CHAPTER 9

Impartiality, Close Friendships and the Confucian Tradition

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between friendship and morality. Two ideas have been influential in the history of moral philosophy: the impartial standpoint and close friendship. These two perspectives on thought and action can conflict, however, and such a case is presented here.

In an attempt to resolve these tensions, and understand the assumption that gives rise to it, I explore an alternative conception of moral conduct and friendship suggested by early Confucian thought. Within this account, moral conduct is that which aims at harmony, understood as the appropriate blending of different elements. This suggests a conception of friendship that realizes harmony through a focus on shared activities, and the quality of interaction achieved between people as they participate in shared social events. This account offers a novel way of conceptualizing friendship, which also avoids the tension between the impartial standpoint and close friendship.

Introduction

In his book on friendship, William Rawlins recalls the following story:

> A man living in a small town in the mid-western United States, who I'll call Hank, was about to go bankrupt. However, Hank had come up with a solution to his financial problems that he confided to his best friend, who I'll call Barry. Hank informed Barry that he had decided to set fire to his own business. He figured that the insurance settlement on the loss would clear up his debts and put him in pretty good shape to start fresh with another venture. Soon after their conversation, Hank torched his store. Unfortunately, the flames destroyed more than he planned. Before the local fire department could extinguish the blaze, it burned down most of the block of buildings making up the economic centre of the small town

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> where they both lived. Due to the circumstances of the fire and some incriminating evidence about its cause, Hank was charged with arson.[1]

As Rawlins narrates the story, the jury is leaning towards acquitting Hank, and Barry is faced with a dilemma: should he testify about his conversation with Hank to ensure justice is done? Doing so would betray his friend's trust and possibly destroy the relationship. But not doing so would condemn innocent fellow citizens to suffer economic harm. What should Barry do?

To make clearer the conflict inherent in this kind of situation, we might modify the story. Substitute Hank and Barry for two friends from a minority population within society, whether by gender, ethnicity or other grouping. Further, assume they highly value membership of that group and also believe that their interests are not always adequately represented by the law or majority opinion. Next, swap the small town for a large city; exactly who is affected becomes less clear, involves more strangers unknown to the protagonists and fewer familiar faces before which Hank and Barry feel shame. In this way, the importance of the friendship is heightened, and the community enlarged and made less personal, arguably making resolution of the dilemma more difficult.

Barry's dilemma is a vivid illustration of a conflict between two well-established practices or ideals: impartiality and close friendship. In one corner is impartiality: the belief that all people are to be treated equally and no one is to receive preferential treatment. Impartiality in the story arises partly in the demand for impartiality in the legal system. The presiding judge and jury must not have any personal interests in the case, and set aside personal biases to judge in an impartial manner. The figure of Lady Justice is blindfolded.

But the image of an impartial judge weighing up all relevant considerations also describes Barry himself. Barry is called upon to recognize the interests of all members of the community and to set aside his personal bond with Hank in his deliberations. Impartiality demands that all members of a community be treated fairly. If Barry views the situation and himself in this way, as a citizen, he would probably testify against Hank.

From Barry's perspective as a close friend of Hank's, however, it is precisely the personal and particularistic bond that matters. While there are many kinds of friendship, close friendships are often distinguished by a heightened interest in and caring about one or more particular persons; and this attitude is not extended to others. Valuing his bond with Hank leads Barry to remain silent and save his friend from prosecution.

1 Rawlins, *Compass of Friendship*, 2.

Barry's dilemma derives from the fact that a person can reasonably adopt two very different perspectives on the situation, based on impartiality and close friendship respectively, which give rise to conflicting courses of action. The tension is particularly acute because both impartiality and close personal bonds are often treated as foundational features of ethical living. In what follows, I explore this tension by considering how the two have been presented in the Western philosophical canon, stretching from Aristotle through to the European Enlightenment and its heirs, and highlight their incongruent and sometimes confusing relationship. Of particular interest is how equating impartiality with morality marginalizes the value of close friendship, denying it any intrinsic moral worth.

Exploring the tangled relationship between impartiality, close friendships and morality prepares the ground for a look at the Confucian tradition, which offers resources to re-conceptualize friendship and moral conduct. By offering alternative accounts of both, Confucian thought helps articulate an integrated account of friendship and morality. This in turn invites reflection on, and perhaps even revision of, the place of impartiality and close friendships in ethical thought.

Impartiality as a Moral Ideal

In Barry's dilemma, the community that Barry should view impartially is limited to a small town. But as the modified example suggested, impartiality can have a much wider remit. At its limit, the impartial standpoint point transcends social and national divides and is sensitive to all morally considerable beings. This might be all humans, all rational agents, all pain-sensitive beings or some other constituency. This perspective takes into account the interests of all affected parties and grants special consideration to none. Particular personal attachments do not carry any special significance. They are, as it were, invisible (this is not to say that personal relationships as an institution or a way of life do not figure in this view, only that relationships between particular people are irrelevant).

