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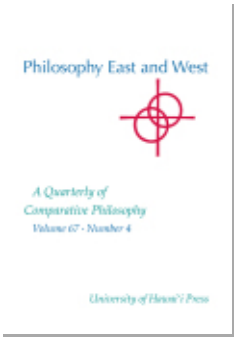

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FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF RATIONAL AUTONOMY TO THE VIRTUOSITY OF EMPATHETIC EMBODIMENT: RECLAIMING THE MODERN SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFUCIAN CIVILIZATION

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With the recent economic ascendancy of China, there has been increasing research on various aspects of Chinese culture and growing interest in the modern significance of Confucian teachings.[1] Roger T. Ames, among others, has praised the Confucian legacy as "one substantial resource for informing and inspiring new directions in human culture, a legacy that for the past two centuries and largely for economic and political reasons, has been muted and ignored." Heralding the emergence of a new world order, Ames argues that Confucianism "offers us philosophical assets that can be resourced and applied to serve not only the renaissance of a revitalized Chinese culture, but also the interests of world culture more broadly."[2]

Unfortunately, the value and significance of the Confucian *cultural heritage* have largely been ignored by mainstream Western intellectuals, and especially by philosophers. One of the biggest predicaments of the Chinese cultural tradition consists in the so-called legitimacy of Chinese philosophy, namely whether Chinese thought can and should be regarded as a legitimate "system of philosophy." In my view, one major cause for the prevalent exclusion and marginalization of Chinese and other non-Western intellectual traditions from the discipline of philosophy is the narrow-minded conception of philosophy as informed by traditional and modern Western methodologies and paradigms pivoting on *logical* argumentation and demonstration. For most Western philosophers, it seems quite reasonable to disprove or disregard the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy on account of the apparent lack of comparable rational argumentation and scientific methodologies in traditional Chinese thought.

Remarkably, the insistence on this narrow definition of philosophy is not simply an innocuous preference in labeling. It showcases rather the deleterious ethnocentric biases that are still active in reducing all forms of non-Western thought, based on their alleged lack of "philosophical reasoning," as religious and superstitious beliefs without the "critical" and rational spirit that is the privilege of Western philosophical traditions. With a view to striving against this Western disparagement, it has become quite customary and even obligatory for champions of Chinese philosophy to vindicate and promote the values of traditional Chinese thought by *boxing up* the traditional Chinese intellectual elements into the grid of dominant Western conceptual frameworks. Paradoxically, this expedient tactic of validation acquiesces and encourages further the tenacious mentality that Chinese thought is in essence irrational and

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inscrutable unless it can be matched up with the authoritative Western methodologies and paradigms. As a result, in current academic and political settings, the spirit of Chinese and Confucian cultural ideals can have little more than distorted and suffocated expressions. They are seldom understood on their own terms. With their citizenship suspended for permanent scrutinizing, devoted disciples of Chinese philosophy indeed seem to have no choice but to submit to their fate as either vagrants or vassals in the Kingdom of Philosophy.

As I see it, the discounting of the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy bears out the detrimental influence of two big-headed mentalities of the modern West. One is the ethnocentrism informed by modern Western imperialism and colonialism that has tenaciously disregarded the cultural identities of less developed countries as equivalent to their Western counterparts. The other is the intellectual and cultural prejudice that dismisses any elements in other cultural and intellectual traditions that are *different* from, and thus "inscrutable" under, the "superior" Western conceptual frameworks. One refuses to recognize other cultures as having the *same* validity and integrity as one's own culture. The other dismisses the significance of other cultures precisely on account of their *difference* from one's own conceptual habits. It is thus intriguing that despite their opposite orientations, these two mentalities often go hand in hand with each other in protecting and promoting the supreme authority of modern Western ideologies and institutions.

Certainly, I am mindful of the growing support for Chinese culture and philosophy by many modern Western intellectuals. The question is why has the prejudice against Chinese philosophy been so persistent and how should we deal with it? It would of course be easy to proclaim that we should promote mutual respect and understanding of all cultural traditions and candid cross-cultural dialogues by *overcoming* and *eliminating* all kinds of prejudice. High-sounding as it is, this simple-minded proposal has only a dim prospect of success. For the fact of the matter is that intellectual and cultural prejudices are *inevitable* in all cross-cultural dialogues and integrations; they are present and persistent in the comprehension of Western ideas and institutions by Eastern peoples as well. As I see it, the big-headed ethnocentric mentalities cannot simply be attributed to the presence of cultural prejudices or to the naive assumption of such prejudices as the universal condition of human understanding. They stem rather from the philosophy of entitlement, either from the refusal to acknowledge such prejudices or from the presumptuous maintenance that such prejudices are irrevocable as they are the prerogatives of particular cultural identities. Indeed, the noxious consequences of ethnocentrism would diminish instantly as soon as the authority of these prejudices are questioned and contained, when they are not "imposed" as the uniform condition for all human understandings. Hence, the clarification and critical analysis of such entrenched prejudices may well be the best stepping-stone for the leap toward reciprocal respect and understanding in cross-cultural dialogues.

In what follows, I will take a cue first from some typical Western prejudices against Chinese culture as represented by Alasdair MacIntyre's provocative questions and commentaries for Confucian ethics in his candid engagements with a group of

prominent scholars of Chinese philosophy. My purpose here is not to chastise the prejudices embedded in MacIntyre's well-intentioned argument. Remarkably, as a leading voice in contemporary moral and political discourse and an advocate of dialogue between different traditions, MacIntyre's engagement with Chinese philosophy is both candid and commendable. And yet, precisely because of its candidness, MacIntyre's commentaries on Confucian philosophers are expedient in exposing some persistent problems and limitations in the current cross-cultural dialogue and scholarship on Confucianism. By laying bare these prevalent prejudices for critical analysis, I hope to pave the way for an alternative approach to the hermeneutics of Chinese thinking and cross-cultural dialogue that is not dictated by the authority of rational and scientific argumentation, but inspired by the empathetic openness to the matter itself.

The clearing of the typical liberal prejudices sheds a new light on the nature and importance of the Confucian tradition. As I will show, the Confucian order of ritual is not the hierarchy of power and domination sanctioning the privileges and interests of the aristocrats and social elites. It is rather a rule of benefaction centering on selfless and sagacious leadership by those who are able to disseminate the cosmic cycle of grace and sacrifice through harmonious social union with care and reverence, with poetical mindfulness and virtuosity. The essence of the Confucian project is to transform conventional power hierarchies into an order of honor and devotion that is oriented toward the general cultivation of moral character. The central mission of the Confucian order of ritual is the production of the ideal type of humanity, one informed by sympathetic intelligence, and a happy union of soul and intellect, head and heart.

Taking on the controversies over the autonomous and relational nature of the Confucian self, I will make evident the view that the ideal of Confucian personality is neither rational autonomy nor passive heteronomy, but what I shall call the virtuosity of empathetic embodiment. It is the cultivation of this virtuosity that is the ideal of Confucian moral enlightenment, which is not governed by the principle of autonomy and rationality, but is rather inspired by sympathetic and spontaneous resonance among all beings. With unique emphasis on empathetic persuasion and personal exemplification, the Confucian approach of moral education promises a middle path for the healthy and harmonious development of both the individual and society without implicating the rigid autocracy of conventional hierarchies or the dissolute manners of radical individualism. It marks a way of civilization aspiring to the opportune synchronization of the ideals of progress and renaissance, for the regeneration of the miracle of being that originates in the organic harmony of sky, earth, and humankind through recurrent art and ritual enactments.

