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## CONFUCIUS AND ACT-CENTERED MORALITY\*

Confucius is asked in the *Analects* by his disciple, Yen Hui, about human-heartedness (*jen*). The Master says that to subdue oneself and return to ritual (*li*) is to practice human-heartedness.<sup>1</sup> The Confucian notion of “to subdue oneself” cannot be merely understood as the suppression of one’s bodily desires. Rather, it is closely related to the concept of self-cultivation if we put the notion of “to subdue oneself” in the moral context. The notion of “return to ritual” does not imply that one should submissively act in accordance with rules of proper conduct, but that by acting in accordance with rules or laws, one expresses one’s well-cultivated nature or character, that is, human-heartedness.

In this article, I would like to argue that although throughout the *Analects* Confucius seems to give his readers the impression that he is concerned with act-centered morality,<sup>2</sup> that is, how to act properly in a given situation, yet the inner dimension, that is, agent-centered morality, underlying proper acts or conduct is immanent in Confucianism. In the first section, I shall explore the notion of “to subdue oneself” to see an agent-centered view of morality in Confucian ethics. And in the second section I would like to discuss the notion of “return to ritual” to see the relation between ritual and human-heartedness and why moral actions for Confucius cannot be merely acting in accordance with rules or laws. Finally, the union of agent-centered and act-centered morality in Confucian ethics will be considered.

### THE NOTION OF “TO SUBDUE ONESELF”

To understand the Confucian notion of “to subdue oneself” as something distinct from the suppression of one’s bodily desires, I would like first to draw attention to the *Mencius*. Mencius is asked by Kung-tu Tzu: “Though equally human, why are some men greater than others?” Mencius replies,

He who is guided by the interests of the parts of his person that are of greater importance is a great man; he who is guided by the interests

of the parts of his person that are of smaller importance is a small man. (Kung-tu Tzu pursues:) Though equally human, why are some men guided one way and others guided another way? (Mencius replies:) The organs of hearing and sight are unable to think and can be misled by external things. When one thing acts on another, all it does is to attract it. The organ of the heart can think. But it will find the answer only if it does think; otherwise, it will not find the answer. This is what Heaven has given me. If one makes one's stand on what is of greater importance in the first instance, what is of smaller importance cannot displace it. In this way, one cannot but be a great man."<sup>3</sup>

This passage shows, by implication, that for Mencius there is a distinction between mind and body, and both perception and feeling can distract the mind. The Mencian emphasis on the function of the human mind, thinking, seems to be parallel to Plato's emphasis on reason in the *Republic*. Plato says that reason should rule in the soul since it has "the wisdom and foresight to act for the whole," and that "a mind with a grace and sense of proportion that will naturally and easily lead it on to see the form of each reality."<sup>4</sup> The second quotation implies that the mind must avoid distractions to contemplate the Forms. The mind, for Plato, concentrates on the world of the Forms. For the Confucians, however, the mind must avoid distractions to concentrate on the affairs of this world. That is, the mind without distraction can perform its function properly, which enables one to express one's feeling and enjoy pleasures to a proper extent. The problem of how to express one's feeling toward others depends on one's acting in conformity with ritual. In a society, the interaction among the members should be regulated by rules of proper conduct. Thus, to act rightly one must understand those rules, which is the job of the mind.

It is said in the *Analects* that

In the practice of the rites harmony is regarded as the most valuable thing, and in the ways of the ancient kings this is regarded as the most beautiful thing. It is adopted in all matters, both small and great. But sometimes it does not work. If you behave harmoniously because you understand harmony, but do not regulate your conduct with ritual, surely that cannot be made to work.<sup>5</sup>

