps the *only* way – to exploit these contexts in order to establish and create meaning.

It is interesting in the light of this discussion to review Mozi's criticism of Confucian *li*. Mozi perceived the Confucian project as an elitist and a trivial preoccupation, attempting merely to preserve exclusive ritual forms. He argued that the resources required for the maintenance of *li* were simply unjustified:

> the Confucians corrupt men with their elaborate and showy rites and music ... They turn their backs on what is important, abandon their tasks and find contentment in idleness and pride ... If they can get enough to eat and drink and get themselves put in complete charge of a few funerals, they are satisfied ... ('Against Confucians', Part I, Section 39; trans. Watson, 1967, p. 127)

If one is concerned to maximise utility, as in the case of the Moists, the Confucian preoccupation with *li* and music did little more than to detract from one's economic productivity. But perhaps the Moists had failed to grasp that one of the functions of ritual behaviour was to restrain desires. Restraining desires, in turn, could have had positive effects on consumption and production patterns.[14]

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[13] Ibid., p. 9.

[14] For a discussion of this, see Graham, 1989, pp. 257–8. On self-control and restraint among the *shi* class during the Warring States period, see Hsu, 1965, p. 8.

It might also be argued that the socio-political utility of *li* in standardising behaviour and unifying the people was grossly underestimated by the Moists. *Li* also served to restrain excesses of emotion such as joy and grief (*Analects* 3:4; 7:9, 7:10). Most prominently, in Xunzi's scheme, *li* were largely functional. Xunzi understood *li*, together with penal law, as useful institutions, instrumental in effecting social order. He envisaged *li* and punishment as *complementary* instruments ('The Regulations of a King', Section 9; trans. Watson, 1963, p. 34).

Li provided the structural framework for distinguishing between relationships, a theme central to Confucian thought. In his chapter devoted to discussion of *li*, Xunzi meticulously investigates its origins as well as his applications. He eloquently expresses a sense of proportion and restraint brought about by instituting *li* in society:

> Rites trim what is too long and stretch out what is too short, eliminate surplus and repair deficiency, extend the forms of love and reverence, and step by step bring to fulfilment the beauties of proper conduct. Beauty and ugliness, music and weeping, joy and sorrow are opposites, and yet rites make use of them all, bringing forth and employing each in its turn. (Trans. Watson, 1963, p. 100)

Li is one of the basic structures of social organisation, particularly in the realisation of social harmony by marking for each his place within society (*Works of Xunzi*, Chapter 14). Homer Dubs discusses the breadth of scope and versatility of Xunzi's *li*:

> *Li* is human emotion expressed, harmonized, and beautified so as to become a pattern for all. It uses the features, the voice, food, garments, and dwellings, and gives each their appropriate means of expressing emotion. As a pattern, *Li* aids those whose expression of sorrow would be too little, and those whose expression of sorrow would be too violent, alike to reach a golden mean. By means of *Li*, the degenerate son is kept from becoming worse than a beast, and the over-sensitive man is prevented from injuring himself. *Li* is the beautifying of man's original nature by means of acquired characteristics which could not be acquired of themselves.[15]

Although Xunzi was a champion of *li*, his endorsement of both *li* and punishment as important institutions of government was a major point of departure from Kongzi's and Mengzi's philosophies. Kongzi saw the two systems as based in fundamentally different conceptions of human good and social development. For him, *li* and punishments were essential and complementary forms of social control. By contrast, while Kongzi is said to

[15] Dubs, 1966, pp. 146–7.

have claimed that he was good at litigation (*Analects* 12:13), he aimed not to use it.[16]

Kongzi objected to the institution of punishment for various related reasons. For one, he would have seen penal law as being overly universalistic. Focusing on prohibitive behaviours would have meant that particular relational characteristics were ignored or considered irrelevant in moral decisions. *Analects* 13:18 is a case in point. The theme that relational attachment must be recognised in legal institutions has persisted through Chinese history; some scholars dub this phenomenon the 'Confucianisation of law'.[17]

More importantly, the Confucians believed that punishment did not assist in the cultivation of virtue because it encouraged an avoidance strategy which focused on not being found out. The external control and regulation of behaviour did not assist in developing the kind of reflective self-awareness as exercised by, for example, Zengzi (*Analects* 1:4). The fundamental psychology underlying penal law and punishments instigated an unacceptable, litigious approach to wrongdoing. The threat of punishment encouraged self-preserving instincts as well as mere behavioural conformity, rather than virtuous, other-regarding behaviour (*Analects* 2:3).[18]

The Connection between Ren *and* Li

Contemporary scholars and defenders of the Confucian tradition are rightly worried about the conservative undercurrents in *li*-practices. The *Analects* is at best ambiguous about the criteria for modifying *li* and the extent to which that is allowed. These questions are important because they foreshadow the adaptability of Confucian philosophy to contemporary contexts.

Although the *Analects* seems at points to be adhering rigidly to *li* (*Analects* 3:17; *Analects* Book 10), it does, on the other hand, also allow for the modification of *li*-practices. *Analects* 9:3 expresses the preparedness of Kongzi to modify traditional practice:

> The Master said, 'The use of a hemp cap is prescribed in the observance of ritual propriety (*li*). Nowadays, that a silk cap is used instead is a matter of frugality. I would follow accepted practice on this. A subject kowtowing on entering the hall is prescribed in the observance of ritual propriety (*li*).

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[16] A.C. Graham expresses Kongzi's sentiments succinctly: 'Confucius accepts law as belonging to government, but measures success in ruling by how little it is necessary to apply it' (1989, p. 14).

[17] Discussed by Ch'u, 1965, esp. pp. 267–79.

[18] Hansen convincingly juxtaposes punishment as self-preserving, against *li* as other-regarding (1992, pp. 64–5). Litigation made people 'clever' and glib in order to evade punishment. Hence, litigiousness generates words rather than action (for Hansen's fascinating analysis of the role of words in litigation, see ibid). In contrast, Confucian *li must* be manifest in action (*Analects* 1:3), with priority accorded to action rather than speech (4:24; 14:20; 14:27).

> Nowadays that one kowtows only after ascending the hall is a matter of hubris. Although it goes contrary to accepted practice, I still kowtow on entering the hall.' (*Analects* 9:3; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 126)

Kongzi was impelled in the first case to modify ritual behaviour (see also *Analects* 17:11 and 17:21). Nevertheless, this is a specific instance and a more precise Confucian value-theory is required. The common line taken by scholars in this regard is to emphasise the Confucian concept *ren* broadly to signify a commitment to humanity.

An example of a *ren*-based account is offered by Wei-ming Tu. Tu's analysis of *ren* and *li* in his paper 'The Creative Tension between *Jen* and *Li*' (1968) includes extended treatment of *Analects* 12:1, a passage that expresses the importance of conforming with *li*.[19] He also provides further justification for *ren* as fundamental by citing the comments of the modern Chinese writer and critic, Lu Xun (1881–1936), who commented on the May 4th period:

> The so-called 'doctrine of *li*' (*li-chiao*), which was under such violent criticism during the May 4th period, especially by literary writers like Lu Hsün, is a good example [of *li* degenerating into social coercion incapable of conscious improvement and liable to destroy any true human feelings] ... During the Ming-Ch'ing period, quite a number of widows committed suicide hoping to show that their acts were in conformity with the *li* of chastity. In view of such stupidity, Lu Hsün was quite justified in calling this type of *li* 'eating man' (*ch'ih-jen*).[20]

For Tu, *ren* comes to the rescue of *li*. In the event where *li* is corrosive of human well-being, ren is called in to realign *li*-practice with human welfare. This interpretation of *ren* as basic is central in Tu's programme, which attempts to establish the relevance of Confucian thought in modern-day societies. If Confucianism is to be applicable today, there must be avenues for revising ancient practices. Hence, Tu draws on *ren* as foundational in his promotion of Confucian thought: '*ren* as an inner morality is not caused by the mechanism of *li* from outside. It is higher-order concept which gives meaning to *li*.'[21]

[19] In this paper, Tu argues that the difficult phrase *kezi fuli* is not expressive of a call to subjugate oneself to the status quo. He contends that, while *ke* means 'to overcome', *kezi* has often been (mistakenly) transcribed as overcoming the self. This understanding of *kezi* is not uncommon; it has been proposed by scholars such as James Legge (1991a, pp. 250–51). Legge imposes on the Confucian text a devaluation of the physical body and its selfish desires, a view which owes more to Buddhism and/or certain strains in western philosophy than to Confucianism.

[20] Tu, 1968, p. 37.

[21] Ibid., p. 33. However, in a subsequent article, Tu concedes that *ren* and *li* are in fact inseparable: 'although *jen*, especially when used as a comprehensive virtue, gives meaning to *li*, *jen* without the manifestation of *li* is also inconceivable' (Tu, 1972, p. 188).

On the other hand, some others have defended the view that *li* are the primary driving force or concept in Confucian philosophy. In '*Li* (Ceremonial) as a Primal Concept in Confucian Spiritual-Humanism', Skaja argues for the revitalisation of *li* as ideal spiritualised conduct, highlighting its educative and governing functions that contribute to the cultivation of character. Skaja states explicitly that moral standards are rooted in *li*-acts and *li*-practices: 'standards are derived and objectified from envisioned, actual or legendary acts already performed'.[22] Further:

> In his effort to establish the future of civilized culture, Confucius creatively selected, used, and transformed the traditional behavioral norms of conduct (*li*) which were still of educational value. He thereby *transformed* and *generalized* the meaning of *li* from mere 'rite' or 'ritual sacrifice' to the necessary educative and self-reflective socialization process, itself, whereby man becomes humanized, i.e. socialized.[23]

But Skaja's interpretation embodies the difficulty that many Confucian interpreters seek to avoid: if *li* occupy a more fundamental position than *ren*, then Confucian self-cultivation is merely a socialisation process. The danger then lies in individuals being submerged within the norms of the status quo.

A compromising strategy in this debate is to understand both ren and *li* as fundamental. Kwong-Loi Shun presents an insightful interpretation of the connection between *ren* and *li* in the *Analects*, arguing that they are necessarily interdependent. He understands *ren* and *li* as integral to each other, explaining their relation by analogy with linguistic competence. Here, Shun draws on the connection between the mastery of a linguistic concept – say, tense – and the mastery of its use – one's use of tense in language. While having mastery of a concept (likened to *ren*) is to have the capacity for thoughts relating to the subject, having mastery of a linguistic practice (likened to *li*) is like having 'the capacity to use a language correctly in appropriate circumstances and to respond in appropriate ways to its use'.[24]

The mastery of a concept can only properly be realised in and through its corresponding linguistic practice. One demonstrates an understanding of tense only by successfully using it within a particular linguistic context. Conversely, competent usage of tense in a particular language demonstrates one's mastery of the concept. Hence, Shun suggests that mastery of the usage of tense is both necessary and sufficient for the mastery of the concept. Shun's analysis of the *ren–li* connection is a creative and philosophically satisfying one. It raises other important issues, including the criteria or basis for modifying *li*.

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[22] Skaja, 1984, p. 55.
[23] Ibid, pp. 62–3.
[24] Shun, 1993, p. 468.

It should not be assumed that drawing an interdependent relation between *ren* and *li* settles the issue of decision-making criteria in Confucian thought. The concept *ren* is fairly undefined in the Confucian texts and readers should avoid reading retrospectively into Confucian philosophy by imbuing *ren* with modern meanings. For instance, Dubs argues that *ren* might serve as the justification for a notion of individual right:

> *Jen* was a principle whose consistent application would have carried Confucius into a break with the old order of things in favour of the right of the individual to decide matters for himself.[25]

Dub's interpretation of *ren* challenges the integrity of the early texts. In these texts, *ren* denotes a variable and broad set of emotions primarily associated with relational attachment, at times also referring to a more impersonal concern for humanity in general. Historically and conceptually, discussions of *ren* have also been embedded within hierarchical frameworks, whereby, for instance, the benevolent ruler leads his people. But Dubs reads retrospectively into *ren*, casting it as a concept aligned with a modern, liberal notion of individual right.

To reiterate this point, exactly the opposite may be achieved, using *ren* to denote a more dated conception of humanity. For example, referring to Tu's example of widows committing suicide in order to demonstrate their chastity, one might argue that a primary aspect of *ren* is loyalty:

> According to the norms of human relatedness (*ren*), a wife 'belongs' to her husband; where a married woman excels is in her capacity as a wife. As a consequence of his death, she would find life meaningless. This is because she is forever devoted to him, even unto death. Hence, widows may as well end their lives not merely in view of their chastity but also of their devotion to their deceased husbands.[26]

The problem arises, and is particularly acute, within a philosophical framework that emphasises the communal over the individual. *Ren* cannot merely re-emphasise the status quo. It now seems apparent why Mengzi was keen to locate goodness in a heaven-endowed human nature. He would have been hard-pressed to find evidence of it in the common practice of his time.

But the problem seems more acute than first suggested: if *ren* is understood to be necessarily interdependent with *li*, how can it simultaneously be evoked as a standard upon which *li* may be modified? In other words, if one learns to embody humanity and to realise oneself through *li*, the socially accepted ritual forms, how might one also learn to be *critically independent* of them?

[25] Dubs, 1966, p. 127.
[26] This example is first raised in Lai, 2003b, at p. 126.

Yi: *Morality and Righteousness*

Perhaps a concept other than *ren* is required to provide an independent basis for a proper evaluation of existing *li*-practices. It may be the case that the concept *yi* serves this function; this idea has been suggested by some scholars who translate *yi* as providing the essential moral content. In this light, *yi* is translated as 'right', 'duty', 'morality' or 'righteousness'.[27]

In relation to its translation as 'morality' or 'righteousness', *yi* is an essentially normative concept. For example, in Legge's translation of *Analects* 15:17, *yi* is basic in the *junzi*'s disposition:

> The Master said, 'The superior man *in everything* considers righteousness [*yi*] to be essential. He performs it according to the rules of propriety [*li*]. He brings it forth in humility. He completes it with sincerity. This is indeed a superior man.' (*Analects* 15:17; trans. Legge, 1991a, p. 299)

Yi as 'righteousness' is a dispositional state that serves as the foundation of the *junzi*'s actions. *Yi* is rooted in the *junzi*'s commitment and made manifest in his actions such that 'the thing, whatever it be, [is] done righteously'.[28]

Mengzi's application of the concept *yi* has been influential in its interpretation as 'righteous'. In Mengzi's philosophy, *yi*, together with *ren*, *li* and *zhi* (wisdom), are the four roots of human nature. *Yi*, moral righteousness, arises from that aspect of the mind-heart which feels disgrace (*xiu*) and aversion to evil (*wu*) (*Books of Mencius*, 2A:6). The term *xiu* has frequently been translated as 'shame'. However, many translators do not make a clear distinction between the concepts *xiu* (*Books of Mencius* 2A:6; *Analects* 13:22) and *chi* (*Books of Mencius* 4B:18.3; 5B:5; *Analects* 2:3; 14:1; 14:27); both are often translated as 'shame'.[29]

The lack of distinction in the translation of *xiu* and *chi* could obscure important differences in their meaning. The translation of *chi* as 'shame' appears accurate as it captures the sense of embarrassment motivated by some external standard or public disclosure. One is ashamed if one's reputation exceeds oneself (*Books of Mencius* 4B:18), or if one is an official associated with an ineffective or evil regime (*Books of Mencius* 5B:5.5). Shame also arises in response to censure by an external source. This notion of shame is often contrasted with guilt, the latter often seen as a self-regulated conception of morality. The reference to *chi* in *Analects* 2:3 is particularly supportive of this

[27] See, for example, D.C. Lau's translation of the *Analects* (1963). Lau considers a broad range of interpretations of *yi* in his introductory chapter to his translation.

[28] Refer to Legge's translation notes, (1991a, at pp. 299–300).

[29] This is the case in Ames and Rosemont Jr.'s translation of the *Analects*. For example, *chi* (*Analects* 2:3; 14:1; 14:27) and *xiu* (*Analects* 13:22) are translated as 'shame'.

interpretation: the common people led by *li* (social propriety) will learn a sense of shame. This suggests that *chi* refers to shame that is associated with exposure to others, or in public.

In comparison, the one occurrence of *xiu* in the *Analects* is a quote from the *Yijing*, that a person who lacks constancy in virtue will feel disgraced (*Analects* 13:22). *Xiu* figures in a more prominent way in Mengzi's philosophy and, in contrast to *chi*, seems to refer to an internal moral-regulatory capacity. In *Books of Mencius* 3B:1.5, for example, the gentleman is morally guilty, *xiu*, if he improperly bends his principles simply to be in accord with the prince.

A comparison between passages 5B:1 and 5B:5 in the *Books of Mencius* provides insight into the distinction between *chi* and *xiu*. On the one hand, 5B:5.5 establishes that an official is *chi* (shamed), if he is part of an evil prince's court; being associated with an evil prince is readily subjected to public scrutiny and one should feel shame (*chi*). On the other, 5B:1.3 upholds Liuxia of Hui, for *not* feeling guilty (*xiu*) in serving an inadequate prince because in his service, Liuxia did not conceal his principles. In other words, Liuxia's attempt to maintain his principles in difficult circumstances is an application of independent ethical judgment; this is also particularly clear in passage 3B:1.5. Guilt relates to the exercise of independent judgment and is not subject to public scrutiny.

It is noteworthy that the predominant concept in the *Analects* is *chi*, externally regulated shame, while Mengzi discusses *xiu* especially in connection with *wu* (aversion to evil) as one of the basic capacities of the mind-heart (2A:6 and 6A:6,7). When *xiu* is paired with *wu*, the suggestion is that the original mind-heart is averse to evil.[30]

It follows from this discussion that *yi* captures a sense of independence from status-quo determination of individuals. For Mengzi, *yi* is an innate moral sensitivity to moral righteousness. The sharpest illumination of this innate moral intuition at work is articulated in *Books of Mencius* 6A:10:

> Suppose here are a small basket of rice and a platter of soup. With them one will survive and without them one will die. If you offer them in a loud and angry voice, even an ordinary passer-by will not accept them, or if you first tread on them and then offer them, even a beggar will not stoop to take them. What good does a salary of ten thousand bushels do me if I accept them without any consideration of the principles of propriety (*li*) and righteousness (*yi*)? (Trans. Chan, 1963a, pp. 57–8)

[30] One needs to be careful not to oversimplify the contrast between shame and guilt given that there are subtle shades in both concepts (Ng, 1981). An insufficient understanding of the two concepts could lead to a misunderstanding of Confucian thought as a 'shame-morality', whereby moral standards are mainly located in external sources (for example, Hansen, 1992, p. 165, esp. footnote 29).

The aversion of bad, or evil, moves one to be repelled at circumstances that degrade one's humanity. The concept *yi* denotes internal moral sanction that may be applied to address the modification of *li*. However, while the notion of an innate moral intuition or conscience may be textually accurate, it will not satisfy the demands of philosophical rigour. The understanding of *yi* in the early Confucian texts is far from clear, and this further affects the indeterminate role of innate moral intuition in the assessment of situations. More to the point, an appeal to moral intuition as the basic arbiter of morality simply does not stand up to philosophical scrutiny. It might be argued that an appeal to *yi* as moral intuition or conscience is at least as broad and vague as an appeal to *ren* as 'humanity' or 'shared human concern'.

Yi: *Appropriateness and Right*

The translation of *yi* as 'right' or 'rightness' often corresponds with a focus on the particular circumstances in any event rather than an ethical norm or ideal. In his translation of the *Analects*, D.C. Lau states that *yi* as rightness (though he translates the term as 'morality' in some of the passages) pertains to an act-centred ethics. On this understanding of the concept, *yi* 'is basically a character of acts and its application to agents is derivative. A man is righteous only in so far as he consistently does what is right'.[31] According to this view, the role of *yi* in the *Analects* complements that of *ren*. *Yi* is a basic standard requiring no further justification: 'there is no further standard by which *yi* itself can be judged'.[32] On the basis that it is an act-centred concept, Lau proceeds to argue that, in Confucian ethical deliberation, *yi* assists in the determination of that which is 'morally fitting in the circumstances'.[33] This suggests that it is a matter of 'fit' or appropriateness, whether certain actions are right in the context of particular circumstances.

These observations regarding *yi* appear to resemble the concept of right defined by W.D. Ross, in *The Right and the Good*.[34] There, Ross sets up a contrast to establish the distinctness of the two notions. Providing a defence of deontological ethics, Ross argues that the concept right – pertaining to the obligatoriness of particular actions – is independent of good. It is desirable in so far as it enhances the life of which it is a part. Accordingly, good applies to an agent's motives and right to the specific and particular features morally relevant in a situation.

Ross maintains that the notion of right, which is central to a duty-based ethics (that is, something is right if it is morally obligatory), is irreducible. It

[31] Lau, 1979a, p. 27.
[32] Ibid., p. 27.
[33] Ibid. See also his discussion of the relation between *li* and *yi* on p. 49.
[34] Ross, 1930.

cannot be analysed because it is based on the criterion of fittingness or suitability which, in turn, is dependent on the various features of a situation coming together.

An act-centred understanding of *yi* as right has the following features:

(a) Right is fundamentally determined by the details of particular circumstances.
(b) There are no absolute standards or measures of right or wrong.
(c) The concept of right-ness applies to action and not to the assessment of an agent's motives or character (although it need not be incompatible with the latter. For instance, *yi* may be act-centred and compatible with *ren*, which is agent-centred).

That *yi* refers to the idea of fit or appropriateness of particular actions within specific contexts, is clearest in Ames and Rosemont's translation of *Analects* 4:10, where the *junzi* measures his actions according to the situation:

> The Master said, 'Exemplary persons (*junzi*) in making their way in the world are neither bent on nor against anything; they go with what is appropriate [*yi*].' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 91)

The commitment here is to the open nature of ethical deliberation, much of which depends on the specific details of particular situations. According to this interpretation, *yi* pertains to the *process* of deliberation. It emphasises the necessity of due consideration of specific details in a particular situation. These details are bearers, or potential bearers, of moral content. The *Analects* abound with examples of Kongzi's attention to the specific details in each situation. *Analects* 11:22 demonstrates the point effectively – Kongzi provides different responses to Zilu and Ranyou, tailoring his responses to the relevant and significant features of their character:

> Zilu inquired, 'On learning something, should one act upon it?' The Master said, 'While your father and elder brothers are still alive, how could you, on learning something, act upon it?' Then Ranyou asked the same question. The Master replied, 'On learning something, act upon it.'
>
> Gongzi Hua said, 'When Zilu asked the question, you observed that his father and elder brothers are still alive, but when Ranyou asked the same question, you told him to act on what he learns. I am confused – could you explain this to me?'
>
> The Master replied, 'Ranyou is diffident, and so I urged him on. But Zilu has the energy of two, and so I sought to rein him in.' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, pp. 146–7)

The passage articulates an awareness of the need for different responses to the two disciples. Gongzi Hua sets out specifically to raise that issue. What Kongzi

recommends to each of them rests ultimately on the fittingness of his advice to the distinctive needs of each disciple.

While *yi* may be understood as a fundamental element in ethical deliberation (*Analects* 4:10; 6:22; 16:10; 17:23), it is not a concept to be taken in isolation. That *yi* does not allow one simply to make the most of each situation for personal benefit is clear: *yi* runs against selfish profit (4:16; 14:12; 19:1); wealth and position gained through inappropriate means is considered not-*yi* (*buyi*). It is also significant that *yi* is often closely aligned with the norms of propriety (*li*), sincerity (*xin*), and doing one's best (*zhong*) (1:13; 12:10; 13:4). In the many instances of Kongzi's deliberations in the *Analects*, he is seen to draw the significant strands of each situation together, working toward an ideal balance and coherence of significant factors. A noteworthy understanding of *yi* based on a process-orientated interpretation of Confucian thought is expressed by Hall and Ames:

> The primary reference of *yi* is to the organic process comprised by the harmony of action and circumstance ... The sort of world required by our analysis of *yi*, however, cannot be characterized primarily by the sort of harmony achieved by the imposition of antecedently existing patterns upon events, for *yi* acts involve the deriving or bestowing of meaning in such a way as to realize novel patterns uniquely suited to each concrete circumstance ... the act of deriving meaning, if it is an *yi* act, is an act of appropriation which constitutes a novel instance of propriety that is, in a very real sense, unrepeatable.[35]

This interpretation of *yi* avoids its more common interpretation as a normative concept. Here, *yi* is to be contrasted with a pre-determined transcendent standard and superimposed on ethical deliberations or situations.

But there is a significant concern regarding this characterisation of *yi*. It seems to allow for an unspecified degree of elasticity and vagueness. Michael Martin expresses a strong objection to Hall and Ames' thesis. According to Martin, appeals to the notions of fit, harmony or aesthetic achievement are inadequate as these concepts are not sufficiently rigorous. He argues that

> while saving Confucius from rigidity, Hall and Ames' interpretation of *yi* goes too far in the opposite direction, leaving Confucius with *too few* constraints on behaviour, aesthetic achievement, like beauty, being very different things to different people.[36]

[35] Hall and Ames, 1984, pp. 16–18.

[36] Martin, 1990, p. 500. There is follow-up of this discussion in Hall and Ames (1991) and Martin (1991).

Martin illustrates the complexity of the problem with reference to the possibility of slave society being 'harmonious' without being just. His concerns are that *yi* be philosophically defensible and contemporary democratic values such as justice be upheld.

In relation to the first issue, Hall and Ames emphasise the different standards in philosophical justification and evidence in Chinese and Anglo-American philosophies. They argue that the style and mode of reasoning in Chinese philosophy are focused on aesthetic harmony rather than logic or rationality, and that appropriateness rather than coherence characterises the deliberative process.[37]

However, we should assess Hall and Ames' dichotomous approach to philosophical styles between so-called eastern and western thinking. It may be unhelpful and destructive to polarise the reasoning styles in Chinese and Anglo-American philosophies. Perhaps a response that challenges the dichotomy – rather than one which feeds it – may be more constructive and desirable. For example, it could be argued that philosophical reasoning affords a rich variety of styles and it is not a choice of one against others, but how they might severally support an argument. For instance, we might argue that *yi* aims at harmony but is also outcome-oriented.

Perhaps a more effective response to Martin is to question his assumptions in his understanding of *yi* and the *Analects* in general. Could it be that Martin's concerns are based on *yi* as a normative concept? If we take *yi* to be a meta-ethical concept, we may expect it to work in conjunction with some selected set of ideals. The primary focus of *yi* as 'right' is on the deliberative process rather than normative content. What is important here is how various factors need to be taken into consideration, how certain values are taken as basic, and how various elements come into play in arriving at a decision.

From this standpoint, normative approaches are woefully inadequate, including the account of *yi* as righteousness offered in the previous section. The *Analects* and the texts associated with Mengzi and Xunzi are not prescriptive but abound with richness in the detail of particular deliberations. These early Confucian texts present the figures of Kongzi, a number of his followers, Mengzi and Xunzi as committed, conscientious and skilful thinkers and deliberators.

Confucian Moral Deliberation

The passages in the *Analects* reflect elements of Kongzi's reasoning that are applied rather than explicitly articulated. In this section, I draw together some

[37] These points are also emphasised in their book, *Thinking Through Confucius* (1987).

of these deliberations in the light of concepts previously articulated. Here, six significant features of Confucian moral deliberation are identified:

(a) *Commitment to and enjoyment of worthwhile pursuits*. The burden is heavy and the road is long (*Analects* 8:7); one must be uncompromising when it comes to *ren* (15:9). Nevertheless, the commitment is characterised by enthusiasm and delight (*le*, 6:20), as for instance in having a circle of many friends of superior character or in discussing what others do well (16:5).

(b) *Reflectiveness in one's undertakings*. Kongzi himself is characterised as one who is constantly and passionately engaged in self-reflective examination (*Analects* 15:16). This reflectiveness is not merely a process and not restricted to self-examination. Rather it signifies a *mindful attitude* toward all matters (19:6; 16:10). The term for mindfulness, *si*, is associated with the mind-heart (*xin*)[38] and it stands to reason that a capacity for thoughtfulness and reflection is one that is also mindful of one's particular commitments.

(c) *There is emphasis on learning broadly*. This applies to the content – the breadth of knowledge (*Analects* 19:6) – as well as perspective. According to *Analects* 17:9, there is a wealth of insights to be drawn from learning the odes. These include arousing one's sensibilities (*xing*), strengthening one's powers of observation (*guan*), enhancing one's ability to get on with others (*qun*) and sharpening one's critical skills (*yuan*).[39] More specifically, the study broadens one's appreciation of the world.

(d) *Moral reasoning is characterised by flexibility*. There is attention to the relevant details of each situation (*Analects* 1:8; 18:8) and this includes consideration of the particular circumstances and disposition of individuals (11:22; 11:26; 19:12). There are explicit statements against stubborn adherence to any preconceived idea (1:8; 14:32), with Kongzi stating at one point that he does not have presuppositions regarding what may and may not be done (*wuke*, *wu buke*; 18:8).

(e) *The effects of Confucian self-cultivation must be observable in practice*. The character and motives of a person are revealed in his actions (*Analects* 2:10). The learning process is incomplete when one's behaviour and comportment are not concordant with his or her utterances (9:24). Hence, there is palpable emphasis in the *Analects* on making good on one's word (*xin*) (trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 206) and living up to it (1:4–8; 9:25; 12:10; 14:37; 15:6). In *Analects* 2:22, the importance of *xin* is

[38] Together with its cognate *lü* (see *Analects* 12:20, 15:12 and 18:8), *si* is 'from the heart' (*cong xin*). See *Shuowen Jiezi*, 1815, at p. 502.