What Is the Matter with Hierarchies? Reexamining Alasdair MacIntyre's Critique of Confucianism

As the expression of an "outsider" in relation to the Chinese tradition, MacIntyre's engaging attitude toward and profuse knowledge of Chinese philosophy are admi-

rable. For MacIntyre, we now "inhabit a world in which ethical inquiry without a comparative dimension is obviously defective."[3] The Confucian ethical tradition is important as "the most influential source of non-Western values" in "many of the economically-advancing societies of the Pacific Rim." More than any other Asian standpoint, it "challenges some of the key assumptions of modern Western morality effectively, while providing a viable alternative to them."

Even for MacIntyre, however, the significance of Confucian tradition comes less from its intrinsic vitality and integrity than from two sorts of pragmatic concerns: (1) the growing needs of Chinese individuals and families to present and preserve their cultural values in their Western host countries, and the similar needs of Western individuals/families in China, and (2) the increasing cross-cultural economic and political transactions prompted by so-called globalization, which MacIntyre recognizes as "the new mask worn by American Imperialism."[4] Hence, Confucian ethics is respected as one of the many competing systems of moral values that ought to assert their rights of utterance on the platform of rational and multicultural discourse with a view to overcoming the cultural narrowness of liberal ideologies.

Informed by these two concerns, MacIntyre argues for the "necessity" of a specifically Confucian concept of rights, despite the apparent lack of such a concept in well-governed traditional Chinese and other non-Western societies. In sum, there are two main reasons for this argument. The first reason is what may be called the "amoral nature" of the modern nation-state. A set of legally established and enforceable rights is indispensable for individuals in modern nation-states to protect themselves from the potential abuses of various political and economic organizations. This is so because modern political societies, except in the lip service of certain politicians, cannot be genuine communities based on the conception of the common good—communities that really care for the well-being and moral development of their individual members. This amoral nature of the modern nation-state is determined by certain economic and technological conditions of modern societies: (1) the unprecedentedly great set of heterogeneous social and technological resources that the modern states must manage to allocate, and (2) the competing interests of diverse social and economic groups that have to be accommodated through a series of compromises based on the bargaining power and interrelationships of these groups. Accordingly, the priorities and policies of modern governments are not to promote the common good of the people, but to secure the efficient operation of their distributive mechanisms by the norms of neutrality and procedural justice.

Second, a Confucian concept of rights is also necessary because of the alleged lack of a critical and reflective dimension in traditional Confucianism, which is evidenced by the oppressive hierarchies of traditional Asian societies in which Confucianism had flourished for so long.[5] The prevalence of these oppressive hierarchies attests to the "practical denial of the capacity for reflective self-direction" of the vast majority of the common people. It bears out the Confucian failure to recognize the moral potentiality of these individuals (e.g., women and workers) and to assume "any responsibility for the frustration of their moral development, let alone for their subjection and exploitation."[6] Considering this apparent tension between the Confucian

project of moral development and the oppressive hierarchies in traditional Confucian societies, the institution of a Confucian concept of right becomes imperative for the construction of a modern egalitarian social form in China that will grant all individuals their due place within the family and society.

Overall, MacIntyre's analyses of the problems faced by contemporary Confucianism are pragmatic and provocative. Considering the prevalence of modern economic and political order, a specifically Confucian concept of human rights is no doubt useful for contemporary Confucians to preserve and promote traditional Confucian values. However, MacIntyre's argument involves certain prejudices that call for careful reflection. In what follows, I will lay bare these prejudices as I venture a tentative response to the two sets of questions above raised by MacIntyre. My purpose is less to chastise these particular prejudices, than to demonstrate the limitations of scientific methodologies like rational argumentation that still direct current cross-cultural dialogue and scholarship on Confucian ethics. By exposing these prejudices and limitations, I hope to bring out the Confucian approach of moral enlightenment through sympathetic resonance and correspondence as a vital alternative to a Western ethics governed by the rule of rationality.

Let me start first with the questions about the so-called "Confucian hierarchies of oppression" that are very representative of modern scholarly and popular opinions of traditional Confucian societies. From the liberal perspective, the presence of such hierarchies of oppression is a major target of criticism that justifies various revolutions against Confucian China and other premodern societies. Admittedly, there were many *instances* of oppression and exploitation in ancient China as in the rest of the ancient and modern world. Modern liberal ideas and institutions should certainly take credit for reducing and eradicating certain forms of abuse in traditional societies. However, the overgeneralized liberal criticisms of conventional "oppressive" hierarchies are not always justifiable as they often bear out the lack of a critical attitude of their own. After all, modern liberal societies are plagued by many new forms of oppression and exploitation as well. The moral authority and superiority proclaimed by modern liberals, hence, is deeply questionable. For one thing, we clearly do not have sufficient data and records, let alone an impartial set of criteria, to measure the comprehensive level of oppression in ancient China in comparison with that in other premodern societies and in our modern societies today. As a matter of fact, the condemnation of traditional societies is often used as a reckless political tactic for replacing conventional social structures with liberal revolutions, careless of the direction toward actual promotion or devastation of the well-being of a society. Insofar as traditional Confucian society is concerned, I believe there are at least three important reasons why such overgeneralized criticisms are untenable.

First, the mere fact that Confucianism has long *co-existed* with certain oppressive social hierarchies and practices in ancient Chinese history does not prove that Confucianism "endorsed" or even "acquiesced" to such oppression. To believe that it did involves a typical logical fallacy that imposes a *causal* or intrinsic relation between two events that just happen to *correlate* with each other. We know, for example, that

medication and vaccination, since their very invention, have co-existed with various diseases and epidemics. Many of these diseases have not been eradicated by these medicines. On the contrary, despite the use of vaccination, some types of influenza in the United States have persisted year after year and even intensified in certain years. But although it may be right to question the efficacy of vaccination, it would be absurd to condemn its use as the virtual endorsement of diseases just because of their long co-existence.

In my view, although traditional Confucian teachings indeed grant a "provisional" authority to the conventional power structures based on the division of labor between the regulator (those who labor with their hearts and minds) and the regulated (those who labor with physical effort),[7] they have never *endorsed* any of the abusive and oppressive practices of authoritarian rulers. As Henry Rosemont and Roger Ames argue, there were no abusive or oppressive attitudes and behaviors that were ever "championed in the Confucian texts; on the contrary, they were all uniformly condemned in unequivocal terms." With regard to the Confucian ideal of family, which epitomizes an ideal for all social and political organizations, Rosemont and Ames further pinpoint "a pervasive and seemingly invincible misreading . . . that equates hierarchical structure with coercion and the absence of simple equality with oppression."[8] Remarkably, the goal of the Confucian approach of moral enlightenment is to domesticate conventional hierarchical structures into organic civil unions in which the superiors and subordinates will live up to their opportune heavenly vocations and social responsibilities autonomously without the imposition of any authoritative injunctions. Hence, while the historical efficacy of this gentle and gradual approach of moral transformation is debatable, the integrity of the Confucian project remains indisputable.[9]