In the tradition of moral thought that emphasizes this approach, this impartial standpoint is described as *sub specie aeternitatis* (from the perspective of eternity) or the 'God's eye' perspective. It is a privileged vantage point, which produces clarity of thought without partiality towards the self—the ideal foundation for moral judgment. This ideal standpoint is expressed in Christian theology and the natural law tradition, as an ordered world created by God, and in which the human good and the right could be known by the human

mind. As theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote, "In ethical decisions, a man must consider his action *sub specie aeternitatis* and then, no matter how it proceeds, it will proceed rightly."[2]

Although the metaphysical worldview supporting such a moral viewpoint largely disappeared, along with confidence that the human good can be so readily known, the idea survived in some secular ethics. Immanuel Kant, for example, tried to build reasoning from the impartial standpoint into the basic structure of rational thought. Acting morally was acting rationally—i.e., acting only from those maxims or principles that "belong in a universal legislation."[3] More recently, John Rawls's use of the 'original position' in *A Theory of Justice* offers a contemporary example of this ideal. Rawls writes:

> Thus to see our place in society from perspective of this position [the original position] is to see it *sub specie aeternitatis*: it is to regard the human situation not only from all social but also from all temporal points of view."[4]

This conception of the impartial standpoint is particularly important because it provides the framework for an influential modern conception of moral thinking. It makes possible a concise intellectual test for moral rightness: an action or policy is judged right or wrong depending on how it affects all members of this extended community, and this is known by adopting the impartial point of view. Influential moral theories developed since the European Enlightenment, especially Kantian and Utilitarian moral theories, adopt this approach.

The details of this moral test vary by theory, but all rely on some kind of impartial perspective. In utilitarian theory, an action is right if it produces greater overall utility or better consequences than any other option, impartially considered. In Kantian moral theorizing, an action is permissible if it can be 'universalized'—if it is acceptable to any rational agent in a similar situation, where both agents and the situation are understood impersonally, as if viewed from the God's eye vantage point. In both theories, a conclusive justification of action can only be made from the impartial viewpoint.[5] Returning to our

2 Bonhoeffer, *Testament to Freedom*, 350.

3 Kant, *Groundwork*, 53.

4 587. R.M. Hare's metaphor of the omniscient 'archangel' in his theory is another example of this ideal vantage point (see *Essays in Moral Thinking*, 189–90).

5 For a recent account of Kantian moral theory, see Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; a recent consequentialist account is Petit, "The Consequentialist Perspective."

dilemma, acting under the guidance of such theories would lead Barry to testify against Hank.

Close Friendships

The tradition of equating moral conduct with the adoption of the impartial perspective, however, is only one way of conceptualizing moral conduct. One rival approach, which can be traced back to Aristotle, begins from an examination of the value of close friendships.[6] While close friendships can be conceptualized in various ways, two particular features have been used to distinguish them from other friendships and relationships. The first is acquaintance and familiarity with the friend, a knowledge of 'who they really are,' which requires time, effort and commitment to achieve. The second is a non-instrumental concern to promote the friend's interests. These two themes figure prominently in discussions of friendship in the same philosophical tradition.[7]

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle offers a threefold categorization of *philia*, often translated as friendship. He distinguishes friendships of pleasure, utility and character, with character (or close) friendships being the most valuable and stable. These are based on knowledge of the other's good character, acquired over time and through sustained interaction. As Aristotle notes, "Though the wish for friendship comes quickly, the friendship does not."[8] Partly because of such knowledge, a friend comes to be regarded as 'another self.'[9] Further, this knowledge and the personal attachment it generates are necessary conditions for a robust non-instrumental concern for the friend's good. In Aristotle's words, one must wish goods to friends "for their own sake."[10]

6 Anthologies exploring morally relevant features of friendship include and LaFollette and Graham *Person to Person*; Pakaluk, *Other Selves*; Badhwar, *Friendship*.

7 Other features are associated with close friendships. These include shared time together, the enjoyment of each other's company, shared activity, some measure of equality or reciprocity, and privacy and the exclusive disclosure of information. However, the two features (acquaintance and familiarity; a non-instrumental concern to promote the friend's interests) seem particularly important to close friendship and its moral authority, and form an important contrast with a kind of friendship in Confucian thought, discussed below.

8 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1156b30.

9 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1170b5.

10 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155b30. Cf. "Goodwill is inactive friendship and that when it lasts some time, and they grow accustomed to each other, it becomes friendship," ibid. 1167a10.

Later thinkers also develop these themes,[11] but Montaigne expresses this kind of close friendship in its purest and most complete form: as both complete familiarity and perfect union of wills. He recalls Cicero's account of the friendship between the great Roman leader Tiberius Gracchus and confidant Caius Blosius, and regards his own friendship with Etienne de la Boetie as similar in nature:

> Having committed themselves absolutely to each other, either [Gracchus or Blosius] held absolutely the reins of each other's inclinations…Not one of [de la Boetie's] actions could be presented to me, whatever appearance it might have, that I could not immediately find the motive for it… Not only did I know his soul as well as mine, but I should have trusted myself to him more readily than to myself.[12]

Montaigne also makes a striking claim about how and when close friendships should guide action. He writes, "a single dominant friendship dissolves all other obligations."[13] On this view, close friendships enjoy priority over other considerations and can provide the most fundamental guide to how to live. This prioritizing of close friendships is also a contemporary theme. The novelist E.M. Forster expressed the importance of trust in particularly dramatic fashion: "if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country."[14]

These claims for the importance of close friendships convey a moral force, and substantial arguments have been made that they are crucial for an ethical life. Close friendships might be necessary for well-being or flourishing for many reasons, including the need for mutual assistance, having someone to share ideas with and so develop them, being loved and loving, the delight of shared activities. As Aristotle writes, "No one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all the other goods."[15] He declares friendship "is a virtue or involves virtue."[16] Personal flourishing is a reasonable aim for any life, and since close friendships are necessary for this end they enjoy precedence in

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Whether Aristotle thinks goodwill is ever entirely unconditional is debatable; however, later thinkers have conceived of close friendship in this way (e.g. Badhwar, *Friendship*).