[39] Translations adapted from Ames and Rosemont, 1998.

analogous to the pin of a yoke that enables a carriage to be drawn. Notably, the man who embodies *ren* is in an enviable state; he is at ease and without anxiety (7:37; 7:38).

(f) *There is a focus on excellence in everyday life*. For Kongzi's disciple, Zixia, learning draws upon everyday experiences and practice (*Analects* 19:5). The *junzi* is continually training his capacities to deal with a wide range of situations. He gives attention to his observations, listening, countenance, bearing and attitude, speech, conduct of affairs, contemplation of doubts, anger and issues of personal profit (16:10).

In the picture that emerges here, what is important is a sense of real debate and deliberation within the passages of the *Analects* without suggestion that certain predetermined conclusions must hold sway. These deliberations lead the reader to think that, more important than the specific outcome of the decision or its recommendation, are the *processes* which produce the respective conclusions. The three different responses to queries regarding *ren* in *Analects* 12:1–3 demonstrate the concreteness and practical application of ethical deliberations, tailored to the inquirer and situation at hand. In assessing these passages together, one gets a sense that the meaning of *ren*, being broad in scope, is largely dictated by the specific details in each case. This is not to suggest that the concept *ren* is devoid of useful content but rather that the depth of the Confucian insight rests in the reasoning strategies used to balance different and competing obligations and demands in real ethical situations.

In relation to the six features outlined above, we see that the salient characteristics of the paradigmatic man cannot be reduced to any one value or type of action. The range of concepts *ren*, *xin*, *zhong*, and *shu* more or less comprise a conception of good in Confucian thought. This composite and dynamic concept of good *informs and underscores* deliberations. To reiterate, the focus here is on standards of achievement and excellence of individuals rather than ultimate commitment to any one value. Lauren Pfister presents the integrated nature of Confucian ethics:

> There must be a concern for the concrete expression of morally appropriate behavior and a creative intuition which preserves one's moral activity as a harmonized whole and extends it into the world of social relationships. The concreteness of its expression is displayed in its production of 'memorable sayings' (14:4) and service (12:21); its preservation is manifested in those who love it (9:18, 15:13) and 'hold on' to it (19:2); its extension is accomplished through its cultivation (7:3) and exaltation or accumulation (12:10).[40]

[40] Pfister, 1986, p. 241.

Li, understood as the norms of behavioural appropriateness, would contribute to the assessment of correct and appropriate action in particular circumstances. Additionally, in so far as it is thought to be expressive of *ren*, *li* traverses the two notions of right and good, bringing together the set of Confucian virtues and their realisation in specific contexts. The commitment of the paradigmatic man to *yi* is realised in the adept and sensitive consideration of significant factors relating to *ren*, *li*, *xin*, *zhong* and *shu*, achieving a most suitable response to the factors. Such moral sensitivity to the morally salient features of each situation is not easily defined as it is based on a range of factors, including the ability to unravel and analyse the complex features of particular situations and to pick out those which are morally relevant. This is, of course, ultimately reliant on the commitment of individuals, and their cultivation of those skills. Those who are diligent and conscientious in their efforts are set apart from others (*Analects* 1:7; 17:2). Therefore, the culmination of learning is to be able to exercise moral judgment:

> The Master said, 'You can study with some, and yet not necessarily walk the same path (*dao*); you can walk the same path as some, and yet not necessarily take your stand with them; you can take your stand with them, and yet not necessarily weigh things up in the same way.' (*Analects* 9:30; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, pp. 132–3)

In the light of the preceding discussion, David Nivison's observations about Confucian self-cultivation are pertinent. For him, the question of self-cultivation centres on the inculcation of moral sensitivity, what he terms *de* (virtue):

> the focus [in Confucian ethics] is not on how to define the good or the right, or to determine what is good or right; these things will seem unproblematic. The real problem seems to be how one becomes a person who has *de*; and this means that the moral tradition is centered from the start on self-cultivation and on how one conveys insight to a student or gets the student to change.[41]

For the Confucians, moral deliberation is not a straightforward matter of simply applying the correct, normative *li*. Confucian moral cultivation involves the attunement of individuals to the norms within the community, sensitivity to persons, and awareness of morally significant contextual factors. Ultimately, all moral actions are the actions of distinctively-constituted and relational moral agents and all moral discourse embedded in the ways of life of the community.

[41] Nivison, 1999, p. 750.

CHAPTER FOUR

Daoist Meta-ethics: Frameworks and Approaches

The Daoist challenge of Confucian, Mohist and Legalist thought focused on some common underpinning assumptions of these philosophies. Both the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* texts are critical of an assumption of normativity in these other philosophies and their attempts to prescribe specific courses of action. Thinkers belonging to each of these schools contended that their way was the correct one: the Mohists took socio-political utility as the ultimate value, Confucians emphasised social differentiation and political order grounded in human relationality, while Legalists were concerned with the maintenance of political power and authority.

From the Daoist point of view, the solutions to the existing socio-political unrest proposed by these other schools served only to create additional encumbrances for humanity: the norms imposed on human behaviour were designed to encourage conformity. The ways in which the norms were taught and reinforced left little room for creativity and spontaneity, which are the essence of truly ethical responses. The Daoists in response proposed an approach that overturned both the existing values and the way they were being instilled. They replaced values of strength, fame and wisdom with non-assertiveness, quietude and simplicity. They also rejected conformist methodologies for one that was non-imposing (*wuwei*) and did not seek to control the spontaneous expressions of the people (*Daodejing* 49).

The primary aims of this chapter are to explore the critical elements of a Daoist approach to ethics and to draw on them to inform ethical thinking. The Daoist texts appear more meta-ethically aware than those of their Confucian counterparts. Their deliberations include consideration of ethical norms as well as methodological issues. Both areas of consideration may be related to the understanding of the concept *dao*. *Dao* has often been translated as 'path' or 'way'. *Dao* as 'way' allows for the inclusion of method, process and content, as in 'The way to get there is ...' and 'Which way are you going?' 'Path' is useful in indicating a direction which can also include elements of process, as in a person travelling a particular path.

The understanding of *dao* relates to a fundamental question in Daoism: What is the *point* of Daoist philosophy? The orthodox interpretation of *dao* is to understand it as a normative, ethical standard. Scholars taking this approach have frequently speculated on just what those norms might be. For example, *dao* may be projected as the one overarching value system which

supersedes or perhaps encompasses all others. On this view, it claims a deeper or greater significance as compared with other schools of thought, and moves to establish itself as the normative philosophy.

Alternatively, *dao* may be lodged within a pluralist framework. In this case, the perspective of the *dao* is not to challenge the correctness of each school of thought as it sees itself as one among many. If choices must be made between these competing solutions, there must be appeal to some external set of criteria, perhaps situationally- or contextually-determined.

Another interpretation of *dao* places emphasis on its scepticism. According to this view, there are no grounds (metaphysical scepticism) for working out which doctrine is correct, or we are unable to know (epistemological scepticism). Hence, the method of the *dao* is to refrain from making any such judgments. There is an element of modesty in refraining from proclamations of correct or moral recourses of action. The two texts appear to have different agendas. The *Daodejing* supports the interpretation of *dao* as normative while the *Zhuangzi* seems to engender the latter two understandings. Debate regarding these interpretive theories revolves around the treatment of various ethical and meta-ethical issues in the texts. It is to these we now turn.

The Question of Value

The short anecdotes in the *Analects* do not engage in deliberations regarding the ultimate locus of value and its justification. While there are a number of identifiable key concepts, and there is general consensus amongst scholars that *li* and *ren* are two of the most basic, the recalled conversation snippets do not expressly articulate *why* these concepts are normative. Perhaps if we were to look at *ren* and *li* from the point of view of expediency, it is comforting to think that the Confucians located the ultimate meaning of human existence in its shared togetherness. This, it seems, is a rather straightforward, if simplistic, remedy to socio-political unrest: in the face of much strife and enmity, Kongzi and his followers sought to emphasise the benefits of loyalty and relationally defined obligation. Mengzi took the theme of common humanity even further, grounding it in a transcendent heaven. Importantly, even in spite of the different estimations of human nature by Mengzi and Xunzi, the Confucians were united in their optimism that rectification of the socio-political order would ultimately enhance human life.

An analysis of these deliberations is made more interesting by considering the ideas in the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* as if they were direct responses to the Confucian solutions. The *Daodejing* makes light of elevated moral status, honour, men of worth, and wealth. It is deeply wary of how the imposition of norms will result in the fragmentation of human life at two levels: between the haves and have-nots, and the suffocation of other pursuits (*Daodejing* 19). The

Daodejing moves in subversively to uphold the weak, non-assertive and indiscriminating. The *Zhuangzi*, more subtly, toys with the options – weak–strong, Confucian–Mohist, win–lose – and metaphorically tosses them to the wind. In this way, it breaks all sense of dichotomy and rectitude, perhaps even that of a moral sort.

Dualisms and Opposites

The *Daodejing* promotes an overturning of the ordinary, commonly held standards and values pervasive in ancient Chinese society. It promotes quietude and vacuity (*Daodejing* 17) and encourages abandonment of pursuits of sageliness (18, 19) and knowledge (20). Ames and Hall have identified 'an increasingly institutionalized Confucianism' as the target of the critique in *Daodejing* 18 and 19. They suggest that there are two general aspects of Confucianism, the first which lies in the externally imposed conventional norms that are 'at best ossified remnants of what was once real morality', and the second, those aspects of human sentiment that are 'particularistic and alive'.[1] They suggest that the Daoist disagreement with Confucianism centres essentially on the first feature, those externally imposed behavioural norms that came to be associated with Confucian thought. According to this view, the Daoist disaffection is primarily with the institutionalised aspects of Confucianism rather than its more fundamental philosophical commitments.

If Ames and Hall are correct, the Daoist–Confucian disagreement is only trivial; it would revolve around issues of comportment and external behavioural conformity. But, contrary to this thesis, it seems that both the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* texts articulate a deeper level of concern. (See, for example, *Daodejing* 2, 3, 8, 12, 13, 19, 20 and, for an expression of the serious ambivalence about the Confucian and Mohist debate, *Zhuangzi* 2.) What is at issue is not merely institutional Confucianism. Both texts take on board a much fuller range of meta-ethical issues including the justification for the particular set of Confucian values, the elevated status of those who determine them, the imposition of a particular way (both method and content) of human realisation and restriction of otherwise more spontaneous forms of expression.

Instead of the ethically cultivated, paradigmatic Confucian man, Daoist philosophy proposes a model of leadership that is non-intrusive and non-interfering (*Daodejing* 49, 60). It overturns notions of leadership and strength, status and socio-political power. But the *Daodejing* is not merely a subversive thesis as it also presents a model of interaction between polarities such as hot–cold, strong–weak, light–dim and strength–weakness. There is a sense of reversion in the interplay of polarities: 'Bowed down then preserved; bent then

[1] Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 105.

straight; hollow then full; worn then new' (*Daodejing* 22). The idea of balance between two polarities has been variously described, in terms of a see-saw up-and-down surge and fall, cyclic change processes, development–decline cycles, and change characterised in terms of children's activity up and down a slide: 'One climbs laboriously to the top, but once over the edge the downward movement is quick, abrupt, inevitable, and complete.'[2] Some of these models, such as the see-saw, gesture at an equal balance between the two poles, while others, like the slide, are uneven (see, for example, *Daodejing* 43 and 61).[3]

Angus Graham argues that the notion of reversal is not a superficial suspension of the ethical in order to advance its opposite. He understands the notion of reversal to entail obliteration of dichotomy:

> For *Lao-tzu* ... reversal is *not* a switch from preferring A to preferring B, aiming to become weak, soft, below instead of strong, hard and above. Since all human effort is against a downward pull toward B, that direction is a first approximation to the Way of spontaneous process, to be adjusted next to the upward impulse after renewal from the fecund bottom of B. *The reversal smashes the dichotomy of A and B*; in preferring to be submissive the sage does not cease to be oriented towards strength, for he recognises that surviving by yielding to a rising power is the road to victory over it when its climax is past.[4]

Graham's description of the interactions between A and B captures the processes of interaction and change. However, his analysis does not mention the nature of the *telos* of these interactions. This is problematic because some of the *Daodejing* passages seem to be targeting what is conventionally upheld: winning (61, 66). These passages present the Daoist philosophy of reversal in terms of a 'be weak in order to be strong' manipulative culture. Benjamin Schwartz worries about this feature of the *Daodejing*. He comments that there is an 'obvious and striking "asymmetry" in the Lao-tzu's view of the female versus the male, the weak versus the strong, the soft versus the hard, and the passive versus the active. In all cases, the first term of the dyad is definitely "preferred." It enjoys a higher "ontological" status, just as water is preferred

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[2] Lau, 1963, 'Introduction', p. 27.

[3] In the *Daodejing*, there are two terms referring to the relation between opposites. The first, discussed here, is reversion (*fan*) (for example, *Daodejing* 40), and the second return (*fu*) (for example, 16, 65). The former captures an ongoing and perhaps ceaseless aspect of the relationship between the polarities. By contrast, the latter denotes the process of return to the source or origin, *dao*. Chung-ying Cheng explains the difference in the following way: 'Reversion is the opposition of the opposite: it is the derivation of opposite from an overexerted position. Return on the other hand seems to suggest a return to the origin or source of change which is the *Tao* or voidness' (1977a, p. 216).

[4] Graham, 1989, pp. 228–9; italics mine.

to stone; it seeks lowly places, and it is, in a profounder sense, stronger than stone.'[5]

But there is a different, more potent way to challenge Confucianism from a Daoist platform. This involves the rejection not only of dualism, but of dichotomous frameworks that underlie dualistic evaluations. *Daodejing* 2 appears unhappy with *dichotomous* dualistic structures, which are part of the Confucian ethical framework:

> When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty,
> There arises the recognition of ugliness.
> When they all know the good as good,
> There arises the recognition of evil.
>
> Therefore:
>
> Being and non-being produce each other;
> Difficult and easy complete each other;
> Long and short contrast each other;
> High and low distinguish each other;
> Sound and voice harmonize each other;
> Front and behind accompany each other ...
>
> (trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 101)

A dichotomous framework is one that already assumes a mutually exclusive either-or: things have to be one way or another, beautiful or ugly, good or evil. Confucian norms of appropriate behaviour and its conceptions of paradigmatic men are built upon such contrasts: gentleman–small man, *li*–transgressions of *li*, *ren*–not-*ren* and the like. *Daodejing* 3 appears expressly to address those contrasts: 'Not to honour men of worth will keep the people from contention ...' (trans. Lau, 1963, p. 59).

The widespread imposition of prohibitions unnecessarily fragments human pursuits, making the people destitute (*Daodejing* 57, 19).[6] Interestingly, *Analects* 2:3 contrasts Confucian *li* with law and there contends that the use of penal law to impose conformity will only nurture and instil an immature attitude of punishment-avoidance; the application of *li*, by contrast, is more spontaneous and guided by shame. But, according to Daoist philosophy, one guided by dichotomous thinking will conceptually cut up the world in artificial and arbitrary ways: good and evil, self and other, this and that. *Zhuangzi*

[5] Schwartz, 1985, p. 203. This builds up to a later concern that the *Daodejing* may be read as a Machiavellian political treatise advocating a strategy of 'stooping to conquer' (pp. 213–14).

[6] 民彌貧: the people are destitute. Ames and Hall note in their translation of this passage (2003, p. 165 at footnote 145) that the Guodian text has different characters, reading 'the more rebellious the people will be' (民彌叛).

recognises this most acutely in his remark on the artificiality of categories encapsulated in language:

> There is nothing that is not the 'that' and there is nothing that is not the 'this.' Things do not know that they are the 'that' of other things; they only know what they themselves know. Therefore I say that the 'that' is produced by the 'this' and the 'this' is also caused by the 'that.' This is the theory of mutual production. (*Zhuangzi* 2; trans. Chan, 1963a, pp. 182–3).

There are also epistemological reasons against the use of dichotomies. Zhuangzi refuses to endorse either polarity in any given set because there is no adequate epistemological justification for doing so. His dissatisfaction with the demarcation of boundaries and drawing of distinctions comes across most effectively in Slingerland's translation regarding the knowledge of the ancients:

> The knowledge of the ancients really got somewhere ... [there were] those who believed that there were boundaries but that there had never been 'right' or 'wrong' [*shifei* 是非]. The glorification of 'right' and 'wrong' is what caused the Way to be harmed ...[7]

To *shi*-affirm and *fei*-deny is to engage in making distinctions (*bian*). This, of course, is the groundwork of normative right and wrong.[8] Zhuangzi's refusal to take sides in a dispute is obvious in his assessment of the Confucian–Mohist dispute. He demonstrates an awareness of how, in the minds of both these groups, their differences are irreconcilable: 'What is *it* for one of them for the other is not, what is *not* for one of them for the other is' (*Zhuangzi* 2; trans. Graham, 2001, p. 52). In response, Zhuangzi's remarks first appear rhetorical: 'Do we really say something?'

But this is not merely a view that nothing (important) has been said. The question is immediately followed through by its opposite: 'Or have we never said anything?' Zhuangzi expresses a detachment from the whole debate without a preference for either position. All forms of discrimination, including ethical ones, rely on clear, sharp boundaries between what belongs or is allowable and what not. True to his scepticism, Zhuangzi refuses to *endorse or reject* either Confucian or Mohist doctrine. The view that dichotomy should be avoided is explicit:

> The Way has never had borders, saying has never had norms. It is by a 'That's it' which deems that a boundary is marked ... To 'divide', then, is

[7] Slingerland, 2003, p. 177.

[8] Hansen (1992) discusses Zhuangzi's concept of *bian*, its place within the Zhuangzi–Mohist dispute (pp. 295–6), as well as its centrality in the philosophy of the *School of Names* (Terminologists: *mingjia*) (pp. 235–9).

> to leave something undivided: to 'discriminate between alternatives' is to leave something which is neither alternative. 'What?' you ask. The sage keeps it in his breast, common men argue over alternatives to show it to each other. Hence I say: 'To "discriminate between alternatives" is to fail to see something.' (*Zhuangzi* 2; trans. Graham, 2001, p. 57)

Here, Zhuangzi implies that there are many dangers in dichotomous thinking. The question of where and when to draw the lines is only a minor issue. Two other points are more philosophically interesting. First, dichotomy tends always to be too clean; it omits or neglects those matters that do not fit neatly within each of the polarities as defined. This, in turn, causes a second, more insidious, problem: thought that is conditioned by and restrained within dichotomous frameworks will *fail* to see all else that does not fit into the schema. The first is a metaphysical issue regarding the application of dichotomies; the second is an epistemological one resulting from the first.

The ethical grounds for rejecting dichotomous thinking flow on from these considerations. Evaluations arising from a dichotomous framework – say, of guilty or innocent – *begin* with an assumption that a person must be one or the other. Many important causal and indirect connections may be left out of such considerations if the deliberations are clouded by earnestness to come to one or the other of the conclusions. A person's adoption of dichotomised evaluative frameworks may lead to simplistic evaluations of states of affairs, including those with important ethical content.

This description of Daoist thought has affinities with Chad Hansen's analysis. Hansen presents an ethico-linguistic interpretation of the Daoist project, arguing that its objection to the status quo is effectively a critique of conventional norms that are instilled through language.[9] According to his analysis, conceptions of strength, beauty, wisdom and the like are encoded in language. These conceptions shape our thinking and condition our desires, effectively ruling out those more spontaneous patterns of response that may have otherwise been explored or expressed. For instance, in learning the terms beauty and ugliness, one is simultaneously internalising conventional notions of beauty and its contrastive term ugliness. Consequently, one acts according to these notions, attempting to attain beauty and seeking to avoid ugliness. Many problems arise from this. First, the language-user is *taught* to think according to these categories. Secondly, definitions of beauty and ugliness are encoded in language and furthermore perpetuated in language use. A skewed sense of normativity is gradually entrenched: beauty-preferred, ugliness-to be avoided.

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[9] Hansen, 1992, esp. pp. 213–14.

If we are to avoid dichotomous frameworks, how might we proceed? One way of characterising Daoist opposition is to describe it in terms of dialectical thinking. The term dialectical is used here in a broad, descriptive sense to capture the possibilities afforded by the unity of opposites. In other words, it challenges traditional modes of logic that rely on such laws as the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle.[10] Most importantly, it refers to a dynamic interplay of the polarities which can be non-antagonistic, and emphasises the advantages of such conceptual frameworks.

In the exploration of what is meant by dialectic here, I draw on Antonio Cua's analysis of Daoist complementation. Cua's insightful explication alludes to Herman Hesse's *Narcissus and Goldmund*, a novel that articulates how extremes in character can optimally come together. While Narcissus seeks the development of his scholarly mind, Goldmund pursues sensuous satisfaction. Yet, in their relationship, Narcissus and Goldmund are reconciled in a profound and genuine manner. They recognise their extreme differences but yet allow the differences to co-exist in complementation: 'It is not our purpose to become each other; it is to recognize each other, to learn and see the other and honor him for what he is; each the other's opposite and complement.'[11]

A number of interesting features of complementation arise from Cua's analysis. They include:

(a) Acceptance and recognition of the other's distinctness and separateness.

(b) Complementation of the other. Goldmund's pursuits complement those of Narcissus. Importantly, complementation does not mean assimilation, in which one attempts or is required to grow into the likeness of the other.

(c) Reciprocity: complementation is achieved neither by means of mutual adjustment of aspects of the two opposed ways of life nor by recognising common and intersecting elements to form one coherent way of life. Rather, it is achieved by a reciprocal appreciation and learning. Goldmund's appreciation of Narcissus' pursuits allows for more thorough reflexive reflections on those of his own.

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[10] It is significantly different from the Hegelian dialectic that is associated ultimately with a monolithic synthesis of the two polarities. The underlying framework in Chinese philosophy is to affirm *both* polarities *and* their differences, and perhaps to assert the validity of each polarity. Most importantly, the notion of dialectic in Chinese philosophy is grounded in a metaphysical commitment to the interdependence of beings. Within this context, the idea of a dialectic is part of a larger Daoist commitment to a multiplicity of perspectives and their respective validities in relation to each of the perspectives (Cheng, 1977a).

[11] Herman Hesse (1971), *Narcissus and Goldmund*, trans. Ursula Molinaro, New York: Bantam Books, p. 42; cited in Cua, 1981, p. 125.

(d) Mutual resonance: this draws upon the concept of *ganying* (resonance),[12] a classical Chinese theory of mutual influence and response which is predicated on the interdependence of particulars. Goldmund and Narcissus have an interdependent relationship; the actions, decisions and behaviours of each impact on the other in a range of ways. The other becomes an important part of one's life. According to Cua, such mutual interdependence involves 'an expansion of intellectual horizon and a restructuring of one's vision of life'.[13]

Cua refrains from reading normative content into his construction of Daoist opposition. In this regard, he notes that the significance of Daoist complementation does not lie in its function as rules or principles with substantive content but rather as an *orientation* independent of one's theoretical and normative commitments. Cua argues that:

> Tao, as an ideal theme of harmony of opposites, has a vague and minimal cognitive content. We are offered no guiding principles for articulating clearly its specific or detailed practical import ... A commitment to tao is more a resolution to view things in a certain way, rather than a knowledge of the nature of things.[14]

Cua's analysis is interesting and persuasive and offers fresh and useful insights into the notion of dialectic. It yields a picture of complementarity which is not reductionist and which emphasises mutual dependence between the concepts. This builds on the theme of interdependence in Daoist philosophy and effectively demonstrates how it might be realised practically. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the ethical implications of interdependent thinking by focusing on the concepts *ziran* (spontaneity) and *wuwei* (non-action).

Scepticism about the Correct Way

The *Daodejing* challenges the basic normative assumptions of a Confucian world order. It sees the Confucian solutions to the socio-political unrest as only superficially remedial. The prescriptions for behavioural rectitude – or so they

[12] The notion of *ganying* was a feature of Chinese thought from the time of the earliest historical records. Early Han thought (206 BCE–220 CE), in particular, set out consciously to demonstrate that some of the correlations between human life and cosmic processes were regular and predictable. In addition, the interaction between different spheres and forms of life was explained in terms of groups and sets of numerical balances and contrapositions such as the four seasons, four directions, five colours, five sounds, five tastes, five smells, five phases, and eight trigrams and sixty-four hexagrams. See Graham, 1986; and Major, 1993.

[13] Cua, 1981, p. 127.

[14] Ibid., p. 132.

were perceived – did not sufficiently address the underlying fragmentation in society. Indeed, they introduced more unnecessary and divisive ethico-social hierarchies:

> Abandon sageliness and discard wisdom;
> Then the people will benefit a hundredfold.
> Abandon humanity and discard righteousness;
> Then the people will return to filial piety and deep love.
> Abandon skill and discard profit;
> Then there will be no thieves or robbers.
> However, these three things are ornaments (*wen*) and are not adequate ...
> (*Daodejing* 19; trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 132)

Significant aspects of Confucianism – sagehood, wisdom (*zhi*), humanity (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*) – are considered ornamental.[15] This stands in direct contrast to the Confucian presumption that the norms associated with relationality are objective and grounded in heaven's mandate. The Confucian grand theory about names and their appropriate manifestations looms even larger when provided with a transcendental basis by Mengzi. Yet in the *Daodejing*, they are thrown to the wind and made light of as merely ornamental.[16]

Zhuangzi toys with the phenomenon of normativity, simply asserting the conventional nature of morality:

> When people say, 'Not all right,' then [things are] not all right. A road becomes so when people walk on it, and things become so-and-so [to people] because people call them so-and-so. How have they become so? They have become so because [people say they are] so. How have they become not so? They have become not so because [people say they are] not so. In their own way things are all right. There is nothing that is not so-and-so. There is nothing that is not all right. (*Zhuangzi* 2; trans. Chan, 1963a, pp. 183–4)

Zhuangzi resists the assumptions of uniformity and conformity associated with prescribed norms. A parable in Chapter 18 of the *Zhuangzi* text tells of the

[15] A number of chapters in the *Analects* (6:18; 12:8; 12:15) demonstrate awareness of this debate. The Confucian stance in these chapters is to deny that Confucianism is devoid of ethical content and that it only promotes a particular cultural lifestyle suited to the elite. The general line of argument in the *Analects* is to assert that *wen* (socialisation or acculturation) is not a sufficient criterion for self-cultivation. The concept is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 below.

[16] While Mengzi advocates proper nourishment of *xin*, the heart-mind (*Books of Mencius* 2A:6; 6A:6), Zhuangzi would see the 'nourishment' as acquired, and would argue for humanity to be starved of these influences. Slingerland terms Zhuangzi's approach one of 'deculturation' (2003, pp. 184–5) drawing upon David Nivison's analysis (1997, pp. 17–30).

Marquis of Lu who provided a bird with nourishment fit for humans; the result was the death of the bird:

> the bird only looked dazed and forlorn, unwilling to eat a single bit of meat or drink a single cup of wine, and after three days it died. The marquis was trying to nourish a bird with what would nourish *him* ... (Trans. Slingerland, 2003, p. 176)

The moral, we are told, is that 'rightness [must be] established upon what is suitable (*yisheyushi*).'[17] What was *yi*-right or fitting was not an issue that could be resolved in a once-and-for-all fashion. No one perspective could adequately speak up for all the others; all are lodged (*yu*). This challenges the very basis of all claims of normativity.

The astuteness of Daoist philosophy regarding ethical norms makes fun of the Confucian seriousness regarding the correctness of its particular set of prescriptions. From Zhuangzi's point of view, what is right in each situation transcends the lodged anthropocentricism that is by necessity inherent in all human perspectives. *Daodejing* 5 specifically rejects *ren* as the absolute measure of goodness: heaven and earth do not follow the dictates of *ren* and neither does the Daoist sage. The passage notes that *ren* is a merely human concern, inward-looking and narrow.

But what does Daoist philosophy offer as an alternative? The traditional interpretation of the philosophy of the *Daodejing* is that *dao* is a replacement for all other value systems. Defenders of this view would also usually supply a normative notion of *dao*. These interpretations generally combine aspects of *dao* with attributes gleaned from the *Daodejing*, including non-action, simplicity, primordial existence, unadulterated nature, non-assertiveness, femininity and youth. In some other analyses, *dao* represents a metaphysical, spiritual or ethical aspiration, an all-inclusive and non-anthropocentric perspective that transcends humanly-contrived systems (*Daodejing* 2, 5, 23, 25).

According to the normative interpretation of *dao*, the aim of Daoist philosophy is to attain the perspective or realisation of a unified oneness: dualism is rejected and replaced by monistic, perhaps all-inclusive, *dao*. This orthodox interpretation of *dao* as ideal enlightenment runs into some difficulties in the light of Daoist scepticism. Should Daoism also promote a *way*, if all proposals are ultimately limited by their anthropocentric, perspectival narrowness? The opening statement of the *Daodejing* – 'the *dao* that can be told is not (the/a) true (*chang*) *dao*' – immediately casts doubt on claims that any one philosophical system is the prevailing one. The choice of 'a' or 'the' by interpreters as a qualifier of *changdao* is an important interpretive

[17] Slingerland, 2003, p. 176.

issue as it determines whether *chang dao* is the only one (the) or one of many (a).[18]

In the case of the *Zhuangzi*, commentators are divided on what the ultimate *telos* might be or even if there is *one* particular one. Harold Roth argues that *Zhuangzi* recommends a deep mystical tranquillity through meditative contemplation.[19] Others contend that philosophical enquiry is the primary goal of the *Zhuangzi*, though opinions are yet again divided regarding whether the basis of the philosophical enterprise rests ultimately in scepticism, relativism or perspectivalism.[20]

Is Daoist scepticism so deep-rooted that it must refrain from making judgments? While the *Daodejing* has a discernibly anti-anthropocentric tenor, the *Zhuangzi* appears to uphold all perspectives – human, bird, monkey, fish, to name a few – without endorsing any single one. In discussing the competition between the different schools of thought, Zhuangzi takes a detached, bird's-eye view of philosophical debate. The Confucians recommend one way, the Mohists another, and the Legalists yet another. An adjudicator is called in on the assumption that he has an objective, unbiased point of view. Here, Zhuangzi is resolutely aware of the criterion of objectivity in philosophical debate. But is objectivity at all possible, given that the adjudicator already *has* a view?