Second, it is true that there was not much prospect for most ancient Chinese women and workers in lower social strata to move up the social ladder toward prestigious positions with great wealth and power. Nor, in general, did they have the opportunity for higher *intellectual* education. But such historical constraints in the distribution of social and economic opportunities cannot substantiate the charges concerning the Confucian denial of proper *moral* development to women and the masses. In fact, in ancient Chinese and many other societies, "moral education" did not necessitate the kind of formal schooling we entertain today. It might take a variety of forms within the process of daily transactions and ritual enactments by means of personal influence and communal persuasion. According to the abundant evidence in the classical Confucian texts and reliable historical records, moreover, moral education for *all* members of the society was the central concern of the ancient Chinese civil order. That education is possible and should be provided for all people is indeed a principal teaching of Confucius that has been influential throughout Chinese history.[10]

Here, it is helpful to remember that a good portion of ancient Chinese leaders and officials were coming from the lower social strata; many of them were selected and promoted from the grassroots when their virtues and talents were duly

recognized either through personal recommendations or through the well-developed system of national examinations.[11] Therefore, although there was not the kind of social mobility intended by modern liberals, the allocation of prestigious positions in ancient China was actually more flexible and meritocratic than prescribed by most other ancient aristocratic societies such as in ancient and medieval Europe. At the same time, the test of Confucian moral development, let us recall, is never the possession of greater wealth and power but greater care and devotion to live up to the duties provided by the social order. Therefore, it is mistaken to attribute the limited social mobility in ancient China to inadequate moral education. In fact, it may be true, not only for the ancient Chinese but for almost everyone in any age, that moral development and perfection are only possible within the specific roles and limits determined by their social and natural functions.

Last but not least, the presence of hierarchical structures is a basic feature of all sophisticated human societies including those of the modern liberal West. Therefore, it is the nature and function of these hierarchies, not their mere existence, that should inform our judgment of a particular civil order. Now, contrary to some still influential scholarly opinions, the essence of Confucian order or ritual is not hierarchy of power and domination based on the ratification of elitist, aristocratic, or despotic privileges and interests. Strictly speaking, it is not even some form of meritocracy in which individuals with superior talents and aptitudes are rewarded with positions that endow them with greater rights and profits. Rather, the essence of Confucian civil order is an order of honor and devotion. It is the virtuous rule of benefaction in which the roles of leadership are only justifiable by a leader's kindness and benevolence in protecting the benefits that go to the people. The higher institutional positions do not certify greater profits and entitlements but require greater sacrifice and responsibility. Thus, despite their different social rank and responsibilities, all members of the community are equivalent in their common belonging to the grand cosmic cycle of grace and sacrifice, to the harmonious circulation and personification of the cosmic vibrancy that supports the life of all beings.[12]

All in all, there are certainly valuable lessons modern Confucians can and should learn from liberal ideas and institutions with regard to the intellectual and social advancement of women and the masses. But the injustice attributed to conventional power structures in traditional Confucian societies should not be taken as an excuse to justify modern condemnation of the "integrity" of the Confucian moral and political teachings, or the alleged lack of critical spirit in the Confucian tradition. Remarkably, Confucius and his followers never blindly and unconditionally ratified the validity of these conventional power hierarchies. The provisional acceptance of such hierarchies was based on a judicious deliberation that prioritized a gradual moral transformation over radical structural revolution. What is crucial here is to recognize the distinctive Confucian project of moral transformation that, in contrast to the liberal campaign for the general empowerment of all individuals with rights and freedoms, pivots on the general cultivation of moral character, namely on the moral enlightenment of all persons so that they conscientiously live up to the heavenly vocations and social functions that are presented to them.[13]

By defending the Confucian tradition against certain typical modern criticisms, I do not mean to romanticize the value and effectiveness of Confucian teachings in the long history of China. Just like the persistence of various diseases and epidemics despite ever advancing medical technology today, vicious and violent practices were never absent in ancient China despite sincere and sympathetic Confucian endeavors to remedy them. No society is perfect. But it is precisely for this reason that the mere presence of instances of oppression and exploitation in ancient China is not a sufficient reason to disparage and dismiss the "integrity" of traditional Confucian teachings. Nor is it a proof that these problems of hierarchical oppression cannot be coped with and properly addressed within the Confucian tradition without imposing the liberal concepts of rights.

Admittedly, the concept of rights can be "useful" for modern Confucians as they defend themselves against the oppressive forces of the modern state and continue to overcome certain conventional oppressive practices in the modern setting. Here, I am not in a position to expand on the complex meanings of rights and the intriguing possibilities for a Confucian concept of rights, a topic that I have to leave for later study. What I would like to question here, however, is a typical prejudice implicated in MacIntyre's insistence on the "necessity" of the concept of rights for modern Confucians. In my view, MacIntyre's argument seems to involve a lack of critical thinking about the following two key questions: (1) Can we find adequate moral and legal sources in classical Confucian/Chinese tradition (e.g., regarding the dignity of the individual; the organic harmony of the family, society, and the cosmos; the order of ritual as a rule of benefaction; etc.) to protect every member of the society from potential oppression by the state and other agencies? (2) Is the concept of rights itself sufficient to effect the elimination of the various forms of oppression and exploitation in both traditional and modern societies?

My primary concern here is that the concept of rights is a double-edged sword in that it is accountable for the very kind of problems and exploitation it claims to resolve. According to the meticulous research of Gary Herbert, the very idea of "rights" has been continually manipulated into a form of "philosophical legitimation for the abuses and repressive forces of bourgeois institutions, the justification of political exploitation, [and] social, economic, [and] sex subjugation" in various modern transactions.[14] Indeed, only when we recognize the limitations of the concept of rights are we able to discern the *double standard*—a lack of consistent use of critical reasoning in MacIntyre's comparative evaluation of the modern significance of Confucian moral teachings. It is curious that while MacIntyre is totally critical toward the so-called Confucian hierarchies that must be transformed in line with the universal principle of human rights, he remains mostly acquiescent to the "amoral" nature of modern nation-states as an inevitable and invariable condition despite invidious problems and consequences.

However, MacIntyre's reason for endorsing this amoral nature of the modern nation-state, which boils down to the "scale" of the economic and technological

resources it has to manage, is inadequate and unconvincing. This stems from a lack of critical deliberation on a set of fundamental questions concerning modern political economy: Should the capitalistic mode of market economy and industrial and technological expansion command an absolute authority that inevitably reduces the function of modern states to that of an impersonal allocator and arbiter who perfunctorily distributes goods with a procedural justice that is lacking in any moral vision? Or should the market economy and technological innovation be taken as a "means" for promoting the common good of the society? That is to say, should the operations of corporations and markets be *contained* and *coordinated* to serve the best interests of local, national, and global communities in promoting sustainable growth and the cultivation of rational and responsible human beings?

MacIntyre, of course, is fully aware and critical of the invidious consequences of modern political transactions that are controlled by the elites of wealth and power. Seeing the inadequacy of this politics of bargaining, MacIntyre argues strongly for the deliberative politics of local communities as epitomized by the Aristotelian ideal of the Greek city-state, which is seen as a way to promote virtue and excellence among people. Indeed, MacIntyre's conscientious engagement with the Confucian tradition attests to his good intention to recognize an Eastern counterpart for his project, which aims to remedy the problematic transactions of modern nation-states by reinstating an Aristotelian virtue ethics and reviving deliberative mechanisms in local communities.