11 See for example, Cicero, *On Old Age*, 30.

12 "Of Friendship." For Montaigne, so pure is the close friendship bond that it can be shared only with one other person; plurality is compatible only with 'common friendships' (195).

13 Ibid.

14 Forster, "What I Believe," 68.

15 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a5.

16 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a2.

thought and action. In contemporary literature, Bernard Williams makes a similar argument.[17] Whatever morality demands, a person needs the motivation to respond to those demands. But without personal relationships (and personal projects) to structure our lives, we lose the motivation to act at all. Therefore whatever morality is or demands of us, it must accommodate, i.e., be restricted by, personal relationships. Close friendships are thus central to an account of an ethical life.

A second way in which close friendships are made crucial to an ethical life is by equating moral conduct with genuine and non-instrumental care for another person's good or interests. Close friendships, like mother-child relationships, are a paradigm example of this form of conduct. This approach is seen in the contemporary development of an ethics of care.[18]

Evidently, there are several prima facie reasons why close friendships might be a decisive influence in settling moral questions. These arguments support the view that Barry is right to structure his decisions around the interests and needs of Hank.

The preceding case study and discussion suggest that a tension exists between the moral ideal of the impartial standpoint and the practices of close friendship. Judgments from the impartial standpoint require that one's own interests, background, education, gender, social class, et cetera not influence those judgments; but those personal characteristics and the motivations flowing from them are precisely what provides the raw material of close friendships. Furthermore, moral judgments informed by the impartial standpoint can be universalized—they apply to anyone in the same situation; but the practical decisions of friendship are not usually like this. They are directed at particular people and situations and not intended as general prescriptions. The ideal of impartiality thus threatens to push friendship out of the realm of ethical practices. This leads to the question: which should take priority?

Moral Qualms about the Impartial Standpoint and Close Friendships

Both prongs of the fork lead to difficulties. First, several moral philosophers reject the equating of the impartial viewpoint and the moral theories derived from them—including Kantian and Utilitarian theories—with moral

17 Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality."

18 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*; Held, "Non-contractual Society."

conduct.[19] One argument, stemming from Hegel's criticism of Kant, is moral reasoning that attempts to represent how a universal community lapses into an empty formalism. The abstract moral principles derived from this imagined perspective—such as rules as acting only in ways that are acceptable to all rational agents—provide little meaningful guide to action: they are too far removed from the concrete situations of everyday life. Others have argued that the impartial viewpoint, a view from nowhere, is impractical or humanly unachievable.[20] Marilyn Friedman, for example, argues that it is impractical.[21] While presuming to reason impartially, a person has no way to confirm that their thinking is genuinely impartial and free from bias or prejudices. The impartial perspectives required by modern moral theories are, according to Friedman, "extraordinary cognitive feats."[22] Others have argued that it is undesirable because attempts to view things from an impartial perspective obscure important differences between individual perspectives.[23] Attempts to imaginatively take on the perspective of others can cause that perspective to be unwittingly reduced to something like one's own. This criticism is particularly relevant to R.M. Hare's formulation of impartiality, where the moral subject must adopt the perspective of each party involved.[24]

Philosopher Bernard Williams regards the elevated status of impartialist morality as a contingent historical creation rather than a rational principle.[25] He describes its emphasis on the obligation to meet the demands of the impartial perspective as the 'morality system,' and sees the historical origins of its popularity in specific Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant. The ideal of an impartial standpoint subsequently became dominant because it suited emerging forms of social organization—the rise of bureaucratic forms of management and public rationality relied on an impartial viewpoint. But the impartial viewpoint is only one possible foundation of morality, and its authority can be questioned without rejecting morality. This gives us cause to consider alternative foundations for morality.

19 On Kant's views on friendship, see his "Lecture on Friendship."

20 See Friedman, *What are Friends For?* ; Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity"; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

21 Friedman, *What are Friends For?* 18–27.

22 Ibid., 22. Friedman is responding to the Kantian contractualism of Rawls and R.M. Hare's utilitarianism, but her arguments apply to all similar theories.

23 Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity," 41.

24 Hare, *Essays in Moral Thinking*.

25 See Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, esp. Chap. 10.

There are also reasons to doubt that close friendships can provide a foundation for moral conduct.[26] For one, they are typically insensitive to impartiality. Regardless of the limitations of the impartial moral standpoint, impartiality is an important moral ideal: getting people to consider the interests a wider set of people, beyond friends and loved ones (or, worse, only themselves). This practical and motivational challenge is neglected in close friendships, where motivations focus on a small set of people.[27]

Further, the non-instrumental concern often identified with close friendships may not be a morally pure motivation.[28] Søren Kierkegaard argued that it derives from self-love and, unlike the impartial position, self-love is a poor basis for moral justification.[29] How a person responds to, and befriends, others is based on his or her own (usually beloved) dispositions and characteristics. Those people similar to what Kant called the 'dear self' may be liked, and differences present opportunities for learning or entertainment. Self-less concern was supposedly central to close friendships' moral authority, but this argument suggests its motivations are parasitic on self-love.[30] This leads Kierkegaard to agree that friendship contains 'no ethical task.'[31]

These arguments question the moral authority of close friendships. They also raise the question of whether there are other forms of friendship that better accommodate the demands of morality, and impartiality in particular. In response to this, and to the doubts about the impartial moral standpoint, it is helpful to consider how other traditions have conceived of the relationship between morality and friendship. Examining the classical Confucian tradition reveals an alternative way of conceptualizing both; moreover, it avoids the

26 On the moral danger of friendship, see Cocking and Kennett, "Friendship and Moral Danger"; Rachels, "Morality, Parents, and Children."