> You and I having been made to argue over alternatives, if it is you not I that wins, is it really you who are on to it, I who am not? If it is I not you that wins, is it really I who am on to it, you who are not? Is one of us on to it and the other of us not? Or are both of us on to it and both of us not? . . . Whom shall I call in to decide it? If I get someone of your party to decide it, being already of your party how can he decide it? If I get someone of my party to decide it, being already of my party how can he decide it? If I get someone of a party different from either of us to decide it, being already of a party different from either of us how can he decide it? If I get someone of the same party as both of us to decide it, being already of the same party as both of us how can he decide it? (*Zhuangzi* 2; trans. Graham, 2001, p. 60).

[18] For example, Chan (1963b), Lau (1963) and Mair (1990) use 'the' while Waley (1958), Duyvendak (1954) and Ivanhoe (2002) use 'a'. Hansen discusses this difference at length (1992, pp. 215ff.).

[19] Roth, 1999. There is an established tradition of Daoist religious and mystical practice which draws from a range of Daoist textual sources. See Isabelle Robinet's *Taoism: Growth of a Religion* (1997), and Livia Kohn's *The Taoist Experience* (1993).

[20] There are critical differences in these philosophical positions. Ivanhoe (1993; 1996) contends that Zhuangzi was a linguistic and epistemological sceptic. Hansen (1992, pp. 285–92) argues that a monistic rendition of *dao* is simply not viable as it would render the *Zhuangzi* internally inconsistent. Instead, he advocates a perspectivalist interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* according to which Zhuangzi is seen to endorse each perspective within its own framework. Hansen is also insistent that there is no one view of finality, even if an aggregate of many perspectives were possible.

Whether Zhuangzi is to be understood as relativist or perspectivalist, one point is clear: ethical monism cannot be justified. This has severe implications for all of the other competing traditions of thought, all of which claim singularity. However, Confucian philosophy is most vulnerable to this criticism as its theory of correct names (*zhengming*) assumes that appropriate behaviour is normatively and universally encoded in relational status. Xunzi's philosophy is to some extent buffered from this criticism as he astutely offers an understanding of these norms as conventional: the proper ways of behaving within relational contexts are determined by those who are morally mature. However, Mengzi's philosophy seeks to justify Confucian norms with reference to Heaven's mandate, and this is where the Daoist criticisms have their greatest sting. Mengzi's ethical naturalism – that filial piety and parental love are 'natural' (*Books of Mencius* 3B:9) – appears uncritically naive in the light of Zhuangzi's hesitations about ethical monism and absolutism.

Zhuangzi's rhetoric in the passage above sounds like shoulder-shrugging despair over whether it is humanly possible to come to agreement and whether an objective point of view is ever possible. He endorses time and again a multiplicity – the many pipes with different sounds (*Zhuangzi* 1) – and here denies that a 'view from nowhere' is ever possible. Each view is a 'view from somewhere':

> If a man sleeps in a damp place, he will have a pain in his loins and will dry up and die. Is that true of eels? If a man lives up in a tree, he will be frightened and tremble. Is that true of monkeys? Which of the three knows the right place to live? ... Mao Ch'iang and Li Chi were considered by men to be beauties, but at the sight of them fish plunged deep down in the water, birds soared high up in the air, and deer dashed away. Which of the four knows the right kind of beauty? From my point of view, the principle of humanity and righteousness and the doctrines of right and wrong are mixed and confused. How do I know the difference among them? (*Zhuangzi* 2; trans. Chan, 1963a, pp. 187–8)

Interpreters of Zhuangzi's philosophy either as relativist or perspectivalist may appeal to this passage to support their conclusions even though they will champion different conceptions of *dao*.[21] But how can such arm-waving scepticism inform practical ethical deliberation? Can nothing be known objectively, and if so, are there no criteria for determining correctness or accuracy of one's viewpoint? 'How do I know the difference ...?' If Daoist philosophy does not endorse any one way or if it endorses many ways, can and

[21] Two anthologies on Zhuangzi's philosophy provide comprehensive discussion of these issues. They are Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (eds), *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (1996); and Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Philip Ivanhoe (eds), *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi* (1999).

does it provide any ethical guidance? These questions are even more worrying when considering passages in both texts that seem to suspend judgment about good and evil (*Daodejing* 20; *Zhuangzi* 2).

I will now demonstrate that the ethical insights of Daoist philosophy lie in their meta-ethical explorations. In particular, hesitations in Daoist philosophy regarding dichotomous and absolutist thinking are deeply intertwined with the Daoist concept of self as essentially interdependent and contextualised. I argue that Daoist philosophy supports an approach to moral philosophy that recognises individuals as interdependent and situated, yet spontaneous (*ziran*). Here, I draw on the concept *wuwei* as referring to an ethical methodology that refrains from prescribing a predetermined, absolute, universal course of action that holds for one and all.

Ziran: Spontaneous Unconditioned Responses

Ziran is associated with a range of metaphors including effortlessness (*Daodejing* 8, 21, 57), quietude (37), simplicity (28) and emptiness (48).[22] The two dominant translations of *ziran* are 'nature' or 'natural', on the one hand, and 'self-so-ness' or 'spontaneous', on the other. The first set of translations, of *ziran* as 'nature', accords with a naturalistic interpretation of Daoist thought. For instance, Wing-tsit Chan's translation of *ziran* as 'Nature' in *Daodejing* 25 alludes to a naturalism that could be identified with a concern for the natural environment:

> Man models himself after Earth.
> Earth models itself after Heaven.
> Heaven models itself after Tao.
> And Tao models itself after Nature (*ziran*).
>
> (Trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 144)[23]

There is a series of paradigmatic ideals here: humanity, earth, heaven and *dao* work toward an ultimate commitment: Nature. The naturalistic interpretation of *dao* is a rather prominent one, indebted to Wang Bi's (226–49 CE) interpretation of the *Daodejing* as metaphysical naturalism. In his notes on *Daodejing* 25, he proposes an absolutist, naturalistic conception of *ziran*:

[22] Slingerland discusses at length these metaphors and the range of available meanings of *ziran* (2003, pp. 95–107).

[23] Philip Ivanhoe's translation has similar naturalistic commitments: 'The way models itself on what is natural' (2002, p. 25)

> Tao does not oppose *Tzu-jan* and therefore it attains its nature. To follow Nature as its standard is to model after the square while within the square and the circle while within the circle, and not to oppose Nature in any way. By Nature is meant something that cannot be labelled and something ultimate.[24]

In Wang Bi's analysis, there is an appeal to nature as having normative or ethical force: humanity is ultimately to take nature as its model. Here, we need also to note that Wang Bi espouses a 'go with the flow' conception of *ziran*: model after the circle while within the circle. His description of *ziran* seems to oscillate between the natural, physical environment, on the one hand, and, on the other, an ideal metaphysical construction of how the individuals and elements within the natural world come together.

Contemporary scholarly debate on this topic is polarised along the lines of whether a naturalist interpretation of Daoist thought is philosophically fruitful.[25] Much depends on what 'natural' is taken to mean. Which aspects of nature are significant: growth, decay, nourishment, reproduction and predation? Are human-built environments 'natural'? Is social and political organisation 'natural'? And which naturalistic perspective is to be adopted? A biocentric, ecocentric, or holistic one? In brief, *ziran* understood as 'nature' could yield a 'primitive harmonious anarchy'.[26] This ideal would have little, if any, contemporary value.

The translation of *ziran* as 'self-so' derives from a literal combination of its two terms, *zi* referring to 'self'[27] and *ran* referring to 'so'.[28] The compound meaning of *ziran* may be expressed as a 'self-as-so'.[29] This interpretation captures a

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[24] Trans., Rump, 1979, p. 78.

[25] Xiaogan Liu (1999) defends a naturalistic approach to ethics with reference to the concepts *ziran* and *wuwei*. Liu states explicitly that 'What Laozi seeks is a situation where interpersonal relationships are marked by unadorned simplicity, naturalness and peacefulness' (p. 229). On the other hand, Randall Peerenboom (1991) argues that a naturalist interpretation of Daoist philosophy derives only trivial implications. Peerenboom contends that, if Daoism upholds a naturalistic message, then either human beings belong to the realm of the natural – in which case the dictum to be natural, like *dao*, is superfluous – or they do not – in which case the dictum to be natural is a misdirected aim.

[26] Schwartz, 1985, p. 210.

[27] The *Shuowen Jiezi* identifies the meaning of *zi* (自) with nose, *bi* (鼻) (四篇上, at p. 136). It could be suggested that the reflective mirror image of oneself is dominated by the nose which occupies the central position in a person's face. The mirror-image metaphor is the central theme in *Zhuangzi* 5: the sage is like a mirror; he only reflects without distortion or intrusion. This theme is taken up in a later section, in connection with the notion of interdependent and mutually resonating selves.

[28] *Ran* has two meanings, one associated with fire and the other with a condition of existence, 'as so'. The *Shuowen Jiezi* (十篇上, at p. 480) expresses this 'so-ness' as 'just as is' (*ruci*: 如此).

[29] Arthur Waley translates *ziran* as 'self-so,' which he also describes as the 'unconditioned' or the 'what-is-so-of-itself' (1958, p. 174). Other creative interpretations of *dao* as characterising spontaneous interaction include Chang Chung-yuan's *Tao, a New Way of Thinking* (1975) and Kuang-ming Wu's *On Chinese Body Thinking* (1997).

nascent dual polarity of the concept: the first of the self situated within its environing conditions and the second of its freedom to move within those boundaries.

A translation of *ziran* that focuses on self-so spontaneity would encompass a sense of openness and fluidity in all aspects of an individual's life, not least its responses to others. In other words, there is real unpredictability in how individuals will respond in particular circumstances. In the simplest practical terms, an individual that expresses spontaneity is not confined to conditioned responses or ways of behaving.

Paradoxically, the two interpretations of *ziran* as nature and spontaneity seem to have opposite implications. To suggest that it is 'natural' for an individual to be such-and-such is to recommend that it follow a prescribed path of development. Conversely, to say that an individual is spontaneous is to allow for freedom in exploration and creativity.

Ziran understood as spontaneity is philosophically profound. For individuals that are spontaneous, there are both those parameters that limit it and those within which it is unconditioned. That there are parameters of the latter sort is important because individuals might otherwise be engulfed within their environments. In essence, spontaneity of individuals is important because it prevents Daoist philosophy from collapsing into trivial holism. The interdependent self is partly circumscribed by certain aspects of its wider environment,[30] yet is able to instantiate itself in original and novel ways.[31]

Slingerland argues that the Cook Ding analogy (*Zhuangzi* 3) demonstrates how both restraint and freedom can operate within the same situation. With many years' experience, Ding shows an intuitive flair for butchering, knowing where exactly to sever the joints, at the space between the bones. According to Slingerland, this is an exemplification of how freedom to act fittingly within a given situation is 'a subtle combination of freedom and restraint'.[32]

Each individual self is bound by aspects of its place – its relational and contextual location – but at the same time is free to express itself within those boundaries. The notion of place is not merely a geographical location. It includes an individual's position in time, society, culture and history. Zhuangzi's view of perspectival difference comes closest to capturing the sense of an individual's situatedness in a particular place.

The concept of mutual resonance (*ganying*) also plays an important role in the understanding of spontaneous interdependence: as a self acts, others

[30] Liu Xiaogan (1999) identifies an internal aspect of self as part of the meaning of *ziran*. It may be helpful to use Liu's characterisation to contrast what is of the spontaneous self (internal) with its environing conditions (external).

[31] Alan Fox (1996) argues that such spontaneous individual freedom is a fundamental feature of Daoist philosophy.

[32] Slingerland, 2003, p. 206.

resonate with it or against it in many varied ways. This understanding of mutual resonance is enlivened by the themes in the complementary interplay of Narcissus and Goldmund discussed previously. Roger Ames' analogy of flavours coming together in a stewpot is also helpful in conceptualising mutual resonance: an 'individual's realisation can be more profound and meaningful in resonance with others in the environment.[33]

The picture of self articulated here is inconsistent with prescriptive norms of the kind that are assumed to have transcendent, inviolable and unconditional status. Such predetermined norms are not sufficiently sensitive to the ethical elements in relational interaction, resonance and contextual situatedness. The interpretation of *ziran* as spontaneity requires an ethical methodology of *wuwei*, one that recommends non-assertiveness because it recognises the value of uncoerced and unconditioned response.

Wuwei: The Method of Encouraging Spontaneity

The concept *wuwei* is most readily and often associated with a Daoist style of government and leadership. Ideal Daoist government refrains from using force and domination, violence and weapons (*Daodejing* 30, 31, 42, 53, 69). It may also *actively* seek to annul or reduce existing norms and practices.[34] One way to embody the passive (to practise non-action) and active (to censure existing norms) aspects of *wuwei* is to adopt a rather more ambiguous translation of the term. For example, Angus Graham intentionally retains the 'paradoxical force of the Chinese expression' in his translation of it as 'doing nothing'. Regarding the paradoxicality of Daoist philosophy, Graham says, 'to call the sage's behaviour at one moment "doing nothing" and at another "doing but ..." seems ... a characteristic Taoist reminder that no word you use will ever fit perfectly'.[35]

Views on political leadership including the subtle accomplishment of goals (*Daodejing* 17, 58, 60), leading people away from conventional wisdoms and ethical practices (18, 19, 20), and taking on the people's ideas (49), are predicated on deeper assumptions about humanity and the realisation of

[33] Ames, 1986, p 331; discussed above in Chapter 2.

[34] Benjamin Schwartz discusses one interpretation of *wuwei* to involve an overturning of the 'deliberate, analytic, and goal- oriented thought and action in a plural world', one that espouses the opposite of *wuwei*, a *yuwei* consciousness. Schwartz sees this *wuwei–yuwei* tension in both the *Laozi* (*Daodejing*) and *Zhuangzi* texts as a reaction to the specifically Mohist goal-directed activity, which is 'based on an accurate analytic knowledge of the factors which bear on the situation at hand and on an accurate "weighing" of such factors'. In response to Mohist aims and method, the Daoist sage exercises non-intrusive or non-interfering action in the government of the empire (1985, p. 190).

[35] Graham, 1989, p. 232.

human ends. This may be contrasted with the tone in *Analects* 8:9 that does not reckon the common people can be made to understand the aims of government and human society.[36]

But the implications of *wuwei* should not be restricted within the field of political philosophy. The wider ethical significance of *wuwei* is manifest especially in the distinction between *wuwei* and its opposite term, *yuwei*. The contrast between the terms is not merely that of passive (*wuwei*) and active (*yuwei*) methods. Rather, *yuwei* pertains to a particular goal-directed intentionality that is lacking in *wuwei* forms of action. *Yuwei* consciousness is purposeful in attempting to attain a historically and socially circumscribed notion of achievement and progress.

Hansen's analysis deals with the *wuwei* concept as having socio-ethical significance: *wuwei* challenges socially-induced patterns of response.[37] For Hansen, *wuwei* is neither an ethical norm nor an invocation for a cessation of desires or action. It is a deeper ethical conviction to rid oneself of socially conditioned responses in order to facilitate more spontaneous, autonomous responses. The commitment to rid oneself of socially conditioned responses is appropriate not only for those in government. Hansen understands *wuwei* to be applicable to everyone in their ordinary ethical reflection and action. He discusses two meanings of *wei*, the first being to 'act', to attempt to or to bring about socially-defined goals.[38] Secondly, looking beyond action, Hansen also explores the meaning of *wei* as 'deeming', judging or evaluating. He notes that the Chinese term 'to *wei*' means to take on a certain perspective – interpretive glasses through which one views the world, so to speak. This interpretation of *wei* accords it more significance than one defined along the lines of passive and active acts. The stance of the *Daodejing*, according to Hansen, is to reject all forms of 'deem'-ing that are conditioned by conventional values and norms. According to this argument, to *wuwei* is to act without deeming – in a manner that is not conditioned by, or restricted to, conventional norms and values:

> *Wei* $^{\text{do:deem}}$ is not 'purposeful' in the sense of free, rational, conscious, or voluntary action. On the contrary, for Laozi *wei* signals socially induced,

[36] Roger Ames (1994) discusses the concept of *wuwei* in Confucian leadership in *The Art of Rulership*. A more recent and detailed discussion of this topic is found in Slingerland's *Effortless Action* (2003). Note also that the Daoist concept *wuwei* is rather malleable such that some proponents of *Huang-Lao* Daoism, a syncretic combination of Confucian, Mohist and Legalist philosophies within a Daoist framework, appealed to it to demand compliance with the ruler's dictates. A good representation of the *Huang-Lao* texts is provided in De Bary and Bloom (1999, pp. 235–82).

[37] Hansen, 1992, pp. 213–14.

[38] Ibid., p. 212.

> learned, patterns of response – the opposite of autonomous or spontaneous response.[39]

On this analysis, the ethical force of *wuwei* lies in the scrutiny of coercive and conditioning aspects of social engagement. *Wuwei* is an open-ended challenge, not merely rejecting conditioned behaviours but also advocating the more positive effects of unconditioned and spontaneous behaviour. Edward Slingerland applies the translation of *wei* as 'regard' to *Daodejing* 38, and through this effectively demonstrates how *wuwei* applies to both action and thought:

> The person of highest Virtue is without action (*wu-wei*) and holds nothing in regard (*wuwei er wuyiwei*) . . .[40]

Slingerland's translation of *wuwei er wuyiwei* emphasises the primary importance of conceptual categories because of how they can determine thought. He notes that there are two aspects of Daoist non-action which come together. These are the behavioural non-action (*wuwei*) and cognitive 'no-regarding' (*wuyiwei*), with the restriction of cognitive faculties being more fundamental.[41] The rejection of *yuwei* modes and the advocacy of *wuwei* modes are not two separate projects. Effectively, there is one goal: the encouragement of spontaneity.

According to this account, *wuwei* is grounded in the recognition of spontaneity in individuals and is required by it. The commitment to spontaneity of individuals necessitates the application of methods that are sensitive to spontaneity. This is the Daoist ethic of *ziran*-*wuwei*.

Spontaneity and Sensitivity in Daoist Ethics

Recognition of the other's spontaneity, distinctness and separateness entails an ethical response of non-interference or no undue interference. Non-interference has many significant ethical implications. These include avoidance of inflexible, absolutist ideals and unilateral and dictatorial methodologies. This novel interpretation of *ziran*-*wuwei* has important implications for ethical methodology.

The *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* texts reject the *yuwei* schemes proposed from the perspective of the petty-knowledge (*xiaozhi*) views of the other schools. This is due primarily to the insistence of each regarding the correctness of their own view. In response, Zhuangzi presents a commitment to multiplicity. The

[39] Ibid., pp. 212–13.
[40] Slingerland, 2003, p. 81.
[41] Ibid., pp. 89ff.

ethical significance of Zhuangzi's view lies right at the start of ethical deliberation and concerns the *process* of moral deliberation: in apprehending a situation, one must begin by embracing the many perspectives *prior to* deliberations regarding the best course of action. No prejudgment is made before the consideration of the many views.

This method is still compatible with the application of moral principles or norms; the critical difference is that such applications come *later*. From this point of view, the pervasive moral problem lies not in normativity as such but in the assumption that norms are basic and that their application *precedes* the consideration of relevant factors in any one situation. This goal- or outcome-directed moral reasoning does not allow for spontaneity and is oppositional to *wuwei* methodology. From the vantage point of the *Zhuangzi*, the common people under the Confucianist, Mohist and Legalist schemes no longer possess the flexibility to respond in a way that is critically reflective. Their responses are conditioned (*yuwei*) responses. The common people on the Confucianist, Mohist and Legalist agendas are no longer thinking agents; it follows that they cannot be considered ethical agents either.

In contrast, *wuwei* describes an ethical response that *allows* for the other's self-expression by not unduly influencing it or seeking to control it. *Wuwei* does not essentially pertain to passivity; we could even argue that it is a concept akin to respect for others. In this case, the difficult phrase *wei wuwei* (*Daodejing* 63), a thorny phrase for commentators, comes to light. Those commentators who assert that *wuwei* is an injunction promoting passivity are at a loss regarding how this phrase might be understood.[42] By contrast, according to the interpretation of *wuwei* proposed here, *wei wuwei* simply means to act (*wei*) according to the *wuwei* approach, which allows the other to be *ziran*-spontaneous. The issue here is not whether *wuwei* encourages passivity but rather relates to the promotion of a particular ethical methodology.

The key to understanding the *ziran*-*wuwei* ethic is to appreciate its association with the Daoist concept of interdependent self. It is an ethic which encapsulates the elements of relationality and contextualisation. An interdependent individual expresses itself spontaneously within its relational and contextual environment. Hence, *ziran* does not mean unfettered freedom. This is another reason why it is inadequate to describe *ziran* as a naturalist ethic of 'letting things be'. The idea of *ziran* as 'self-so' is not a philosophy promoting complete self-determination; it must be properly embedded within the larger Daoist philosophical context, one that asserts the interdependence of individuals and mutual resonance (*ganying*). Hence, *ziran* should be understood as a concept that incorporates the fundamental relationality of

[42] For an interesting discussion of these self-contradictions in the *Daodejing*, see Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, pp. 48–51.

individual things and components. *Ziran-wuwei* are the core concepts in an ethical framework that is grounded in respect for individual spontaneity. Here, there is a delicate tension between the integrity (*de*) of individuals and their interdependence. It should not be assumed that the practice of *ziran-wuwei* is 'natural' to humanity and therefore comes easily. Indeed, it requires deep wisdom and self-discipline, coupled with particular skills. The *ziran-wuwei* schema comes to fruition in *Daodejing* 64:

> He who takes conventionally-prescribed action [*wei*] fails
> He who controls things loses them.
> Therefore the sage takes unconditioned and non-controlling action [*wuwei*] and therefore does not fail.
> He seeks not to control anything and therefore he does not lose anything . . .
> He learns [*xue*] to be divested of conventional norms and their associated conditioned perspectives [*buxue*],
> And returns to the original multiplicity and specificity [of individuals]
> Thus he supports all to be spontaneous and not to act according to learned and conditioned responses.
>
> (Trans. mine)

What are the ethical implications of this conception of interdependent individuality? The idea that individuals might try to break free from, or transcend, their relationships or environment is alien to this conception of self. This picture of self and others is associated with a different ethical paradigm from one that assumes atomistic individuality. For the interdependent individual, moral agency is largely constituted by one's responsiveness and sensitivity to others. The *Daodejing*'s emphasis on gentleness, fragility and non-assertiveness describes the nature of one's responses to others in ideal terms. *Wuwei* is spontaneous, pre-reflective response *before* the application of a conventional rule or norm. It is a mutually-resonating response driven by a sense of one's own fragility. It is important for the Daoist sage to recognise gentleness, quietude and fragility in others, as well as to express himself in those ways. In the ideal relational scenario, the recognition of the spontaneity of the other is a mutually-embracing process. The counterpoint between the two interpretations of *wuwei* as 'effortless following', on the one hand, and 'individual spontaneity', on the other, expresses the delicate core of an ethic built upon interdependence. There are attempts by some scholars to explain away the tension. But here, I argue that the paradoxical force should be maintained in order to embody the reality of self–other interdependence. Kuang-ming Wu insightfully applies the theme of a mirror in Zhuangzi's philosophy in capturing the idea of mutuality:

> A mirror, by being itself, smooth and without dust or defect, reflects the outside naturally and faithfully. A good mirror neither distorts nor intrudes into the things it reflects. It reflects non-exclusively and non-preferentially. Furthermore, its reflecting activity courts no loss to the mirror itself. The mirror itself is not distorted, intruded into, or excluded for all its reflective activities. On the contrary, reflection expresses the very nature of the mirror; it cannot help but reflect, and in doing so manifests itself as such without any loss or imposition ... Once [the true man] has become listless and dust-free, he spontaneously responds to things as a good mirror does – fittingly, without effort or knowledge.[43]

Here is where the value of the Daoist insight on ethics lies: the ethical framework of *ziran*-*wuwei* is morally required by recognition of the other's distinctiveness, separateness, interdependence and spontaneity. The recognition engenders an attitude of openness toward others and of gentleness and quietude, rather than an insensitive, rigid and unthoughtful imposition of conventional norms. At the practical level, *wuwei* ethical action is a response to the immediacy of the situation and the needs of individuals within those situations. The implications arising from this concept of ethics are exciting and profound. Allowing for spontaneity in the other – and, ultimately, between people – is a much more risky exercise than one that relies more substantially on norms and behavioural expectations. Importantly, a spontaneous response is a true exercise in ethical behaviour, as compared with one in which the response merely conforms to expectations. It allows for individual freedom within the limits of particular relationships and the circumstantial context, and strives (*wei*) not to impose any more limits than are necessary (*wuwei*).

Is it too fanciful to suggest that the *Daodejing* advocates on behalf of the weak and fragile? Passages such as *Daodejing* 77 impel the reader to reflect on, and to reject, the tendency to compete and to procure at the expense of others:

> Heaven's way is indeed like the bending of a bow.
> When (the string) is high, bring it down.
> When it is low, raise it up.
> When it is excessive, reduce it.
> When it is insufficient, supplement it.
> The Way of Heaven reduces whatever is excessive and supplements whatever is insufficient.
> The way of man is different.
> It reduces the insufficient to offer to the excessive ...
>
> (Trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 234)

The account of *ziran*-*wuwei* ethics challenges a top-down style of moral reasoning as an adequate model. How one *sees* the others involved and

[43] Wu, 1982, pp. 123–4.

perceives the morally significant factors in a particular situation is *prior* to deliberation about the ethical course of action. The argument here is that moral sensitivity – one that is able to put oneself in another's shoes – is the first and foundational aspect of ethical action. Moral sensitivity determines subsequent deliberative processes. While there is a necessary place for normative moral deliberation, it can neither occupy the entirety of moral discourse nor can it claim to be its most significant feature. If this is correct, moral education should look first to the cultivation of moral sensitivity, rather than the inculcation of moral norms.

The application of predefined absolute norms, indiscriminately and without consideration for the numerous morally significant particulars in each situation, is rejected in Daoist thought. This thesis rests on epistemological assumptions that embrace the many and different. The focus is on a methodology which works through listening, discussing, empathising, supporting, responding, and compromising. It avoids unduly influencing or shaping the preferences of others. But this methodology is not another layer, *over and above* moral norms. It is not an *extra*-perceptive state. It is also not a formula that guarantees correct action or outcomes; indeed, no ethical theory can or should provide that guarantee. The methodology suggested here recommends a fundamental way of seeing things and understanding situations and individuals that is not primarily goal-, rule- or outcome-driven. It is an ethically sensitive response that focuses on the fragility and spontaneity of interdependent individuals. That, we might argue, is the beginning of most, if not all, moral reflection and action.

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II
Realising the New

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CHAPTER FIVE

Confucianism as a Skills-Based Ethic

> The Master said, '... I learn much, select out of it what works well, and then follow it. I observe much, and remember it ...' (*Analects* 7:8; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 112)

Contemporary scholars of Confucian thought have offered many proposals promoting the contemporary relevance of Confucian ethics. One strategy is to draw parallels between Confucian ethics, on the one hand, and ethical categories and concepts available in western philosophies, on the other. In this light, Confucian ethical thought has been variously characterised as deontological (duty-based), utilitarian or consequentialist, and virtues- or character-based ethics. More recently, it has also been described as being significantly similar to the feminist ethic of care.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that each of these characterisations of Confucian ethics captures only partially its important elements. While Confucian thought shares common themes with each of these moral theories, it cannot fully be identified with any of them. I argue that the most fruitful way of characterising Confucian ethics is to understand it as a skills-based ethic which incorporates elements of character, care, duty, obligation, and consideration of outcomes. According to the view I propose here, the significance of Confucian ethical thought lies in its attention to the cultivation of reasoning skills and sensitivity in moral deliberation. These include abilities to distinguish different factors at play in particular situations, pick out those that are morally salient, and bring together the *relevant* moral principles, rules, obligations and relational commitments. Taken together, we may describe these skills in terms of 'coordinative reasoning', a phrased used by Antonio Cua to describe a process of 'presenting and representing those features of the case which severally *cooperate* in favour of the conclusion ... The reasons are like the legs of a chair, not the links of a chain'.[1] According to Cua, this kind of reasoning – as contrasted with argument processes that require a deductive chain of demonstrative reasoning – is distinctive not only in its methodology, but also in what it takes to constitute validity. Within the Confucian ethical tradition, validity in moral reasoning may include appeals to tradition and precedents, as well as consideration of contextual, personal and circumstantial

[1] John Wisdom, 1957; cited in Cua, 1998, at p. 207.

factors. With these points in mind, the account articulated here will provide a much more fruitful way of characterising Confucian ethics as it is neither confined to nor limited by the frameworks available in western moral philosophy. A primary import of this approach is to draw upon Confucian thought in order to present fresh, insightful observations regarding the processes involved and the skills required in moral reasoning.