Be that as it may, it remains questionable why MacIntyre should take this amoral rule of modern nation-states, which is the basic tenet of contemporary liberal theory of government, as an inevitable consequence of modern economic and technological conditions—only to be compromised by the development of deliberative bodies in *local* communities. For one thing, I do not understand how modern liberals, with all their championing of freedom of choice, have come to ignore the blatant inconsistency in their very argument that the basic form and administration of political institutions should be determined by the economic and technological bases of a society, but not by the free *choices* of rational and responsible human beings. Now if we were to accept the amoral rule of modern nation-states as the *necessary* outcome of modern economic conditions, then people in traditional societies (e.g., on the model of Confucius, Aristotle, or indigenous peoples) would be justified in arguing that the presence of the social and political hierarchies they endorse were nothing but *necessary* outcomes of the economic conditions and technological developments of their times. Thus, the modern liberal condemnation of traditional societies, with its uncritical acceptance of the amoral nature of modern nation-states, would itself imply the cryptic use of a double standard; the tactic of such argumentation is still caught up in the Scylla and Charybdis of ethical absolutism and relativism.

Furthermore, how can local communities with their deliberative politics as envisioned by MacIntyre truly flourish or even survive under the amoral and insensate machination of national and global political maneuvers? Have the invasions of corporatism and overpowering state administrations not been the major causes for the historical decline and destruction of various local communities along with their fea-

ture, home-grown businesses and family associations? Is MacIntyre supposing that we are able to overturn these invidious consequences without attending to and redressing their historical causes?

Finally, yet importantly, it would be pertinent to point out a couple of omissions in MacIntyre's argument. Henry Rosemont, among others, has well illustrated the Confucian ideas and institutions underlying the commitment to caring for and protecting the sick, poor, and unlettered. Such practices are obviously to the credit of the Confucian system, as compared to the utter negligence shown toward slaves and the underprivileged that is endorsed by Plato and Aristotle in their rigid aristocratic hierarchies.[15] However, MacIntyre pays little attention to the substantial superiority of the Confucian type of political system, which he holds responsible for similar serious defects in the Aristotelian system. More importantly, neither MacIntyre nor the scholars of Confucian ethics have taken adequate notice of the elements of rational and sympathetic discourse in traditional Confucian politics—the kind of rational deliberation that MacIntyre holds to be impossible for large political systems. It is now apparent that traditional Chinese society (which in the opinion of some scholars was responsible for one third of the global economy in the first half of the nineteenth century) had significant natural and technological resources to manage their system. The basic directives of Confucian political discourse and deliberation, nevertheless, were oriented to the ideal of promoting the common good and the peaceful and harmonious growth of community at both the local and national levels.

All in all, I believe that the prejudice and omissions inherent in MacIntyre's argument expose the fundamental limitations of "rational" dialogue and argumentation and the inadequacies of the scientific and analytic methodologies that dictate the current scholarship on Confucian/Chinese philosophy. In what follows, I would like to introduce an alternative approach of moral education and cross-cultural dialogue that is not predicated on the authority of rational argumentation and logical consistency, but inspired by sympathetic and spontaneous resonance. From the Confucian perspective, the ultimate purpose of dialogue or moral persuasion is not to represent and justify the rationality of some particular cultural and theoretical position or to establish its identity, validity, and superiority. It is rather the open enactment of receptive and reciprocal understandings—the heart-to-heart correspondence that is ever hopeful of elevating all participants toward a profound vision and intuition of the matter itself. For it is this vision and intuition that may prompt us to move out of and across our respective cultural and linguistic barriers.

From Rational Autonomy to Empathetic Openness: Toward a New Way of Moral Enlightenment

The bias in MacIntyre's otherwise well-formulated argument bears out the limitations of a methodology of ethical inquiry based on rational argumentation and demonstration. This rationalistic understanding of moral conduct has not been immune to insightful criticisms by modern Western philosophers. David Hume, for example, argues that the source of human conduct is not reason but the senti-

ments of desire and aversion. For Hume, reason cannot be the master and guide of passion, but "is, and ought only be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."[16] This is so because the faculty of reason, whose function consists in discovering the truth or falsehood of our judgments, "is perfectly inert, and can never either prevent or produce any action or affection."

Now with regard to whether reason can ever be an independent faculty directing our passions and whether its sole function, as Hume insists, consists in discovering and evaluating our judgments, and is thus only submissive to passion, are complex issues that I cannot investigate fully here. But the inadequacy of a rationalistic understanding of human conduct may have been adequately exposed if we note only the wide range of historical and everyday incidences in which rational arguments are used expediently for justifying inordinate desires. Indeed, there has never been a lack of rational argumentation for even the most hideous atrocities and crimes such as the Christian Crusades, the modern slave trade, the elimination of indigenous populations as the result of colonialism and imperialism, and the Holocaust. These crimes and the human crises they have brought about attest to the key inadequacy of moral systems that are based on rational argument and principles alone. Such inadequacy is especially alarming in this age of globalization when different national groups all become enmeshed in devastating conflicts and are apt to justify their actions with their own respective rational arguments.

In his well-known article "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn," Jonathan Bennett highlights the failure of certain conventional Western moralities that have endorsed and even encouraged the system of slavery, the condemnation and eternal torment of heathen "sinners," and the terrible persecution of the Jewish people. Recognizing the disturbing problems of the "bad morality" informing such hideous crimes, Bennett is a strong advocate of human sympathy in our moral decisions and deliberations. He illustrates the importance of sympathy in a critical episode in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* where Huck is pressed to decide whether or not he should report on the runaway slave Jim, with whom he has spent a joyful and eventful raft journey down the Mississippi River. For us today, as Bennett says, "morality and sympathy would both dictate helping Jim to escape." But this is the case only because our morality no longer endorses the property rights of Miss Watson as Jim's owner. For Huck and most of his contemporaries, however, the concern "for Jim is and remains irrational."[17] As a result, Huck is obligated to attend to the property damages of Miss Watson, the consideration of moral principles and rational arguments, and his own grinding conscience, the fear that "people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire."[18] Ironically, it is only through his sympathetic feeling, which is regarded as a *weakness of character,* that Huck finally decides to tear up the letter reporting on Jim's whereabouts, despite the threat of Huck's going to hell.

The story of Huck Finn illustrates one of many disturbing historical examples of human failure that bear out the critical inadequacy of moral systems based primarily

on the universal authority of rational principles. Rightly recognizing those situations where an over-abundance of sympathy should be corrected by the principle of reason, Bennett strives hard to strike a balance between sympathy and rationality in the making of our moral decisions. While "moral principles are good to have," one should keep checking them "in the light of one's sympathy" so as to avoid the kinds of undesirable consequences of the single-minded pursuit of well-established norms. From the Western perspective of logical consistency, admittedly one cannot help noting the obvious difficulties in Bennett's argument, which urges us to question the universal soundness of our moral systems despite our inherent beliefs in the truth of "every single item" of our moral principles. How to solve this tension between sympathy and rationality properly remains a challenging problem for Bennett and Western moral thinkers. Nevertheless, Bennett's discussion of the importance of sympathy is revealing and groundbreaking. It calls into question how and why the cultivation and direction of our sympathetic feelings have almost never been a central theme of study for mainstream Western ethical theorists, who are preoccupied with establishing absolute and universal principles for human conduct.[19]

