**Chapter 6: *Ren*: An Exemplary Life**

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The term *ren* (仁) has a prominent place in the *Analects*, mentioned in 60 of its 503 conversations. These occurrences serve to intensify and complicate, rather than to clarify, its meaning. References to *ren* across a range of conversational topics and contexts impact on its meaning: it is the *summum bonum* of an exemplary life (Book 1), an *orientative stance* (Books 4, 6, 8 and 12); it is manifest in official life (Books 4-8, 12, 13, 17); there are discussions about its scope and cultivation (Books 14, 15) and the benefits for humanity when it is realized in exemplary government (Books 4, 20). This variance is to be expected in light of how the different conversations in the text figured in the lives of subsequent generations of followers of the tradition.[[1]](#footnote-1) Some of these differences arise because of emphases while others are more problematic as the meanings of *ren* appear incompatible in different conversations.

This chapter focuses on *ren* in an exemplary life, using this as a conceptual framework to draw together the range of meanings of *ren*. The discussion explores the significance of *ren* *qua* the orientation of an exemplary person, including especially the manifestations of *ren*. The analysis will include the investigation of *ren* and its associations with other significant terms in key passages of the text. It will also explore how the Confucian notion of an exemplary life might contribute to contemporary debates in moral philosophy.

The phrase “an exemplary life” is used here to denote how *ren* may be manifest in a life lived well. I have deliberately used the indefinite article “an,” rather than the definite article “the,” to allow for *different instantiations* of exemplary lives. This is to capture both the spirit of Confucian philosophy in the *Analects* and its compositional background: the text does not recommend a *singular* picture of the life well-lived. The term ‘exemplary’ is also used to indicate that the life of the person who manifests *ren* is inspirational without it necessarily being *paradigmatic*.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is to avoid the suggestion that there is a *typical* example of a good life. The *renzhe* (仁者)—an exemplary person—is to be distinguished from the *junzi* (君子), the ethically-minded Confucian engaged in official life: the latter’s life is characterised by engagement in social and administrative matters although this is not necessarily the case for the *renzhe*. The following section examines the scope of *ren* in the *Analects*, drawing from classical texts, commentaries and contemporary analyses.

**The Scope of *Ren***

The meaning and scope of *ren* in the *Analects* is broader and more inclusive in comparison to its use in earlier texts such as the *Book of Documents* (書經 *Shujing*) and the *Book of Odes* (詩經 *Shijing*) (Chan 1955, esp. notes 4-5: 296). For example, in the *Shujing*, *ren* characterises the benevolence of the ruler, King Tang, while in the *Shijing*, two hunting poems utilise *ren* to denote manliness and virility (Schwartz 1985: 75). Wing-tsit Chan suggests that Confucius was the first thinker to have conceived of *ren* as the general virtue (Chan 1975: 107). The discussion in this chapter will attempt to show, however, that *ren* is oversimplified when characterized as “virtue”.

The character *ren* comprises two composite characters, 亻 or 人, to signify human, and 二, meaning “two’”. The *Shuowen* *Jiezi*, the earliest extant Chinese etymological lexicon compiled in 90 CE by *Xu Shen* (許慎) (d. 120 CE?), explains *ren* in light of *qin* (親), relational proximity and affection (*Shuowen* 卷九, 人部: 4927). This idea is expressed in *Analects* 1.2, where the root (本 *ben*) of *ren* is expressed in terms relational attachment, specifically, of filial piety (孝 *xiao*) and brotherly propriety (弟 *di*). The interpretation of the term *ben*, root, is critical to our understanding of the connection between these personal relationships and *ren*. The character *ben* may be understood to refer to the centrality—that is, the fundamental nature—of familial relationships in a person’s life. This means that these relationships are more significant, including being more morally weighty, than other, non-familial, relationships in the life of a person. *Ben* may also reflect chronological priority, whereby the familial context is the initial environment for a person’s development. In this sense, it highlights the importance of the formative childhood years in a person’s development. Within this environment, one learns how to relate to others.