Normative Standards and Principles in Confucian Ethics

Especially in the early Confucian writings, there is palpable emphasis on *li* as a normative standard of conduct in relational interactions. These behavioural codes appear to occupy a central place in Confucian moral thinking. For instance, there are many injunctions for sons to fulfil their father's wishes or follow in their father's ways, even after the father has passed on (*Analects* 1:2; 1:11; 4:20). These statements on appropriate filial behaviour – including such motions as hastening one's steps as a sign of respect (16:13) – evoke a sense of external compliance.

For defenders of the Confucian tradition, *li* becomes a problem particularly if it is understood both as a normative standard and overriding of other, morally significant factors. In the words of Michael Martin, who is generally sceptical of the ethical concepts and insights of Confucian thought:

> from a modern liberal perspective the objection will be bound to arise that [the Confucian] view of man, far from ensuring human dignity, actually hampers and hinders it by tying the human person to pre-established expectations and pre-established roles and relationships not of his own making. One's moral choices are limited and thus, from the liberal point of view, one is to that extent dehumanized.[2]

But the problem Martin describes arises primarily because *li* are understood as normative. I have argued elsewhere that *li* have a range of functions which need to be viewed in a developmental context.[3] According to the account I offer, *li* are adaptive rather than normative. In the case of the learner, for example, *li* are primarily normative whereas for the mature deliberator, *li* are ethico-aesthetic forms of self-expression. The role of *li* varies according to the stage of cultivation of individuals. In other words, *li* do not always have ultimate status in Confucian ethics.[4]

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[2] Martin, 1995, p. 14.

[3] Lai, 2006.

[4] Cua (1996a; 1978) provides lucid and compelling accounts of Confucian ethics in many of his essays, meticulously articulating the elements and processes in Confucian moral reasoning. One of

Together with the concept *ren*, *li* pertains to character development (see *Analects* 4:1; 4:3; 4:4) and must therefore be adapted for use in its different stages. This is one important reason for not viewing *li* as a static and undifferentiated concept. As discussed previously, the Confucian *junzi*, the paradigmatic individual, cannot be satisfactorily and exhaustively defined by his commitment to normative standards or principles alone. It is in the *junzi*'s attitudes and commitments underlying his behaviours and actions and their practical realisation, that the depth of Confucian morality lies (2:10; 4:4; 6:22; 14:29; 4:31; 16:10).

According to this view, *li* are instrumental to, yet indispensable in, the cultivation of the self. One learns through *li*-practice to express and cultivate commitment to others. In this regard, the concept *ren* does not merely embody the principle of respect for persons or of benevolence but rather captures the ultimate commitment of moral agents. In brief, Confucian ethics is both act- and agent-centred.

A second reason why Confucian ethics should not be seen primarily as normative is that that would fail to capture the centrality of practice in Confucian philosophy. The *Analects* is emphatic that self-realisation is meaningful only in concrete, practical contexts: the positive effects of the sage-kings is tangibly present in the socio-political environment (*Analects* 6:30). In this connection, there is significant weight given to the concept *xin*, 'matching deeds with words', more commonly translated 'sincerity'. In numerous passages in the *Analects*, the focus on practical action is clearly articulated, as for instance in 2:22:

> The Master said, 'I do not see how a man can be acceptable who is untrustworthy in word? When a pin is missing in the yoke-bar of a large cart or in the collar-bar of a small cart, how can the cart be expected to go?' (Trans. Lau, 1979a, p. 66. See also *Analects* 1:4–8; 1:13; 12:10; 14:37)

The match between commitment and action is fundamental in Confucian philosophy. As established previously, an understanding of *yi* as process-oriented rather than norm-based more accurately captures the character of Confucian ethics. What is at issue here is not that these two elements of moral action, norms and practice, are incompatible. But when it comes to the essentials, the question is where the emphasis lies. In the case of Confucianism it is not in the norms, but in commitment and practice.

Third, a primarily norm-based account of ethics is incompatible with a consequentialist commitment, which figures in numerous instances in the

his arguments relating to the role of principles in Confucian thought (1989) is that they only have *prima facie* status in that they may be overridden by circumstantial factors deemed more morally weighty.

Analects. A number of its passages articulate a fundamental concern for socio-political utility (for example, *Analects* 1:2). The theme of utility – in this case comprising by ideals associated with the flourishing of humanity – is a prominent one in Confucian philosophy. Here, we must pause to consider how Confucianism might balance an axiological (value-driven) view of *ren* (human goodness) with the various goods that may be achieved (outcome-driven) in human togetherness.

Utility

The passages in the *Analects* which discuss the actions of Guanzhong (683–642 BCE) reveal some difficult tensions in Confucian thought. Guanzhong is despised by the Confucians; as noted in *Analects* 3:22 he had overstepped the boundaries of *li*. He took measures that were inappropriate for men of his status. Kongzi made the rhetorical remark that, 'If we say that Guanzhong understood the observance of ritual propriety, then who doesn't?' (trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 87).

Guanzhong was well known for indulging in excesses and for showing no compunction to be moral. Additionally, he had also undertaken extensive legalist reforms under the reign of the Duke Huan (683?–641? BCE) which the Confucians would have disagreed with. Yet, Guanzhong's actions are defended in *Analects* 14:9, 14:16 and 14:17. The *Analects* focuses on the outcomes of his actions: 'To this day, the common people still enjoy the benefit of [Guanzhong's] acts . . . ' (*Analects* 14:17; trans. Lau, 1979a, p. 126). Based on these considerations, *Analects* 14:16 proclaims 'Such was [Guanzhong's] *ren*. Such was his *ren*' (trans. Lau, ibid.). Benjamin Schwartz captures the essence of this problem:

> Here we seem to have a deep tension between a concept of personal morality based on purity of motive and intent and a concern with the good sociopolitical 'results' achieved by a statesman of great talent but little personal virtue.[5]

Is high regard due to Guanzhong because he helped to establish a political system the Confucians approved of? And this is not the only case that demonstrates the importance of utility in Confucian reasoning. Youzi, a prominent disciple of the Confucian school, expresses a consequentialist justification for the virtues of filial piety and brotherly submission:

[5] Schwartz, 1985, p. 110.

> Master You said: 'It is a rare thing for someone who has a sense of filial and fraternal responsibility to have a taste for defying authority. And it is unheard of for those who have no taste for defying authority to be keen on initiating rebellion. Exemplary persons concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way will grow therefrom. As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of authoritative conduct.' (*Analects* 1:2; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 71)

This passage embodies the same tension described by Schwartz, between an ethics based on 'purity of motive and intent' and one that is justified by achievement of certain socio-political consequences. Are filial piety and brotherly submission merely politically functional: means to socialise individuals to be oriented more toward conformity than rebellion or disagreement?

The worry is not so much that Confucian thought may embody elements of outcome-driven moral reasoning but rather that it seems to incorporate a commitment *both* to *ren* as an orientation toward virtue *and* to elements of consequentialism. Ivanhoe proposes to overcome this double-headed commitment in his portrayal of Confucian thought as 'character consequentialism'. According to Ivanhoe, character consequentialism in Confucian thought is:

> an ethical theory concerned with the effects actions have upon the cultivation of virtues and which concentrates on certain psychological goods, particularly certain kinship relationships which it regards not only as intrinsically but also instrumentally valuable, as the source of more general social virtues.[6]

Due to its focus on character, the emphasis is on 'future fruits rather than immediate results'; among those fruits are psychological goods associated with certain unique relationships. To escape the common criticism of consequentialism as allowing for the ends to justify the means, Ivanhoe also makes the point that virtue is valued both instrumentally and for its own sake.

This is an important philosophical point regarding the ultimate commitment of Confucian philosophy. Describing Confucian ethics as 'character-consequentialism' allows Ivanhoe to draw together the two polarities, one focusing on an identified set of character ideals and the other on outcomes. Ivanhoe has made a compelling case that Confucian philosophy holds various personal, psychological goods, including personal relationships, as fundamentally important.

Nevertheless, we need to work out whether Confucian ethics is *ultimately* consequentialist or ideal-driven. Historically, this issue was at the core of the Mengzi–Mohist debate. Mengzi was emphatic in denying Mohist philosophy

[6] Ivanhoe, 1991, from 'Abstract', at p. 55.

because of the importance the latter attributed to the role and status of utility in moral deliberation. Mengzi argued that appealing ultimately to utility and to *jianai* (equal concern for everyone) as a standard would render obsolete the special relations between kin, especially the father–son relationship (*Books of Mencius*, 3B:9).

Yet, as Hansen points out, Mengzi's emphasis on kin (the realisation of *ren* in particular human relationships) must eventually transform into a general universal concern (*ren* as a commitment to general human well-being).[7] This renders Mengzi's ultimate commitment almost indistinguishable from Mozi's universal utilitarianism.

This difficult bind cannot be resolved here. It may be that the concept *ren* is valued by the Confucians both for its intrinsic qualities (respect for persons) and its instrumental ones (socio-political harmony). But the problem remains for those wishing to characterise Confucian ethics as *primarily* consequentialist.

Confucianism and Virtue Ethics

The rendition of Confucian ethics as virtue ethics is compelling as Confucian philosophy does appear to have the cultivation of virtues or character as a primary focus. In Confucian philosophy, as is the case in virtue ethics, the conduct of a person is seen as a manifestation and measure of aspects of one's character. Other similar themes in the two schemes include the attention to primary relationships, especially as these are seen in part to constitute the self, and an acknowledgment of the significant role of tradition in shaping individuals and in backgrounding conceptions of the good.

Daniel Star asserts that Confucian thought is best understood as a virtue ethic.[8] In his detailed analysis of elements both of care ethics and virtue ethics, Star contends that there are significant features of Confucian moral reasoning that render it akin to virtue ethics, including (a) the acceptance of exceptions to standard rules in moral practice, and (b) the importance of tradition in shaping, and in providing a context for, moral practice and notions of the good life.

The distinctiveness of Star's characterisation of Confucian ethics as virtue ethics lies in its emphasis on roles. He argues against assertions that Confucian thought grants fundamental moral weight to relationships. According to Star, the primary focus in Confucian ethics is on roles. For instance, the important aspects of the father–son relationship dwell not in the relationship itself but

[7] Hansen, 1992, pp. 168–70.
[8] Star, 2002.

rather in the fatherly role and the son's role, and on how well particular fathers and sons live out their roles. Star dubs his interpretation of Confucian ethics a 'role-focused virtue ethic'.

Perhaps one of the most detailed accounts of Confucian virtue ethics is proposed by Kim-Chong Chong in 'Confucius's Virtue Ethics: *Li*, *Yi*, *Wen* and *Chih* in the *Analects*'.[9] Here, Chong draws together a number of Confucian concepts, weaving them together to converge on the theme of character cultivation. He makes a case against the construal of Confucian ethics either as deontological or teleological (consequentialist). Two important aspects of Chong's defence are, that 'a concern with character is required, to ensure right action', and 'ethico-aesthetic education [primarily through *li*] is required to ensure the correct motivations'.[10] Chong's analysis focuses on the notion of right action supplemented by meaningfully intended action within a particular ethico-social context.

Along similar lines, Antonio Cua presents an insightful articulation of aspects of tradition, interpretation, appropriateness and ethical education, in Confucian character formation or personal cultivation.[11] In Cua's account, these features come together convincingly to demonstrate how some difficult practical issues might be resolved within a version of virtue ethics informed by Confucian philosophy.

The three accounts presented above have different objectives. Star aims to highlight various elements in Confucian thought that are more closely aligned with virtue ethics than with the feminist ethic of care. Chong's essay presents a number of Confucian concepts within the framework of virtue ethics. He argues that these concepts come to light best when understood from the perspective of character cultivation. Cua analyses the practical issues associated with moral reasoning within the framework of a Confucian virtue ethics. Together, these proposals are persuasive in demonstrating that Confucian ethics has many significant similarities with virtue ethics. And indeed, one might conclude that Confucian ethics is most adequately characterised according to the conceptual framework of a virtues-focused ethic, as contrasted with one focusing primarily on deontology, consequences or care.

But the question remains whether Confucian ethic is best characterised according to any of the existing models in Anglo-American moral philosophy. This is a different point from whether there are any significant similarities between the different models, as there doubtless will be.

[9] Chong, 1998, pp. 101–30.
[10] Ibid., p. 125.
[11] Cua, 1996a, 1996b, 1998.

I contend that many important practical details of moral reasoning in Confucian philosophy are lost when we attempt to squash them into the frameworks of western ethical theory. The significant features of Confucian moral thinking – attention to roles and their corresponding obligations, consideration of what is right, connection between character and moral motivation, an ethic that is both act- and agent-centred, the primacy of practice, a method of argumentation that prefers arbitration to adjudication and reasoned judgment based on what is the right or fitting thing to do – must not be lost in translation. I proceed to present the argument that where Confucian ethics is most insightful is in its articulation of the skills associated with moral reasoning and moral practice.

Skills in Ethical Deliberation

The early Confucian texts present the figures of Kongzi, Mengzi and Xunzi as committed, conscientious and skilful thinkers and deliberators. They provide a sense of how various factors need to be taken into consideration, how certain values are taken as basic, and how various elements come into play in arriving at a decision.

Xunzi draws our attention to the need for negotiation skills and emphasises the central function of *li* in civilising behaviours. In his example of brothers vying for property, Xunzi draws out the ugly aspects of self-serving desire and competition:

> Suppose some brothers are to divide their property. If they follow their natural feelings, they will love profit and seek gain, and thus will do violence to each other and grab the property. But if they are transformed by the civilizing influence of the pattern and order of propriety [*li*] and righteousness, they will even yield to outsiders. (*Hsun Tzu*, Chapter 23; trans. Chan 1963a, p. 130).

How do *li*-behavioural patterns transform behaviour? Xunzi does not advocate the cessation of desires as a solution to competition; elsewhere, he specifically notes that the reduction or control of desires is not the concern of government.[12]

Li have an instructive function as they teach the brothers to negotiate their relationship. Indeed, they also teach the brothers to negotiate relationships

[12] Xunzi writes: 'All those who maintain that desires must be gotten rid of before there can be orderly government fail to consider whether desires can be guided, but merely deplore the fact that they exist at all. All those who maintain that desires must be lessened before there can be orderly government fail to consider whether desires can be controlled, but merely deplore the fact that they are so numerous ... the possession or nonpossession of desires has nothing to do with good government or bad' ('Rectifying Names', Chapter 22; trans. Watson, 1967, p. 150).

outside the family. Together with the proper application of behavioural standards (*zhengming*), *li* teach one to yield where the situation calls for it. If we accept this explanation, issues such as gentle remonstration with one's parents (*Analects* 4:18) and being loyal to one's father or son (13:18) may be understood in a less oppressive light. These skills of negotiation are required at the interface of self and other: 'one may not be able to enjoy all the most beautiful things in the world, and yet he can still increase his joy ... This is what it means to value the self and make other things work for you.'[13]

Constant practice in negotiation helps one to cultivate moral sensitivity to the other and as well to the morally significant factors in particular situations. This is only a different way of expressing the connection between *li* and *ren*: by first engaging in the many prescribed patterns of behaviour, one learns to be sensitive to the needs of others in a variety of situations. Moral cultivation works toward the development of this sensitivity. *Analects* 2:4 is a famous passage portraying Kongzi's development:

> The Master said, 'At fifteen I set my heart on learning;
> at thirty I took my stand;
> at forty I came to be free from doubts;
> at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven;
> at sixty my ear was atuned [*sic*];
> at seventy I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the line.'
> (Trans. Lau, 1979a, p. 63)

This passage describes the cultivation of moral sensitivity in the life of Kongzi. Sensitivity is both grounded in one's commitment to certain values and manifest in the way one perceives the factors at play in particular situations, weighs up those that are morally significant and decides on an optimal resolution.

In Confucian thought, the primacy of practice contextualises the entire cultivation process. Actions and behaviours are the only way to give full expression to one's commitment; the practical implications of one's commitment to particular values are critically important. As the scholar Donald Munro writes:

> The consideration important to the Chinese is the behavioral implications of belief or [the] proposition in question. What effect does adherence to the belief have on people? What implications for social action can be drawn from the statement? ... In Confucianism, there was no thought of 'Knowing that did not entail some consequence for action'.[14]

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[13] Ibid., pp. 155–6.
[14] Munro, 1969, pp. 55–6; cited in Cua, 1996a, p. 154.

One learns to be sensitive by observing and sometimes following the actions of others; one might even avoid the bad actions of others (*Analects* 4:17; 7:22). One also learns from the knowledge or experiences of enlightened people in the past. The reading and understanding of the *Shijing*, the Book of Odes, was of immense importance to Kongzi. He frequently drew upon their insights (1:15; 7:18; 8:3), gaining inspiration from them (8:8).

Analects 17:9 is noteworthy in this regard. It states that the study of the odes arouses sensibilities (*xing*), strengthens powers of observation (*guan*), assists in getting along with others (*qun*), sharpens critical skills (*yuan*), and instils in one a wide vocabulary for making distinctions in the world.[15] In this one passage lies a whole repository of insights regarding the skills required in moral deliberation. Further, in *Analects* 13:5, it is stated that the study of the Odes must have practical outcomes; it is otherwise a futile exercise:

> The Master said, 'If people can recite all of the three hundred [Odes] and yet when given official responsibility, fail to perform effectively, or when sent to distant quarters, are unable to act on their own initiative, then even though they have mastered so many of them, what good are they to them?' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 163)

Seen in this light, the *Analects* is a collection of assessments of behaviour or character, a *manual of how people acted appropriately (or otherwise) in different situations*, rather than how one is actually required to act. When understood in this manner, the 499 passages are truly significant. Otherwise, the passages appear to be nothing more than dogmatic judgments and pronouncements on correct or appropriate action.

According to this account, the *Analects* is a book about moral decision-making in specific circumstances. In the *Analects*, concrete and particular details are often morally significant. However, it does not require us to memorise or imitate those details. For, to insist on the latter would be to deny the specificity of detail in each particular situation. If there is a primary commitment to concrete, everyday practice, it cannot also follow that the intention of the *Analects* is for us to do exactly as Kongzi and his disciples did, given that our experiences will undoubtedly be different. We learn from reading the *Analects* how these thinkers deliberated in particular situations and we reflect on their actions in order to improve our skills in moral deliberation.

Ground Rules

There are rules that need to be complied with in order that any games proceed at all. We are not, after all, living in Alice's Wonderland where rules and goals

[15] Adapted from Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 206.

are continually changing. A successful football game needs at least to comply with the rules of the game. On the other hand, however, compliance with the set of rules pertaining to a game – even a full and complete compliance – does not amount to a good game. Notwithstanding significant dissimilarities between morality and games, we can at least say that the necessity of basic ground rules is a point of significant similarity between the two.[16]

Morality needs to be grounded, to greater or lesser extents, in criteria such as consistency, impartiality, universality and objectivity. However, even when taken together, these four features do not amount to a 'good' or 'comprehensive' moral system. They do not tell us how to act in particular situations.

At times, certain principles may have to be suspended because of overriding factors; we might lie to protect a friend. Kongzi remarked that he does not have presuppositions regarding what may or may not be done (*wuke*, *wu buke*) (*Analects* 18:8). *Li*-practices are important guides for behaviour and hence have a prominent role in the early stages of a person's cultivation. *Li* play an essential role in the early development of the moral learner as they provide specifications regarding what is permissible, and what is not, in a variety of contexts, taking into account relational and other circumstantial factors. Beyond the early stages in one's development, however, a good measure of spontaneity, improvisation and imagination is called for (for example, *Analects* 13:5; 2:4; 8:1; 8:2; 13:26; 15:21).

There are many different accounts of how Confucian ethics at times requires the relegation of principles or behavioural norms to a lower priority. Antonio Cua explains this flexibility in terms of the *ching-chuan* principle. *Ching* is 'an invariable rule, a standard of conduct, constant, recurring'; while *chuan* pertains to 'exigency, circumstances, that which is irregular, and opposed to *ching*, that which is constant or normal – from this comes, therefore, the idea of temporary'.[17] Cua suggests that the doctrine of *ching-chuan* is a theory of the normal, on the one hand, and the exigent or exceptional, on the other. While the former is an 'invariable rule in the sense of a rule regularly and invariably applied to situations or actions that fall within the scope of its application', the latter applies in situations in real life that 'appear to fall outside the scope of the application of rules'. In particular, in the *Books of Mencius*, attention is given to some exigent situations (1A:7, 4B:18, 5A:2; 6B:1, 7A:26). The most famous of these is Mengzi's proclamation that, while males and females are normally not allowed to touch, a man must reach out to save his drowning sister-in-law as a matter of exigency (4A:17). What we see here is the exercise of

[16] One needs to be cautious about the application of this analogy to ethical practice and discourse. We should not take morality to be a 'game' in a conventional sense.

[17] Cua, 1971, pp. 50–51. Cua argues for a liberal interpretation of Confucian moral theory, dealing with the idea of the *junzi* as a paradigm that is not bound by strict obedience to principles.

practical wisdom which is arguably more important than mere rule-following. Moral practice requires the continual filling out and refining of general principles or norms as a necessary part of ethico-cultural development.

The Uniqueness of Each Situation and Creativity

Herbert Fingarette discusses various aspects of Confucian ethical practice by drawing analogies with elements in a game. In a particular baseball game, a variety of skills, excitement, suspense and remarkable performances may come to life. Yet, it is absurd to consider this model game a complete and sufficient paradigm for all baseball games. Of course, we expect many different model games, each with different characteristics, some of which we may consider equally exciting, others more skilful, others displaying excellent teamwork, and so on. Fingarette argues that '[t]he very unrepeatable uniqueness of a model baseball game is part of what makes it a model'.[18] Both in Confucian ethics and games, in which practice is paramount, no one person (or game) can fully and systematically embody the whole range of Confucian virtues and values (or ideal manoeuvres and skilful tactics).

Hence, in Confucian ethics, there is no imposition of transcendent standards, absolutism regarding certain norms or values, or closure on a single correct resolution. In practical morality, there may be *good* outcomes or a number of *equally expedient* solutions, but there is no assumption of one resolution to each problem. Similarly, with good game matches, there are many excellent-making characteristics, though these will be realised differently in *different*, good games.

In moral decision-making, contingent and varied elements make it such that the 'best' response is not necessarily an ideal one. Compromise may be necessary, and it is possible that one makes a decision on the basis of the least worst outcome. In this regard, exemplars are important because they allow us to see for ourselves the instantiation of values or principles in a range of scenarios, and to understand that there may be a number of ethical courses of action that are equally justifiable. The focus is on trying to understand the morally significant features of particular circumstances and to bring them together as they stand in relation to each other. *Analects* 9:8 presents the commitment of Kongzi to unravel the different elements of a particular situation:

> The Master said, 'Do I possess wisdom (*zhi*)? No, I do not. But if a simple peasant puts a question to me, and I come up empty, I attack the question from both ends until I have gotten to the bottom of it.' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 128)

[18] Fingarette, 1981, p. 34.

Kongzi is conscientiously committed to understanding the situation. There is much attention given to how one might adequately understand a situation in order appropriately to respond to it.

This calls for creativity in action. If each situation is unique, ethical deliberation must involve interpretation and understanding of the details of that situation and creativity in one's handling of that situation. In the famous passage on what Kongzi expects from the teaching and learning process, he states:

> I do not open the way for students who are not driven with eagerness; I do not supply a vocabulary for students who are not trying desperately to find the language for their ideas. If on showing students one corner they do not come back to me with the other three, I will not repeat myself. (*Analects* 7:8; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 112)

Kongzi expects a significant degree of intellectual independence and initiative of his disciples. A number of philosophical analyses, notably those articulated by Hall and Ames, make room for creativity in Confucian self-cultivation. For Hall and Ames, creativity is a key element in the authoritative (*ren*) person-making (*ren*).[19] Exposure to a wide variety of situations and a broad range of exemplars will increase one's repertoire and moral imagination. Hence, one is advised to learn extensively, from many different sources (*Analects* 6:27; 19:6).

Sensitivity, Interpretation and Moral Imagination

In moral practice, creativity is related to sensitivity. One must be able to see the different elements and factors at play and creatively work with them in order to come up with an optimal solution. Take for example *Analects* 13:18, where sons are told to cover up for their sheep-stealing fathers. We might say that this passage exposes a weakness in Confucian ethics because it is merely situational: Kongzi is telling us to lie. But this is not a philosophically interesting view nor is it textually sensitive. There are moral considerations pulling at least two ways. One has to do with truth-telling and the other filial piety. But perhaps those with a more acutely sensitive 'eye' will 'see' even broader, richer complexities of the picture. In addition to the two already mentioned, they might also consider the obligations associated with family loyalty and its ethical implications. This may include a consideration of the impact upon the family if the father is found out. However, it does not mean that lying to protect family members is therefore to be upheld as a rule. Rather, such sensitivity allows one to see the picture somewhat differently and to understand

[19] Hall and Ames, 1987.

the situation of this boy as a uniquely difficult one to which there is no easy solution.

Such sensitivity to morally significant factors may be cultivated – at least in part – through education and practice. As suggested earlier, the broadening of perspectives opens one's mind to a range of possibilities. Chad Hansen understands this process, which he calls 'intuition', as a spontaneous one, involving the 'acquired skill to process contextual clues and react to them quickly enough to adjust our action to ever-changing circumstances'.[20] Furthermore, he argues:

> Precisely because we need to adjust our action to an endless variety in a myriad of factors, practice is required. Practice builds an intuition – an ability quickly to process and respond to clues to environmental features that affect the performance.[21]

Hansen's description of intuition in moral practice overlaps significantly with the concept of *yi* offered in this book. In *Analects* 4:10 it is said that the *junzi* does not have a prior commitment to anything, but seeks what is appropriate. Such appropriateness must focus on the specific details of particular circumstances. *Yi* does not take the perspective of a predetermined transcendent standard impressed upon things or states of affairs.

Additionally, it is clear that *yi* is a *skill* one applies in moral deliberation. It does not of itself supply the normative elements for ethical reasoning. Rather, it draws together the elements at play within each situation, weighing them singly and also placing them in relation to the others. Within the Confucian framework, careful deliberation about moral issues is carried out with consideration of a range of factors including aspects of *li*-practice, *ren* as expressive of a concern for humanity, relations between the people involved and existing norms and expectations. In this light, we can understand *yi* in terms of as an openness of mind, and sensitivity to the morally significant features in each unique situation.

Conclusion

The preceding sections present a distinctively Confucian approach to ethics with a primary focus on particular contextual and circumstantial features of moral situations. Confucianism is, however, not a situation-based ethic because there are important normative elements embedded especially in *li* and appropriate instantiations of one's role relationship (the theory of

[20] Hansen, 1992, p. 73.
[21] Ibid.

zhengming). These prescriptions provide clear boundaries and scope for permissible and commendable actions.

Nevertheless, individuals must not be restricted by these ground rules. For underlying Confucian ethical practice is *ren*, a concept signifying the essence of human affection and sympathy. Within relational contexts, special obligations apply, as well as opportunities for caring for others.

The realisation of *yi*, a skill in creative interpretation and understanding of the morally significant features in each situation, is what draws the deliberations toward an optimal outcome, or one that maximises good; however that may be conceived within the framework of particular socio-cultural assumptions. We must accept that there is some commitment to maximising outcomes in Confucian thought. The application of *yi* may be understood as a skill of balancing components in a situation. It should be obvious that this account, focusing on skills, is compatible with different conceptions of the good. The decision is informed by the ultimate commitment of a person, including details of whom she cares about, what she sees in a particular situation and her moral imagination in interpreting a situation. These are some of the sensitivities inculcated in the Confucian cultivation process.

Here, we see a significant overlap between morality and the notion of a good life. Accordingly, any theoretical or abstract dichotomy between act and agency, or behaviour and character, is transcended. This is because one's character is expressed both in the ends and means of one's projects and activities. This is expressed in *Analects* 2:10:

> Look at the means a man employs, observe his reasons or motives, examine where/what he takes his rest or feels at home in. How can his character be hidden? (*Analects* 2:10; trans. mine, adapted from Lau, 1979a, p. 64)

The person is the agent of his action. His activities reveal his commitments but, more importantly, they constitute in part his character. Robert Neville succinctly expresses the contrast between Confucian ethics and a juridical, act-based account of morality:

> Moral life is displayed not as a set of court-judgments on specifiable actions but rather as the development of relationships, skills, and ongoing virtues that make it possible to affect things for the better at the right time and in the right way. The power of this point derives from its contrast to the usual Western mode of moral thinking. Perhaps because of the pervasiveness of the juridical model, Western philosophers have looked at the judgeable action as the proper unit of moral worth.[22]

[22] Neville, 1986, p. 191.

Confucian ethics is multifaceted rather than univocal. Its conception of morality is realistically grounded in a developmental perspective on moral life and practice. Several of its elements may be understood to resemble certain key aspects of western moral theories. However, I have argued here that none of these existing theories sufficiently captures the nature of Confucian ethics, which is best characterised as a cultivation of skills of moral deliberation.

The most useful way of understanding Confucian insights is to understand their emphasis on the following features of moral deliberation: skills of interpretation and creativity, sensitivity to morally significant factors, a broad knowledge and understanding of situations in life, a depth of experience including learning from the experiences of others, and the fine balancing skills required in deliberation and judgment. Surely, this is the point of Kongzi's comment in *Analects* 15:29, that 'It is the person who is able to broaden the way (*dao*), not the way that broadens the person' (trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 190).