Remarkably, the central project of Confucian moral education is never the systematic formulation and demonstration of explicit logical argument, but the gradual *fostering of sincere and sympathetic intentions.* In contrast to prevalent Western normative ethical theories, the Confucian way of moral cultivation is not determined by strict and clear-cut scientific reasoning, but inspired by a kind of artistic mindfulness and virtuosity. Accordingly, right decisions and actions do not come about simply and straightforwardly from the rational discovery of a true and universal principle that can be automatically applied by everybody in every situation and at every moment. Rather, they are spontaneous and sympathetic enactments of sensible and sophisticated personalities in their open engagement with various concrete situations. The prudential conduct of a right action, hence, is comparable to the performance of a piece of classical music by a virtuoso. It requires not only a "knowledge" of the meaning of the music, but also a skill in performance that can only be acquired through a painstaking process of cultivation. But above all, what is essential for a musical performance that is genuine is to put one's heart and soul into the music, in order that "your heart, your love for the composer and his work, shines through every note he wrote."[20]

Now just as the performance of fine art requires that "the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together,"[21] authentic Confucian moral enactment is not possible without the harmonious coordination of one's reason and sympathy, of one's intellectual understanding and bodily habituation. The key inspiration for Confucian moral education and cultivation consists precisely in the quality of artistic virtuosity, in what Peimin Ni nicely refers to as "cultivated spontaneity."[22] Speaking about progress for moral cultivation, Confucius observes that those who simply know the right and just way of living are not as good as those who like to pursue this way of living. But those who like to pursue this way of living are not as good as those who are able to enjoy and engage themselves in the virtuous way of living—so much so that they

can personify the way of benevolence and justice just as they are engrossed in an enchanting musical performance.[23] For moral personalities with "cultivated spontaneity" even the routine of daily activities is imbued with poetic mindfulness, with care and reverence for the miraculous course of the way.

My clarification concerning the Confucian ideal of virtuosity and cultivated spontaneity may bring a new perspective to the troubling controversies about the "autonomous" and "relational" natures of Confucian moral persons. Henry Rosemont and Roger Ames have rightly underlined the spontaneous and aesthetic dimensions of Confucian moral performance, which are in distinct contrast to the contemporary Western ethical theories that are preoccupied with the discovery and demonstration of rational and universal principles directing all human choices and actions. In the Introduction to their recent translation of the *Xiaojing,* Rosemont and Ames propose to illustrate Confucian persons as *role* bearers in contrast to the *rights* bearers conceived in contemporary Western theories of human beings as free, autonomous, and independent individuals. Confucian persons are "relational selves": "They are not free in the sense of being independent, for their lives are intimately and inextricably bound up with the lives of many others. And they are not autonomous, for there is little that they do, or can do, that does not have significance for the lives of others."[24]

The role-ethics model developed by Rosemont and Ames brings out nicely the situational and communal dimensions of Confucian moral education that have continuously been downplayed in dominant Western ethical theories such as Kant's deontological ethics and Bentham's and Mill's utilitarianism. Rosemont and Ames are certainly right to highlight the difference between the relational self in Confucianism and the free and autonomous self as envisioned by such Enlightenment thinkers as Locke and Kant. Nevertheless, this role-ethics model involves a key ambiguity as it does not spell out the true essence of Confucian personality that is beyond all relational and communal influences. Indeed, the denial of the autonomy of the Confucian self can easily invite the still tenacious misconception that such a self is heteronomous, that its decisions and conduct are completely determined by the dictating power and authority of its social environment.

As I see it, in order to understand the true nature of the Confucian self, we need to recognize first that the very concept of autonomy is fraught with ambiguities and paradoxes in modern moral and political discourse. Autonomy can mean different or even contradictory things to different people. One prevalent meaning of "autonomous self" in contemporary economic and popular usage, for example, has to do with the notion of "personal autonomy," which is often used to substantiate actions and decisions that are self-centered, self-interested, or even selfish. On the other side, it is important to remember that the original and philosophical import of autonomy is the "*capacity* to be one's own person, to live one's life according to *reasons* and *motives* that are taken as one's own and not the product of manipulative or distorting external forces."[25] The proper meaning of moral autonomy, thus, is that the foundation of one's action rests upon one's own power of rational decision and deliberation, not upon the coercive forces of external social, political, and religious

institutions. As long as the decision is made on the basis of one's own capacity, an action may well be autonomous and "have significance for the lives of those others" at the same time. Indeed, for both Kant and Mill, it is "imperative" for a moral agent to conduct autonomous actions that agree with the conception of the good in the universal kingdom of humanity (Kant) or with the general utility of the human society as a whole (Mill).

However, precisely because modern Western ethical theories (such as Kantian deontological ethics and Bentham's and Mill's utilitarianism) are anchored in the presumption of the isolated individual, moral requirements are conceived as *obligations* that restrain the natural desires and temperaments of a person from violating the rights of others and working against the general good of society. Moral responsibility denotes one's *accountability* for one's actions, which are regulated by universal and rational principles—such as the categorical imperative of Kant and the principle of general utility of Bentham and Mill. The goal of education is to develop an *autonomous* self whose free determination will agree *spontaneously* with the categorical imperative of the moral law: to act on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law of nature (Kant). The highest ideal consists in a democratic society whose order and harmony are obtained when each individual becomes a law unto herself.[26]

Considering this spontaneous dimension of the genuine meaning of moral autonomy, being intimately and inextricably bound up with the lives of one's family and community should not *necessarily* exclude one's capacity for self-expression and self-determination, just as being immersed in water should not necessarily incapacitate one in determining her course of movement by swimming. For the criterion here is again whether or not a person—no matter how embedded in her familial and communal influences—is *able* to conduct a moral action on the basis of her own deliberation and choice.

Now one of the grossest lapses in contemporary moral and political debates is the frequent confusion of right-bearers with autonomous selves. This is almost like saying that an individual with a life vest is a good swimmer. For all that the sanction of legal and political rights can do is to protect the self from the coercive forces of economic, political, and religious institutions. There is no assurance that an individual with rights would make rational and moral choices on the basis of her own capacity and decisions. True freedom and independence are not abstract concepts or a set of rights that can be bestowed on somebody gratis. They are essentially *capacities* of an individual to control and navigate herself toward the right paths of living within a web of constraints and resistances. And just as one can never learn swimming without being first immersed in the water, the capacities for freedom and autonomy must be cultivated and earned through the proper tempering and disciplining of the self.

Given this complexity in the meaning of freedom and autonomy, it is helpful to recall the key metaphor for the autonomous self as an "inner citadel." In this early understanding of autonomy, the essence of an autonomous self is regarded as an inner citadel that is immune from the commands of external authority and influence.

However, the difficulties and ambiguities of autonomy seem inevitable when philosophers disagree about the demarcation of this inner citadel—for example whether it should include our desires and instincts, or whether it consists in our moral conscience and capacity alone. After all, it remains deeply controversial to what extent a rational self is actually "able" to make decisions and actions wholly by itself without influence from the external world.