In discussing the meaning of *ben* in this passage, Zhu Xi (朱熹; 1130-1200), the Song (宋朝; 960-1279) Confucian thinker, suggests that *xiao* and *di* are necessary components of *ren* but do not sufficiently constitute it. While *ren* relates to human nature and character (性 *xing*), *xiao* and *di* are channels (用 *yong*) for attaining ideal character.[[3]](#footnote-3) If we follow Zhu Xi’s line of reasoning, cultivation of personal relationships is a central aspect of *ren* but not its only one. Zhu Xi follows Mencius and places *ren* among three other concepts, *yi* (義 rightness), *li* (禮 behavioural propriety) and *zhi* (智 wisdom) as four cornerstones of Confucian thought (*Mencius* 2A.7). In the *Analects* passages, however, these four terms are not linked in any of the conversations although *ren* is discussed individually in connection with *li* (*Analects* 3.3, 12.1, 15.33, 17.21) and *zhi* (eg. *Analects* 4.1-2, 6.22-23, 12.22) in various conversations. There are also associations with other terms. *Ren* in *Analects* 17.6 is articulated in terms of respectfulness (恭 *gong*), broad-mindedness (寬 *kuan*), reliability (信 *xin*), alertness (敏 *min*) and kindness (惠 *hui*) (*Analects*: 17.6/48/13; 15-16)[[4]](#footnote-4). In *Analects* 13.27, a person who is resolute (剛毅 *gang yi*) and deliberate in speech (木訥 *mu na*) is said to be close to *ren* (近仁 *jin ren*) (*Analects*: 13.28/36/23). In *Analects* 19.6, a number of pursuits are taken collectively to constitute *ren*: learning extensively yet remaining focused on one’s purposes (博學而篤志 *boxue er duzhi*); and inquiring with earnestness while engaging in self-reflection (切問而近思 *qiewen* *er jinsi*) (*Analects*: 19.6/54/18). With this variation in its associations with other terms, it seems reasonable to hold that *ren* is not reducible to any one of these characteristics or dispositions, or even a set of them. This seems to be the undercurrent in *Analects* 5.8, where Confucius was unable to comment on whether particular individuals were to be deemed *ren* because he knew only of one aspect of their achievements.

Twice in the *Analects*, in different Books, *ren* is grouped in a trio, with *yong* (勇), strength of character, and *zhi* (知), understanding: “The Master said, ‘The wise [知] have no doubts, the [*ren*] have no anxieties, the brave [勇] have no fears’” (*Analects* 9.29; trans. Brooks and Brooks 1998: 56).The grouping of these three terms is significant: the image that is presented—lack of doubt, anxiety and fear—is compelling. Brooks and Brooks note that the focus here is on people without vacillations, drawing a connection between *Analects* 9.29 its previous conversation, *Analects* 9.28, which alludes to the sturdiness of the cypress and the pine (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 56).

Brooks and Brooks also suggest that *zhi* in this Book is appropriately understood as ‘wisdom’ whereas in earlier chapters of the text, it meant ‘mere knowledge’ (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 56). From a number of other conversations on *ren* and *zhi*, it is clear that they are mutually-enhancing (See *Analects* 6.22; 12.22). For example, *Analects* 15.33 presents the following conversation:

The Master said, “When persons come to a realization (*zhi* 知) but are not authoritative (*ren* 仁) enough to sustain its implementation, even though they had it, they are sure to lose it…” (Trans. Ames and Rosemont Jr. 1998: 191).

Inferring from the association between *ren* and *zhi* in the other conversations, I suggest that *ren*, *yong* and *zhi* in *Analects* 9.29 are not merely three separate virtues or capacities in a list but they must operate in association with each other in the realisation of an exemplary life. Although the passage articulates the differences between the three capacities, there is a sense of holism or unity of these different capacities (cf. Gier 2001: 288; Yu 2007: 168). Hence, *yong* is not simply “bravery” or “courage” but strength of character, of a person who is not apprehensive (懼 *ju*).[[5]](#footnote-5) *Zhi* is not simply ‘knowledge’ but understanding, as it is characterised by the lack of perplexity (惑 *huo*). The person of *ren* is marked by a lack of anxiety (憂 *you*). In *Analects* 14.28, which repeats the description of these three features, it is the *junzi* who ideally possesses such confidence and equanimity.