Having harmonious social relations with others is a precious thing, but it is not worthwhile to pursue such harmony if one does not do so in accordance with ritual.<sup>6</sup> To act in conformity with ritual requires one to understand ritual. Only when one knows ritual is one able to take one's stand.<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that the Confucians think that acting in accordance with ritual is helpful in shaping one's character. For one's love toward people is a kind of raw feeling. It needs ritual to shape and regulate it so that one can express one's love toward others properly. A similar idea can be found in the *Republic*, where Plato claims that doing just

acts produces justice in the soul.<sup>8</sup> Both Plato and Confucius would agree that one's external behavior has an impact on one's character. However, the difference between Plato and Confucius on this matter is that for the former, even though people of the lower classes—whose natures are silver, bronze, and iron—do just acts, it does not mean that they possess inner harmony in their souls. Only the philosophers, whose nature is gold, can be said to possess a harmonious soul. In contrast, the Confucian claim that by nature men are close to one another,<sup>9</sup> allows a road sweeper, for example, to have a good character by doing the right acts.

Furthermore, both ritual and music are concerned with harmony. Plato in Book 3 of the *Republic* claims that different types of music are associated with different types of character. Thus to educate the young guardians, the Educator has to choose those kinds of music that can produce harmony and self-control in the young guardians' soul. Confucius, like Plato, thinks that music can perfect one's character. He says that "[o]ne is roused by the *Songs*, established by ritual, and perfected by music."<sup>10</sup>

In the Platonic tripartite soul the relation among the three elements—reason, spirit, and appetite—is that appetites have to be under the control of reason with the aid of spirit.<sup>11</sup> The expression "under the control of reason" does not imply the suppression of appetitive desires. Neither Plato nor Mencius see the necessity of suppressing our feelings or physical desires. Plato in the *Republic* says,

Then if the mind as a whole will follow the lead of its philosophic element, without internal division, each element will be just and in all other respects perform its own function, and in addition will enjoy its own particular pleasures, which are the best and truest available to it.<sup>12</sup>

Plato in this passage claims that bodily desires are not necessarily to be suppressed. They should be guided by reason in the right direction. Although Mencius does not share Plato's view of the soul as comprising three parts, he holds that our desires and feelings have to be fulfilled to a proper extent. Mencius says,

When I say that all men have a mind which cannot bear *to see the sufferings of others*, my meaning may be illustrated thus:—even now-a-days, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress. *They will feel so*, not as a ground on which they may gain the favour of the child's parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbours and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of *having been unmoved* by such a thing. From this case we may perceive that the feeling of commiseration is essential to man, that the feeling of shame and dislike is essential to man, that the feeling of modesty and complaisance is essential to man, and that the feeling of approving and disapproving is essential to man. The feeling of commiseration is the principle of benev-

olence. The feeling of shame and dislike is the principle of righteousness. The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the principle of propriety. The feeling of approving and disapproving is the principle of knowledge. Men have these four principles just as they have their four limbs. When men, having these four principles, yet say of themselves that they cannot *develop them*, they play the thief with themselves, and he who says of his prince that he cannot *develop them* plays the thief with his prince. Since all men have these four principles in themselves, let them know to give them all their development and completion, and the issue will be like that of fire which has begun to burn, or that of spring which has begun to find vent. Let them have their complete development, and they will suffice to love and protect all within the four seas. Let them be denied that development, and they will not suffice for a man to serve his parents with.<sup>13</sup>

This lengthy quotation indicates that for Mencius, feeling and thinking always go hand in hand in our moral life without one suppressing the other. It is significant that the Chinese character *hsin* is translated in the first quotation as *heart*, and in the second quotation as *mind*. As Liu Shu-hsien points out, “[I]n the Chinese tradition the mind and the heart have never been sharply distinguished from each other. Hence the conflict between cognitivism and emotivism has never become a serious issue for the Chinese philosophers.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in the Confucian view, human desires should not be suppressed but be fulfilled to a proper extent. As Confucius says, “[r]iches and honours—these are what men desire, but if this is not achieved in accordance with the appropriate principles, one does not cling to them,” and “riches and honours acquired by unrighteous means are to me like the floating clouds.”<sup>15</sup> Every human being has desires that should not be suppressed recklessly—they should be fulfilled to a proper extent.