27 Some argue that caring about particular others brings about wider concern (Williams, *Morality*, Chap. 1. But others argue that concern for a particular person can make people's interests less open to others (Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality*, Chap. 2; friendship can form an exclusionary 'mutual admiration society' (Lewis, *Four Loves*, 88).

28 See Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, Sec. II.B.

29 Ibid., 60–72.

30 The experience of jealousy supports this view. Genuine non-instrumental concern should result in delight whenever a friend benefits, regardless of benefactor; but jealousy is sometimes experienced when others are the providers of such benefit. This suggests a selfish expectation that it is "I" who should be benefactor. Similarly, Gore Vidal's comment, "Whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies" is insightful ("A profile of Gore Vidal, whose latest novel, Burr, will be published early next year," *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 16 September, 1973).

31 Kierkegaard *Works of Love*, 58.

tension between the impartial standpoint and close friendships, since neither feature in it.

A Confucian Moral Ideal: Harmony

First, some clarifications are necessary. Discussion of the Confucian tradition will focus on the classical Confucian texts: the *Analects*, the *Mencius* and the *Xunzi*, and other texts that informed early Confucian discourse. In extrapolating the embryonic theories of these texts, I am not implying that the early Confucians explicitly discussed friendship in the ways presented here. Rather, the aim is an interpretation of classical Confucian concepts that speaks to contemporary issues.[32] Further, focusing on one conception of friendship does not mean that others were absent or that it is unique to Confucian texts or culture, but only that it is relevant to the tension between close friendships and impartiality.

How did the early Confucians understand 'morality?' Arguably, it was not from an impartial standpoint. We noted above that some scholars rejected the impartial perspective as the foundation of morality. In fact, some female writers suspect that it reflects a male point of view,[33] and seek an alternative foundational moral concept that includes the experiences of women. One such alternative foundation was suggested by Annette Baier: trust.[34] In the same spirit, I suggest that the early Confucian texts also offer an alternative moral foundation: they regarded harmony (*hé* 和) as the guiding ideal of action.[35] Such harmony is central to an alternative conception of friendship, discussed below.

32 Interpreting ancient texts in light of contemporary interests is an established practice within China's commentarial tradition. For example, Yuet Keung Lo ("Teacher-Disciple or Friends?") examines how understandings of *peng*—a term for friendship—in the Analects have varied in different eras, according to the needs of that era.

33 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*.

34 Baier, "What do Women Want," 27–32.

35 Compare this with other interpretations, including a conservative emphasis on upholding the traditional rituals of Antiquity (Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*), reading the Analects as a handbook of self-cultivation, (Hall and Ames, *Thinking through Confucius*), and reading it as an early form of role ethics. Harmony has a range of meanings in the early Chinese corpus, not all of which concern us. It also refers to a kind of cosmic unity of earth, humans and the heavens; accord between humans and nature; the smooth running of society and general social accord; or people performing the duties appropriate to their social position.

Chenyang Li writes, "*hé* 和 is probably the most cherished ideal in Chinese culture."[36] To understand why, it is helpful to contrast the metaphysical assumptions (or lack thereof) that sustain it with those behind the European Enlightenment ideal of impartial judgment applied to an extended and abstract moral constituency. The latter reflects the belief that once subjective perspectives were removed, there remained some form of rational and knowable structure that guided moral judgments. The underlying structure was posited in various ways. These include an orderly world created by God, a mechanistic universe governed by empirically discoverable laws, confidence in the measurability and commensurability of key human values like pain and pleasure and of human welfare in general, and even a generic rational agent upon which universal moral prescriptions could be based. Theoretical impartiality, as a special standard of appeal, made sense given one or more of these commitments.

The classical Confucian texts, however, largely lack this confidence in an underlying order. The *Analects*, in particular, rejects such metaphysical speculation.[37] Without it, moral judgments have a more local and limited range, applying to the situations before or around the individual, not to abstract standards of order. Moral judgment becomes relational and contextual judgments of appropriateness (harmony), or judgments grounded in concrete social rules and norms lacking any deeper form of justification aside from appeal to precedent.

Without this underlying metaphysical framework to guide judgment, the practical ideal of harmony has a profoundly relational quality. It might be characterized as unity or good fit between different parts or features. In contrast to the moral theories discussed earlier, the relation between the parts is not captured by a single concept or measure, one that unifies and makes all elements commensurable. The rightness of actions is revealed in the degree to which they display coherence, mutual fit or an organic complementarity among the assembled elements. This contextual and pragmatic attempt to find harmony among diverse elements is well-expressed by a culinary metaphor:

> Harmony (*hé*) is like making soup. One needs water, fire, vinegar, sauce, salt, and plum to cook fish and meat. One needs to cook them with

36 Li, "The Confucian Ideal of Harmony," 583.

37 Confucius refuses to speculate about supernatural issues such as spirits (7.21) and did not discuss cosmology; he did not 'speculate,' 'claim or demand certainty,' and was 'not inflexible' (9.4). The capacity of language to fully explicate or represent the effects of action is also questioned (2.13, 4.22). All translations from Ames and Rosemont, *The* Analects *of Confucius*, unless otherwise indicated.