Among other things, the preceding analysis suggests that, in order to understand *ren* and an exemplary life more fully, we need to look into the contexts within which *ren* is (to be) manifest and realized. (This methodology of understanding *ren* also takes into account the varied authorship of the text and other compositional issues mentioned previously.) *Analects* 13.19 explicitly states that *ren* is manifest differently in different contexts: to be reverent in private (居處恭 *ju chu gong*), respectful in handling matters (執事敬 *zhi shi jing*) and sincere in interacting with people (與人忠 *yu ren zhong*) (*Analects*: 13.20/35/25).

The connection between *ren* and *li* (behavioural propriety), attests to this suggestion that *ren* in the *Analects* is primarily practical. *Ren* is not conceived of in abstraction but is necessarily manifest in behaviour. Conversations on the close connection between *ren* and *li* can help illuminate this point. In *Analects* 3.3, it is noted, rhetorically, “What has a person who is not authoritative (*ren* 仁) got to do with observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮)? What has a person who is not authoritative got to do with the playing of music (*yue* 樂)?” (Ames and Rosemont Jr. 1998: 82; see also *Analects* 15.33).[[6]](#footnote-6) This gives the impression that *ren* must be manifest in appropriate behaviours.

In discussing the relation between *ren* and *li*, contemporary scholar Tu Weiming (杜維明) suggests that “... *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*” (Tu 1968: 33). Tu’s characterisation of *ren* as ‘higher-order concept’ and ‘inner morality’ may not be appropriately sensitive to the underlying commitments of Confucian thought. First, it may not be accurate to describe terms in the *Analects* as “concepts” as if the *Analects* presents us with a unified conceptual framework within which abstract ideas are situated. Secondly, the suggestion that *ren* is “inner morality” may give the misleading impression that it may be conceived of in terms of the “inner” intentions or other psychological processes of a person. As Herbert Fingarette has pointed out, “[t]he psychological, subjective use of [*ren*] in Chinese is a later development, a use whose import is exaggerated both by the profound psychological bias of Buddhist commentators and by the Western, Graeco-Christian outlook of translators” (Fingarette 1972: 37. See also Fu 1978; Fingarette 1978).

There is some support for Fingarette’s concern when we examine passages such as *Analects* 12.1. When Yen Yuan (顏淵), a favoured follower of Confucius, asked him about *ren*, Confucius replied, “[r]estraining yourself and returning to the rites constitutes *ren*” (克己復禮為仁 (*Analects*: 12.1/30/17); trans. Slingerland 2001: 32). The sentiments of this passage sit comfortably with Fingarette’s assessment of the *Analects*, that “[t]he ceremonial act is the primary, irreducible event…” (Fingarette 1972: 14). Interestingly, this passage poses difficulty for Tu’s portrayal of *ren* as “higher-order concept” (Tu 1968). Being aware of this, Tu focuses in detail on the phrase *keji fuli* (克己復禮). According to Tu, *keji* is identical to self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身) in Confucianism and is not primarily to be understood as “to conquer oneself” (Tu 1968: 30). In addition, *fuli* is not to be understood as submission to rituals but actively to bring oneself in line with *li* (Tu 1968: 30). No matter which way we understand *keji fuli*, it is important to note that, in this passage, *ren* is characterised in terms of *li*, that is, *keji fuli* is constitutive of *ren* (*wei ren* 為仁). Hence, it is not obvious that *ren* is a “concept” that has primacy in relation to *li*.

The issue of the relative priority of *ren* and *li* is thought to have emerged relatively early in the founding period of the Confucian tradition. Benjamin Schwartz notes that conversations associated with the disciples Ziyou (子游) and Zixia (子夏) usually emphasise *li* while those involving Zengzi (曾子), Zizhang (子張) and Yanhui (顏回) show a greater commitment to *ren* (Schwartz 1985: 130-4). Although it is not the place to present the different views here, it is important to press the point that the two terms are closely connected in the *Analects*, and that the nature of their connection has been a controversial matter right from the start of the tradition.