How do we engender and inculcate these skills? While the burden is heavy and the road is long (*Analects* 8:7), I suggest the *Analects* is a good place to begin, where the reader attempts to understand the skills as they are played out and instantiated in the deliberations in its different passages. Studying the ways and practices of those who have gone before us will enlighten our moral thinking and practice.

CHAPTER SIX

The Feminist Care Ethic and the Issue of Relationality in Chinese Philosophy

Recent scholarship in Chinese philosophy has turned its attention to some of the concerns raised in the field of feminist ethics.There are many common focal areas and shared concerns in the two broad fields, offering much scope for dialogue and debate. Areas of comparison include the similarities between Confucian relational morality and the feminist ethics of care[1] and the alignment of ideas and values associated with femininity in Daoist philosophy.[2]

These comparative projects are important, particularly if the discussions facilitate critical reflection on common concerns, significant differences and emergent ethical and social issues. In comparisons between Confucian and care moralities, debate has advanced beyond noting superficial similarities – for instance, that both are primarily concerned with relationships. More careful comparisons are mindful of important differences between Confucian morality and the care ethic as their backgrounding assumptions are dramatically different.

In reading Daoist philosophy, those with feminist concerns take delight in discovering the mention of femininity in the *Daodejing*. But this turns quickly into disappointment as the concept of femininity is associated with non-assertiveness and perhaps even a sly, cunning methodology.[3]

The explorations in feminist philosophy have prompted an inquiry into the existing conceptual frameworks that breed denigrated notions of femininity, and which underlie exploitative practices against women. It is at this juncture that I suggest Chinese philosophy has important insights to offer to contemporary debates as it emphasises a different perspective on complementation.

Both Confucian and Daoist philosophy take the relational, interdependent self as basic and as the locus of all discussions of morality. The identification of the relational self as the locus of meaningful and ethical action supports a

[1] Chenyang Li's account (1994) would be amongst the earliest. See also Henry Rosemont's 'Classical Confucian and Contemporary Feminist Perspectives on the Self: Some Parallels and their Implications' (1997) and the collection edited by Chenyang Li (*The Sage and the Second Sex*, 2000).

[2] See, for example, Wawrytko, 1981; and Kleinjans, 1990.

[3] Refer to Lai, 2000.

different paradigm from those of theories grounded in an independent self. An ethic arising from relationality is oriented toward assessments of embodiment, situatedness, inclusivity, responsiveness, sensitivity, interdependence, particularity and multiplicity. Confucian and Daoist philosophies engage in extensive consideration of many of these themes. I explore a number of them in response to some themes and concerns raised in discussions of feminist ethics, particularly those centring on the notion of care.

Interdependence and Relationality: Challenging Dualisms

The concept of interdependent self generates rich and complex notions of social, ethical and political activity and involvement. While Daoist philosophy provides the conceptual underpinnings for a philosophy based on interdependence, Confucianism explores its realisation in the lived human world.

The *Daodejing* aligns its values with the set of characteristics associated with femininity including non-assertiveness (*buzhen*), quietude (*jing*), softness (*rou*) and submissiveness (*ruo*) (*Daodejing* 8, 16, 36, 43, 61, 66, 76, 78). These characteristics are viewed positively in the *Daodejing*. There is, moreover, some emphasis on the beneficial effects of being submissive and non-assertive. Certain chapters (for example, 61, 66, and 76) suggest that the submissive, the soft, or the inferior overcome their respective contrastive terms and subsequently assume the higher position (*shang*).[4] According to this picture, taking the lower position is a means to an end, a manipulative strategy derived perhaps from observation of certain strategies used by women to further their ends.

But we need to scrutinise this thesis because the underlying framework, albeit based on a preference for femininity, is ultimately a dualistic one. The mere overturning of existing norms is not adequately thorough in overcoming the masculinist bias and its underlying assumptions. It is an unhelpful way of approaching an inquiry into political and social (including patriarchal) dogmatism. Such a simplistic reversal does not extend much beyond a rejection of what is normative.[5] Furthermore, a dualistic framework often

[4] Schwartz comments that there is an 'obvious and striking "asymmetry" in the Lao-tzu's view of the female versus the male, the weak versus the strong, the soft versus the hard, and the passive versus the active. In all cases, the first term of the dyad is definitely "preferred." It enjoys a higher "ontological" status, just as water is preferred to stone; it seeks lowly places, and it is, in a profounder sense, stronger than stone' (1985, p. 203).

[5] In feminist philosophy, such moves to 'revalorise' traditional femininity have been described as 'conservative pre-feminist or anti feminist strategy', which would not lead to the addressing of women's interests and needs (Plumwood, 1990, p. 287).

drives a dichotomous approach and expects to see difference and fragmentation rather than concordance, cooperation, compromise and dialogue.

Strategically, the more effective approach to reading the *Daodejing* is to transcend the explicit references to femininity and its characteristics and to examine its conceptions of opposition and interdependence. As noted in previous discussions, both the philosophies of the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* affirm the ontological and epistemological interdependence of opposites.

I draw upon the Daoist idea of opposition to furnish a philosophically satisfying picture of complementation and interdependence. Briefly, Daoist philosophy views opposition and contrast as potentially complementary and mutually resonating (*Daodejing* 26, 28; *Zhuangzi* 2).

The Daoist notion of complementarity insists on the integrity and distinctiveness of each polarity. Each should maintain its distinctness, and yet neither is reducible to the other. In emphasising interdependence, there is room for healthy tension between the two. What is sought is not an assimilation of one to the other, or even a middle-ground compromise situation in which common elements of the two are identified and upheld as central. There is no a priori moral commitment to focus on similarities while obliterating differences, as interdependence implies both connection and distinctness.

According to this argument inspired by Daoist philosophy, the concepts of femininity and masculinity are interdependent and thus incomplete in themselves. The Daoist texts view cooperative dialogue between the polarities as an essential feature of the particularity and definition of each of them. Metaphysically, the two are continually engaged in interactive dynamism. In this connection, the phrase '*buzhen*' should be translated as 'yielding' rather than 'submission' (*Daodejing* 66, 78). The relation between the two polarities, while held in a delicate tension, is not antithetical: each one does not necessarily negate, eliminate, or neutralise the other. This challenges the view that antagonism and dichotomy are the only ways to conceptualise opposition.

In its application to contemporary feminist debates, the assertion of interdependence between the notions of femininity and masculinity is also effective in shattering the associated dichotomies of public–private, impersonal–personal, universal–particular, moral–natural and rational–emotional. As noted by many feminist scholars, separatist views of femininity and masculinity are undesirable because they do not properly reflect the anthropological, sociological, ecological and political aspects of human life.

By contrast, what is being proposed here is a conceptual framework that expects dialogue, cooperation and mutual benefit, and is built upon sensitivity and mutual responsivity. Obviously, an ethic built upon these assumptions will be at times irregular, spontaneous and dynamic. In its recognition of the dynamism between conceptions of femininity and masculinity, Daoism

upholds a picture of humanity that is sensitive to continuing change and development as cultures and traditions evolve.

While Daoism provides the metaphysical groundwork for conceptualising interdependence between the concepts of femininity and masculinity, Confucian thought promotes reflection on practical aspects of moral life, particularly in the moral significance of interdependent relational attachment. The Confucian emphasis on cultivating appropriate responses to particular others and developing proper emotional ties within specific relationships arises from its commitment to interdependence as a basic fact in human life. Unlike the case in early feminist philosophy, these bonds of interdependence in Confucian thought are not merely a feature of how women think.

The Confucian idea of relationality has important implications for ideas associated with moral agency and personal identity. The notion of the related self challenges inadequacies and biases in those notions of personhood which construe autonomy not only as integral but also as inviolable. It impresses on the need for moral theory to recognise the many contingencies affecting moral deliberation, particularly those relating to relational attachments. Furthermore, it also addresses the necessity for moral philosophy to reflect more accurately the empirical aspects of human life.

One of the ways in which deliberations in Confucian ethics may inform feminist ethics is in the former's articulation of elements involved in relating to others. An ethic conceived along the lines of interdependence is in many ways richer and more effective as a relational ethic than one based on the (feminist) notion of care. As noted in the literature, the paradigm of caring for the other in the feminist care ethic may be (mis)interpreted in patronising and demeaning ways, with negative outcomes for the person cared for. A care ethic in the wrong hands may legitimise a powerful, dominating carer who, even with the best intentions, may end up infantilising the other.[6] Furthermore, while a 'carer–cared-for' relationship may be appropriate within certain domains, such as parental care and medical and nursing care, these are specialised and professional contexts of care that cannot be generalised across all relationships. After all, women do not want to be cared for in a way that leaves them open to determination by men.

The Confucian notion of interdependence in relationships reaches beyond the confines of a gender-determined construction of relationality and ethics. Some empirically-focused proposals of feminist ethics understand values associated with relational attachment as especially important, and perhaps distinctive, in women's experience of morality: these values are central in

[6] This view is widely shared amongst feminist ethicists. Virginia Held writes: 'for one person to be in a position of caretaker means that that person has the power to withhold care, to leave the other without it. The person cared for is usually in a position of vulnerability' (1987, p. 119).

women's perceptions of themselves, their identities and their understanding of how they should live their lives. Yet, as we can see from the Confucian sources, the call for commitment, human sympathy, concern and sincerity are not less applicable to men. In this connection, it is worth noting some of the conclusions in Margery Wolf's significant anthropological study of relationships within some rural communities in China.[7] One of her findings was that men in these rural communities emphasised the need for focusing on relationships, more so than their female counterparts.

It is ironic that Confucian ethics, with its exclusive focus on the masculine *junzi* paradigm, shares common concerns about relationality with the feminist care ethics. An initial lesson to take from the comparison of the two is that men as well as women should (begin to) see relational attachment as morally significant. If relational attachment is morally weighty, there is no reason why these considerations should be limited within a feminine or feminist experience of morality. Deliberations regarding relational ethics in Confucian thought demonstrate the limitations of a care ethic labelled as 'feminist' as well as the narrowness of an ethic focusing on care rather than relational interdependence.

Ren is the key Confucian concept richly imbued with potentially limitless aspects of human relationality. Broadly construed, *ren* is an awareness of one's shared humanity and concern for humanity in general, realised in a complex multiplicity of ways. There is extensive deliberation of the cultivation of *ren* in the Confucian texts, beginning from the nurturing of *xiao* within the family context and subsequently extending beyond the domain of the family. Confucian philosophy presents a compelling account of the family context as an ideal starting point for the developing individual in providing the primary locus of relationships. The family context provides individuals with an introduction to the dynamics of relating to others; this serves as the preparatory basis for relationships in extra-familial contexts. But *xiao* is only the beginning. Most fundamental is the realisation of the self (*zhong*: commitment to self) in the context of meaningful and developing relationships (*shu*: mutuality): Kongzi's one thread (*Analects* 4:15).

Together, *zhong* and *shu* articulate the integrity of the person as a relational being, in light of his interactions with significant others. This stands in contrast to the early proposals of the feminist care ethic in which, in order to care for others, one had to sacrifice the needs of the self.[8] By focusing in detail on the dynamics of relationships, Confucian ethics avoids simplistic characterisations of self and other. Morally significant features of relationships lie at the

[7] Wolf, 1994.

[8] See Carol Gilligan's (1982) analysis of women's moral experiences; she suggests that one of the struggles in moral development is for women to overcome a sense of guilt for not being sufficiently selfless.

intersection of self and other; these include notions such as mutual obligation and responsibility, affection, and emotional and physical proximity.

In Confucian thought, there is explicit acknowledgment of the significance of key personal relationships in the development of the self. Corollary to this picture of the self is the view that morality is relational, relative and dynamic rather than fixed or determinate. This 'thick' picture of morality – as opposed to a 'thin' one which focuses on specific actions, principles or particular individuals – appeals to concepts such as trust, responsibility, commitment, empathy and care as basic in ethical life.

Experiencing Relationships: Rethinking Theoretical Commitments

Feminist inquiries into moral philosophy have raised awareness of the empirical nature of women's experiences of morality. Generally, this means that, for many women, morality does not merely involve the application of relevant rules or principles to specific circumstances. In women's experience of morality, moral deliberations and actions are embedded within lived, relational contexts. It is the operation and application of principles and values in particular situations rather than their abstract, inviolable status that renders morality significant.[9]

Yet, the need to consider *differences* in women's moral experiences has only relatively recently been considered in feminist literature. This is surprising, as it would seem that the care ethic, focusing on women's *experience* of morality, should be ready to embrace a multiplicity of experiences. In other words, a commitment to an empirical approach to ethics must also commit to the diversity of lived experiences. The considerations should encompass differences in experiences across national, ethnic, religious and cultural boundaries.[10]

Confucian philosophy has a similar focus on ethical practice, especially in the realisation of *ren* in particular relational and circumstantial contexts. This is noteworthy as it should not be assumed that all views of self-realisation include and encompass human relationality. According to the Confucian conception of interdependent self, one is a unique individual not only because

[9] Susan Moller-Okin (1998) makes a persuasive case for reconsidering the notion of human rights because many contemporary infringements are justified by appeals to cultural or religious norms; there is an urgent need for assessing women's rights in particular cultural contexts.

[10] Many empirical studies of earlier versions of the care ethic have found them to be culturally narrow and biased. Issues have been raised, not only regarding the justice-care framework originally suggested by Gilligan (1987), but also regarding the use of hypotheticals in the survey, and how they are posed to interviewees. Wolf's 1994 study adds to the considerable literature defying and challenging the conceptual and methodological frameworks of versions of the care ethic.

of one's personal and idiosyncratic characteristics, but also on the basis of one's significant personal relationships. To put this differently, one is a relationally-constituted self and at any one time involved in a number of relationships. One may be a friend, employee, colleague, mother, sister, daughter, daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law. This is not to say that the individual must be consciously self-aware and reflecting on all her relationships at every point in time. The suggestion here is that the relationally-constituted person is constituted *simultaneously* by all of her relationships. Tu Wei-ming observes the relational and ethical dynamics of Confucian personhood and rejects the interpretation of Confucianism as a role-centred morality:

> The dramatic image of the modern person who assumes a variety of social roles is definitely unConfucian. The idea of my assuming the role of son in reference to my father and simultaneously assuming the distinct and separate rôle of father in reference to my son is unnatural, if not distasteful. From my own experience ... I have always been learning to be a son. Since my son's birth, I have also been learning to be a father and my learning to be a son has to take a new significance as a result of becoming a father myself. Furthermore, my being a son and a father is also informed and enriched by being a student, a teacher, a husband, a colleague, a friend, and an acquaintance. These are ways for me to learn to be human.[11]

A self construed in this way will have different ethical concerns from one who is required to balance self-interest with those of society, juggling a number of different roles. According to the latter picture, ethical deliberation and practice will centre on ethical ideals such as altruism, impartiality and selflessness. By contrast, in the case of a relationally-constituted self, ethical deliberation and practice will focus on how one balances the range of obligations, responsibilities, attachments and relational proximities that bear relevant moral weight in each situation. The deliberations of Zengzi in *Analects* 1:4 are indicative of moral reasoning that focuses on relationship as a core concern. Zengzi's *self*-evaluation consists in reflecting on his conduct in relating to others:

> Master Zeng said: 'Daily I examine my person on three counts. In my undertakings on behalf of other people, have I failed to do my utmost (*zhong*)? In my interactions with colleagues and friends, have I failed to make good my word (*xin*)? In what has been passed on to me, have I failed to carry it into practice?' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 72)

An ethic that focuses on relational attachment will be more variable and susceptible to relational and circumstantial nuances. Kongzi's different suggestions for different people reflect an awareness of the moral weight of

[11] Tu, 1985, p. 58.

such factors. Nevertheless, it does not stop the critics of Confucian philosophy from seeing the *Analects* as merely anecdotal or as a loose collection of epithets articulated by the founder of a tradition. But this is because some of the critics are unwilling to accept that morality may be realised differently in different relational contexts, or they refuse to accept that elements of relationship are constitutive of morality.

In Confucian thought, different relationships are marked by different kinds of loyalties, commitments, concern and affection. The family context is a preparatory ground for introducing one to the exacting tasks of balancing moral requirements with obligations, responsibilities, loyalty, and one's sense of integrity and right. Admittedly, relationships outside the family context will be different from familial ones: different relationships entail different commitments, obligations and loyalties. Nevertheless, the experience of balancing competing responsibilities is called upon in many moral situations. Skills acquired from experience in handling moral complexity can only be developed when put to the test in a broad variety of scenarios.

The upshot of the Confucian commitment to empirical relational ethics is its endorsement of a multiplicity of ways in which one's commitment to various principles is realised. According to this view, the articulation of abstract moral principles or rules is meaningless; morality is only meaningfully realised in lived empirical contexts. This is not to say that there are no principles in Confucianism to guide moral deliberation or criteria for ethical evaluation. As discussed previously, *ren* serves as the basis of shared human empathy and respect, while *yi* (rightness) pertains to the process of maximising outcomes according to the criteria of *li* and *ren*, amongst others. A number of concepts in Confucianism – *zhong*, *shu* and *xin* (trustworthiness) – may also be identified as akin to moral principles or focal points of moral commitment. However, these are not always overriding but are manifest and realised differently in different situational and relational contexts. In the final analysis, the particular realisations of one's moral commitments must come together in a cultivated ethical character that is consistent in thought, commitment and actions (*Analects* 16:10).

Confucian ethics operates within a framework that is exactly at the meeting point of theoretical and empirical approaches to ethics. From this perspective, the emptiness of those moral injunctions to negate self or quell self-regard or to always be impartial is most acutely felt. The Confucian commitment to values and ideals is realised in lived, relational contexts. Moral deliberations are made by moral agents who are importantly and fundamentally related to others in a range of different ways. Moral development involves cultivation of the ability and sensitivity to detect what is morally significant, drawing from a breadth of experience. The morally mature person is not one who has collected an impressive record of compliance with moral rules and principles. It is one who

has in many circumstances adeptly and appropriately realised her moral commitments in a maximally enriching way, for herself and others.

Spontaneity in Response

A relational ethic relies heavily on the responses to the other. Both the nature and quality of the relationship are inextricably intertwined with questions of how one is expected to respond, and actually responds, to the other. A parent–child relationship, for instance, has certain norms regarding physical contact and emotional closeness that would not be deemed appropriate in some other relationships, say that between colleagues.

Yet, although certain aspects of relational interaction are normative, a relational ethic must also account for the various elements which contribute to the distinctiveness of individual relationships. These include the nature of the relationship, the character of the people involved, and their contexts and frequency of interaction.

In much of relational interaction, one's responses to the other are not expressed after scrupulous consideration of some abstract, a priori moral principles. This is of course not to preclude instances in which one might take extensive periods to mull over the best decision or course of action. However, it is most usually the case that one apprehends the other immediately as a related other and responds accordingly – spontaneously. Here, the term 'spontaneity' does not refer to temporal swiftness; a spontaneous response is, most importantly, one not ultimately dictated by the correct application of moral rules or conformity to expectations. The related other is not a substitutable person understood within a framework of utilitarian or other impartialist moral theories. The related other is seen as a distinctive and un-intersubstitutable individual, whose well-being one is personally interested in.

The Confucian norms of behavioural interaction – encapsulated primarily in the theory of *zhengming* (correct names) and encoded in the practice of *li* – provide the contextual limits of relational interaction. What is significant about *li* and *zhengming* is not their content as articulated in the early Confucian texts, but rather in their *function*. They circumscribe appropriate behaviours in specific relational contexts. As argued previously, a dominant line of criticism that *li* are inflexible and restrictive draws from a focus primarily on the content of *li*.

But when understood in conjunction with the concept *ren*, these appropriate behavioural *li*-forms assist in establishing a comfortable milieu within which the nature of one's attachment to and concern for the other may be realised. Continuing and extensive practice in *li* provides for familiarity with the normative boundaries of relationships. Such practice contributes in part to the equanimity of the *ren*-person (*Analects* 9:30). On this account of

relational interaction, spontaneity is realised – and, more importantly, maximised – in a relational context where both people are aware of the relevant expectations and norms, and comfortably respond to the other within those boundaries.

Naturally, one fundamental question arising from this account of *ren* and *li* relates to the extent to which relationships are circumscribed by *li* – that is, how much room there is for spontaneity. Clearly, the two exist in inverse proportion: actions dictated more or less by *li* will leave little room for spontaneity. The primarily oral communication of ideas amongst the early Confucians and the piecemeal and ambiguous deliberations in the early texts rendered the notions *ren* and *li* very much susceptible to interpretation. This explains in part the gross excesses of strict adherence to normative *li* in the Song, Ming and Qing periods. Overemphasis on *li* and insistence on its normativity and inflexibility resulted in an unjustified imposition of repressive norms, particularly those defining and circumscribing femininity. We should be able to draw philosophical lessons from *ren-li* philosophy and overcome the historical overestimation of Confucianism as *li-jiao* (*li*-teaching).

Daoist philosophy also sheds insights on the concept of spontaneity in relationships. The ethical discourse of *ziran* sponsors an interdependent and mutual evolution, rather than one determined from a transcendent, abstract perspective. A recognition of self-so-ness in individuals requires a methodology of *wuwei* that does not unnecessarily impose restrictions on the other (*Daodejing* 19, 20, 60). Politically, a *wuwei* style of government recognises the self-so-ness of the people, and is committed to encouraging expressions that are spontaneous.

In the case of personal relationships, the recognition of spontaneity of the other requires an ethically appropriate response. Spontaneity in response is central to relational interaction because it captures the distinctive features of each specific relationship and locates it in the interactivity. More importantly, the ethical requirement entailed by spontaneity (of the other) lies in respect for her individuality. This addresses a concern previously articulated in connection to the care ethic, that it could leave the person cared-for vulnerable to the whims of the carer. But, if respect for the cared for and her individuality were deemed ethically weighty, the exploitation of the weaker other would simply be seen as morally wrong. The logic of spontaneous response is embedded in a context of interdependence. Within this context, the other is not a completely alienated other that is discontinuous with the self. The other to whom one is related constitutes part of the self; exploitation of the other or treating it as a means for self-gain betrays both the self and the other.

There is an intended slipperiness in the concept of spontaneity articulated here. In one of its senses, it refers to the scope that is available for an individual to realise her creativity and distinctiveness. This may be referred to as a metaphysical usage of spontaneity (*ziran*). The second sense refers to a reaction

or response that is relatively or reasonably unpremeditated or arrived at not after considerable norm- or rule-based assessment. This is spontaneity as ethical methodology (*wuwei*). An ethic that focuses on relationality must embrace both notions of spontaneity. A recognition of spontaneity (*ziran*) in the other entails an ethical commitment to the other's spontaneous, undetermined actions and decisions. One responds appropriately to this through non-imposing (*wuwei*) approaches. It might even be suggested that, in a relationship where spontaneity is a guiding ethical principle, one should encourage the other to be inventive, take initiative and be resourceful. In practical terms, one must refrain from imposing (*wuwei*) predetermined standards and expectations on the other's behaviours and actions.

Where spontaneity is mutually embraced within a relationship, the two meanings of spontaneity must be realised: (a) I must allow for the other to be spontaneous by (b) not requiring him to conform to my expectations. Here, some quick examples assist in demonstrating the point. A relationship that swallows up one partner, by assimilating the weaker to the stronger, has failed. The distinctiveness of one of the selves is lost. Similarly, in relationships in which the two selves compromise to the extent that they become identical, the distinctiveness of each of the two selves is again lost. In both cases, the relationships have ceased to be interdependent; they are *dependent* relationships. Summarily, the primary advantage of emphasis on spontaneity is that relationships that are stifling and restrictive will not be tolerated as they do not allow spontaneous individuals to develop maximally, within the contexts of their interdependencies.

Conclusion

The advent and subsequent development of the feminist care ethic has generated much-needed critical takes on ethical theory in western philosophy. Many of the concerns voiced by feminist ethicists were taken up with great fervour, and justifiably so. These include hesitations about the extent of abstraction and rigidity in principle- and rule-based systems of morality, atomistic conceptions of self associated with these accounts of morality, pictures of moral development without sound empirical foundations, emphasis on paradigms of moral achievement which compartmentalised and fragmented aspects of the embodied self, and skewed visions of moral progress and development. Many of the significant insights of feminist ethical theory have been drawn from subsequent reflections on the care ethic.

One important development in feminist ethical theory is a wariness about separatist approaches to feminist ethics. Many feminist ethicists concur that separatist accounts of ethics, one male, the other female, are unnecessarily and inaccurately divisive. In this light, some original proposals of the care ethic,

formulated as a distinctively feminine moral experience,[12] must be rejected. Without recapturing all of the arguments against a separatist feminist ethic, suffice it to say that it may be too easily associated with a dualist, essentialist account of femininity and masculinity.[13]

I have demonstrated that Daoist philosophy supplies the philosophical framework for addressing obstructive dichotomies in moral reasoning: it shatters dualistic assumptions between male and female, public and private, and its many other associations. A conceptual framework that sees the two as interdependent is fundamentally committed to cooperation, collaboration, mutual aid, compromise and assistance, rather than to antithesis, antagonism, antipathy, opposition and hostility.

A rejection of dichotomous conceptions of femininity and masculinity and their corresponding ethical norms does not entail a commitment to every ideal or value associated with femininity and masculinity. The emphasis on interdependence in both Confucian and Daoist philosophies moves the ethical debate from gender-based perspectives to one that focuses on relationality. Importantly, the commonalities between the Confucian paradigmatic *junzi* model and the feminist care ethic warn against a simplistic stereotyping of certain methodologies or approaches as 'feminine' and opposite others as 'masculine'.

At another level, the practical implications of interdependence are most pronounced in its contrast with the commonly assumed dichotomy of self and other in contemporary western moral theory. Whereas Daoism provides the philosophical framework for a self–other interdependence, Confucian thought supplies detailed deliberations about the realisation of the interdependent self. Confucian ideals and paradigms are grounded in the concept of interdependent self. Significant ethical concepts differ from the core set found in western moral philosophy (honesty, temperance, integrity, prudence) that relate essentially to the self. Key Confucian concepts include *ren* (common humanity, humaneness), *zhong-shu* (integrity-mutuality), *xin* (trustworthiness, or keeping one's word) and a host of other ethical notions relating to one's appropriate responses to others in specific relational contexts, including loyalty, relational obligation and protection of the other.

It would be remiss of Confucian philosophy if it only emphasised the centrality of relationships in ethical life without at the same time endorsing an empirical approach to ethics. For much of what transpires within relational

[12] For example, Nel Noddings (1984) argues that there should be different priorities in caring for people because some people are more closely related to us. This claim is not per se objectionable; however, the conclusion she draws is questionable because she claims that we have a more 'natural' obligation to them. Her conception of caring based on appeals to naturalism implies, she feels, that she is not obliged to care for starving children in Africa.

[13] Jean Grimshaw (1991) warns against essentialist approaches to feminist morality.

interaction is specific to particular relationships and the characters of the people involved. The passages in the early Confucian texts appear anecdotal precisely because they allude to specific people (officials of a range of ranks, kings, commoners, and particular disciples of Kongzi), each with their specific concerns. Kongzi in *Analects* 11:21 expressly announces that he prescribes differently for two people on the basis of their different characters and relational commitments:

> Tsze-lu asked whether he should immediately carry into practice what he heard. The Master said, 'There are your father and elder brothers to be consulted; – why should you act on that principle of immediately carrying into practice what you hear?' Zan Yu asked the same, whether he should immediately carry into practice what he heard, and the Master answered, 'Immediately carry into practice what you hear.' Kung-hsi Hwa said, 'Yu asked whether he should carry immediately into practice what he heard, and you said, "There are your father and elder brothers to be consulted." Ch'iu asked whether he should immediately carry into practice what he heard, and you said, "Carry it immediately into practice." I, Ch'ih, am perplexed, and venture to ask you for an explanation.' The Master said, 'Ch'iu is retiring and slow; therefore I urged him forward. Yu has more than his own share of energy; therefore I kept him back.' (Trans. Legge, 1991a, pp. 327–8)

It would have seemed incorrect to Kongzi to make the same recommendations to both these men. Kongzi's advice to each of them happened spontaneously: he responded to them not according to the application of a relevant rule or moral principle. He apprehended each of these men individually, and responded to them accordingly, taking into account what he knew about each one and how they might have responded to his comments.

This analysis identifies spontaneity as the grounding ethical principle of responsiveness to the other. One must be prepared to accept an element of indeterminacy as a feature of this ethic. Yet, spontaneity is not in itself incompatible with ideals and values. Indeed, it might be argued that, within a relational context, spontaneity *ethically requires* respect for the other. This is exactly what is meant by the Daoist pairing of *ziran* and *wuwei*.

The creative interplay of Confucian and Daoist philosophies in addressing the ethics of relationality is particularly significant. Within the framework of interdependence, the self *qua* individual is not a viable moral entity. Additionally, moral concepts such as altruism and impartiality do not have ultimate priority because they assume a self–other dichotomy. Associated with both these moral requirements is the assumption that, in order to be attentive to the other or to appropriately consider the other, one must be selfless. By contrast, the idea of interdependent mutuality does not consider selflessness a relevant ethical concept. This is because in the relational in-between, there is *both self and other,* not *either self or other*. Such an ethical scheme reflects the

embodied aspects of human ethical experiences. It attends to the details of specific relationships and understands one's enrichment of both self and other as an essential part of human ethical fulfilment.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Tradition, Change and Adaptation

The concept of interdependent and embedded self is a basic assumption in Confucian and Daoist philosophies. Their notions of self and other; acculturation, cooperation and participation; change and adaptation; appropriateness and fit; rejection and rebellion; adoption of new ways and the creation of values, all embody this basic assumption. There is both explicit and implied recognition in the two philosophies that an isolated, independent self – perhaps one that creates a new morality as does Nietzsche's *Übermensch* – is simply not feasible.