> firewood, combine (*hé*) them together in order to balance the taste. One needs to compensate for deficiencies and reduce excessiveness.[38]

As with cooking, so action in general requires an integrating of multiple elements that defies simple formulae. Admittedly, the lack of objective standards might render harmony a problematic ideal in some areas. Lacking the basis for critique and opposition, it might give rise to a conservative political order, for example. But harmony is highly apposite for one part of the Confucian moral vision: personal bonds and relationships.

Confucian Morality and Personal Relationships[39]

The importance of personal bonds and relationships to Confucian morality is made explicit in the Confucian doctrine of the five cardinal relationships (*wulun* 五倫). This promotes social harmony through the five relationships most fundamental to social order: ruler-minister, father-son, husband-wife, older-younger (or older brother-younger brother) and friend-friend.[40] The five bonds are often thought of as social roles, such as father or son, the good performance of which is integral both to individual cultivation and a harmonious society.[41]

Friendship is one of the five cardinal relationships, and is presented in different ways in the early texts.[42] Close friendships are one such form. The

38 Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 5:684.

39 For this section especially, cf. Obeyesekere, "The Concept of Friendship in the Jātaka Tales," Wei-cheng Chu, "The Utility of 'Translated' Friendship for the Sinophone World," and especially Ping Wang's etymological overview, "The Chinese Concept of Friendship" in this volume.

40 *Mencius* 3A4 reads: "He [the sage-ruler Shun] appointed Xie minister of education in order to teach people about human relations: that between parents and child there is affection; between ruler and minister rightness; between husband and wife, separate functions; between older and younger, proper order; and between friends, trustworthiness," Bloom (2009) 57. (All *Mencius* translations from this edition.).

41 *Analects* 1.2 is the classic statement of family life as the foundation of social order.

42 Friendship's reception in the tradition is mixed. Some have argued that it became an object of suspicion (Kutcher, "The Fifth Relationship"). Its alternative loyalties allegedly threatened an imperial order in which the family was sacred, and a model for political order in which the emperor was "father" to the people. As dynastic order faded, some reformers saw friendship as key to a new Confucian order, as a relationship founded on equality and not hierarchy (Tan, *Renxue*).

relationship between musician Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi, described in the *Lushi Chunqiu* [Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lu], is the paradigm example:

> Whenever Bo Ya played the qin, Zhong Ziqi would listen to him. Once when he was playing the qin, his thoughts turned to Mount Tai. Zhong Ziqi said, 'How splendidly you play the qin! Lofty and majestic like Mount Tai.' A short time later, when his thoughts turned to rolling waters, Zhong Ziqi said, 'How splendidly you play the qin! Rolling and swelling like a rushing river.' When Zhong Ziqi died, Bo Ya smashed the qin and cut its strings. To the end of his life, he never played the qin again because he felt that there was no one in the world worth playing it for. This applies not only to the qin, but to worthiness as well.[43]

However, close friendships are not the most important kind of friendship in the texts. Friendship is often portrayed as a role in the *Analects* (2.21, 5.25). Unlike father and son, where antagonisms are avoided in order to preserve closeness (*Mencius* 7A35), friends are to be "demanding" with each other, urging each other along the Confucian way and helping to cultivate character (9.25, 12.23). The Chinese character for friendship (*you* 友) is glossed in the Book of Rites and elsewhere as "those with the same aspiration" (*tongzhi* 同志; Duan 1974), while another term for friendship, *peng* (朋), is glossed as "those having the same master" (*tongmen* 同門, lit. belonging to the same school). This friendship thus has a quasi-instrumental form; a friend is someone who can contribute to a person's cultivation and refinement.[44]

The relationship between Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi is important in another respect, however. In construing friendship in terms of musicality, it points towards another kind of Confucian friendship, one particularly relevant to the tension between friendship and impartiality. Music here serves as a metaphor for a different kind of harmony: the harmonizing of affective or emotional experiences. To anticipate, the friendship to be explored might be called event friendship. Unlike close friendships, this does not require long-standing acquaintance with another or non-instrumental concern for his or her well-being. It is distinguished by coordinated activity that creates social events distinguished by their affective quality. To unpack this requires a look at how the Confucians blended the emotions (especially delight), music, and ritual into a picture of worthwhile social activity.

43 Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 308.

44 For a contemporary discussion of Confucian friendship based on self-cultivation, see Hall and Ames, "Confucian Friendship: The Road to Religiousness."