A contemporary scholar, Shun Kwong-loi (信廣來), has articulated a philosophically-sophisticated view of the relation between the two terms. In “*Jen* and *Li* in the *Analects*,” Shun suggests that *ren* and *li* are inextricably interdependent terms (Shun 1993). According to this view, *ren* is manifest only in *li*-practices while a person cannot claim to have fully mastered *li* without also understanding the human feeling it conveys. Shun demonstrates this with an analogy in linguistic practice: to understand the concept of tense *is* to be able to use its various forms effectively. Conversely, the effective use of grammatical structures associated with tense is an indication of a person’s grasp of the concept. In logical terms, mastery of the usage of tense is *both* necessary and sufficient for the mastery of the concept within the linguistic community. Analogously, an exemplary person expresses himself or herself appropriately and reliably in different situations and contexts; while fluency in behavioural propriety is an indication of one’s appreciation of human relationships.

The discussion so far has focused on the scope of *ren*, noting in particular its breadth of meanings and its association with other dispositions (such as broad-mindedness, reliability and kindness) deemed important by the early Confucians in the *Analects*. We have also seen that *ren* is irreducible to any one of these dispositions. I suggest that this is due in part to the fact that *ren* is manifest differently in different situations: in its close connection with *li*, *ren* is *irreducibly concrete*. The following section focuses on the interpersonal context in the life of an exemplary person.

***Ren*: Commitment to Humanity**

In the case of a person who embodies *ren*, insofar as he seeks to establish himself, he also establishes others. Insofar as he seeks to be accomplished, he helps others attain the same. To be able to take what is near and to grasp it is similar (for others) may be regarded the method of (being) *ren*. (*Analects* 6.30; translated by author).[[7]](#footnote-7)

The person who embodies *ren* is exemplary in the way he or she is mindful of the needs of others. More specifically, this involves the recognition that others have similar interests, together with the desire to assist them. The sentiment in this passage captures the meanings of two other important terms, *zhong* (忠) and *shu* (恕):

The Master said, “Zeng, my friend! My way (*dao* 道) 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* 忠) and putting oneself in the other’s place (*shu* 恕), nothing more.” (*Analects* 4.15. Trans. Ames and Rosemont Jr. 1998: 92)

Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. translate *shu* as “putting oneself in the other’s place” and this captures the moral imagination required in the Confucian life. The character *shu* suggests mutuality, which can also mean that a person acts on the belief that others are like him or herself (*Analects* 15.24)[[8]](#footnote-8). This means that an exemplary person, *renzhe*, has both the capacity and the willingness to be imaginatively engaged with the needs of others in part through self reflection (*Analects* 19.6). *Zhong* and *shu* capture the essence of the relational self in Confucian philosophy. The terms are drawn together in *one* strand (一以貫之 *yi* *yi guan zhi*) in this passage, suggesting that they are a central focus of Confucius’ thinking.[[9]](#footnote-9) Antonio Cua, whose scholarly views on Confucian self cultivation are influential, articulates *ren* in terms of a person’s commitment to the other:

[*Ren*] as an ideal theme in part pertains to the psychological condition of responsive agency. Methodologically, the practice and development of [*ren*] begins at the personal level ... [However, w]hat is personal from the Confucian viewpoint can, and ultimately must, have a public or interpersonal import.[*Ren*], as an ideal, involves relation between men rooted in the agents’ conscientious and continuing effort at self cultivation. (Cua 1979: 57)

*Analects* 12.22 explains *ren* in terms of “loving others” (*ai ren* 愛人). This, however, should not be misconstrued as an indiscriminating love. Nor is it about emotional feeling or attachment to particular individuals; the passage discusses the manifestation of *ren* in official life, focusing especially on elevating those who are upright to more prominent positions. This same sense of moral discrimination is expressed in *Analects* 4.3, where Confucius noted, “The authoritative person [*renzhe* 仁者] alone has the wherewithal to properly discriminate the good person from the bad” (Trans. Ames and Rosemont Jr. 1998: 89. See also *Analects* 15.33). Importantly, the opening conversations in Book Four of the *Analects*, where this passage is situated, focus on being settled in *ren* among other like-minded people (*Analects* 4.1-7).