The notion of righteousness here is essential to Confucian ethics. For righteousness in Chinese is *yi*, which means being “suitable,” “congruent,” and “proper” (*yi*<sup>1</sup>).<sup>16</sup> They are different characters with the same tone. The Confucian claim, “[L]et a ruler be a ruler, a subject be a subject, a father be a father, and a son be a son,”<sup>17</sup> is normally understood as a prescriptive norm of how one should act in different social roles. In certain situations, however, one’s different social roles might be in conflict with one another. The Duke She told Master Kong:

In my locality there is a certain paragon, for when his father stole a sheep, he, the son, bore witness against him. Master Kong said: In my locality those who are upright are different from this. Fathers cover up for their sons and sons cover up for their fathers. Uprightness is to be found in this.<sup>18</sup>

This is a typical example of role conflict in our everyday life. Confucius here suggests that one’s judgement about how to act in this situation should not blindly follow rules or laws. For in so doing—that is, if the

son bears witness against his own father who steals a sheep—he violates or turns a blind eye to his own nature, human-heartedness. Filial piety is one of the two roots of human-heartedness.<sup>19</sup> Thus, according to Confucius, the problem of how the son has to act in this situation is the problem of whether he is able to take three factors into account: (1) his role as the son, (2) the current situation (his father has stolen a sheep), and (3) the purpose of his, the son's, action. According to the *Great Learning* (Ta-hsüeh), as a son he has to abide in filial piety, so when there is a conflict between familial responsibility and social responsibility, Confucius holds that the former should have priority over the latter in one's decision making. For to cover up one's father's wrongdoing is to practice filial piety and to practice filial piety is to undergo the process of self-cultivation, rediscovering human-heartedness in one's self. Thus, acting in accordance with rules of proper conduct should be based on the principle of righteousness, and acting according to righteousness is to act humanely.

Throughout the argument above, the notion of self-cultivation is prominent. For in the Confucian view, by undergoing the process of self-cultivation one can bring out the full development of one's character and possess virtues, such as wisdom, righteousness, and propriety. These virtues are internally linked to human-heartedness.<sup>21</sup> This is the reason why Confucius says that “[t]hose who are humane rest content with humaneness and those who are wise derive advantage from humaneness.”<sup>22</sup> Psychologically speaking, every human being has the potentiality to embody human-heartedness. But in order to embody human-heartedness one does not have to seek human-heartedness from without. Mencius says,

Humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not drilled into us from outside. We originally have them with us. Only we do not think [to find them]. Therefore it is said, “Seek you will find it, neglect and you will lose it.”<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, “to subdue oneself” cannot be understood as one element suppressing the other element in the mind, but rather as self-cultivation. That is to say that to be a humane man is to bring his four principles or beginnings into full development. For “[e]ach of these, when fully cultivated, *guarantees* correct moral behavior.”<sup>24</sup>

Human-heartedness as a unifying concept, like the Platonic notion of the Good, is not comprehended by Confucius in a purely intellectual manner. For Confucius tries to embody human-heartedness in the social context, that is, human-heartedness by its etymological sense (“two + men”) requires concrete manifestations. This leads us to the second section, an explication of the saying “return to ritual.”

## THE NOTION OF "RETURN TO RITUAL"

Ritual in Chinese is *li*, which is composed of two parts: *shih* ("deity"), and *li* ("ritual vessel"). It is clear that ritual in its original meaning referred to rules of proper conduct in religious ceremonies, but Confucius extended the range of ritual from this original meaning to both good manners and an ideal of social order.<sup>25</sup> Ritual, according to Cua, can be interpreted both in a particular sense and a general sense.<sup>26</sup> I shall proceed to discuss first the particular sense of ritual.