In the Chinese philosophical tradition, the self is necessarily culturally, historically and ethically located. A moral agent's deliberations, responses, intentions, adaptations and creations must be understood against this background. In early Confucian thought, discussions are almost inevitably of practical, concrete moral situations. We see especially in Zhuangzi's philosophy an aversion to views that claim universality or absolutism.

Notwithstanding their shared fundamental assumption regarding the interdependence of self, there are significant differences in Confucian and Daoist philosophies. One major concern arising especially from Confucian philosophical ethics relates to the opportunity for individuals to challenge the status quo. This issue arises because the Confucian embedded self is often seen to be constrained by the normative boundaries of *li*-practices. Scholars are divided regarding the extent to which Confucianism is an ethic requiring conformism.

By contrast, Daoism highlights the free, spontaneous arising of interdependent individuals, sometimes in conjunction with its relentless parody of existing values. This may give the impression that in Daoist philosophy there are no criteria for distinguishing the ethical from the unethical, or even between different kinds of goods. The *Daodejing* appears in places (for example, Chapter 20) to maintain that there is really no such distinction. While the *Zhuangzi* acknowledges differences between competing points of view, scholarly opinions also remain divided regarding whether Zhuangzi's scepticism is compatible with ethical choice and decision-making.

It would appear that the issue of freedom arising from the Confucian and Daoist conceptions of interdependent self stand in contradistinction. On the one hand, Confucianism is often viewed as a philosophy that circumscribes individuality and is far too definite in its demands for conformity. On the other, Daoism appears to be rather too relaxed in not providing clear criteria for ethical evaluations.

The path taken here is exploratory and speculative as it attempts to deepen the discussion by polarising the two philosophies. In studying the contrasts between Confucianism and Daoism, we arrive at a series of fascinating topics. These include the resources required for challenging the status quo; notions of appropriate action and the idea of 'fit'; the delicate tension between creativity and intelligibility; and the limits of freedom.

How might an interdependent individual critically reflect on norms and values in her existing cultural tradition? How might she express her agreements and disagreements with the status quo meaningfully? The need to explore these issues is more acute in a philosophical framework that assumes an interdependent and embedded self rather than an independent or atomistic self. Among the more interesting insights derived from this juxtaposition of Confucian and Daoist philosophies is the idea of appropriateness or fit. In both Confucianism and Daoism, there is an appeal to 'fit' – what is appropriate in context. On one understanding of fit, individuals are required to conform to expectations, to go with the flow, so to speak. I argue against this simplistic interpretation of fit in both these traditions. I explain the notion of fit in terms of the negotiations of an interdependent self in securing its well-being. I suggest that the expectation to adapt to change and to fit in characterises a particular pragmatic approach – dare I say a distinctively Chinese one – to changing and new situations.

Wen: Forms of Life

Kongzi claims that his values and norms hail from the Zhou period (*Analects* 3:14; 7:5), and notes explicitly that he is a transmitter of the old (*gu*; *Analects* 7:1). Is he holding on to an older tradition and if so, can he offer any fresh insights? The Legalists were emphatic in their denial of any appeals to ancient authority and claimed that Confucianism was out of date.[1]

But is Kongzi only a transmitter and not a creator, as he claims? Indeed, is early Confucian thought *philosophical*, if we mean by that the element of critical reflection? Chad Hansen argues that the Kongzi of the *Analects* is essentially unreflective, failing to challenge the status quo *li*.[2] David Nivison accords somewhat more critical independence to Kongzi's ideas: 'people like Confucius were beginning to do more than just take for granted: to be aware

[1] Shang Yang (d. 338 BCE) plainly noted that there should be no regrets in casting aside traditional ways if necessary: 'rejection of antiquity is not necessarily to be condemned, and conformity to convention does not deserve to be made much of' (*Book of Lord Shang*, Chapter 7; trans. Duyvendak, 1928, p. 173.

[2] Chad Hansen writes, '[Kongzi's] conception of careful thought is more like taking good aim than it is like proceeding from premise to conclusion' (1992, p. 83).

of, consciously study or neglect, treasure or disregard'.[3] Most interestingly, Joseph Levenson and Franz Schurmann describe Kongzi as an 'innovating traditionalist', one who used terms from the past but injected them with new, moral meaning.[4] This description captures the spirit of what seems to be Kongzi's methodology: 'I learn much, select out of it what works well, and then follow it. I observe much, and remember it' (*Analects* 7:28; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 117). Does this not express the essence of philosophical activity? Kongzi learns by listening (*wen*) and observing (*jian*) widely, and then proceeds to distinguish what is good or effective (*shan*). To learn and attain a critical perspective, and to adapt the old to the new, are activities involving creativity and independence of thought.

However, there is more to this passage in its comments regarding critical reflection. In his preceding remarks, Kongzi notes that he must properly understand the existing situation before he can respond appropriately or initiate change (*zuo*: to make):

> The Master said, 'There are probably those who can initiate new paths while still not understanding them, but I am not one of them.' (Trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 117)

This expresses the importance of philosophical, historical and cultural context in Confucian thought. Kongzi views his own responses as a product of his environment; a response is meaningful as a response to an existing situation or circumstance. Zigong responds to a query regarding whom his master, Kongzi, learns from:

> 'The way (*dao*) of Kings Wen and Wu has not collapsed utterly – it lives in the people. Those of superior character (*xian*) have grasped the greater part, while those of lesser quality have grasped a bit of it. Everyone has something of Wen and Wu's way in them ...' (*Analects* 19:22; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 223)

The ways of the revered kings Wen and Wu have permeated the lives of the people in the present. Zigong's response captures the complex balance of old and new in the creative adaptation and reshaping of customs and traditions. Those individuals who are ethically cultivated will have the resources for discrimination and selection.

A term that relates to aspects of cultural tradition is *wen* (文) which appears a number of times in the *Analects*. While traditionally denoting 'inscription' and 'literature',[5] *wen* more broadly refers to the continuity of shared forms of life

[3] Nivison, 1999, p. 747.
[4] Levenson and Schurmann, 1969, p. 54.
[5] *Shuowen Jiezi*, at p. 425.

within society; Ames and Rosemont describe *wen* as 'patterned regularity'.[6] In the *Analects*, *wen* is viewed in contrast to basic disposition or character (*zhi*) though not antithetical to it. In *Analects* 6:18 and 12:8, *wen* is the refinement of basic disposition.

This brings us to one of the core issues in Confucian thought, self-cultivation. One view of self-cultivation sees it as a coordinated socio-political programme that tempers selfish or egotistical desires through habitual practice of accepted behavioural norms (*kezi fuli* in *Analects* 12:1). But more positive accounts of self-cultivation centre on the continuing development of the individual as an integral part of human well-being.

Analects 6:18 and 12:8 are important in the intellectual history of the Confucian tradition because the passages articulate conscious attempts to respond to critics regarding the Confucian emphasis on cultivation.[7] *Analects* 6:18 distinguishes between innate dispositions and refined, patterned behaviour:

> The Master said, 'When one's basic disposition (*zhi*) overwhelms refinement (*wen*), the person is boorish; when refinement overwhelms one's basic disposition, the person is an officious scribe. It is only when one's basic disposition and refinement are in appropriate balance that you have the exemplary person (*junzi*).' (*Analects* 6:18; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, pp. 107–8)

Analects 12:8 presents a more integrated view of *wen* and *zhi*:

> Ji Zicheng inquired '[*Junzi*] are determined by nothing other than the quality of their basic disposition (*zhi*); what need do they have of further refinement (*wen*)?'
>
> Zigong replied, 'It is a shame that the gentleman [*fuzi*: an official] has spoken thus about the [*junzi*] ... Refinement is no different from one's basic disposition; one's basic disposition is no different from refinement. The skin of the tiger or leopard, shorn of its hair, is no different from the dog or sheep.' (*Analects* 12:8; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 155)

In both passages, assumptions about a dichotomy between basic character (*zhi*) and cultivated expression (*wen*) are challenged. We are told that what is innate, and what acquired, must be finely proportioned and harmoniously balanced (*binbin* in *Analects* 6:18).[8] In this light, it seems that Legge's translations of *wen*

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[6] Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 58.

[7] For instance, Mozi argued that the Confucian rituals were both elitist and lacking in utility (Watson, 1967, pp. 124–36).

[8] In these two passages, Kongzi and Zigong are challenging those claims to government made on the basis of birthright alone. In the second passage, Ji Zicheng's remarks are interesting: he presents as an official, a gentleman with social and political status caught within this debate. Ji appears

as 'ornamental accomplishments' and *zhi* as 'substantial qualities'[9] is questionable because they introduce a dichotomy between the two concepts.

The antithesis between 'ornamental' and 'substantial' is refuted in *Analects* 12:8. Indeed, the integrated nature of *wen* and *zhi* seems to match that of *li* and ren*:* *li* allows for the optimal expression of human fellow-feeling, *ren*, while *wen* refines and tempers one's expressions of self (*zhi*).

But what is the connection between *wen* and *li*? Both are required in the life of the *junzi*: the *junzi* is one who can 'learn broadly of *wen*, discipline this learning through observing *li*, and moreover, in so doing, remain on course without straying from it' (*Analects* 6:27 and 12:15; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, pp. 109, 157). This passage presents the concept *wen* as referring broadly to the existing forms of life endorsed by society. *Wen* may include decorum, comportment, ritual, traditional customs, etiquette, and historically and culturally specific norms. Wing-tsit Chan notes a range of translations of *wen* in this passage by scholars, including 'externals', 'civilization', 'adornment', 'outward show', 'aesthetic', 'artifice', 'culture' and 'decorating'.[10] But, importantly, *wen* needs to be directed or brought into line by *li*. In these passages, we detect a recognition of the role of received culture and tradition in shaping people and, in turn, their continuing adaptation and development as traditions are interpreted, practised and revised.[11]

Additionally, if both *li* and *wen* are embedded in existing forms of life, and if *wen* is guided by *li*, then the essential moral content that is provided by *li* must be distinguished from the status quo. Kongzi does on occasion note that some critical distance from *wen* is necessary. He states that, while it might be a simple task to *acculturate* oneself (*wen*), it is a much more difficult task to live as a *junzi* (*Analects* 7:33). Ames and Rosemont Jr. provide this animated translation of the passage:

> The Master said, 'In the niceties of culture, I am perhaps like other people. But as far as personally succeeding in living the life of the *junzi*, I have accomplished little.' (1998, p. 118)

There is a clear distinction made between the respective ends of *wen* and self-cultivation. Acting according to existing traditional and customary norms is a far less onerous task than self-cultivation. Indeed, an unquestioning adherence

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unwilling to acknowledge that he may have to exert some effort in maintaining his status. Within the Confucian tradition, Mengzi is noted for his insistence that civilisation and culture marks the difference between humans (*ren*) and other animals (*shou*) (for example, *Mencius* 3B:9).

[9] James Legge's commentary on *Analects* 12:8 (1991a, pp. 244–5).

[10] Chan, 1963b, note 2 at pp. 132–3.

[11] *Analects* 5:22 presents, in animated fashion, Kongzi in a state of despair about his disciples not knowing how to 'cut and tailor' their learning (trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 101).

to those existing norms is insufficient to constitute self-cultivation. As noted previously, many scholars appeal to *ren* as the moral ground for revision of *li*, in order to demonstrate the continuing significance of Confucian philosophy. But here, in Kongzi's critique of *wen*, we get a stronger sense that the Confucians did challenge received tradition. Cultivation of the self requires more than an awareness of one's historical and socio-cultural setting and the norms that operate therein. Hence, the good villager, 'who, though he acted as if he were following the Confucian norms, was actually only following convention without consciously engaging in moral practice at all',[12] is despised as being a 'thief of virtue' (*Analects* 17:13). Mengzi's comments on the 'village worthy' are particularly perspicacious:

> 'If you want to condemn the village worthy,' said Mencius, 'you have nothing on him; if you want to criticize him, there is nothing to criticize. He chimes in with the practices of the day and blends in with the common world. Where he lives he seems to be conscientious and to live up to his word, and in what he does, he seems to have integrity. His community all like him, and he even sees himself as being right. Yet one cannot walk the way of Yao or Shun with such a person. This is why the Master says that he claims excellence under false pretenses ...'[13]

The comments in *Analects* 13:24 also present some critical detachment from popular opinion:

> Tzu-kung asked, ' "All in the village like him." What do you think of that?'
> The Master said, 'That is not enough.'
> ' "All in the village dislike him." What do you think of that?'
> The Master said, 'That is not enough either. "Those in his village who are good like him and those who are bad dislike him." That would be better.' (Trans. Lau, 1979a, p. 122)

In the *Analects*, the *junzi* figure is often presented in contrast to the village worthy in order to heighten the lack in the latter. The *junzi* is independent of the expectations and norms dictated by popular culture. While the *junzi* seeks what is within himself, the small man, by contrast, seeks that in others (*Analects* 15:21; see also 15:22). In the description of Kongzi's own

[12] Tu, 1968, p. 37.

[13] From *Books of Mencius*, 7B:37; translated Ames and Rosemont, 1998, note 86 at p. 238. Ames and Rosemont also present a relevant analysis of the passage: 'Such a village worthy is overdetermined in the sense of form and regularity so that he is plausible to those who would look to him as a model, yet the creative element necessary for his personalization and renewal of the exemplary role is absent. He has no blood. He is a hypocrite because he has nothing of quality to contribute on his own. Confucius is given the last word in this passage, summing up his concerns about the corrosive influence such a "model" can have on the quality of the culture' (ibid., note 297 at p. 266)

developmental path in *Analects* 2:4, it is clear that the stages of progress involve the cultivation of inner resources quite independent of the then contemporary norms. In this sense, the Confucian project may be seen to involve a gradual and appropriate disinterest in some conventional expectations.

It would be a devastating blow to Confucianism if the gist of its concerns can be reduced to that of ornament or artifice. Perhaps the early Daoist thinkers had misrepresented Confucianism in their criticism of sageliness (*sheng*), wisdom (*zhi*), humanity (*ren*) and righteousness (*yi*) as merely ornamental. *Daodejing* 19 carves out a different route for Daoist philosophy that sees Confucian forms of life as vainly ornamental and that purports to return to the root (*Daodejing* 25, 40).

Dao: A Way of Life

From the metaphysical perspective of the *Daodejing*, a transcendent *dao* which is the root of the ten thousand things is the one unified primordial source. This picture of reality is often associated with truth or ethical insight by scholars. According to such a monistic and unified view of *dao*, the humanly created norms of Confucianism are unacceptably artificial.

Kongzi seems to understand this Daoist concept of *dao* but also seems bent on turning the tables: *dao* is meaningful only because its meaning is imputed by humans:

> Human beings furnish *dao* with value and meaning; simply abiding by *dao* does not render human life meaningful or worthwhile (*Analects* 15:28; trans. mine)

The passage resounds with Confucian humanism as it emphasises human responsibility and achievement. It consciously articulates the created nature of value and meaning, setting up the Confucian conception of *dao* in contrast to one that is transcendent or abstractly determined. References to *dao* in the *Analects* support the view that *dao* is used in a context- or subject-specific manner. It very broadly denotes a range of different aims or standards of achievement, including the *dao* of *junzi* and other exemplary persons (*Analects* 5:16; 14:28; 19:12; 11:20), Kings Wen and Wu (19:22), an ideal historical period (15:7; 16:2), the common people (8:9), and family members, particularly of the father (1:14; 6:12; 1:11; 4:20) and Kongzi himself (4:15; 6:12). *Dao* is clearly not a transcendent, unitary or universal principle in *Analects* 15:40; here, Kongzi advises that those whose *dao* are different should have no part in making plans for each other. In the *Analects*, there are many *dao*s. Each one recommends a different way of life that is linked to an ultimate concern.

The variety of different *ways*, or *daos*, in the *Analects* is matched by its many forms. It is heard of (4:8), spoken (6:12), studied or corrected (1:4), strengthened (15:29) and modelled upon (5:7). It is variously related to skills (16:15), including those of speech (17:12) and performance (13:25; 16:5).[14]

Despite its breadth of scope within the *Analects*, some scholars are keen to establish the Confucian *dao* as an absolute, transcendent principle or *telos*. Arthur Waley argues that *dao* is the 'one infallible method of rule' embodied essentially in the 'Way of the ancients'.[15] Similarly, D.C. Lau asserts the meaning of *dao* as an inclusive or aggregative concept of all 'truths': it is the 'sum total of truths about the universe and man, and not only the individual but also the state' and which 'comes very close to the term "Truth" as found in philosophical and religious writings in the West'.[16] Of course, it may not be inconsistent to assert both that *dao* is a universal principle and *dao* in its instantiations is manifestly varied. Lau's account integrates the two views, arguing that the one 'truth' is an aggregate of the many (instantiations), almost as if to run it in parallel with the Platonic vision of forms and their particular instantiations.

But there is simply insufficient justification for the assertion that the *Analects* passages promote a monistic, inclusive and holistic *dao*.[17] Some clarification is required between the monistic concept of *dao* and the Confucian *dao*. While the latter may be projected as the goal of human realisation (*ren*) – indeed, in Mengzi's philosophy it receives transcendent grounding in heaven's mandate – there is no indication that the Confucians view this as the only one true and transcendent *dao*.

It seems that the monolithic understanding of the Confucian *dao* has been generated by a superimposition of Daoist *dao* on the Confucian notion. The dominant interpretation of *dao* in the *Daodejing* is monolithic, *dao* being frequently identified with one-ness (*Daodejing* 14, 42) or its metaphors including root and origin (*Daodejing* 1, 25, 4, 40, 52). *Dao* in the *Zhuangzi* is altogether more elusive. Although some of its outer chapters mirror the *Daodejing*'s monistic rendition of *dao*, the inner chapters are at best unclear regarding whether there is only one principle or destination, or many.

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[14] Hansen, 1992, pp. 83–5.

[15] Waley, 1938; discussed in Hall and Ames, 1987, pp. 226–37.

[16] Hall and Ames, ibid. Hall and Ames argue that a number of conceptions of the Confucian *dao* restrict the breadth of Confucian moral thinking, and are essentially inconsistent with many of the ideas in the *Analects*, including its humanistic orientation, the flexibility in ideals pertaining to self cultivation, the multiplicity and multivalence of *dao* in its association with various historical figures or models of excellence, and the varying levels of human achievement.

[17] Chad Hansen takes an interesting line. He argues that *dao* in early Confucian thought is a 'mass noun'; parts of larger wholes are *dao*, and the wholes are *dao* as well (1992, pp. 83–5).

Some constructions of Zhuangzi's philosophy – typically, those that align it with intuitive knowledge, illumination or mysticism – rely on the assumption that there is a monistic principle behind the radical scepticism of Zhuangzi.[18] While this is not the place to revisit these debates, it should be noted that some interesting philosophical issues arise from these discussions regarding whether the *Zhuangzi* promotes one view, a multiplicity of them, or perhaps none at all. In relation to this question, Chad Hansen's characterisation of Zhuangzi's philosophy as 'perspectival relativism' deserves attention.[19] Hansen contends that the *Zhuangzi* text articulates the view of a multiplicity of perspectives – many *dao*s. According to Hansen, because Zhuangzi advocates (the legitimacy of) many perspectives, it would be inconsistent at the same time to insist that there is ultimately only one valid and transcendent one. Hansen notes:

> Zhuangzi cannot *recommend* his metaperspective as more natural than the others. All recommendation presupposes one among alternative perspectives ... Zhuangzi's metaperspective does not lead to nonperspectival knowledge of things. It is not a window on the thing in itself, but on the bewildering range of possibilities ... Our metalanguage of a higher or once-removed perspective shows us only a perspective on the plurality of perspectives.[20]

The main concern arising in response to Hansen's account of Zhuangzi's philosophy is, can a perspectivalist theory provide ethical guidance or, indeed, any criteria for choice? Hansen's position on this issue seems to run along the lines that Zhuangzi's metaperspective does not make choices between perspectives – at least not in rating one better than another, or even in asserting their equality, say, as equally valid or equally dubious. He draws upon Graham's comments on Zhuangzi, that 'there is no vertigo to [Zhuangzi's] doubt ... But there is anguish in ethical scepticism only if one feels bound to choose in spite of having no grounds to choose'.[21] According to Hansen, the perspectival relativist account of Zhuangzi does not evaluate. It

[18] See the discussion by Harold Roth (2001): 'Zhuangzi', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2001 Edition)*, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2001/entries/zhuangzi/> .

[19] Hansen, 1983b.

[20] Hansen (1992) notes also that the view of perspectival relativism seems to bridge the gap between mysticism and scepticism. Regarding the differences between mysticism and scepticism, he argues: 'The skeptic furrows his brow critically and experiences the failure of absolute knowledge as a disappointment. The mystic revels in the very incomprehensibility of it. Put in emotional language, the skeptic *hrmmph* and the mystic *aah* are responses to the same realization of the limits of languages ... There is no difference in the substance or amount but a great difference in their emotional reaction' (at pp. 284–5).

[21] Graham, 1983; cited in Hansen, 1992, p. 286.

neither approves (*shi*) nor disapproves (*fei*). Zhuangzi's perspective is a 'nonevaluative' perspective.

Can Zhuangzi decide on a solution for the then existing unrest or for situations in which evaluation and redress are necessary? I suspect the Hansen-Zhuangzi reply would be, 'Yes, from the lodging-place of each'. One worries, however, about the incipient subjectivism in this account. Interestingly, the *Zhuangzi* and *Analects* both advocate a multiplicity of *dao*s. But Kongzi chooses one whereas Zhuangzi does not. Is the end-point of Zhuangzi's scepticism simply to say that everything is acceptable from each particular perspective? *Something* needs to be done about the socio-political unrest. How do we proceed in practical terms when working with a multiplicity of *dao*s?

It seems that the interpretations of *dao* as monistic assume that *dao* refers to a destination: the *telos*. But there is another way of looking at *dao* which has not hitherto been explored. This is the travelling aspect of it, denoted by its left character, 辶. This dimension of *dao* focuses on the travelling of the journey itself: the way. The process of inquiry and the unfolding of matters are not less important than the destinations.

The story of journey-*dao* runs along these lines. *Dao* is the travelling of a journey. There are many paths (as set out by the Confucians, Mohists, Legalists, and so on). Decisions must be made at forks in the paths. However, some may have their decisions taken out of their hands at various points, depending on their chosen paths. (Confucianism seeks to provide *guidance* along the way, particularly to those still learning *li*-practices. Legalism *coerces* people into paths created by the ruler. Perhaps monistic Daoism chooses the path of undifferentiated unity, philosophical illumination or religious mysticism.) Others may select less well-worn paths. Some may travel with others, taking different paths at points (*Analects* 9:30). Some may travel toward a destination (Mohism *directs* them to pursue utility) or move as if there was one. Others may meander as if mindless of a *telos*. Yet others may create new paths (Zhuangzi's reference to road-making in Chapter 2).

This is speculative. But the metaphorical travelling of a path is a conceptual scheme interwoven from various strands in Chinese philosophy, focusing in particular on the debates between the different schools. Importantly, one gets a sense of philosophical activity in these early texts, an unfolding, a discovery, collusion about ways to achieve particular goals, disagreement about destinations, and so on. Zhuangzi seems happy to meander; there may be no ultimate destination prescribed by him, unlike the specific ones chosen by the other schools. But Kongzi has chosen a particular way. And he might say to Zhuangzi:

> All very well for the Daoists who relish philosophical activity and who encourage directionless wandering. This promotes the free, individual

> human spirit. But we need to find the *best* way – the most effective in achieving social harmony through human attachment. And it must be the best way for us all, not just the best from where each of us sits. *Collectively* we must explore paths that lead to better conditions for humanity than what we now have. It must also implement these ways pragmatically and effectively. We must study the paths taken in history and discover new ways of dealing with exigent situations (cf. *Analects* 7:28).

Creativity, Change and Fit

Kongzi sought change. He was dissatisfied with the people involved in government as they were morally inadequate (*Analects* 4:6; 13:20.4; 6:27; 8:18; 2:7). In *Analects* 6:25, Kongzi ostensibly laments the inappropriate use of the term *gu* to refer to a drinking vessel: 'A cornered vessel without corners; a strange cornered vessel indeed, a strange cornered vessel indeed' (trans. mine). The *gu* was a drinking vessel with corners (*jiao*). James Legge explains that during Kongzi's time, the shape of drinking vessels had been changed to one without sharp corners. Therefore it was ironic to maintain the term '*gu*' – cornered vessel – as the term no longer matched its referent. Legge's footnote to this passage states, 'The name without the reality is folly.'[22] According to Legge, this was a pointed criticism of those leaders of the day who bore titles denoting socio-political responsibility but who did not fulfil their respective responsibilities. Hence, for instance, terms such as *junzi* were still in use though they had empty referents because existing leaders were not committed to humaneness: '*junzi* who have abandoned *ren*, do they deserve their title?' (*Analects* 4:5; trans. mine)

Kongzi spoke against the status quo and argued against the common belief that learning and socio-political power was the prerogative only of the well-born. Yet, he believed that he could have made a difference to the desperate human condition even though he did not belong to a family of significant repute (*Analects* 9:6). This is an important strand in Confucian philosophy – a theme shared by Kongzi, Mengzi and Xunzi, as well as the Neo-Confucian thinkers – the availability of self-cultivation for all.

Kongzi insisted that neither poverty nor inferior social status should be obstacles to learning (*Analects* 8:21; 7:7). Accordingly, as a teacher he saw no reason to differentiate people according to social status (15:38); he accepted the poorest of students (7:7). Kongzi attempted to provide justification for learned

[22] Legge also notes, 'This was spoken with reference to the governments of the time, retaining ancient names without ancient principles' (1991a, p. 192).

and cultivated men like him to participate in political processes in order to effect positive changes in society. The *junzi* concept which the *Analects* covers in extensive detail – in many ways resembling the characteristics of those in the *shi* class and historically connected with it – instigates a series of critical questions in political authority. Particularly during 512–464 BCE, the *shi*, having established themselves in their learning, began to play more active roles than rulers.[23]

The *Analects* passages constantly reinforce the centrality of the *junzi*'s commitment to the people. His role in government is to provide his minister with advice on good government. On the one hand, he is cognisant of the needs and interests of the people; on the other, he has to negotiate his relationship with the minister. One of the responsibilities of the *junzi* is to assist the minister to be attuned to the needs of the people. *Analects* 19:10 captures the delicate balancing task of the *junzi*, gaining the trust of both the people and the minister:

> Zixia said, 'Only once exemplary persons have won the confidence of the common people do they work them hard; otherwise, the people would think themselves exploited. Only once have they won the confidence of their lord do they remonstrate with him; otherwise, their lord would think himself maligned.' (*Analects* 19:10; trans. Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 220.)

The reliance on advisors meant that political power ceased to be centralised either in the person of the king or in his ruling house. This movement had implications for the social and political hierarchical structures during the Warring States period. It meant that hereditary criteria were no longer considered the basic validation of political power. Additionally, the sharing of power with others outside the larger family clan kept the rulers under scrutiny.

Mengzi was explicit that a concern for the people was the basic criterion of good leadership. He specifically argues that 'the people are the most important element in a nation' (*Books of Mencius*, 7B:14). His famous assessment of the ousting of the notorious King Jie (1802?–1752? BCE) presents the clearest case for a demand for accountability to the people (*Books of Mencius*, 1B:8). Because Jie has injured humanity (*ren*), he is a thief and no longer a king:

> Mencius said, 'He who injures humanity is a bandit. He who injures righteousness is a destructive person. Such a person is a mere fellow ...' (Trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 62)

[23] Competition between the many warring states brought to light the need for those in power to select capable functionaries (Hsu, 1999, pp. 572–83).

In the *Analects*, *Books of Mencius* and *Works of Xunzi*, we see direct criticisms of some of those in power as well as progressive statements asserting the basic equality of all – sage and commoner alike – in their abilities to cultivate themselves. This meant the end of an exclusive, hereditary political authority essentially insulated from assessment and criticism.

But, as we know, the Confucian picture should not be over-enthusiastically repainted as a liberal, progressive one. There are many reasons why this is so, but two of them need to be explored in detail. First, although we might describe Confucianism as democratic in that it asserted the basic equality of all human beings in their original endowment,[24] it is also a system that emphasises moral achievement and maintains social hierarchy. The view of meritocracy presented in the Confucian texts is complex. Confucian meritocracy is consistent with the view that those who lead by merit should not be challenged, especially not by those who are not also morally cultivated. According to this view, political and social change may be allowed but only if instigated by the right people. Some might appeal to the philological analysis of the term 'sage' (*sheng*) which consists of the components of a king (*wang*) who both listens (*er*) and speaks (*kou*: mouth) although the primary emphasis is on listening.[25] But, of course, the primary question in the *Analects* revolves around *whom* the sage listens to; in the light of *Analects* 8:9 (see also 6:21), it appears very unlikely that the sage listens to the people, *min*. Hence, one must be wary of evoking Confucian philosophy as providing adequate justification for political reform, or in support of contemporary notions of human rights especially including political freedom.[26]

The second reason why Confucianism should not be too quickly associated with progressive change is that it embodies an element of conservatism. While the *Analects* supports the revision of *li*-practices and *li*-forms, the revisions must be understood against a backgrounding set of received norms, customs and tradition. There is a conservative backward pull in Confucianism in its expectations about challenging tradition.