Commitment to the well-being of others is not the only measure of an exemplary person. In a conversation, Confucius challenged the assertion that Guan Zhong (管仲; c. 683-642 BCE) lacked *ren* (*Analects* 14.17). Although Guan Zhong was known to have overstepped the boundaries of ritual propriety (*Analects* 3.22), in *Analects* 14.17, Confucius applauds Guan Zhong’s achievements. This conversation poses problems for how we might understand *ren*, as Schwartz points out:

As an individual [Guan Zhong’s] morality left much to be desired. Having supported one claimant to the ducal throne, when that one was murdered he then threw his support to the later Duke Huan … despite the fact that the strategy he devised for maintaining peace was ultimately based on the sanction of force and diplomatic guile rather than on moral force, Confucius cannot refrain from defending him … 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 socio-political “results” achieved by a statesman of great talent but little personal virtue. (Schwartz 1985: 109-110)

It would be reasonable to think that an exemplary person has a prominent role in society for that, after all, may be the most effective way in which he can help enhance the human condition. It is in this sense that the *renzhe* may be deemed “authoritative” (cf. Hall and Ames 1987: 110-25). An authoritative person achieves desirable outcomes for society *as a result of* his commitment to humanity; in his prominent position, he leads by exemplary behaviour and action. Yet, Schwartz here makes it clear that the focus on outcomes might eclipse the place of, or force compromises in, personal integrity.

*Must* an exemplary person be engaged in official life? On the whole, there seems to be some distinction between *renzhe* and *junzi* in the *Analects*, although *Analects* 6.26 refers to them interchangeably. The phrase *junzi* in the text is frequently used to refer to those who are engaged in public life in an official capacity. However, it is not necessarily the case that all in that capacity have a commitment to *ren* (*Analects* 14.6). There are also conversations where engagement in official life is cautiously encouraged (*Analects* 9.13). In one instance, however, Confucius comes across as being defensive: when asked about his lack of involvement in official duties (不為政 *bu wei zheng*), Confucius cites the *Shujing* in his response, arguing that “The Shu says, “Be ye filial, only filial, be friendly toward your brothers, and you will contribute to the government.” This too, then, is being in government. Why should you speak of being “in government?”” (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 113; see also *Analects* 17.1).[[10]](#footnote-10)

The passages in the *Analects* lack clarity on the issue of whether the *ren*-person must be engaged in official life. There appears to be differences in views. For example, *Analects* 14.6, which notes that there are *junzi* who are not *ren*, appears to be a criticism of some who were actually in office at that time. On the other hand, the conversation in *Analects* 14.28 seems to suggest that, *ideally*, a *junzi* proceeds in three ways (君子道者三), namely, *ren*, *yong* and *zhi*; Confucius in this conversation claims that he himself is not up to it.

In the final section below, I examine what it means to incorporate *ren* in one’s undertakings. The discussion focuses specifically on the close connection between *ren* and *zhi*. The investigation here will reveal assumptions about how *ren* is conceived in the *Analects*, not primarily as an abstractly-defined virtue or principle, but in terms of its realization. Drawing on some discussions of Confucian ethics as virtue ethics, while at the same time being cautious about such classifications of Confucian thought, I suggest ways in which the Confucian image of an exemplary person might inform contemporary debates in ethics.

**An Exemplary Life**

A number of the conversations note the difficult and arduous nature of the pursuit of a life imbued with *ren* (e.g. *Analects* 6.22; 15.10). It might involve great sacrifice, to the extent of having to give up one’s life (*shashen* 殺身; *Analects* 15.9). Nevertheless, 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: 15). A commitment to (realize) *ren* is a weighty matter, such that an exemplary person is slow to speak (仁者其言也訒; *Analects* 12.3). According to Zhu Xi, Confucius in this conversation was addressing Sima Niu (司馬牛) directly. Sima Niu was known to be voluble and hence Confucius remarks that a *renzhe* is slow to speak because of the difficulty of expressing his profound ethical commitments (Zhu 1983: 四書章句集注• 顏淵第十二).