Ritual in the particular sense may be regarded as a set of rules that govern human behavior in different social contexts. It is said in the *Book of Ritual* (Li-chi) that

Do not roll rice into a ball, do not leave rice on the table, do not let your soup run out of your mouth. Do not smack your lips, do not leave a bone dry, do not turn over the fish, do not throw bones to the dog, and do not persist in trying to get a particular piece of meat. Do not turn rice about to let it cool off, and do not take porridge with chop sticks. . . .<sup>27</sup>

Ritual in this passage consists in the detailed regulation of manners of behavior at the table. Although the prescriptive aspect of ritual is important, Confucius is primarily concerned with the relations between ritual and the other virtues as a whole. The following two points can be made. First, Confucius is opposed to formalism. The Confucian notion of ritual cannot be understood merely as a set of prescriptive rules of conduct or etiquette. If someone by a fluke<sup>28</sup> acted kindly toward others in accordance with rules or laws, he would not be a just man. It is in this sense that Confucius says that "[I]f someone is not humane in spite of being a man, what has he to do with ritual?"<sup>29</sup> Second, it follows that ritual is the external expression of one's interior life.<sup>30</sup> Human-heartedness (*jen*), for Confucius, means to love people. But how to express one's love to others in a proper way depends upon ritual. That is, ritual is "an external criterion of the morality of *jen* in the sense that it is a criterion that governs the concrete expression of *jen*."<sup>31</sup> This leads us to the general sense of ritual.

We are told in the *Analects* that ritual plays an important role in the cultivation of moral character. For instance,

One is roused by the *Songs*, established by ritual, and perfected by music.

If you do not study the rites, you will have no way of taking your stand.

If one does not understand the rites, one has no means of taking one's stand.<sup>32</sup>

What is established here, in my opinion, is one's *character*, and what is studied should be internalized in one's self. For one's being courteous,

cautious, brave, etc., cannot be regarded as meritorious without ritual, Confucius says,

If one is courteous but does without ritual, then one dissipates one's energies; if one is cautious but does without ritual, then one becomes timid; if one is bold but does without ritual, then one becomes reckless; if one is forthright but does without ritual, then one becomes rude.<sup>33</sup>

Courtesy, cautiousness, boldness, and forthrightness are regarded as merits of human character only when they are expressed in company with ritual. Even the practice of filial piety has to be in accordance with ritual and to “[a]void breaking the rules.” The reason for avoiding rule breaking is not to avoid punishment, which would simply entail submissively obeying the rules; one obeys the rules with reverence.<sup>34</sup> As mentioned above, to be a superior man is not a matter of fluke or coincidence. For the practice of ritual requires an inner dimension, human-heartedness, and the outer expression of human-heartedness requires ritual performance.<sup>35</sup> As Cua points out,

The Confucian view may be stated thus: without *li* or rules of propriety human actions would degenerate into mere movements—mere occurrences without normative significance. The normative significance of ritual actions ultimately lies in *jen*. But mere *jen*-feelings and dispositions are by themselves incapable of concrete fulfillment when they are expressed in inappropriate contexts. Thus if *jen* is to be properly regarded as an internal criterion for the moral relevance of feelings, *li* expresses the outward or external criterion for the relevance of the *expressions* of these feelings.<sup>36</sup>

It should be noted that it is the notion of ritual that marks the difference between Confucian altruism<sup>37</sup> and Mo Tzu's (468–376 B.C.) doctrine of universal love. Mo Tzu holds that the major calamities come from people's failure to love one another.<sup>38</sup> In answer to Fan Ch'ih's question about human-heartedness, Confucius says that “[i]t is to love others.”<sup>39</sup> The Confucian claims that “to love others” and all within the Four Seas being the superior man's brothers do not have the same meaning as Mo Tzu's universal love.<sup>40</sup> For in the Confucian view, the raw feelings of love or affection should be restrained to some extent in accordance with ritual. Thus, what Confucius proposes here is the principle of *differentiation* of love. The roots of human-heartedness are based on filial piety and fraternal duty.<sup>41</sup> It would be impossible, in the Confucian view, for one who is not able to practice filial piety and fraternal duty properly at home to be able to love others. For social contexts of actions are the extension of the familial contexts of actions. And the harmonious familial relations are the first step of the manifestations of a well-cultivated inner self.