An examination of the dynamics involved in musical performance serves to illuminate this discussion. In particular, I will focus on the significance of the

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[24] Mengzi emphasised, 'The sage and I are the same in kind' (*Book of Mencius*, 6A:7; trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 55). Xunzi writes: 'Every man in the street is capable of knowing the righteous relation between father and son at home and the correct relation between ruler and minister outside ... Now, if every man's faculty to know and capacity to practice are applied to the fact that humanity and righteousness can be known and practiced, it is clear than he can become Yü [a sage king]' (Chapter 23, 'The Nature of Man is Evil', ibid., p. 133–4).

[25] The *Shuowen* lexicon states that *sheng* derives in part from the listening component (*Shuowen Jiezi*, at p. 592).

[26] There are careful analyses of this topic in a number of books and anthologies. See, for example, Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman, 1992; de Bary, 1991 and 1998; De Bary and Tu, 1998.

backgrounding elements of tradition to the performance and the sense of playing together in concert to realise harmonies.[27]

A musical performance is a creative aesthetic performance. However, to say that a performance is creative in the Confucian sense does not mean that it is entirely subjective and free from standards or norms relating to its interpretive parameters. That it makes sense to suggest that a particular performer, say, *interpreted Schubert sensitively*, attests to the fact that there are elements in music interpretation that are not entirely indeterminate. A creative performance is not by definition a haphazard one without form and style.

This, of course, is not to exclude the possibility of music being spontaneous and improvisatory; but, even in the case of improvisation, the setting of the entire composition must be taken into account. Cadenza passages in concertos are most appropriate in demonstrating the point. Such a solo passage, often inserted near the end of a concerto, is intended to afford the soloist an opportunity for improvisation and exhibition of virtuosic talent. This poses a difficult task, as the display of musical dexterity and finesse in this cadenza section must maintain congruity with the rest of the piece, taking into account such factors as its mood, tone, tempo, structure and style. Other performative art forms including dance and gymnastics will also lend themselves to this analysis.

What is the nature of creativity, and how much of creativity is 'new' or 'original'? We must also keep in mind that the creative capacities of a performer are possible only when she or he has acquired a certain level of technical dexterity. Of course, dexterity is acquired only after prolonged and extensive practice, much of which is tedious and repetitive. It is the 'grounding' or practice aspect of technical dexterity – upon which creativity is dependent – that parallels the rigour of *li*-discipline. Mastery of technique facilitates the subsequent accomplished ease of the Confucian paradigmatic man.

The portrayal of the *Analects* here makes room for creativity in two ways. First, as I have argued, there are various accounts of how *li* may be modified (*Analects* 9:3; 17:21). Secondly, the instantiation of *li* in ordinary daily practice requires creativity of sorts. The reader of the *Analects* develops an awareness that the expressions of human sentiment and the contexts within which they are manifest are limitless. No abstractly conceived principle is adequate to cover all human situations (7:8; 11:21). Through extensive practice in a wide range of situations, the paradigmatic man acquires expertise to deal with new situations comfortably. He is at ease (9:30).

But we should keep in mind the nuances in Confucian thought on this issue. There is no simple answer to the question of how much change is encouraged,

[27] Many of the ideas discussed here regarding parallels between Confucian moral cultivation and musical performance are examined in greater detail in Lai, 2003b.

as the answer rests heavily on the moral maturity of the person in question. In other words, the response works on a case-by-case basis depending on *who* is proposing to effect the modification. As discussed previously, passages in the *Analects* indicate the need for cultivated persons, like Kongzi himself, to arrive at different conclusions than what is normally expected. Furthermore, according to Xunzi, it is necessary for those who are morally cultivated to devise standards for others. But these initiatives and changes are not the prerogative of the common people. Apart from those who are deemed to be mature deliberators as in the case of the paradigmatic *junzi*, the majority of people are not to be granted this opportunity. Needless to say, Confucian philosophy seeks always to strike a delicate tension between *ren*, the expression of human emotion, and *li*, its accepted forms.

It would seem that the Daoist paradigm of spontaneity is more appropriate in capturing the notion of creativity. The Daoist rejection of prevailing norms may be interpreted as a dismissal of the many artificial circumscriptions that restrict human spontaneity. Certainly, the notions of *ziran* and *wuwei* embody spontaneous creativity as a basic theme.[28] From a Daoist point of view, the *very* problem with Confucianism is its normative approach that is further entrenched by its prescriptive nature. The comparisons between creative performances in music, on the one hand, and Daoist and Confucian philosophy, on the other, raise the issue of the extent to which one may creatively improvise accepted practices and tradition.

Here, we should consider the view of a critic of Confucian thought, Michael Martin, who commented that the model of a composer rather than a performer is better suited to exemplify the dynamics of creative self-development. Martin contrasts the Confucian performer with the Kantian composer: ‘the Kantian will want to know who creates the *tao*; even more, the Kantian will want to create it himself, autonomously, and with suitable justification’.[29] Drawing from Martin’s analysis, we might say that the common people in the Confucian scheme are performers rather than composers. Or, to take the discussion further, perhaps the most suitable metaphor for the Confucian *junzi* is that of a conductor. He coordinates the ensemble and its performance by setting the pace for the performance: he conducts. A Confucian *junzi* qua conductor is an expert in the technique of expression through his extended personal practice. Furthermore, he is also attuned to how expressivity is optimised through the

[28] The concept of arising (*sheng*: 生) and its various associations including mother (*mu*: 母) and production (*chu*: 出), are important here. The term *sheng* is often inadequately translated as ‘gave birth to’, or ‘produced’. The term incorporates the idea of movement, dynamism, of arising and its common translations fail to capture *sheng* as an ongoing process, rather than situated as a single occurring *event* taking place at a particular time.

[29] Martin, 1995, p. 18.

appropriate technical forms and how best to balance the different parts. And the people are the players in the ensemble.[30]

We must also consider the issue of appropriateness and fit in relation to this discussion on change. Here, I draw from another aspect of music-making. Performances are not ahistorical events that may be understood out of their compositional and performance contexts or settings. For instance, a superbly performed jazz piece may be a disaster of sorts in the wrong kinds of setting. By contrast, a well-chosen piece of music for the right kind of occasion and context enhances an event.

In Confucianism, the cultural tradition embodied in *li* is an important backdrop against which *li*-practices and *ren*-expressions are understood. Each successful application of *li* enhances *li* as an institution through which human sentiment is conveyed. Kongzi makes the point that *li*-practices are neither behavioural requirements (*Analects* 17:21) nor mere affirmations of existing culture (*wen*). Both the realisation of *ren* in *li*-practice and the modification of *li* are creative practices embedded in the existing cultural tradition. Herbert Fingarette succinctly captures the intrinsic connection between a musical composition and its unique instantiation in every performance:

> the musical concept cannot resolve unambiguously *every* aspect of the concrete reality to be actualized ... And so the performer, the one who makes *actual*, cannot be denied the office of creating a reality that is denser and richer than any concept, and that therefore is necessarily personal in important ways – even though the personal only serves and enhances the governing and pervading concept, which is nonpersonal.[31]

This analysis captures the subtle aspects of a person's place and involvement within the context of the continuing inherited tradition. There is a sense of the delicate tension between expressing the self and acting meaningfully, in creative and novel ways, within the limits of existing norms and standards. Individual *li*-performances serve the person as well as the community: the continuing tradition is enacted in and through the *li*-performances of individuals, which in turn sustain and enrich the community and its traditions.

The youth in *Analects* 14:44 is thought by some to be clever – beyond his years – though Kongzi is critical of his attempts to consider himself equal to his superiors: the youth has inappropriately transgressed the boundaries of his rightful place; his actions are not fitting. Only through proper understandings

[30] There are more metaphors to explore. The ideal picture arising from Confucian and Daoist philosophies may look like this: the Daoist sage composes in *wuwei* style. His music encourages creativity and spontaneity, say, with the inclusion of an appropriate number of cadenza passages. Yet, arguably, a *paradigmatic* Confucian leader may effortlessly (*wuwei*) guide the transformative processes (see *Analects* 2:1; 8:6; 8:18).

[31] Fingarette, 1979, p. 137.

of *ren* and its realisation can harmony in society be achieved. This is, of course, the Confucian utopia.

The *Analects* itself enlightens discussion on harmony and fit by alluding to musical performance:

> The Master instructing the grand music master of Lu said, 'How to play music may be known. At the commencement of the piece, all the parts should sound together. As it proceeds, they should be in harmony while severally distinct and flowing without break, and thus on to the conclusion.' (*Analects* 3:23; trans. Legge, 1991a, p. 163)

The final result in a succesful performance is harmony: the players are in tune and they sound good together even although they perform different notes. The orchestra is expected to play in concert. Every member of the ensemble has an important role to play; a good performance is assessed not merely with reference to the technical competence of each of the players but also how well the musicians play *together*. Here, we may even draw lessons with regard to the conductor of the orchestra: an effective leader works in a mutually responsive mode with the people. Likewise, a conductor – in order to be an effective one – must listen to the orchestra and spontaneously respond to the music generated by *individual members of the ensemble playing together*.

What insights may we draw from this vision of social harmony? According to the Confucian vision, there is much individuals stand to gain in the well-being of the community. To put it slightly differently, the ideal Confucian society is realised not when individuals pursue what is in their personal best interests, but when they work together within a communal framework in enriching themselves and others. In reflecting on Kongzi's ideas in the *Analects*, it is difficult not to sense a self-preserving strategy grounded in a concern for humanity. In some ways, the ideas of Kongzi do not seem that different from those of a contemporary moral philosopher who attempts to bridge the gap between self-interestedness and altruism. But Kongzi's response lies at the in-between, where self and society meet: the most effective way to secure one's chances of survival is to cultivate and develop relationships with those who will be caring and loyal when the need arises.

The idea that people within a community participate in its moral life and enrich each other is a theme of profound significance in Confucian thought. In the Confucian scheme, each individual is a necessary and distinct node within a web-like network of different relationships. Engagement with others in society presents opportunities for self-fulfilment and development in that context. The harmonies that are created rely on the concerted effort of people who are fine-tuned to each other and who are mutually responsive.

Daoist philosophy affirms this picture of engagement, particularly in its metaphysical and conceptual frameworks. The theme of metaphysical oneness

reverberates most deeply in the *Daodejing*. But even more profoundly, the *Zhuangzi*'s postulation of an idealised conceptual framework that rejects dichotomous characterisations of the world is what truly challenges simplistic conceptions of self and other. Daoist philosophy addresses the themes of situatedness and contextuality by effecting a change in the reader's personal perspective or attitude. The cryptic language, rhetorical questions, metaphors and allegories in the Daoist texts engage their readers in contemplating these issues and urge them to cast aside their solipsistic worldviews in favour of a more complex, differentiated and situated one. As noted previously, the ethical implications arising from within a Daoist framework embraces multiplicity, relationality, dynamism, resonances and interdependencies.

The view of interdependent self in both Confucianism and Daoism generates an attitude that does not assume full control of situations or the need for it. Issues relating to interaction with others, instigating changes in society and finding one's place in society, are never assessed from an individual point of view. For, as Zhuangzi notes, there is no 'this' that is not also 'that'. The key operational concepts are adaptation, flexibility, versatility, appropriateness and fit, rather than management, domination, restraint, and control. With the former series of concepts, the focus is not on self-determinacy but on sensitivity to interdependencies and resonances. This anticipates the topic of the next chapter – conceptions of conflict and harmony in Chinese philosophy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Harmony and Conflict in Early Chinese Philosophy

The Confucian and Daoist visions of ideal society seem unrealistically naive, though for different reasons. Confucian philosophy proposes a harmonious and smoothly run society built upon relationships of mutual respect, trust and obligation; all of these features are engendered primarily through the initiatives and moral influence of responsible and cultivated leaders. By contrast, the *Daodejing* idealises a close-knit, subsistence-style sufficiency (*Daodejing* 81), wherein the few required measures taken by the Daoist sage are effective, representative (49), subtle and harmonious. The *Zhuangzi*, perhaps the most extreme in its idealism, presupposes that embracing the many (differences in perspective) will result in an optimally harmonious condition for the *wanwu* (ten thousand things).

But closer investigation of each of these philosophies, and their dissonances, reveals more thoughtful deliberations about harmony and conflict. These apparently simplistic and idealistic utopias are grounded in conceptions of harmony, cooperation and adaptation that are philosophically and ethically profound because they incorporate flexibility both in methods and outcomes. Perhaps most importantly, both philosophies emphasise acquiescence in some form: Confucianism, rather more stiffly, promotes methods of recognising status, relational closeness and distance, and loyalty; the *Daodejing* upholds subtlety of technique epitomised in the imagery of water; and the *Zhuangzi* advocates restraint from imposing intransigent norms (*wuwei*).

The complexity and depth in this concept of acquiescence arises from its connection with the idea of interdependent self. It is more complicated because an interdependent self does not, as a matter of principle, seek only to procure benefits for itself. This is due in turn to the view that circumstances can be mutually beneficial both for the self and other, or self and society. The Confucian ideal society aims to inculcate values and processes which serve to foster mutually beneficial and cohesive relationships. This would ensure a supportive network for individuals from the earliest stages of their lives.

The view of harmony in the Daoist texts is at some level associated with a sense of contentment; this is particularly true in the case of the *Daodejing* as it seems at points to reject strife and extremism so as to attain an equilibrium of sorts (*Daodejing* 77). Yet, as the *Zhuangzi* suggests, such contentment is realised in the cacophony of the multitude.

Interestingly, the pictures of harmony in the two philosophies appear oppositional. In Confucianism, harmony arises essentially from the promulgation of standards of appropriate behaviour, while in Daoism harmony is most meaningful in the spontaneous coming-together of different individuals. The subsequent discussion examines the subtle differences in the contrastive views of harmony and sheds light on the nuances of the concept.

Harmony in Early Confucian Thought

There are a number of ways in which harmony is instrumental in the ideal Confucian society. One of these is the understanding of harmony arising from widely shared standards of conduct and behavioural appropriateness. *Li* is a key concept useful in establishing uniformity of behavioural standards. Confucian *li*-practice is a codified and accepted system of behavioural norms guiding social interaction. These norms, further reinforced in the Confucian theory of names (*zhengming*), apply to a variety of relationships and are applicable to all who stand in those relationships. They allow for the institution of a shared and predictable behavioural code which facilitates human interaction. The clearly defined expectations regarding appropriate behaviour serve both as the moral fabric and social cement of society.

Secondly, harmony is engendered through the fostering of feelings of compassion and commiseration common to all humanity. The central concept in Confucian thought, *ren*, expresses the richness and depth of human relationships that provide the basic foundations for morality. This optimistic humanism fosters a sense of human civilisation as a shared project in the creation of a unifying harmony.

Thirdly, harmony is important in a context wherein an ethico-social division of labour is emphasised. Within such a society where superiors, fathers and elders fulfil their responsibilities, inferiors, sons and juniors, respectively, respond with appropriate reverence and respect. Cohesion and success within such a system of mutuality and reciprocity is possible only when people recognise their specific complementary roles in society. According to this view, harmony is an outcome of skilful balancing of one's needs and interests in conjunction with those of the other.

Harmony and the Social Fabric

The most trivial understanding of the Confucian programme is that it offers little more than an agenda for social reform through normative behavioural conformity. Here, conformity to *li* is identified as the culprit that perpetuates an extreme and severe diminishing of the individual human spirit of the common people (*Analects* 8:9).

This portrayal of Confucianism presents the most superficial interpretation of harmony. While there is uniformity in behaviours, the sense of agreement and concordance is shallow and could conceal and even suppress latent discomfort and dissatisfaction. According to this understanding of the function of *li*, those within society learn to act and respond in predictable and expected ways through applying these norms of appropriate behaviour. In addition, it is necessarily through the practice of *li* that the individual is fully implicated in society by cultivating reciprocal social relationships and establishing harmonious family units which in turn support the political order. *Li* embody the idea of Confucian order as a maintenance programme, servicing society and facilitating social interactions.

Amongst the early Confucians, Xunzi was most mindful of this picture of harmony. His prescriptions regarding *li*, law (punishments) and the methods of *zhengming* seem almost to run at odds with the views in the *Analects* and *Books of Mencius*. Kongzi was careful to delineate the different functions of *li* and law. Both engendered behavioural uniformity, though the characteristic attitude underlying conformity with laws is mere avoidance of punishment. By contrast, prolonged practice of *li* could instil shame feelings.

But Xunzi does not appear overly worried about the fostering of moral virtue and positive human feelings. Of course, his view that humans are inherently selfish leaves little room for him subsequently to suggest that goodness should be nurtured. He seems to direct his concerns at the regulation of appropriate behaviours, noting explicitly that the role of government is to prescribe titles so as to achieve social order:

> When the king sets about regulating names, if the names and the realities to which they apply are made fixed and clear, so that he can carry out the Way and communicate his intentions to others, then he may guide the people with circumspection and unify them ... because the people do not dare to think up pretexts for using strange words and throwing the established names into disorder, they will be of one mind in obeying the law, and will be careful to follow orders, and if they are like that, the ruler's accomplishments will be long lasting. When the ruler's accomplishments are long lasting and his undertakings are brought to completion, this is the height of good government. All of this is the result of being careful to see that men stick to the names which have been agreed upon. (*Hsun Tzu*, 'Rectifying Names'; trans. Watson, 1963, pp. 141–2)

It is clear that, for Xunzi, language is a tool of social control. *Zhengming* promotes order through the imposition of uniform codes of behaviour. Xunzi's conceptions of *li* and laws only come to light when understood in conjunction with his views on the goals of *zhengming*. Brothers vying for property need to be taught *li* and laws so that they will yield to the other (*Hsun Tzu*, Chapter 23). In this regard, there is little difference between *li* and laws in terms of their

outcomes.[1] Xunzi dwells on the control of behaviour in order to attain the end of social harmony.

Bleak as this vision of harmony may seem, we need to consider that Xunzi's programme is more thorough than that of Mengzi. While Mengzi focuses primarily on the drawing-out of feelings of sympathy and commiseration as a basis for morality, Xunzi begins with more caution and refuses to assume there is intrinsic goodness to begin with. Xunzi also demonstrates awareness of key differences in morality, on the one hand, and social necessity, on the other. Mengzi and Kongzi were concerned about the inculcation of human goodness; this is the central issue pertaining to morality. But society must also deal with other concerns including the prevention of harmful or antisocial behaviours; this is a matter of social necessity. We see particularly in Mengzi's philosophy of *ren*-government the conflation of morality with social necessity. If we follow Mengzi, we arrive at a one-sided view of ideal society that intends to generate more good without properly restricting the harmful and destructive – therein lies the assumption that individual human characters are uniformly and homogeneously good or evil, never grey. In Xunzi's philosophy we see the thoughtful departure from early Confucian idealism. Harmful, destructive acts must be prevented. This must be immediate rather than protracted. It cannot await self-cultivation to take its course amongst the common people. A number of these themes resound in the Legalist arguments against Confucianism. Some measure of behavioural requirements – even if that is achieved through threat of punishment – is necessary so as to maintain a sense of security and stability in society.

Harmony and Humanism

The harsh and minimalist vision of Confucian social order is supported primarily by Xunzi's philosophy. But we should not ignore his otherwise optimistic view of society as the locus of human good will. In Chapter 23, 'The Nature of Man is Evil', the brothers vying for property will be transformed by the civilising influences of *li* and laws to the extent that they will yield even to outsiders.

Here, Xunzi is in accord with other Confucian thinkers in amplifying the ample fruits of self-cultivation that benefit both individuals and society. Both Mengzi and Xunzi were fully aware that the ideal society was a large-scale, coordinated exercise. In this regard, they insisted that, in his basic capacity to cultivate himself, the common man-in-the-street was no different from the sage

[1] John Makeham (1994) presents a convincing argument for its socio-political function within the *Analects*. See his Chapter 2, 'Confucius and the Correction of Names', pp. 35–50, and 'Appendix C: *Zheng Ming*: A Legalist Interpolation?', pp. 163–5.

(*Books of Mencius*, 6A:7 and 6B:2). There was also a deeper-level affirmation that effective performance of these relational and behavioural requirements by all serves to inculcate fellow-feeling and engender respect and affection. Prolonged practice of such would enhance the human condition in significant ways. Hence '[i]t is beautiful to live amidst humanity [*ren*]. To choose a dwelling place destitute of humanity is hardly wise' (*Analects* 4:1; trans. Leys, 1997, p. 15).

The emphasis on human community as the essential context for human cultivation and development found its strongest proponent in Mengzi. Mengzi explicated a theory of human nature grounded in human attachment as the key human trait. He notes explicitly that affection, particularly that between parent and child, is innate:

> Mencius said, 'The ability possessed by men without their having acquired it by learning is innate ability, and the knowledge possessed by them without deliberation is innate knowledge. Children carried in the arms all know how to love their parents. As they grow, they all know how to respect their elder brothers. To have filial affection for parents is humanity [*ren*] and to respect elders is righteousness [*i*]. These feelings are universal in the world, that is all.' (*Books of Mencius* 7A:15; trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 80)

This 'Idealistic Confucianism', as the scholar Wing-tsit Chan characterises Mengzi's philosophy, differentiates itself from the Confucian *Analects* in its categorical insistence that human nature is originally good. Upon this basis, it follows that human beings, first exposed to the advantageous effects of parental affection and care, ideally achieve full and proper maturation through participation in the life of the community:

> Mencius said, 'All men have the mind which cannot bear [to see the suffering of] others ... When a government that cannot bear to see the suffering of the people is conducted from a mind that cannot bear to see the suffering of others, the government of the empire will be as easy as making something go round in the palm ... If anyone with these Four Beginnings in him knows how to give them the fullest extension and development, the result will be like fire beginning to burn or a spring beginning to shoot forth. When they are fully developed, they will be sufficient to protect all people within the four seas ...' (*Books of Mencius* 2A:6; trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 65).

Mengzi's innatist thesis holds little credibility as a philosophical or psychological theory. It appears that he may have worked backwards from Kongzi's thesis on moral development. Mengzi affirms the importance of self-cultivation and gives it a *telos* by granting it ethico-ontological status in human nature.

These fundamental beliefs in the goodness of human nature and in its full and proper consummation within human community served as the underlying bases for Confucian humanism. Within the Confucian framework, affection and solidarity between people, in their affirmation of a shared humanity, provide the basic conditions for human community. In turn, the communal context is necessary for the continuing development and refinement of moral capacities and feelings, in a united quest for the fruition of human sympathy and fellow-feeling.

Negotiating Harmony

Confucian philosophy promotes a multifaceted society comprised by people of different abilities (*Analects* 16:9), capacities (17:2) and moral visions (9:30; 15:40). This multi-layered and ordered society maintains harmonious relationships through the rigorous self-discipline and self-evaluation of individuals (1:2; 1:4).

At the macro-organisational level, these differences are dealt with by the establishment of an ethical hierarchy led by virtuous leaders (*Analects* 8:9; 12:19). Confucianism advocates a leadership style which promotes an actively ruling elite who lead the common people by example (for example, 13:1; 13:2). The leaders of society exemplify paradigmatic behaviour which effectively influences the behaviour of the common people (12:17; 13:6).

Within this coordinated ethico-social environment, individuals learn the basic obligations, loyalties and responsibilities associated with their different relational networks. In *Analects* 1:2, the training of the young and inexperienced (through cultivating the virtues of brotherly submission (*di*) and filial piety (*xiao*)) is essential if society is to be harmonious: there will be few who will be rebellious in later life. Politically, this means that, within such a society, there is little or no instability or conflict arising from people who may be dissatisfied because they have internalised the requisite attitude of deference. Harmony in such a relational context is realised partly through an emphasis on the complementarity of sets of roles, traditionally defined as the five basic relationships (ruler–subject, father–son, husband–wife, elder brother–younger brother and friendship).[2]

An interesting reference to harmony (*he*) in the *Analects* pertains to the moral stature of the Confucian paradigmatic man:

> The *junzi* seeks to be harmonious (*he*) but does not attempt to be similar (*tong*). The small man, by contrast, seeks to be similar and is not harmonious. (*Analects* 13:23; trans. mine)

[2] *Zhong Yong (The Doctrine of the Mean)*, 20:8.

There are subtle but important differences between harmony and similarity. Harmony does not imply conformity, although similarity does. This primary difference may be obfuscated in the assumption that both harmony and conformity share a similar end, that of peaceful concordance. Clearly, the reduction of conflict between individuals would be an easier process if people shared similar views and goals, and conformed to those set out by the status quo. Hall and Ames also note this in their assessment of Confucian interpersonal harmony:

> This orchestration of the importance of one's community requires from both self and others harmony rather than uniformity, creative enrichment rather than mere amplification.[3]

A zealous commitment to the reduction of conflict will lead to the pursuit of conformity, as we should be warned in *Analects* 1:12. But the slide to conformity in one's pursuit of harmony is an inappropriate price to pay. In his personal experience, Kongzi resolutely rejects compromise, holding out instead for a proper appreciation of his views.[4]

How might we understand the specific sense of harmony articulated in Confucian thought? Here, the analogies with orchestrated musical performance alluded to previously are significant. Much like a polished ensemble performance, the successful Confucian society is a coordinated enterprise, with individuals in different relational roles fulfilling their responsibilities appropriately.

At the individual level, much fine-tuning and extensive negotiations are required to maintain this structural framework. In Chapter 5 I had presented a novel interpretation of Confucianism as offering a skills-based approach to moral cultivation. The balancing of loyalties, obligations, responsibilities and affection is an immensely difficult process and is called into play in negotiating with others. In this regard, Xunzi in particular is shrewd and insightful about the role of government in dealing with the desires of the people. He argues against the suggestion, prevalent in many religious views, that desires must be curtailed in order that strife and rapacity cease:

> All those who maintain that desires must be gotten rid of before there can be orderly government fail to consider whether desires can be guided, but merely deplore the fact that they exist at all. All those who maintain that desires must be lessened before there can be orderly government fail to consider whether desires can be controlled, but merely deplore the fact that

[3] Hall and Ames, 1987, p. 284.

[4] 'Tzu-kung said, "If you had a piece of beautiful jade here, would you put it away safely in a box or would you try to sell it for a good price?" The Master said, "Of course I would sell it. All I am waiting for is the right offer"' (*Analects* 9:13; trans. Lau, 1979a, p. 98). See also *Analects* 18:4.

> they are so numerous. (*Hsun Tzu*, 'Rectifying Names'; trans. Watson, 1963, p. 150)

Xunzi demonstrates perspicuity in human psychology in his statement that 'When one has a desire, he does not wait to make certain whether he can satisfy it, but immediately sets about trying to do so as best he can' (ibid.). Even in Xunzi's Confucianism, which grants a heightened role to the governmental regulation of social order, it is imperative that the governmental structures do not seek to control or quash the desires of the people (see also *Analects* 9:26).

Desires for limited resources must be controlled and regulated, rather than eliminated. For Xunzi, yielding to others was the important issue, not the cessation of desires. It was important for people to recognise that they cannot always achieve what they desire.[5] When to yield, and to whom, was a matter guided by codes that marked out distinctions of eminent and humble, elder and younger, rich and poor, unimportant and important ('A Discussion of Rites'). There were many aspects of relational nearness and distance to consider, such as emotion, affection, obligation, trust and loyalty.

According to this description of negotiation, Confucian relational ethics appears to operate on a case-by-case basis, contingent on many circumstantial and relational factors at hand. But these deliberations are predicated upon one constant: the continually-developing self. The emphasis in Confucianism is on constant practice: carving horn, sculpting ivory and cutting jade (*Analects* 1:15). The cultivation of the self is a continuous, lifelong development of patterned behaviours ideally grounded in affection and respect. Xunzi expresses eloquently the balance of tempered behaviour in the cultivation of human feeling:

> Ritual uses material goods for its performance, follows the distinctions of eminent and humble in creating its forms, varies its quantities in accordance with differences of station, and varies its degree of lavishness in accordance with what is appropriate ... When form and meaning, and emotion and practical use, are treated as the inside and outside or the front and back of a single reality and are both looked after, then rites [*li*] have reached the middle state. Therefore the gentleman understands how to make rites florid and how to make them lean, but he chooses to abide in the middle state, and no matter whether he walks or runs, hurries or hastens, he never abandons it. It is his constant world and dwelling. (*Hsun Tzu*, 'A Discussion of Rites'; trans. Watson, 1963, p. 96)

[5] Xunzi notes, '... although one cannot completely satisfy all his desires, he can come close to satisfying them, and although one cannot do away with all desires, he can control the search for satisfaction.' ('Rectifying Names'; trans. Watson, 1963, p. 152). For Xunzi, discussion of desire had shifted to the issue of satisfaction (see his following discussion at ibid., p. 155).

The application of *li*-behaviours allows for the expression of the self in negotiating relationships. In this way, Confucianism presents a nascent, precursory version of a socio-biological thesis: that the best chances for individual survival are optimised through cultivating good relationships. According to this thesis, 'the individual is not seen as a single entity but as a member of a group upon whose overall success his or her survival depends'.[6] This conception of harmony sits at the crossroads of the individual–society nexus.