The *practice* of *ren* is characterised by extensive study of a wide range of matters (*boxue* 博學) and, at the same time, reflection with self-application (思近 *jinsi*; in *Analects* 19.6. See also *Analects* 2.11). This captures an important aspect of Confucian learning: to learn from others *in order to* reflect on one’s own situation, and to apply these insights to one’s actions. In this connection, the associations between *ren* and *zhi*, understanding, are significant. In Book 4, *ren* and *zhi* are closely linked: “…How can anyone be called wise who, in having the choice, does not seek to dwell among authoritative [*ren*] people?” (*Analects* 4.1, trans. Ames and Rosemont Jr. 1998: 89; see also *Analects* 4.2). The term *zhi* in the *Analects* refers primarily to *manifest* knowledge: it covers a range of capacities or deeds associated with the *exercise* of wisdom, intelligence, knowledge and understanding. In the conversations, the focus is on a person’s ability to realize the different subject matters of *zhi*.[[11]](#footnote-11) In this light, Hall and Ames’ translation of *zhi* as ‘realization’ helps to reinforce the point that *zhi* is irreducibly performative (Hall and Ames 1987: 50-6; cf. *Analects* 15.3; 15.4).

Similar assumptions underlie the notion *ren*. The hallmark of an exemplary person is not simply her ethical beliefs, virtues or moral dispositions but her capacity to realize them. In some conversations, Confucius comments on those who are unable to manifest their commitments (e.g. *Analects* 4.5; 4.6; 4.7). The fundamental concern is not with possession of information but rather with actions that are effected *as manifestations of* an exemplary life. To understand Confucian moral epistemology in terms of realization of the self in particular contexts highlights the distinctiveness of Confucian *ren*. The upshot of this conception of *ren* is that it defies classification either as virtue ethics in the traditional Aristotelian sense or solely in terms of character. In his articulation of Confucian ethics, Joel Kupperman compares Confucian with Aristotelian virtue ethics, although he is careful to draw a fundamental distinction between the two. According to Kupperman, in Chinese philosophy, the focus is on “a general state of being a virtuous person” that “involves mostly (although not always) ‘‘narrow’’ character traits, which involve a strong tendency to function well in certain kinds of choices in certain kinds of situations” (2009: 252, 253). To conceive of character traits as ‘narrow’ is to expect that a person may not necessarily manifest each virtue consistently across a range of situations. For example, a person might exhibit temperance in her personal relationships but not while at work. This conception of virtue contrasts with that typically articulated in Aristotelian ethics: there, particular virtues take centrestage and are assumed to be consistent across different situations.

The focus on the *realization* of *ren* also cuts across debates on virtue ethics in another way. Instead of focusing primarily on the person *qua* the moral agent, Confucian ethics also attends to actions and the contexts within which particular virtues or ethical dispositions are realized. *Ren* sits at the intersection of a person and her actions: in the language of western moral philosophy, it concerns *both* agency and action. This presents a richer and more realistic picture of the moral life than one that is solely agent-based (cf. Luo 2010; Lai 2006: 109-24). Importantly, it understands agency in the light of how a person responds in specific contexts.

It is important also to understand that the contexts we refer to here are not ‘moments of sharp moral decision’ or to be understood in terms of “big-moment” ethics (Kupperman 1971: 194). Rather, the contexts relate to a person’s engagement with others in ordinary, daily activities (*Analects* 1.4). The measure of an exemplary person is not based on the collection of a few significant high-scoring runs he or she has achieved on the scoreboards. Rather, this is a view of ethics that is not surprised to see some mistakes and failures rather than perfect instantiations of a particular virtue in every context. Over time, a person’s actions and behaviors in ordinary contexts and situations will allow us to understand whether a person has been exemplary. This in turn is determined on the basis of his contributions to the well-being of humanity, as discussed in the previous sections.

One striking characteristic of an exemplary life is (a person’s) equanimity and confidence, expressed in *Analects* 9.29 and 14.28: “an exemplary person is not anxious” (仁者不憂). The lack of anxiety is also a feature of the Confucian *junzi*: he is “… calm and unperturbed; [while] the petty person is always agitated and anxious” (*Analects* 7:37; trans. Ames and Rosemont Jr. 1998: 119. See also *Analects* 13.23 and 15.2). Antonio Cua describes the enviable disposition of the *junzi*, who is at ease across different situations: “[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” (Cua 1971: 47).