All in all, considering the confusion and controversy surrounding the concept of autonomy and conflicting views on the nature of the Confucian self, I believe it advisable to go beyond the confinement of Western conceptual frameworks and understand the "Confucian personality" on its own terms. The true ideal of the Confucian self is neither heteronomous nor autonomous, but a person with the virtuosity of cultivated spontaneity. On the one hand, as respect for authority and ritual instructions are important for the cultivation of Confucian moral character, Confucian moral enactments are not directed by self-determining rational calculations alone. On the other hand, the influence of conventional norms and authority should not be taken as absolute and unconditional, but only as a heuristic means of moral training. A cultivated Confucian personality, indeed, is a sovereign in himself who is capable of making independent decisions about whether and how to adjust and modify (and even contravene) the particular commands of ritual when appropriate in concrete situations.[27]

Therefore, while the Confucian self is not a self-enclosed identity within the wall of an inner citadel, it is also not simply a "relational self" determined *completely* by its social relations. Rather, the true essence of the Confucian personality consists in its empathetic openness (*ren* 仁),[28] in its readiness and resilience to embody the dynamic elements and directives in the surrounding world in harmony with the moral enactment of the self. Therefore, the most appropriate decisions and actions can only *emerge* through sympathetic correspondence between the self and its social and natural environments. The foundation of Confucian moral virtue is not the preestablished order of reason that dictates the universal principle of all human conduct. In contrast to the Greek *arête* (ἀρετή), the primary meaning of virtue (*de* 德) for Confucius is not, or not merely, the power and "excellence" in the fulfillment of essential purposes and functions. It means all the more the love and kindness that would inspire one to extend his humble care and compassion toward the greatest circle of lives between sky and earth.[29] The ideal of Confucian moral cultivation is a person of benevolence and empathetic openness who is capable of taking all beings in the world as one body that is none other than the self. It is the virtuosity of cultivated spontaneity that is characterized by the serene release *(wuwei/Gelassenheit)* that transports the self as a site of poetical embodiment for the gracious forces of sky and earth—as a vehicle for disseminating a grand cosmic vibrancy for the nourishment of all beings without selfish misappropriations. As such, the ideal Confucian self personifies the art of coherent enactment of one's hand, head, and heart as it balances the conflicting demands of emotion and reason, love and respect, benevolence and justice, and maternal care and paternal authority, as well as the different roles and functions of the family and the state.

Although the liberal theories of freedom and autonomy sound very progressive, it remains dubious to what extent modern Western civilization has been successful in producing the ideal type of individual who is truly free and autonomous—in other words, who is able to act spontaneously in light of the universal law of humanity. It is in view of the growing moral hypocrisies, the crises in social and political interactions, and the distressing inadequacy of modern ethical theories that many Western scholars like MacIntyre have advocated alternative ethical theories such as Aristotelian virtue ethics for developing moral character and deliberative politics in local communities. This new trend in Western ethical inquiry has also provoked considerable scholarly research oriented toward interpreting Confucian moral teachings as a form of virtue ethics.

Here, I am not in a position to question the good intentions of many scholars to promote Confucian ethics by matching up Confucian moral teachings with some prevalent Western ethical-theoretical model such as Aristotelian virtue ethics. In the current academic setting where non-Western moral and philosophical traditions are barely respected as truly legitimate voices deserving serious consideration, this kind of interpretative tactic is certainly helpful and sometimes even necessary. But one cannot help holding the concern that what this tactic of promotion reassures that it is actually more of a degradation—because of the problematic implication that Confucian moral teachings can only be "intelligent" and "significant" when they are stated in conformity with the conceptual model of Western ethical theories.

In fact, anyone who cares to read even a mediocre translation of the Confucian *Analects* should not find Confucius' teachings "unintelligible" or "insignificant" methods of cultivating honorable and upright human beings. Arguably, the modern Western debasement of Confucian teachings has little to do with the "intrinsic worth" of these teachings. They have much to do with the maintenance of a modern Western consciousness of its racial, technological, intellectual, or cultural superiority to Chinese and other civilizations. This ethnocentric consciousness is clearly epitomized in Hegel's influential debasement of Confucian teaching as a mode of "oriental civilization," which, on account of the lack of conceptual and cultural configurations equivalent to what is found in Western philosophy, is destined to occupy an isolated space permanently outside the historical development of the "World Spirit" *(Weltgeist).*[30]

In my view, apart from all racial and cultural prejudice, this prevalent debasement of Confucian moral philosophy is encouraged also by the dogmatic disparagement of sympathy and emotion in Western philosophies—an intellectual bias that is accountable for the distressing tension between personal and moral autonomy, rational principle and responsible actions, and knowledge and virtue in Western ethical theories. In what follows, I will demonstrate some critical inadequacies of the Aristotelian and liberal programs of moral education and bring out the valence of the Confucian art of moral enlightenment, pivoting on the virtuosity of empathetic

embodiment. The Confucian approach of moral education exemplifies a middle path for producing the ideal type of humanity, which is characterized by the harmonious union of intellect and sympathy, head and heart, without implicating the kind of rigid, authoritarian aristocratic hierarchicalism or the distressing dissipation that is condoned by contemporary radical individualism.

For both Aristotle and Confucius, the attainment of moral virtue entails the cultivation of honorable moral character capable of right decisions and actions in various situations. The substance of moral education is to cultivate *habits* of opportune moral enactment that may help to gradually overcome the sway of inordinate desires and passions, selfish inclinations, myopic and prejudiced conceptions, and external temptations and pressures. As Aristotle puts it, "a man becomes just by doing just actions and temperate by doing temperate actions; and no one can have the remotest chance of becoming good without doing them."[31] Thus, in order for one to become a virtuous person, neither a "knowledge" of virtue nor the "performance" of virtuous actions is enough. Rather, what is required is for a person to perform these just and temperate actions in a certain state of mind, that is, "in the way in which just and temperate men do them." A virtuous person should not simply act with knowledge, choosing the act for its own sake; the act must also spring from a stable disposition or equilibrium of character (1105a30). The majority of humankind, who fancy that they can make themselves good by "discussing" virtue instead of performing virtuous acts, are therefore like "invalids who listen carefully to what the doctor says, but entirely neglect to carry out his prescriptions" (1105b15).

But the question remains *how* a person who is not yet virtuous can actually become so by acting in the right state of mind, as virtuous persons would do. In other words, if knowledge and rational argument alone are not sufficient, what are the other viable means of education that may help to make a person carry out the right prescriptions for a virtuous and just way of living? This question regarding moral education is also of central concern for Confucian moral teachings, which pivot on the inspirational power of empathetic persuasion and personal example, and on the engaging process of ritual and community involvement. To a great extent, this question is one that is not addressed adequately by either Aristotle or contemporary Western ethicists, who are entangled in the tension and confusion between personal and moral autonomy.

Aristotle for sure is fully aware of the difficulty of moral transformation. With the exception of those who are made good by nature, argument and teaching for Aristotle have little influence on most people, who live according to the dictates of passion. Such people tend to pursue pleasure and avoid pain without even a notion of what is noble and *truly* pleasant, since they have never tasted it.[32] This is so because, in general, "passion seems to yield not to argument but to force" (1179b25). Therefore, in order to make argument and teaching really persuasive, it is necessary first to train the soul of the student by means of *habits* for noble joy and noble hatred, so as to elevate the character to a kinship with virtue and excellence. However, since to live temperately and resiliently in accord with virtue is not pleasant to most men, the training of both youth and adults should be regulated by appropriate legislation.

Therefore, the *compulsive power of law* is necessary for the cultivation of the right habits and the noble personality, considering the inertia and resistance of an untrained character: "For most people obey necessity rather than argument, and punishments rather than what is noble" (1180c5). After all, the life of virtue and temperance will not be painful when it becomes customary.