Harmony in Early Daoist Philosophy: Embracing the Many

Daoist philosophy rejects the Confucian ethico-social hierarchy. It views attempts to institute such categorisations as symptomatic of, and contributing to, further fragmentation in society. Upholding the paradigmatic men and applauding their achievements sets up a society divided between the worthy and unworthy. This concern is associated with the Daoist treatment of dichotomous opposition. As discussed previously, the fundamental worry regarding the application of norms is the underlying philosophical assumption that cases must be antithetically either-or: good or evil, wise or unwise, for example. The options – either to conform or not – present a limited choice. The application of clean dichotomies does not allow for instances that fall between the opposites; actions are either right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate.

But these simplistic evaluations create problems in the light of bigger-picture views of ethical assessment as, for instance, if circumstances are taken into account. Or, alternatively, if our concern is an agent- rather than act-centred ethics, the characters of the majority of people would be grey rather than black or white: people carry out appropriate or acceptable actions some of the time, and act antisocially or inconsiderately some of the time. Are these people 'good' or 'evil'?

Also from Zhuangzi's arguments, empirical observations reveal that the many (perspectives, species, differing viewpoints) simply cannot be fitted into exclusive either-or categories. The distortion of multiplicity into two boxes, 'yes' and 'no', will result in a fragmentation of sorts. From the Daoist point of view, the measures advocated by the Confucians, such as enlightened leadership and instituted behavioural norms, were merely superficial remedies for the existing social upheaval (*Daodejing* 18, 19, 20). The imposition of artificial, humanly created norms and institutions on human beings is symptomatic of the chaos that has become a part of humanity as it becomes divorced from the *dao* (22, 28). Emphatically, Daoism rejects the conventional

[6] Tattersall, 1998, p. 98.

knowledge and wisdoms that constrict thought (48, 65) and limit consideration of other alternatives (5, 12). In this connection, in irony typical of the *Daodejing*, the insightful Daoist is described as indiscriminate, dull and ignorant (20, 58).

Daoist philosophy seeks to rectify the existing fragmentation and replace it with a harmonious confluence, a successful coming-together of particulars. In *Daodejing* 29, the Daoist sage draws on lessons from the natural world, recognising and affirming diversity. He seeks to implement a delicate balance of such diversity in the lived human world:

> Of creatures,
> some march forward, others follow behind;
> some are shiveringly silent, others are all puffed up;
> some are strong, others are meek;
> some pile up, others collapse.
>
> For these reasons,
> The sage
> rejects extremes,
> rejects excess,
> rejects extravagance.
>
> (Trans. Mair, 1990, p. 94)

If these reflections are to be understood as expressions of the nature of reality, and if a Daoist proposal for ethics is built upon the recognition of diversity, it follows that the *Daodejing* would advocate an ethical system based on a harmony or balance of opposites. On this view, its preference for what is normally considered inferior within a dualistic system may be understood as a move to reduce the existing excesses within contemporary thought and society. In other words, the preference for what is conventionally inferior – weakness, non-assertiveness, quietude and simplicity – is part of a larger project to incorporate diversity. The notion of harmony in this context is explained in terms of an equilibrium of interdependent polarities.

If we understand the project of the *Daodejing* to involve not merely a critique of existing models of government, but also the rejection of narrow, anthropocentric conceptual frameworks (see, for example, *Daodejing* 2, 5, and 12), then this notion of equilibrium has far-reaching effects. It goes to the root of existing imbalances, rooted in dichotomous and hierarchical thinking. As I have suggested elsewhere, an inquiry prompted by Daoist philosophy is helpful in identifying sources of anthropocentricism in human attitudes toward the natural environment and in providing conceptual resources for a more satisfactory articulation of interdependence within the earth environment.[7]

[7] Lai, 2003a.

In the political domain, the Daoist sage embraces the multiplicity in the population by refraining from the imposition of dictatorial directives (*Daodejing* 10, 34, 64). This is, in brief, the application of *wuwei* methodology. The sage rules subtly, not through subjugation of the people through fear or hatred, and not even because he is loved and praised by the people (17). Hence, his leadership is subtle and follows from the view of the people (66). He also refrains from imposing his personal view and adopts the minds of the people as his own:

> The sage has no fixed (personal) ideas.
> He regards the people's ideas as his own.
> . . .
> The sage, in the government of his empire, has no subjective viewpoint.
> His mind forms a harmonious whole with that of his people.
> They all lend their eyes and ears, and he treats them all as infants.
> (*Daodejing* 49; trans. Chan, 1963b, p. 186)

This chapter of the *Daodejing* presents the most lucid articulation of a democratic approach to the governing of the people. It is also a representative government that contrasts with the Confucian picture of the *junzi*. The Confucian leader is a paradigm of what the common people should be, but in no way does he presume to be the true representation of the whole of the people.[8]

In this light, *wuwei* methodology is not about passivity, nor is it about doing *less*. Unfortunately, one of the dominant interpretations of *wuwei* government is that it has *fewer* measures than those currently in place: 'The more taboos and prohibitions there are in the world, the poorer the people will be . . .' (*Daodejing* 57; trans. Chan, 1963a). Contrary to this common (mis)understanding of *wuwei*, the concept of government proposed in Daoist philosophy is not merely quantitatively different from other proposals. It not only seeks to impose fewer conditions of the sort that restrict expressions of the personal self but must also encourage the voices of the people. In this sense, *wuwei* is clearly not a concept pertaining to passivity as its common translation 'non-action' implies.

If the Daoist sage is to take on the minds of the people as his own, he has set himself a formidable task. As he is committed to diversity, he must also be prepared to deal with the emergent conflict that arises because of diversity. In the true spirit of Daoist philosophy, conflict is the corresponding opposite of

[8] See Cua, 1971.

harmony, and interdependent with it. In this light, the concern of Daoist philosophy is not to eliminate conflict but to manage and balance it.[9]

But how is this conception of harmony and conflict different from others that also promote multiplicity? The distinctiveness of Daoist philosophy lies in its preparedness to work with diversity. As we have seen, the *Zhuangzi* in particular endorses a complementary, dialectical view of opposition that refuses to accord truth or falsity in absolute terms.[10] Especially in his spoof of the criterion of objectivity, Zhuangzi argues that, when two people disagree,

> Whom shall we ask to arbitrate? … If we ask someone who disagrees with both you and me to arbitrate, since he has already disagreed with you and me, how can he arbitrate? If we ask someone who agrees with both you and me to arbitrate, since he has already agreed with you and me, how can he arbitrate? Thus among you, me, and others, none knows which is right. Shall we wait for still others? The great variety of sounds are relative to each other just as much as they are not relative to each other … (*Zhuangzi* 2, 'The Sorting that Evens Things Out'; trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 190)

Daoist philosophy sees conflict not merely as inevitable, but also as potentially edifying. The contrasts that are accentuated when two opposing views clash are not useless debris caught in between the two positions. Some of the contrasts might even assist in the formulation of more precise definitions of each of the original positions. In this way, the opposites are mutually conditioning or mutually resonating. This is the logic of dialectical harmony that is coincident with the conception of interdependent self in Chinese philosophy.

Perspectives on Harmony

Early Confucian and Daoist thought express different conceptions of harmony. Confucianism is broadly concerned with hierarchy, cultivation and good order, while Daoism with simplicity, spontaneity and diversity. One sees conflict as a symptom of social failure, of disorder, while the other accepts it as a necessary, perhaps even positive, correlate of harmony.

The Confucian programme seeks to establish and maintain harmonious, peaceful social relations. In its pragmatic approach to achieve this end, there is

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[9] Hence, the achievement of the great confluence (*da shun*) as described in Chapter 65 is the aim of Daoist government. Victor Mair (1990, p. 36) translates this phrase *da shun* as 'confluence'. It needs to be noted, though, that D.C. Lau translates this term as 'conformity' (1963, p. 127).

[10] *Zhuangzi* 2, 'The Sorting that Evens Things Out', deals in particular with the issue of dialectical harmony. We see this especially in the discussions of 'three in the morning and four in the evening' (trans. Chan, 1963a, p. 184) and the Confucian–Mohist controversy. See also Cheng, 1977a.

a strong push for acculturation of individuals in the institutional frameworks and behavioural norms of Confucian society. The little room given for dissent, particularly with one's parents (father), engenders a pattern of conformity and compliance with norms (*Analects* 4:18). Such conformity at times requires compromise, particularly for those holding positions of relative juniority (1:2; 13:18).

Contemporary scholars seeking to promote a better understanding of Confucian philosophy will need to address this conception of harmony that seems consistently to require the subjugation of less powerful individuals. Even the optimistic ontological equality (of all humans potentially to attain moral cultivation) peters out in the light of irreducible existential differences (*Analects* 17:2).

Scholars including Schwartz, De Bary and Graham candidly acknowledge that the issue of socio-ethical hierarchy is a problem. Schwartz notes his unease with the notions of hierarchy, status and authority,[11] De Bary is concerned with how, in Confucianism, the responsibility for transforming the world falls entirely on the ruler and those who assist him, and not on the people,[12] and Graham, similarly, that 'the worthy reform the conventions by which the inadequate are constrained'.[13]

There have been other attempts to explore the commensurability of Confucian ideals with rights-based conceptions of morality and society, and only the most simplistic would assume that these are easily compatible.[14] Even in Mengzi's ideal of benevolent government, good government is *for* the people, but not *by* the people. Here, the Confucian belief that the government should have the interests of the people at heart is important, as it introduces the element of institutional accountability. Nevertheless, there is no suggestion of representation, that the leaders of society will take into account the desires of the people.

A more compelling approach with which to address the issue of hierarchy and lack of individual freedoms in Confucian philosophy is to appeal to the different logical and conceptual frameworks of both Confucianism and Daoism. As I have consistently argued in this book, the most potent thesis in Chinese philosophy is the conception of interdependent and contextualised self. In this regard, many notable scholars have presented compelling accounts of the practical and concrete focus of ethics in the Chinese philosophical traditions. There are also those who explore these issues at a deeper level, who are

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[11] Schwartz, 1985, p. 55.

[12] De Bary, 1991.

[13] Graham, 1989, p. 270.

[14] There are notable monographs and anthologies that explore the nuances and subtleties of this topic. These include De Bary, 1998; De Bary and Tu, 1998; Angle and Svensson, 2001; and Angle, 2002.

concerned to articulate the fundamental philosophical structures of Chinese philosophy. For example, Chung-ying Cheng argues that Chinese philosophical logic is rooted in a dialectical harmony that accentuates the interpersonal and interdependent, and this is common to both Confucianism and Daoism:

> (1) They both recognize the world as a harmony or a harmonizing process in which all differences and conflicts among things have no ontological ultimacy but serve the purpose for completing a state of harmony of multitudinous life or for bringing forth a multitude of life in the creative momentum of the changing reality; (2) They both recognize that man can experience and encounter conflict and undesirable situations in life, but man can overcome them by developing his understanding and by accommodating his actions.[15]

Furthermore, dialectical interchange is necessarily embedded in a contextualising environment; the broader environment is an irreducible context that is central to a proper understanding of the self:

> [According to a superficial sense of the term, environment means] simply 'the surroundings,' the physical periphery, the material conditions and the transient circumstances ... [But environment] cannot be treated as an object, the material conditions, a machine tool, or a transient feature. Environment is more than the visible, more than the tangible, more than the external, more than a matter of quantified period or time or spread of space. It has a deep structure as well as a deep process, as the concept of Tao indicates.[16]

Hall and Ames argue that the underlying logic of Chinese philosophies follows a pattern of aesthetic rather than logical order, characterised by the 'primacy of the concrete particular' and by its focus on uniqueness, relatedness and coordination.[17] But their most convincing portrayal of the distinctiveness of the Chinese conceptual framework is in the introduction to their translation of the *Zhongyong*, where they describe their field-focus rendition of Chinese philosophy:

> [The language of focus and field] presumes a world constituted by an interactive field of processes and events in which there are no final elements, only shifting 'foci' in the phenomenal field, each of which focuses the entire field from its finite perspective.[18]

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[15] Cheng, 1977a, p. 218.

[16] Cheng, 1986, p. 353.

[17] Ames, 1986, pp. 321–2; see also Hall and Ames, 1987, pp. 131–8.

[18] Ames and Hall, 2001, p. 7. It is important to note their criticism of those interpretations of Chinese philosophical ideas that rely essentially on the philosophical frameworks and languages of western philosophies. These ultimately fail to present the distinctive features of Chinese philosophies on their own terms.

Using this schema, Hall and Ames explore the conceptions of power and causality based on process and change. Dynamism is part of the fundamental world view and the central focus is on interactivity between individuals in their conditioning environment.

Notwithstanding the subtle differences in these two renditions of Chinese philosophical frameworks, there are significant commonalities. Both emphasise the centrality of harmonisation of particulars in Confucianism and Daoism. Importantly, the profundity of this conception of harmony derives from a picture of self that is interdependent and interactive with others in a dynamic contextualising environment. In this, there is another similarity between the two accounts: both emphasise the creative harmonies that may be produced in interaction. Hall and Ames emphasise an aesthetic contextual order, while Cheng describes how a person can deal with conflict by 'developing his understanding' and 'accommodating his actions'.

The creation of an overarching harmony unites Confucian and Daoist thought. Even although the process is more directed and coordinated in the former, harmony is a central feature of both philosophies. Further, it should be noted that in both Confucianism and Daoism harmony requires active engagement of the self with others, and the absence of conflict due to apathy is undesirable.

From the point of view of the Confucian project, it can hardly be denied that the furtherance of personal goals and interests can only be procured with the help of others who care for oneself. The imagery of the parent caring for the young child and, in turn, the adult child caring for aged parents reveals the depth of human interdependence. Fostering significant ties and building harmonious relationships will increase the support base for individuals.

The Daoist embrace of multiplicity and resonance recognises the inevitability of conflict and competition. But it does ultimately seek a harmonious coming-together of particulars. From this point of view, programmes that rely solely on uniformity, assimilation or identity are inadequate. Agreement and disagreement are not the only available responses. The harmony of interdependent and contextualised individuals calls for frameworks of discourse which seek consensus, cooperation, complementation, balance, congruence and mutual benefit.

Conclusion

Insights from Chinese Philosophy

The explorations in this book emphasise the differences between Confucian and Daoist philosophies. Philosophical argumentation here plays with the disharmonies and the to-and-fro debates between the two traditions in order to amplify the distinctive features of each one. Paradoxically, we have through this process also encountered many synergies and resonances between the two.

This strategy of dialectical reasoning is utilised in both Confucian and Daoist philosophies. The backgrounding conceptual frameworks in the two philosophies endorse interdependent polarities rather than antithetical opposites. One prominent manifestation of dialectical opposition is the self–other polarity. I have argued that the lack of clear definition between self and other – in other words, the fundamental reality of interdependent selfhood – is a distinctive feature of these early Chinese philosophies.

The conception of self in Confucianism is one richly endowed with significant relationships and necessarily embedded in the socio-political life of society. Ethical deliberations in this context are far removed from simple standard procedures such as rule-following or the application of principles. Instead, the exercise of moral judgment is a complex process, analogous to juggling or balancing acts. Different concerns, commitments, obligations and loyalties are brought together and weighed. There are two fundamental aspects of this process: first, sensitivity to what is morally weighty and, second, an ability to untangle and situate these different pulls.

Acculturation plays a key role in sensitising individuals to the variety of values, norms and expectations in society. In Confucianism, acculturation is a significant part of self-cultivation. The learning of *li* and familiarity with its behavioural requirements are a large part of the acculturation process. Usually beginning with rote learning, this process continues with practice in *li* as it is manifest in many different situations. Acquaintance with the breadth of *li* applications equips individuals with awareness of its possible adaptations. In the life of the learner, we would say that this first stage is chronologically prior to the second. In practice, however, both aspects of moral deliberation would take place concurrently.

The second aspect of moral deliberation, the ability to prioritise competing demands and obligations, is both more exacting and more philosophically interesting. I have argued that Confucianism is distinctive in presenting moral deliberation in large part as a skill. In this phase, we move beyond the

acculturation process as the individual applies his or her moral judgment and may override existing behavioural norms and other expectations.

Of course, this account of moral deliberation requires that we move beyond the historical scenario in Kongzi's days where the adept moral deliberators were few and far between. While the Confucians sought to extend the application of *li* to ordinary social interactions, we can sense at many points in the *Analects* doubt that the common people could become skilled at moral deliberation. Many were only able to follow, not to understand.

But the Confucian account inspires us to take a deeper look at moral cultivation and to be aware of the different needs of the learner at different stages of the process. Confucian moral philosophy traces a developmental path for the learner and sets up different expectations at points in this process. Rote and rule-bound behaviours must be replaced by artful and sensitive balancing of relevant, morally weighty factors. As I have demonstrated, these skills are instrumental in negotiating relationships.

While there are some legitimate concerns regarding a relationally constituted self, there are on the other hand many vital aspects of human existence captured in the Confucian picture of self and relationality. These include the vulnerability of individuals to externally imposed norms and expectations, the shaping of individuals by significant others, the protection available to them, the acquisition of skills to deal with difficult people, the balancing of loyalties and obligations, and the overall valuing of relational harmony and fit. Many issues associated with these questions have been sidelined in traditional western moral philosophy. Nevertheless, these questions are at least as central to ethical inquiry as those regarding ethical values and norms.

The Daoist picture of interdependent self extends and complements the Confucian one. In many ways, it stands in stark contrast with the latter. Whereas Confucianism seeks to provide security to individuals by anchoring them in stable relationships, Daoism emphasises the vagaries of change. It focuses on the exposure of individuals to their constantly changing environments. A self so conceived is naturally more elusive and fluid and more susceptible to change.

Daoist philosophy perceives Confucianism as ossified and associates it with the run-of-the-mill pursuits of status, power and affectation. In light of this contrast, Daoist philosophy appears remarkably progressive in its openness to change. It endorses the other extreme where ambiguity is common fare; convention, universals and ordinary expectations are thrown to the wind. Particularly in Zhuangzi's philosophy, the acknowledgment of perspectival differences has important implications for moral philosophy. These differences are embraced and each perspective validated rather than subsumed under or assimilated to the dominant view.

Described in this way, Daoist philosophy seems to embrace a democratic approach. Ethically, one must be attuned to the many perspectives. This

requires sensitive awareness of others' differences from, and resonances with, oneself. The legitimacy of each individual is realised through the implementation of *wuwei* strategies. The Daoist concepts *ziran* and *wuwei* encapsulate the spirit of spontaneity that is distinctive in Daoist ethics.

We must return to the ineffability of *dao* to reiterate the intuitive aspect of Daoist spontaneity. Much cannot be captured in words. These conventional, codified and formulaic modes of communication fall far short of the richness of experience. The fundamental insight of Daoist philosophy is not in its content but in its activity. The point of reading the texts is not to gain a greater amount of knowledge but to entertain the paradoxes, puzzles, metaphors and analogies. The primary effect of Daoist philosophy is epistemological. I have made a case for reading the Daoist texts not as metaphysical treatises but as philosophical exercises that enrich the perspectives of their readers. In its fundamental thrust, Daoist philosophy encourages a greater awareness of the contingencies in one's relational and contextual environments.

I have similarly argued that the *Analects* should be read as a manual of moral deliberation, where its readers contemplate the solutions to difficult moral problems. This manual presents Kongzi and some of his disciples as paradigmatic moral deliberators. And, of course, there are some such as Zaiwo whose inner cultivation and deliberations are wanting. Readers must attempt to unravel the reasons for the different decisions in the *Analects* rather than imitate the actions of Kongzi and his favoured disciples. And we learn from both the good and the bad, as Kongzi aptly said.

In the basic Confucian and Daoist texts I have examined here, the concrete and practical focus of philosophy is always at the foreground. The Confucian polarities of inner sageliness and outer kingliness and the Daoist polarities of *ziran–wuwei* embody the essence of an active, practical philosophy grounded in experience. Deliberations in both philosophies are lodged in the concrete details of everyday experiences. Philosophy is a personal argument, to be actualised. It seeks to effect a change in the thinking person: to pause, consider, deliberate and perhaps turn around to see things differently.

Needless to say, both Confucian and Daoist philosophies are preoccupied with questions of identity, selfhood and self-perception. The concept *ganying* so prominent in the Chinese conceptual framework helps to express the immediacy and practicality of one's interactions with others. It depicts one's appreciation of and responsiveness to the other. This acute awareness of relational interaction presents a way of understanding morality that strikes many resonances with feminist ethics.

Contemporary debates in comparative philosophy have presented serious challenges to traditional Anglo-American moral philosophy, much of which focuses centrally on meta-ethical and normative issues. We must come to a broader and more inclusive conception of ethics if moral philosophy is not to

become a theoretical abstraction. After all, our ethical decisions and actions are deeply intertwined with how we see and understand ourselves.

Chinese Philosophy and Practice

In closing, I would like to make a few speculative remarks about the continuing practical significance of Chinese philosophy. We might ask the question, how have these conceptual frameworks in Chinese philosophy permeated the thinking of Chinese people? More specifically, how have Chinese philosophies contributed to the understandings of self, society and morality in Chinese societies? According to Mengzi and Xunzi, every person had the potential to cultivate and manifest human goodness. Do they mean by this a distinctively human capacity for critical philosophical reflection about the self and others?

Extensive testing in cross-cultural psychological research has produced groundbreaking and fascinating findings.[1] Studies have detected significant differences in the cognitive patterns and epistemological assumptions between East Asians and westerners in general. These include a wide range of cognitive processes including approaches to science, attention and perception, causal inference, organisation of knowledge and reasoning. Here, of course, we need to be careful – as many researchers are – of East Asians who have grown up in western societies, or first- or second-generation migrants, and as well of East Asians in diaspora societies, such as Singapore and Hong Kong that have also undergone extensive colonisation by westerners. Much existing research shows that Asian Americans, for instance, had responses that were intermediate between those of Asians and European Americans and sometimes even indistinguishable from those of European Americans.[2] Again, we cannot ignore the subtle differences between westerners of North American and Canadian, and European origin, and differences between the Japanese, North and South Koreans and Chinese.[3]

Two of the research topics deserve particular mention as they not only demonstrate compelling differences in the responses of East Asians and westerners but also assist in authenticating the assertion that some of the philosophical assumptions articulated in this volume do permeate the lives of the ordinary people.

In a number of studies focusing on context-sensitivity, Taka Masuda presented to students at Kyoto University and the University of Michigan animated underwater pictures consisting of one or more 'focal' fish (larger or

[1] Richard Nisbett's *The Geography of Thought* (2003) presents the most recent and accessible compilation and discussion of these findings.

[2] Ibid., pp. 226–8.

[3] Ibid., pp. 71–7.

brighter than anything else in the picture), other animals and plants, rocks and bubbles. After participants had been shown these vignettes, they were asked to say what they had seen; their responses were coded according to what they referred to: focal fish, other active objects, background, inert objects and so on.[4] Although the references to the focal fish and active objects were roughly similar in both groups of students, the Japanese students made more than 60 per cent more references to background elements, including the water, rocks, bubbles, and inert plants and animals. Perhaps more significantly, participants were also subsequently shown still pictures of objects, half of which they had seen before and half of which they had not. Some of the objects were shown in their original background and others in a novel environment. Asked to say whether they had seen each of these objects before, '[t]he ability of the Japanese to recognize that they had seen an object before was substantially greater when the object was shown in the original environment than when it was shown in a new environment, suggesting that the object had become "bound" to the environment when seen initially and remained that way in memory'.[5]

In another series of studies, the beliefs of Chinese and American students regarding change were tested. One of them consisted of showing to participants from Beijing University and the University of Michigan twelve graphs:

> Each graph showed an alleged trend charted over time, such as world economy growth rate or world cancer death rate. For example: The global economy growth rates (annual percentage change in real GDP) were 3.2 percent, 2.8 percent, and 2.0 percent for 1995, 1997 and 1999 respectively.[6]

The trends presented in the graphs were either growing or declining, and the rate of change was either accelerating or decelerating. The American students were more likely to make predictions consistent with the trends: if a trend was going up, they were more likely to predict that it would continue going up; if a trend was going down, they were more likely to predict that it would continue going down. The Chinese on average were more likely to predict change than the Americans.

Amongst the findings of these studies, there is broad evidence that East Asians are more likely to focus on the complexities of particular scenarios.

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[4] T. Masuda and R.E. Nisbett (2001), 'Attending Holistically vs. Analytically: Comparing the Context Sensitivity of Japanese and Americans', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 81: 922–34; and T. Masuda (2002), 'Change Blindness in Japanese and Americans', unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Both are cited in Nisbett, 2003, pp. 89–92.

[5] Nisbett, 2003, p. 92.

[6] L. Ji, Y. Su and R.E. Nisbett (2001), "Culture, Prediction and Change" *Psychological Science*, vol. 12: 450–56; cited in Nisbett, 2003, pp. 104–6.

These complexities derive from a range of interrelated perspectival foci, including consideration of:

(a) a large number of contextual factors relevant in any one particular situation. This is sometimes described as a more holistic view of affairs or one that sees the contextual environment as the primary locus of events. In this sense, all events are necessarily lodged within their contexts;
(b) relationships between subjects or objects as being at least as important as the subjects or objects themselves;
(c) a multitude of differently-related agents and other contingent factors that bear on any one situation;
(d) change as inevitable and perhaps imminent;
(e) negotiation, not confrontation, as the preferred approach to balancing demands and competition; and
(f) full, personal control over situations as a misdirected aim.

These features of reasoning are of course intricately intertwined as, for instance, one does not seek to exercise individual control over situations if one also believes that there are many interdependent factors or players in any situation. Those who subscribe to the philosophical assumptions listed above are more prepared to negotiate or more likely to seek cooperation. We should note that some of these cognitive patterns are associated with issues of mental health. In contrast to those who view the self interdependently and are ready to negotiate, people who expect to gain control of situations will inevitably suffer from a feeling of failure should they prove unable to do so.[7]

These findings in psychological research are not insignificant. They demonstrate that major elements of Chinese philosophical thinking have permeated the world views of many Chinese people in a real and living way. While the description of research findings given above is general and cursory, it also suggests there is much more to explore in this interdisciplinary field.

My intention is not to explain away every problem encountered in Chinese society. Of course there are situations when confrontation is the best recourse. And there are many trade-offs in assuming that individuals are essentially interdependent and contextualised, as contrasted with the picture of self associated with a liberal, democratic philosophy.

What I am seeking to express here is that Chinese philosophical frameworks do have practical implications that are not negligible and indeed are pregnant with insights, some of which I have attempted to present in the second part of this volume. These recent research findings in cross-cultural psychology demonstrate that there are different conceptions of relevance and different

[7] Nisbett, 2003, pp. 96–102.

sensitivities that are brought to bear in the perception of events and situations. In the true spirit of Chinese dialectical harmony, we should seek to explore the contrasts and complementation between Chinese philosophies and others – not just eastern and western, but also contemporary, indigenous and world philosophies. This approach plumbs the depths of multiplicity that globalisation affords us. It exploits the richness and creativity of human thought in order to suggest plausible and multifaceted solutions to the urgent issues of today.

Glossary of Chinese Terms

ai	愛
Baijia zhi xue (hundred schools of thought)	百家之學
bian	辯
buren	不仁
chen	臣
chi	恥
Chunqiu (Spring and Autumn)	春秋
ci (female)	辭
ci (shame)	雌
dao	道
de	德
e	惡
er	耳
fu	父
fuli	復禮
gu (drinking vessel)	觚
gu (old)	古
guan	觀
guang	廣
jian	見
jianai	兼愛
jiao	角
jin qi xin	盡其心
jing	敬
junzi	君子
Jixia [Academy]	稷下
kezi	克自
keyi weishan	可以僞善
Kongzi	孔子

kou	口
Laozi	老子
li	禮
Lunyu (*Analects*)	论语
Mengzi	孟子
min	民
mu	母
nei	內
Neipian (Inner Chapters of *Zhuangzi*)	内篇
neisheng waiwang	內聖外王
pin	牝
qin	親
qun	群
rang	讓
ren	仁
renzhe	仁者
renzheng	仁政
Ru (scholar)	儒
Rujia (Confucian school)	儒家
shan	善
Shangdi	上帝
sheng (birth / growth)	生
Sheng (sage)	聖
Shiji (Records of Grand Historian)	史記
Shijing (Book of Poetry)	詩經
Shujing (Book of History/Documents)	書經
Shun	舜
Shuowen Jiezi Zhu (Shuowen Lexicon)	說文解字注
si	思
suoyi shitian	所以事天
tian	天
tianming	天命
Tianzi	天子
wai	外

wang 王
weiwuwei 爲無爲
wen (culture, writing) 文
wen (hear) 聞
wu (dislike) 惡
wu (negation) 無
wuwei er wuyiwei 無爲而無以爲
wuxin 無心

xi 習
xiang 相
xiao 孝
Xiaojing (*Book of Filial Piety*) 孝經
xiaozhi 小知
xin (mind-heart) 心
xin (sincerity) 信
xing (nature) 性
xing (happiness) 興
xing shan 性善
xiu 羞
Xizhou (Western Zhou [period]) 西周
xuan 玄
Xunzi 荀子

yan 嚴
yao 堯
yi 義
yi guan 以貫
yisheyushi 義設於適
yong 勇
yu 寓
yuan 怨

Zhanguo (Warring States) 戰國
zhengming 正名
zhi qi xing 知其性
zhi (knowledge) 知
zhi (basic disposition) 質
zhi (straightforward) 直
zhong 中
Zhongyong (*Doctrine of the Mean*) 中庸
Zhou (period) 周
Zhougong (Duke of Zhou) 周公

Zhuangzi	莊子
zi	子
zu	族
zuo	作

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