It is noticeable that benevolence or universal love cannot be sufficient for a social morality because social life has to be structured by

rules. A society without rules would be an impoverished society. For we need rules in the society to be the guidance for our interaction with others. Rules as the guidance to our interaction with people enable us to predict how people would act in a given situation. In other words, it would be easier for us to know how to interact with people, if a set of social rules is well established. Confucius's appeal to the rules of proper conduct is to show that ritual plays an important part in holding both society and people together. Thus, the absence of ritual in the *Republic* is an interesting phenomenon. Plato in the *Republic* thinks that the ideal state could dispense with law, because the basic element for the ideal state to come into being and the social order to be maintained is the philosopher-king. The philosopher-king's interaction with people seems to be limited. They do not have family life, private property, etc. These are distractions to the philosopher-king's rule of the state. However, in the *Laws* Plato sets up a complex code of laws to be the guidance to the interaction between man and man, and between man and the state.

The role of ritual as the criterion for expressing one's love or affection toward others is illustrated in the *Great Learning*, where we are told that

The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives. . . . ; when personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; and when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world.<sup>42</sup>

The idea of this passage is that the fulfillment of peace in the world depends on (1) the well-cultivated individual, (2) the regulated family, and (3) the orderly state. One can only manifest one's character through external behavior, which is guided by rules or laws. A well-regulated family requires each of its members to act in accordance with ritual, that is, let a father be a father, and let a son be a son. Likewise, an orderly state can be achieved only when the ruler acts as a ruler, and the ministers act as ministers.

The appeal to regard others as one's brothers in the *Analects* also appears in Plato's *Republic*. Plato says in Book III that the Guardians should regard their fellow-citizens as brothers because they were born from the same mother earth.<sup>43</sup> It seems to me that the fraternal love (*philia*) conceptualized here by Plato seems to be more similar to Mo Tzu's universal love than to the Confucian differentiation of love. Both Platonic fraternal love and Mo Tzu's universal love are utilitarian in nature. For both of them think that the kind of love they recommend will do great benefit to the society as a whole. In contrast, the Confucian

differentiation of love is more similar to Francis Hutcheson's universal benevolence. Hutcheson says in "An Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good" that

The *universal benevolence* toward all men, we may compare to that principle of *gravitation*, which perhaps extends to all bodies in the universe; but increases as the distance is diminished, and is strongest when bodies come to touch each other.<sup>44</sup>

Confucius would agree with Hutcheson's claim in that for Confucius, one's love toward people must have differentiation. If human-heartedness is a universalistic principle, then ritual is the principle of *particularism*.<sup>45</sup> If to love others is what human-heartedness demands, then loving others in accordance with the principle of differentiation will be the practice of ritual: "In other words, a Confucianist always carries out his moral self-cultivation in the social context."<sup>46</sup> Confucian self-cultivation does not make one refrain from active participation in society. For by human-heartedness itself one has, of course, to love others, while the realization of this love should be in accordance with different situations at different times. This is the expression of expediency or righteousness on which acting in conformity with ritual is based. Rules of proper conduct are important not only because they enable us to predict others' actions and coordinate our behavior with them, but because actions have meanings. The meaning of "love one's parents" is different from that of "love one's friends."

So far, we have discussed the claim that "to subdue oneself and return to ritual" is to practice human-heartedness. It is clear that according to Confucius, one's personal authenticity and sociality should always go hand in hand. In other words, the reason for one to act morally can only be found in the union of one's character and its social expression in actions. In what follows I shall proceed to argue that in Confucian ethics the dichotomy of agent-centered and act-centered ethics does not exist.