In conclusion, we have seen that a Confucian exemplary life is not reducible to any one level of analysis in standard western philosophical discourse. The realisation of an exemplary life is situated at the nexus of commitment and action. This opens up the possibility of *different manifestations* of exemplary lives. The Confucian exemplary person is not an abstractly-defined ideal type. He or she is not simply a virtuous person, nor one who seeks only to fulfil norms, or to attain specific outcomes. This non-conceptual, concrete account of personhood contributes to contemporary debates in a number of ways. First, it attends to more realistic parameters, such as contextual appropriateness, for understanding the place of morality in a good life. Secondly, by focusing in part on the agent’s actions, it avoids rule-based on norm-driven morality. Third, it considers the enrichment of others’ lives as an important part of human excellence. And, finally, it supports different models of an exemplary life.

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1. Bruce and Taeko Brooks (1998) present an analysis of the Books of the *Analects* according to their authorship associations. Their analysis has significant implications for understanding the text, though I have not adhered strictly to their classification of Books for the purposes of this discussion. Rather, I have focused on the possible meanings of *ren* used in the contexts of passages in particular Books. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Antonio Cua uses the phrase “paradigmatic person” to describe the Confucian *junzi* (Cua 1971). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Master Cheng said,] “… It is all right to call [filial piety and fraternal respect] the root of practicing true goodness [*ren*]; it is not all right to call them the root [*ben*] of true goodness. It would seem that true goodness is human nature [*xing*] and that filial piety and fraternal respect are its function [*yong*]. Within human nature [*xing*] there exist true goodness, righteousness [*yi*], propriety [*li*] and wisdom [*zhi*]: these four things and nothing more. Where do filial piety and fraternal respect come in? True goodness presides over love, and in loving, there is nothing greater than loving one’s parents. Therefore it says, ‘Filial piety and fraternal respect: are they not the root of practicing true goodness?’” (Zhu 1983: 四書章句集注•學而第一; trans. Gardner 2003: 72). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. All references to the Chinese text of the *Analects* are taken from the ICS *Lunyu* (1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 勇 is typically translated as “courage”. Here, however, I have translated it as “strength of character” as that better represents the meaning of the term in accordance with its uses in the *Analects* (e.g. *Analects* 2.24) as well as in the *Shuowen*, which explains 勇 in terms of ability (*li* 力): 力部: 勇: 气也。从力甬聲。(*Shuowen* 卷十四, 力部: 9196). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 子曰： 「人而不仁， 如禮何？ 人而不仁， 如樂何？」(*Lunyu*: 3.3/4/29). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲達而達人。能近取譬，可謂仁之方也已。 (*Lunyu*: 6.30/14/17-18). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 子曰：「其恕乎！己所不欲，勿施於人。」 (*Analects*: 15.24/43/23-24). “The Master replied, “There is *shu* 恕: do not impose on others what you yourself do not want.” (*Analects* 15.24. Trans. Ames and Rosemont Jr. 1998: 189). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Wing-tsit Chan writes, “... Confucianists have not agreed on what [the ‘one strand’] means. Generally, Confucianists of Han and [Tang] times adhered to the basic meaning of “thread” and understood it in the sense of a system or a body of doctrines. [Zhu Xi], 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 [*zhong*] and *shu*, which are best expressed by [Zhu Xi], namely, [*zhong*] means the full development of one's [originally good] mind and *shu* means the extension of that mind to others.” (Chan 1963: 27). Contrary to Chan’s assertion, however, the terms *zhong* and *shu* do have a range of meanings in the early Confucian texts. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Brooks and Brooks argue against treating this conversation as an actual record of Confucius’ beliefs. Instead, they suggest that this conversation captures the situation the Confucians were in, whereby they had lost their position at the Lu (鲁) court. (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 113). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. E.g. *zhitianming* (知天命), to apprehend and realise the ordinances of heaven (*Analects* 16.8); *zhiren* (知人), to understand people and respond to them appropriately (*Analects* 1.16; 12.22; 13.2; 14.30; 14.35); *zhiyan* (知言), to appreciate the use and force of speech (*Analects* 20.3). See Hetherington and Lai 2012, and Lai 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)