Admittedly, Aristotle's program of moral training can be credited with cultivating and promoting human excellence in the classical and medieval worlds. However, Aristotle's emphasis on the power of compulsory legislation entails obvious limitations, as it is to an extent informed by the historical and geopolitical setting of the ancient Greek city-states. For one thing, except for those who are already disposed to pursue the temperate and virtuous life, compulsory law is not really helpful, because the cultivation of good habits and a virtuous personality, as Aristotle himself stresses, requires the *deliberate choice* of the virtuous act for its own sake. Therefore, what the punitive power of law can produce is at best a *superficial* conformity as the result of fear. Such *compulsory* conformity is hardly conducive to transforming a "bad" person into a "good" one as it virtually rules out the possibility of the person conscientiously choosing the moral act for its own sake. Considering the resentment toward and outright revolt against compulsory obedience to authoritative injunctions in the history of Europe, Aristotle may have indeed been somewhat naive to assume that the law can "enjoin virtuous conduct without being invidious" (1180a24).

At the same time, the single-minded imposition of "right" legislation also threatens to impose the formal establishment of conventional social hierarchies based on the categorical divisions of reason and passion, good and bad, master and slave, man and woman. For Aristotle, while the good person should be stimulated to pursue a noble and virtuous life through good argument and influence, those who disobey and are of inferior nature should be subjected to chastisement, while the incurably bad should be completely banished (1180a10).

In the long history of ancient and medieval Europe, repressive hierarchies have been responsible for the political subjugation of those who were held to be inferior by nature for proper moral development (e.g., women, slaves, and barbarians). One key justification for the modern revolutions against such authoritarian hierarchies has been the new aspiration to recognize and nurture the "germs of reason" that are present in all human beings. Nevertheless, considering the wanton inclinations that are a part of human nature, it remains doubtful whether and how we can instill the germ of reason and morality in people without resorting to the abuse of compulsory law when rational argument appears ineffective by itself.

Regretfully, the importance of love and empathy in moral education has been largely overlooked by contemporary Western ethical theories, embedded as they are within the scientific methodology of argumentation and the conventional dichotomies of reason and emotion, mind and body, subject and object. Admittedly, with its championing of equality, liberty, and autonomy of the self, modern liberalism has radically overturned medieval social and political hierarchies of aristocrats who were seen as entitled by their divine endowments of reason. It indubitably points to great progress when the Enlightenment thinker recognizes the germ of reason in all people.

However, when modern liberals advocate this autonomy of reason as a universal and innate quality, even as the inalienable rights of all human beings, they may have lost sight of the danger of another false path: the dismantling of the painstaking process essential for cultivating rational and autonomous individuals has encouraged a kind of radical individualism that reduces the meaning of reason and freedom to that of an entitlement to do everything dictated by even the most inordinate passions and desires.

It is in view of these intractable difficulties in traditional and modern Western ethical theories that we may recognize the Confucian approach of moral cultivation as a viable alternative. In contrast to the idea of a fixed identity of the individual self, as presupposed by modern ethical theories, Confucian self-cultivation begins with the effort to diminish the rigid adherence to the presumption of self-identity. There is no predetermined meaning of the self except for its *openness* and *elasticity,* allowing it to bend and adjust itself to perform various functions within the interplay of family and social relations. Moral responsibility, accordingly, consists in one's care and devotion to one's vocation, which is endowed by heaven and consigned by one's family and the state. The primary meaning of responsibility is *receptivity* to the call of one's familial and social functions and acceptance of the dignity of the self and other beings in the surrounding world. This receptivity originates in reverence for the miraculous course of *dao* as it nurtures the virtuosity to personify the cosmic cycle of grace and sacrifice—the cycle in which everyone arises from and ultimately returns to their source. It is in light of this virtuosity of empathetic embodiment that the Confucian approach of moral enlightenment exemplifies the middle path beyond the demoralizing clashes between reason and emotion, authority and freedom, and society and the individual, as well as the manipulative brawls of various interest groups and ideological camps. It promises caring and compassionate associations that may protect the dignity of the individual and the solidarity of the community without involving the abusive power of law and punishment.

By recognizing the potential of moral development in all human beings, Confucian teachings promise a way to overcome the rigidity of conventional social and economic hierarchies and to domesticate their hegemonic authority by promoting reciprocal respect and affinity among all members of society. Education is open to all kinds of people, as Confucius unequivocally states.[33] Mengzi, who was widely acclaimed as the second Confucian sage in ancient China, further confirms that all human beings, regardless of their social and economic backgrounds, have the potential to become Yao and Shun, the archetypal figures of ancient Chinese sage-kings![34]

On the other hand, the Confucian approach also circumvents the upsetting outcomes of radical individualism by recognizing the integrity of a moral personality—or, if one likes, the truly free and autonomous self (*junzi* 君子, lit. a "sovereign of the self"), not as an intrinsic quality or innate right, but as an ideal of humanity that can only be realized through lifelong cultivation and practice. Even Confucius himself repeatedly declines the suggestion that his moral achievement justifies the title of humaneness or sageliness. Only in his seventies did Confucius feel confident that

he could indeed act as his heart intended without transgressing the appropriate norms.[35]

In conclusion, let me illustrate this Confucian approach of moral education with a story about Mengzi's mother (Mother Meng) who has long been acclaimed as a model of Confucian education. Even such a sagely figure as Mengzi was not attributed any divine endowments or prerogatives. Instead, arising from humble roots and supported solely by his widowed mother's hard work as a weaver, he was susceptible to unbecoming influences in his neighborhood such as tomb building and peddling. That is why Mother Meng felt obliged to move their house twice—from the vicinity of a graveyard to that of a marketplace and finally to that of the public school. But even after Mengzi went to school, he turned out to be just a mediocre and unmotivated student who was satisfied just to drift along. So it happened that when Mengzi returned from school one day, Mother Meng was still weaving in the house as she asked Mengzi how much progress he had made with his study. "Just as it was before," Mengzi replied. On hearing that response, Mother Meng cut up the cloth she had been weaving. Mengzi was startled and asked why his mother was doing this. Mother Meng said,

> You are abandoning your studies, just as I cut up this cloth that I have been weaving. For a noble person studies in order to establish his name and inquires in order to broaden his knowledge. In so doing, he is at peace and harmony when he rests and is distant from harm's way when he acts. Now as you abandon your studies, you will be unable to escape from lowly service and misery. How is this any different from . . . when a woman like me abandons halfway the work of weaving that is essential for feeding the household? For how can she then provide clothes for her man and sustain the food supply for the household for long? Hence, if the woman abandons her work for feeding the household and the man idles along without cultivating his virtue and kindness, then they will surely end up as slaves if not as robbers and thieves.[36]

Agitated, Mengzi studies unremittingly day and night and finally makes himself one of the most celebrated literati.