#### THE UNION OF ACT-CENTERED AND AGENT-CENTERED THEORY

Moral theory can be distinguished, in a broad way, into two categories: act-centered and agent-centered. Act-centered theory is mainly concerned with the right action or conduct. Its central notions concern obligation, duty, "morally ought" and "ought not," and right and wrong. It follows that from an act-centered view the proper answer to the question, "What is the right thing to do?" will be that one should conform oneself to those duties and obligations. That is to say, a good man is the one who is able to fulfill his duties and obligations, and perform the

proper actions on all occasions. Therefore, we can identify a good man as one who is capable of and willing to do his duty, and his virtue “lies in conscientiousness about doing the right thing.”<sup>47</sup>

Another domain that is different from the act-centered theory is agent-centered theory. It is principally concerned with the good person or good agent. The central notions of agent-centered theory are virtue and goodness. So the question will not be the same as the one that is proposed by act-centered theory, but will be “What kind of person should I be?” The proper answer to the question will not refer to the agent’s external actions, but rather to the agent’s internal character. In this view a person is identified by people as just, not because he or she does the right action at the right moment, on the right occasion, but because he or she possesses the very character that is relevant to justice. The just actions he or she does are only the expressions of the very character she or he possesses. Consequently, we can clearly see that act-centered theory is directly connected with action, whereas agent-centered theory is not. As Laird points out, “[A]gent-ethics includes potentiality; act-ethics, directly at least, does not. Apart from that, agent-ethics is not restricted to willed action, but act-cent[er]ed is so restricted.”<sup>48</sup> Agent-ethics is not restricted to willed action only, because some involuntary actions can reveal one’s character as much as voluntary ones do. Furthermore, “potentiality,” in my understanding, means that when we talk of character we are talking of potentiality or tendency. That is, a person who possesses the character of temperance has the potentiality to behave moderately and temperately. It is by his character that he will behave this or that way.

In Confucian ethics, however, neither of these two theories alone can give a complete account of morality. For a moral agent’s self-cultivation in the Confucian view cannot be isolated from society. To be social is to achieve self-realization. A moral agent in Cua’s framework must aim not only at the cultivation of *right* feelings, but also at the right expressions of these feelings in a proper context.<sup>49</sup> The emphasis on seeking human-heartedness within what is otherwise called self-cultivation leads Confucian ethics to an agent-centered theory, whereas the emphasis on ritual leads Confucian ethics to an act-centered theory. The ideal of the superior man is the embodiment of the combination or union of human-heartedness and ritual. Confucius says,

He (The gentleman) puts his sayings into action before adopting them as guidelines.

Only one who is humane is able to like other people and able to dislike other people.

The gentleman never shuns humanness.

The ways of the gentleman are three. . . : the humane do not worry; the wise are not perplexed; and the courageous do not feel fear.

Righteousness the gentleman regards as the essential stuff and the rites are his means of putting it into effect.<sup>50</sup>

The central idea of these passages is that acting in conformity with rules of proper conduct requires an inner dimension for its foundation, that is, human-heartedness. Otherwise, ritual will only be the mechanism of regulating people's behavior. As Mencius says,

[A]ll the ten thousand things are there in me. There is no greater joy for me than to find, on self-examination, that I am true to myself. Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to benevolence."<sup>51</sup>

To be true to one's human-heartedness is to have harmonious social relations with others. Thus, the significance of the superior man as a paradigmatic individual lies in the fact that the actualization of human-heartedness cannot be understood only as purely intellectual or theoretical, for moral behavior according to Confucius is a union of internal and external criteria in the concrete situations of the life of the moral agent.<sup>52</sup>

The question whether Confucius is aware of the modern dichotomy of moral theories, it seems to me, can easily be answered. Confucius was not aware of this dichotomy in that the interdependence and intimate relationship between human-heartedness and ritual lead Confucius to think that a complete account of morality should contain both agent-centered and act-centered theories.