Affective Harmony and Delight

The exemplary Confucian is not characterized by reflective moral judgments aiming at impartiality, but as someone with a rich emotional life, and whose emotions are in harmony. The Confucian classic, the *Zhongyong* (中庸), often called *The Doctrine of the Mean*, is an account of the ideal Confucian subject or sage. Its opening section explains harmony as follows:

> Happiness and anger, sorrow and joy; before they arise this is called balanced; arising in the proper rhythms (*jie* 節) this is called harmonious (*hé* 和). Balanced, this is the great root of the world; harmonious, this is the ultimate path of the world. Reaching balanced harmony, the heavens and earth take their proper place and the myriad things and events of the world are thereby nurtured.[45]

Harmony is the appropriate experiencing of joy, anger, sorrow and delight, and this is the "ultimate path of the world." Such appropriate affective experience is a precondition of wider social responsibility and ability to influence the "myriad things and events of the world." In short, affective experience is treated as a reliable guide to practical action.[46] However, "appropriate" affective experience is not simply a balance among emotions, with none experienced to excess; nor does it mean a temperate disciplining of inner feelings, achieved in spite of the pressures of the everyday world. The ideal affective life attains a rhythmic or dynamic attunement (*jie* 節) with events in the social world. Another Confucian classic, the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*) illustrates this social and inter-subjective character of affective harmony. Ode 161 contains the following:

> The deer sound pleasantly as they graze in the field,
> I entertain honorable guests with the music of drums and strings

45 Sec. 1, translation mine.

46 The title "*Zhongyong*" is relevant to the account of ideal conduct developed here. It is composed of two characters, *zhong* 中 and *yong* 庸. *Zhong* means focus, balance, hitting the target, or maintaining a dynamic equilibrium. *Yong* means "everyday," "commonplace," with the character originally denoting the menial task of de-husking rice. The importance of focusing on the everyday and commonplace—including personal interactions—as an ethical task is thus implicit in the title. Section three of the *Zhongyong* makes this explicit: "Focusing the familiar affairs of the day is a task of the highest order. It is rare among the common people to be able to sustain it for long" (Hall and Ames, *Focusing the Familiar*, Sec. 3).

> With such beautiful music, there are profound harmony (*hé*) and joy (*le*).
> With elegant wines, I entertain the heart of the honorable guest.[47]

Similarly, Ode 164 includes:

> Enjoying the dishes and wines with all your brothers,
> There are harmony (*hé*) and joy (*le*) like playful children.
> Enjoying the union with wife and children,
> It is like the mingling of drums and strings.
> With brothers in concord there are profound harmony and joy.
> Thus you bring good to house and home,
> Joy to wife and child.
> I have deeply studied; I have pondered.
> It is truly so.[48]

The poems suggest that affective harmony is created by attending to events shared with others, and unfolding before oneself in the here-and-now. Echoing this theme, the *Analects* notes that harmony is the guiding concern of the social activity of ritual interaction (1.12), and the aim of affective harmony between people is well-captured in the image of Confucius joining in with the harmonies of his disciples' songs (7. 32).

The poems above also suggest something else. Affective harmony is directed towards a certain endpoint or goal. It gives actions something to aim at, a teleological structure. This is the realization of a particular affective experience: joy or delight (*le* 樂). Notably, the character for delight (*le* 樂) and its musical counterpart (*yue* 樂, see below), appear more frequently in the *Analects* (48 times) than filial conduct (*xiao*) and appropriateness or justice (*yi*) combined—two concepts usually thought central to Confucian morality. Perhaps the most vivid expression of delight's importance is found in the *Mencius*.[49] Here, delight is the euphoric outcome of cultivating the Confucian virtues of humaneness (*ren*), appropriateness or justice (*yi*), wisdom (*zhi*), and ritual propriety (*li*):

Mencius said:

> The greatest fruit (*shi*) of humaneness (*ren*) is serving one's parents. The greatest fruit of a sense of justice and appropriateness (*yi*) is going along

47 Trans. Li Chenyang, "The Ideal of Harmony in Ancient Greek and Chinese Philosophy," 81.

48 Ibid, 82.

49 For the ethical importance of delight and the shared experience of it, see *Mencius* 1A2; 2B1; 2B4.

> with one's elder brother. The greatest fruit of wisdom (*zhi*) is knowing these two things and not abandoning them. The greatest fruit of ritual propriety (*li*) is regulating and civilizing these two. The greatest fruit of music is taking joy (*le*) in these two. When there is joy, they grow. When they grow, how can they be stopped? If they cannot be stopped, then without realizing, one's feet begin to step in time to them and one's hands dance according to their rhythms.[50]

This passage conveys the remarkable idea that when relationships with parents and siblings go well, following Confucian virtues, they result in a crescendo of emotional experience so intense that spontaneous dancing erupts. Confirming the importance of delight, passage 6.20 in the *Analects* offers a hierarchical account of individual experience in which the capacity for delight is primary: "Knowing is no match for liking; liking is no match for delighting."[51] Conduct is ordered by taking affective sensibilities as basic data to guide action.

Structuring Delight through Music and Ritual

Just as there are several conceptions of harmony, so delight is not the only end at which action aims. Maintaining "face" and avoiding shame are also integral to Confucian harmony. However, the texts convey confidence that delight can responsibly coordinate action, and is not merely a capricious private experience. This is confirmed by the second meaning of the character for delight or joy. The same character also means musical conduct (*yue* 樂), understood broadly to include singing and dancing, and the coordinated activity of making music.[52] The Book of Rites illustrates the power of music to coordinate emotions and conduct, here within the framework of the five cardinal relationships:

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50 *Mencius* 4A27, translation mine, following Irene Bloom's *Mencius*. Cf. the Great Preface to the *Book of Songs*: "Song is the result of dispositions. It resides in the heart-mind as dispositions and is articulated in language as song. One's feelings stir within one's breast, and take form in words. When words are inadequate, they are voiced as sighs. When sighs are inadequate, they are chanted. When chants are inadequate, unconsciously, the hands and feet begin to dance them." Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 4: 34.