Mother Meng's lesson for Mengzi is illuminating for the way it invokes the empathetic persuasion and personal exemplification essential to the Confucian way of moral education. By revealing the noble ideal of moral education and the dire consequences of abandoning it, Mother Meng presents a rational argument for promoting a diligent and disciplined way of living. Presumably, this rational argument would not be effective without Mother Meng's cutting of the cloth in the first place. Nor would Mengzi take the lesson so earnestly had he been castigated for his mistakes directly. In fact, on learning of Mengzi's delinquent behavior, Mother Meng does not punish her son, but takes the sacrifice upon herself. For it is precisely through this sacrifice, this destruction of her own valuable work, that Mother Meng is able to cause Mengzi to feel remorse—revealing a sympathetic and candid understanding of the matter in the heart and mind of her son. Without his change of heart, it would be impossible for Mengzi to take her argument seriously, no matter how rational and

persuasive it sounded. Indeed, what really moves Mengzi toward diligent and conscientious performance is not merely the presentation of a sound if abstract argument. It is rather the compassion expressed in the love and care of his mother through her own diligence and devotion.

All in all, the story of Mother Meng's moral persuasion well illuminates an ancient Chinese understanding that *reason* in human conduct is not imposed through theological and metaphysical injunctions, but *emerges* out of empathetic and harmonious engagement. This Confucian approach of moral enlightenment is informed by ancient Chinese cosmology, which identifies the "prime mover" of the world not as some omnipotent Divine Agent or determinate set of Laws of Nature, but as the process of *gantong* 感通—the embodiment of sympathetic interchange between the cosmic forces of *yin* and *yang* and the spontaneous resonance and correspondence among all beings. The ancient Chinese, remarkably, never defined human beings as "rational animals" entitled to lord it over other forms of life by dint of their superior intellectual and technological prowess. Instead, humankind is the "heart of sky and earth" destined to dignify the miraculous order and vibrancy of the cosmos by enacting their compassionate hearts, their heavenly potential for reverent and benevolent communication with all beings.

This Confucian way of moral enlightenment defines a kind of civilization that is not anchored in the absolute authority of scientific and rational "truth" or unlimited material and technological advancement. Rather, moral, artistic, and ritual enactments are brought together in the primordial experience of "spiritual truth"—of witness to the miracle of life that originates in the organic harmony of sky and earth, the human and the divine.

Notes

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1 – Here, I am using the term "modern" in a largely historical sense, without implying any general endorsement or condemnation of modern Western cultural values and institutions—in contrast to taking such competing stances as "traditionalism" or "postmodernism." It is apposite to note here a recent work by Wang Zhihe and Fan Meijun, who, inspired by John Cobb's theory of process theology and constructive postmodernism, argue for the necessity of a Second Enlightenment for overcoming the hegemonic and ethnocentric dimensions of modern Western civilization, as well as for a postmodern stance that draws upon valuable lessons from classical Chinese and especially Confucian teachings (Wang Zhihe and Fan 2011, p. 201). I am most sympathetic to the general orientation of Wang and Fan's argument; theirs is a viable and stimulating ap-

proach to addressing the various predicaments in the development of modern societies. However, considering the great ambiguities and controversies surrounding such concepts as postmodernity and postmodernism as well as the meanings of modernity, I will not attempt here to determine the degree of affinity between postmodernism or process theology, with their constricting parameters, and classic Confucian teachings. After all, Wang and Fan's book, as Robin Wang rightly points out, "is more like a call to activism, than an academic treatise" (Robin Wang 2013, p. 450). One purpose of this essay is to challenge the rigid dichotomy between traditional and modern societies that has been taken for granted by most advocates of modern values. In so doing, I intend to demonstrate that the ideals of humanity and virtuosity as advocated by Confucian teachings are significant for both traditional and modern societies, and, if one wishes, for postmodern societies as well. (I thank one reviewer of *Philosophy East and West* in bringing the inspiring theory of Second Enlightenment to my attention.)

2 – Ames 2011, p. 2.

3 – MacIntyre 2004, p. 203. Next two citations, p. 204.

4 – Ibid., p. 204.

5 – Ibid., p. 210.

6 – Ibid.

7 – Mengzi 3A4. See Huaiyu Wang 2016 for a critical exposition and defense of this Confucian civil order against modern liberal denunciations.

8 – Rosemont and Ames 2010, pp. 4–5.

9 – See Huaiyu Wang 2016 for a more elaborate exposition of this Confucian approach against liberal criticisms.

10 – *"You jiao wulei"* 有教無類 (In teaching there is no [social] class) (*Analects* 15.39).

11 – Daniel Bell, among others, has presented some provocative arguments for the modern significations of Confucian meritocracy in East Asia (Bell 2006, pp. 152–179). As I will argue below, the essence of the Confucian political order is not meritocracy, but the rule of benefaction. But meritocracy is indeed an important element in Confucian societies. See Miyazaki 1981 for a careful study of the ancient Chinese examination system that can be regarded as the pillar of this meritocracy.

12 – See Huaiyu Wang 2016. Cf. Wang 2015.

13 – See Huaiyu Wang 2016 for a more comprehensive defense of the Confucian civil order against modern liberal criticisms.

14 – Herbert 2002, p. xii. See pp. 258–272 for an elaboration of the amoral nature of the utilitarian theory of rights that is prevalent today.

15 – Rosemont 2004, p. 61.

16 – Hume 1978, p. 415. Next citation, p. 458.

17 – Bennett 1974, p. 124.

18 – Twain 2001, p. 342.

19 – Cf. Huaiyu Wang 2011a, pp. 225 ff., for a critical reflection and analysis of the moral paradox of Western conscience and ethics.

20 – Bruser 1997, p. 221.

21 – "Fine art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together" (John Ruskin, *The Two Paths,* "Lecture II: The Unity of Art"; cited in "Art" 1989).

22 – See Ni 2002, pp. 127 ff., for a nice exposition of the importance of this cultivated spontaneity for the Confucian account of freedom and moral cultivation.

23 – *Analects* 6.20.

24 – Rosemont and Ames 2009, pp. 31–32.

25 – Christman 2009; emphasis added.

26 – See Whitman 1970, p. 18: "The purpose of democracy . . . is . . . to illustrate, at all hazards, this doctrine or theory that man, properly train'd in sanest, highest freedom, may and must become a law, and series of laws, unto himself, surrounding and providing for, not only his own personal control, but all his relations to other individuals, and to the State."

27 – See Huaiyu Wang 2011b for an elaboration of the Confucian art of moral deliberation and decision that is still overlooked by current scholarship.

28 – See Wang 2012 for a demonstration of the most original meaning of *ren* as *gantong,* namely "empathetic openness."

29 – See Wang 2015 for the exposition of the Confucian rule of benefaction based on the new interpretation of the primary meaning of virtue *(de)* as kindness and benevolence.

30 – Hegel's degrading judgment of Confucius has long been influential and representative for Western opinions on Confucian and Chinese civilization: "He is hence only a man who has a certain amount of practical and worldly wisdom—one with whom there is no speculative philosophy. We may conclude from his original works that for their reputation it would have been better had they never been translated. The treatise which the Jesuits produced is, however, more a paraphrase than a translation" (Hegel 1892, vol. 1, pp. 119–121). Cf. Hegel 1956, pp. 116–138; Spence 2013, pp. 134–135; and Mungello 2013, pp. 159–160.

31 – Aristotle 1934, 1105b10. Citation for this text with in-text page numbers below.

32 – Aristotle 1996, 1179b5 (cf. Aristotle 1934). Citation for this text with in-text page numbers below.

33 – *Analects* 15.39.

34 – *Mengzi* 6B2.

35 – *Analects* 2.4.

36 – See the biography of Mother Meng in Wang Zhaoyuan 2012, vol. 1, pp. 33–35.

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