When Confucius says in the *Doctrine of the Mean (Chung-yung)*,

In the way of the superior man there are four things, to not one of which have I as yet attained.—To serve my father, as I would require my son to serve me: to this I have not attained; to serve my prince, as I would require my minister to serve me: to this I have not attained; to serve my elder brother, as I would require my younger brother to serve me: to this I have not attained; to set the example in behaving to a friend, as I would require him to behave to me: to this I have not attained.<sup>53</sup>

What Confucius says does not only mean that one has to fulfill the duties that arise from one's social roles, but also means that one's duty-fulfilling acts are the manifestations of one's nature. So Confucius says, "[W]hen one cultivates to the utmost the principles of his nature, and exercises them on the principle of reciprocity, he is not far from the path."<sup>54</sup> Moral action has to be complemented by moral attitude, and moral attitude has to be carried out by moral action. For Confucius, the account of the moral action can never be completely appreciated without both.

Confucius says, "[A]t fifteen I set my heart on learning, at thirty I was established, at forty I had not perplexities, at fifty I understood the

decrees of Heaven, at sixty my ear was in accord, and at seventy I followed what my heart desired but did not transgress what was right.”<sup>55</sup> In spite of suspicions about the authenticity of this chapter,<sup>56</sup> it nevertheless shows that for Confucius the process of self-cultivation is a lifelong task. One’s moral actions can only stem from one’s proper cultivated nature, and one’s proper cultivated nature can only be recognized or actualized through one’s action. A humane man, as Confucius, will always subdue himself and return to ritual.

### CONCLUSION

The distinction between agent-centered and act-centered theories presupposes a distinction in psychology between the “inner” and the “outer.” If my argument is correct, Confucius does not make such a distinction. A just or humane man cannot be recognized only by the former without the latter, or vice versa. For in Confucius’s view, to be just is to carry out the duties that arise from our social roles. A just action can never be meritorious unless it is underlined by a right character; and a right character cannot be revealed unless the moral agent acts justly. In Confucian ethics the distinction between agent-centered and act-centered theories loses importance to the extent that who we are is defined by our social roles.

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### ENDNOTES

\* I am grateful to Professor R. F. Stalley for comments on early versions of this paper, and also to Professor R. S. Downie for drawing my attention to Francis Hutcheson’s thought. The remaining errors and infelicities are my own responsibilities.

1. Unless otherwise indicated in the notes, passages of the *Analects* in this paper are from R. Dawson, *Confucius: The Analects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Here *Analects* 12.1.
2. Moral theory is generally distinguished into two kinds: act-centered and agent-centered theories. The former is mainly concerned with what the agent *does*, and the latter is principally concerned with what the agent *is*. It is commonly said that Confucian ethics is mainly concerned with role obligation. One’s being in a certain role makes one *act* in a certain way in which one can fulfill the duties and obligations prescribed by the role. See H. Rosement, Jr., “Right-bearing Individuals and Role-bearing Persons,” in *Rules, Rituals and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated to Herbert Fingarette*, edited by M. I. Bockover (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 71–102.
3. D. C. Lau, *Mencius* (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 6A:15, p. 168.
4. Passages of the *Republic* are from D. Lee, *Plato: The Republic* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 441e and 486d.
5. *Analects* 1:12.