51 Other Analects passages on the social dimension of delight include 3.3 and 16.5.

52 The idea that harmony in music can bring about harmony between people predates the Confucian texts, and is found in the oracle bones and bronze inscriptions. See Chenyang Li, "The Confucian Ideal of Harmony."

> For this reason, when there is music in the ancestral temple, both ruler and minister, superior and inferior listen to it together, and none fails to be harmonious and respectful. When there is music among the clan elders and townspeople, elder and younger listen to it together, and none fails to be harmonious and orderly. When it is played within the gates and doorways of a house, father and son, older and younger brother together listen to it, and none fails to be harmonious and intimate. Thus it is music…that unites father and son, ruler and minister; it is music that creates familial bonds among a myriad of peoples. This is the method behind the former kings' establishment of music.[53]

These elements for directing conduct—the coordinating of affective experience, delight, and their use to ensure that human relationships go well—are combined in another foundational element of Confucian social life: ritual (*li* 禮).[54] Confucian ritual can be understood in several ways, some highly conservative. Here, however, the important sense is the coordination of action and creation of affective experiences through ritual.

The *Analects* confirms that ritual is more than merely performing roles according to a script. Confucius declares:

> In referring time and again to observing ritual propriety (*li*), how could I just be talking about gifts of jade and silk? In referring time and again to making music (*yue*), how could I just be talking about bells and drums?"[55]

Ritual is significant not for its rule-like formality, but for the affective experience bound up with its performance.[56] Passage 8.8 confirms ritual's role in creating a subject sensitized to the creation of delight: "The Master said: the Songs arouse [the affective life], ritual shapes it [around the social world] and musical experience brings it to completion."[57]

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53 Zehou Li, *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*, 19. A similar passage appears in the Watson, *Xunzi*, 113.

54 On the gradual historical shaping of emotions around communal practices and symbols in China, see Li Zehou, *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*.

55 Ames and Rosemont, Analects *of Confucius*, 206.

56 Other passages emphasizing affective experience in ritualized interaction include 1.13, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.26.

57 1.12 offers a historical endorsement of this function of ritual, "The most valuable function of ritual is [the creation of] harmony; it is precisely such harmony that made the way of the former kings a thing of beauty." In 8.8, *xing* could be read without an affective

To make this approach to ritual clearer, consider it independently of the texts for a moment, simply as a gathering of people in which all participate in a social event.[58] Ritual directs people's attention towards a communal event, giving each a role, and structures participants' affective experiences around the constitutive practices and gestures. All participants play their part in contributing to an overall effect. To see this, consider an analogy with a sporting event. The players, coaches, referees and crowd each have their part to play in the event going well. Without umpires, the game descends into bickering between players; without an audience, the players are less motivated. The actions of each are also constrained by certain norms (the rules of the game for players and referees, reliable strategies for coaches, and non-abusive chants for the supporters) while still leaving room for interpretation and personal effort (referees have to make interpretive inferences from the rules, based on their own experiences and judgments). Whether the event goes well or badly depends on the contribution of each of these participants. But the event itself, considered as a whole, forms the object for an important kind of affective experience, which we are here calling delight, and which distinguishes it as an event. The delight that participants feel is based partly on their contribution to the overall event, and also on their response to or appreciation of that event.

Notably, the memory of the event also serves to regulate and direct action. Participants might seek to repeat the experience, and become more civilized in other areas of personal interaction away from the stadium in order to preserve the conditions necessary for this. They might also feel a certain respect for those who shared in it and even a preparedness to identify with and protect the community that contributed to it. A sporting event thus provides a semi-formal way of harmonizing people's attitudes and affective experiences; so does ritual in classical Confucian thought.

An Alternative Form of Friendship: Event Friendship

We have now examined all the elements of a distinctive approach to action, one that also suggests a distinctive conception of friendship. The same kind of memorable and moving social event created in ritual, can be created in friendship, with one modification. As ritual structures delight and secures a certain

element, as simply "flourish" or "begin" (see 13.5). But *xing* in the Analects often has an affective and motivational sense of "inspiring" or "arousing" (8.2 and 17.9).

58 Roy Rappaport (*Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*) discusses what makes an event a ritual, and analyzes the constitutive features of ritual.

quality of interaction in formal contexts, so the same aim pursued between people in unstructured or informal contexts is a form of friendship. As the very first line of the *Analects* notes, describing the event of a long-delayed reunion, "To have a friend visit from afar, is it not a joy (*le*)?"[59]

Friendship as an agreeable, shared emotional experience created by willing participants is encapsulated by 11.26. Confucius asks his students how they might express their worth or achievements, and after the other disciples have given answers pertaining to the political realm, the disciple Zengxi answers:

> At the end of spring with the spring clothes having already been finished, I would like, in the company of five or six young men and six or seven children, to cleanse ourselves in the Yi River, to revel in the cool breezes at the Altar for Rain and then return home singing. The Master heaved a deep sigh and declared, 'I'm with Zengxi!'[60]

Friendship can consist in the quest for affective harmony—shared delight—through unplanned and unstructured activities as these arise among people in the course of the day. For the Confucians, those who can create moving experiences as they advance through the rolling series of personal interactions that make up a day are sages, and acquire a form of charismatic authority.

A useful metaphor for this friendship, which captures the Confucian linkage of music and action, is an informal musical "jamming" session. When people gather to make music, the responses of each musician depend on the notes played by others. The notes played must harmonize with others, and a discordant note ruins the overall effect. This requires skill and attentiveness; but there is room for creativity and novelty; any participant can try something new, something playful, within the constraints of the music. When this interaction goes well, there is an overall effect that is shared by all—the exhilaration of being in harmony with others, of contributing to the experience and sharing in it with others.

Moving from music to daily life, and unlike close friendships, this account presents an "ethical task" for friendship, a novel conception of obligation. This is twofold: to transform routine interpersonal interactions into events; and to extend the circle of people with whom such events are created. The latter is possible because the basis for action is transferred from close friendship's knowledge of character to imaginatively integrating all people and features of the situation into the event.

59 *Analects* 1.1, translation mine.

60 *Analects* 11.26, trans. Ames and Rosemont.

Evaluating Event Friendship

Event friendship avoids the tension between close friendships and impartiality. It does so because in realizing harmony, event friendship realizes a moral ideal, and the demands of friendship and of morality are thus aligned.

But event friendship has relevance outside the Confucian tradition, since it is also less susceptible to the objections directed at the impartial viewpoint and at close friendships. It satisfies the intuitive demand for impartiality, without relying on an impartial standpoint, and in a way that close friendships do not. Close friendships are often restricted and exclusive. In contrast, event friendship can be initiated with a much broader range of people. Furthermore, the practical ideal of achieving a quality of interaction is open with regard to who can participate. Events can be created by a group of people, not merely two who share an intimate bond.

Similarly, there are no barriers arising from the time needed to become familiar with another's character or the need to develop a sense of admiration, liking or care for that particular person. It is therefore more open to those who are initially strangers than close friendship. An individual life might in reality be made up of interactions with a very limited number of people, but there is no principled distinction between an inner core of intimates and an excluded periphery; there are no formal restrictions on who may participate in this friendship. This openness is thus a form of impartiality, since a quality of interaction can be achieved with anyone who enters the subject's local social world.

Event friendships are less personal than close friendships. It also appears to derive from a duty-like disposition to create social events, which for the Confucians is the result of socialization into social roles and family duties. This contrasts with the folk belief that friendship is a voluntary matter, a matter of choice. But overemphasizing individual character, goodwill, similarity and choice can obscure other valuable forms of friendship. Close friendships might be more intense, and subjectively more important, and yet be a less ethical form of friendship than relationships with people who are not our best friends.

An objection might be raised against claiming event friendship as an ethical phenomenon. Namely, that it makes morality too parochial, too ignorant of wider social issues. It loses the capacity to criticize social structure and impersonal states of affairs. Many ethical problems cannot be resolved through personal bonds.

Two points can be offered in response. First, most people's experience of 'morality' is local and social. The majority of issues that occupy many people focus on their local community. How they get along with those encountered on most days or for the first time, what antagonisms arise during the flow

of daily interactions, and the degree of trust and social standing they enjoy, are the salient practical issues. Maintenance of a broad web of affective relationships appears as important for a good life as a few close friends. Event friendship draws on this view of morality as something local, social and interpersonal, rather than as abstract and remote practical dilemmas infrequently confronted, such as abortion, euthanasia and just war—often the focus in contemporary applied ethics.

Further, personal relationships are not politically impotent. Amorphous or rhizome-like webs of friendship-like relationships can influence, by-pass or even oppose political authority. For example, when centrally-issued laws are insufficiently responsive to local communities, webs of affective ties act as a corrective. Guanxi networks (networks of personal connections) in modern East Asian societies yield examples of this.[61]

Second, perhaps "morality" is not a unitary phenomenon, but is constituted by different realms of practical activity, in which different normative ideals apply. In the political realm, theoretical impartiality might be paramount. But when decisions arise in more local and personal contexts, then friendship and its practices are a better guide. On this view, practical wisdom consists in grasping how best to conceptualize a situation, and thus which kind of moral thinking should guide action. This would be a kind of ethical relativism, shorn of a single standard of moral rightness; but it need not be pernicious, as practical disputes could still be resolved to people's satisfaction.

Conclusion

Barry's dilemma illustrates the tension between the perspectives of the impartial standpoint and that of close friends, and that which should take priority is sometimes unclear. In fact, Barry eventually testified against Hank. But others might believe a different conclusion was warranted. *Analects* 13.18, for example, approves of a son who covers for a father when the latter steals a sheep, rather than turn him over to the authorities.

In fact, the early Confucian tradition cannot provide an easy resolution to Barry's dilemma; there isn't one. But exploring the tradition makes clearer the assumptions about friendship and morality that generate the tension, and illustrates how the two have been conceptualized differently in different times and places. In classical Confucian thought the categories of personal relationships and morality converge, finding unity in the ideal of harmony. Applying

61 Otis and Lo, "*Guanxi* Civility"; Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets*.

this insight to more contemporary times reveals that it is possible to think in the wrong way about friendship. Relying on thoughts of freedom, choice and preference, and driven by attraction and inclination, might mean a failure to develop relationships that might be developed with a different sensibility or understanding of the situation. The Confucian account makes us think of friendship as a task, driven by the possibility of creating events that stir both parties.

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