6. Here I disagree with R. Dawson's claim that "the purpose of ritual (*li*) is to bring about harmony between man and nature, . . ." (*Confucius: The Analects* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], note on passage 1.12, p. 84.) Ritual in this passage is understood as the measure of the interaction between man and man.
7. *Analects* 16:13.
8. Plato, *Republic*, 444c–d.
9. *Analects* 17:2.
10. *Analects* 8:8.
11. Plato, *Republic*, 442a–b.
12. Plato, *Republic*, 586e–587a.
13. J. Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 2A:6, pp. 202–204.
14. Shu-hsien Liu, "A Philosophical Analysis of the Confucian Approach to Ethics," *Philosophy East and West* 22, no. 4 (1972): p. 420.
15. *Analects* 4:5 and 7:16.
16. P. A. Boodberg, "The Semasiology of Some Primary Confucian Concepts," *Philosophy East and West*, 2, no. 4 (1953): 331.
17. *Analects* 12:11.
18. *Analects* 13:18.
19. *Analects* 1:2.
20. It is said in the *Great Learning* that ". . . The Book of Odes says, 'How profound was King Wen! How he maintained his brilliant virtue without interruption and regarded with reverence that which he abided (*chih*).' As a ruler, he abided in humanity. As a minister, he abided in reverence. As a son, he abided in filial piety. As a father, he abided in deep love. And in dealing with the people of the country, he abided in faithfulness" (Wing-tsit Chan, trans. and comp., *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963], p. 88). Hereafter cited as Chan, *A Source Book*.
21. Wei-ming Tu, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 57.
22. *Analects* 4:2.
23. *Mencius* 6A:6, from Chan, *A Source Book*, p. 54.
24. Chad Hansen, "Freedom and Moral Responsibility in Confucian Ethics," *Philosophy East and West*, 22, no. 2 (1972): p. 175.
25. Yutang Lin, *The Wisdom of Confucius* (London: Michael Joseph, 1958), p. 25.
26. A. S. Cua, "Reflections on the Structure of Confucian Ethics," *Philosophy East and West*, 21 (1971): p. 132.
27. Lin, *The Wisdom of Confucius*, p. 49.
28. Cua, "Reflections," p. 133.
29. *Analects* 3:3.
30. Cua, "Reflections," p. 132.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Analects* 8:8; 16:13, 20:3, respectively.
33. *Analects* 8:2.
34. See *Analects* 2:5 and 2:7.
35. Cua, "Reflections," p. 133, and Wei-ming Tu, "*Li* as a Process of Humanization," *Philosophy East and West* 22, no. 2 (1972): 188.
36. Cua, "Reflections," pp. 133–134.
37. For an account of the historical development of Confucian altruism, see H. H. Dubs, "The Development of Altruism in Confucianism," *Philosophy East and West*, 1, no. 1 (1951): 48–55.
38. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 95.
39. *Analects* 12:22.
40. *Analects* 12:5.
41. *Analects* 1:20.
42. Chan, *A Source Book*, pp. 86–87.
43. Plato, *Republic*, 414e.

44. R. S. Downie, *Francis Hutcheson: Philosophical Writings* (London: Everyman, 1994), p. 101.
45. Wei-ming Tu, "The Creative Tension Between Jen and Li," *Philosophy East and West* 18 (1968): 36.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
47. J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 157.
48. J. Laird, "Act-ethics and Agent-ethics," *Mind* 55 (1946): 114.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
50. *Analects* 2:13; 4:3; 4:5; 14:28; 15:18, respectively.
51. Lau, *Mencius* 7A:4, p. 183.
52. Cua, "Reflections," p. 138.
53. J. Legge, *Confucius* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), chapter 13, p. 394.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Analects* 2:4.
56. Dawson, *Confucius: The Analects*, p. 85.

### CHINESE GLOSSARY

chih	止
Confucius	孔夫子
<i>Chung-yung</i>	《中庸》
Fan Ch'ih	樊遲
hsin	心
jen	仁
Kung-tu Tzu	公都子
li	禮
li <sup>1</sup>	豐
<i>Li-chi</i>	《禮記》
Liu Shu-hsien	劉述先
Mencius	孟子
Mo-tzu	墨子
shih	示
<i>Ta-hsüeh</i>	《大學》
Yen Hui	顏回
yi	義
yi <sup>1</sup>	誼