XUNZI'S RITUAL MODEL AND MODERN MORAL EDUCATION

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Abstract. While the early Confucians were largely content to maintain the rituals of ancient kings as the core of moral education in their time, it is not obvious that contemporary humans could, or should, draw from the particulars of such a tradition. Indeed, even if one takes ritual seriously as a tool for cultivation, there remains a question of how to design moral education programs incorporating ritual. This essay examines impediments faced by a ritualized approach to moral education, how they might be overcome, and how a ritual method could be developed in modernity. I contend that a Confucian notion of ritual, particularly as elaborated in the *Xunzi*, is both compatible with modern moral education and capable of making a distinct contribution to moral education in terms of how rituals can be used to structure and inculcate a shared climate of respect and humaneness both in- and outside the classroom. Specifically, the ritual education method includes emphases on inculcating moral fluency via symbolic practices and distinctions, training and appropriately associating promoral dispositions, enhancing moral imagination, and developing awareness of other minds. The model is thus a multifaceted approach to moral education through (meta)cognitive development.

THE STATE OF MORAL EDUCATION

Few will dispute the importance of inculcating morality (or at least prosocial tendencies), so it is no surprise that, as educational institutions evolve, so too do moral education initiatives. For example, over the past several decades United States schools have increasingly invested in moral and character education programs, generally focusing on inculcating skills and dispositions that can assist in resolving common conflicts among youth, ranging from sharing to drug abuse.[1] The U.S. Institute of Education Sciences depicts this education as the influence that families, schools, and other social institutions have on the positive character development of children and adults, where character is understood as "the moral and ethical qualities of persons as well as the demonstration of those qualities in their emotional responses, reasoning, and behavior."[2] The programs employ a variety of methods, encompass diverse settings, and may be pervasive throughout a community or localized to particular classroom or extracurricular experiences.

While it is unclear whether there is a consistent underlying theory or vision for what these moral education programs (should) look like,[3] many have made at least marginal progress. Peer mediation, for example, is an increasingly popular program due to initial successes in promoting the (arguably moral) practice of conflict resolution and an overall reduction in reported conflicts over time.[4] Students train to

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1   While this essay draws mainly, though not exclusively, from U.S.-based research, moral education is an international concern. Accordingly, I suspect that the messages conveyed herein will appeal to a broader audience.

2   "What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Review Protocol for Character Education Interventions", https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/ReferenceResources/CharEd_protocol.pdf, accessed 6 January 2020.

3   Thomas Lickona, "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education", *Journal of Moral Education* 25, no. 1 (1996) has attempted to develop an outline for principles that character education programs should look to, although it is unclear whether all or most programs currently in use actually subscribe to these principles as guidelines for development. James S. Leming, "Tell Me a Story: An evaluation of a literature-based character education programme", *Journal of Moral Education* 29, no. 4 (2000), 413–14, however, has suggested that many such programs lack even underlying theoretical bases, let alone unified designs.

4   Stephen K. Bell et al., "The effectiveness of peer mediation in a low-SES rural elementary school", *Psychology in the Schools* 37, no. 6 (2000).

become "mediators" who help fellow students work through various personal and interpersonal conflicts. Additionally, several multi-year studies of more general, comprehensive moral education programs provide empirical support for the claim that such programs have a variety of positive effects on students. A study conducted across twenty primary schools in Hawai'i found that a program emphasizing character development resulted in a seventy percent reduction in suspensions, a fifteen percent reduction in absenteeism, and improved performance on literacy and mathematics tests.[5] Another study, conducted over a period of twenty years at a Utah high school that folded character-building practices into academic lessons, also reported great success in terms of character development and academic progress by participants.[6] Such outcomes imply that moral education benefits both individual students and the school environment at large.

There is, then, motivation for the continued adoption of moral education programs: they can reduce antisocial and problematic behaviors, increase conflict resolution skills, and yield improved quality of coursework. Less clear is *how* the moral education process should proceed and what it should entail. This is an end to which ritual, particularly as conceptualized in the Confucian tradition, can contribute as an educational resource.

WHAT IS (CONFUCIAN) RITUAL?

In the Confucian tradition,[7] "ritual" refers not only to special, more dramatic performances (e.g., sacrifices), but also to mundane practices that one might classify as etiquette (e.g., greetings and modes of address, general comportment in public, etc.).[8] Additionally, and dissimilar from its apparent use by many contemporary theorists, Confucian ritual is also depicted in non-performative terms as social divisions that mark out distinctions of right and wrong, noble and base, and superior and subordinate.[9] In so doing, ritual formally establishes relationships between members of the community and the behaviors concomitant to said relationships. It is also noteworthy that the Confucian notion of ritual is specifically a *norm* of performance. While, from an anthropological perspective, one might construe a community's rituals as the way people behave in general, as opposed to (pro-)moral behavior in particular, for the Confucians this would be a mistake: people can certainly fail to perform *according* to ritual, potentially resulting in moral failure. It is best, then, to construe the Confucian notion of ritual as not only particular practices, but as a collection of *prescriptions*. Specifically, given the association of ritual with inculcating

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5   Frank Snyder et al., "Impact of a social-emotional and character development program on school-level indicators of academic achievement, absenteeism, and disciplinary outcomes: A matched-pair, cluster randomized, controlled trial", *Journal of research on educational effectiveness* 3, no. 1 (2010).

6   David D. Williams et al., "Character Education in a Public High School: A multi-year inquiry into Unified Studies", *Journal of Moral Education* 32, no. 1 (2003).

7   Though I write of the Confucian tradition broadly, I understand that the myriad pre-Qin and neo-Confucian texts differ on a number of subjects, including ritual. I do think, however, that there are at least aspects of ritual that are treated consistently across the early and later Confucian canons that are sufficient to compose a core conception of ritual that, and this is the notion with which I operate. Where appropriate, I attempt to identify distinct strands of Confucian thought and how they give rise to particular features of ritual or a ritual education model.

8   See also Herbert Fingarette, "Human Community as Holy Rite: An Interpretation of Confucius' Analects", *The Harvard Theological Review* 59, no. 1 (1966). It is important to clarify, though, that ritual is not *merely* etiquette. For one, as I will argue, ritual possesses affective and moral components that, arguably, are detached from (or at least inessential to) etiquette. Moreover, ritual is not reducible to the details of performance; it can be amended to better serve its moral purpose, whereas it is not clear that such is the case for etiquette.

9   E.g. *Xunzi* 10/43/1–3; 12/57/23–26. I use the ICS numbering throughout this essay. All translations are my own except where otherwise indicated.

and expressing prosociality,[10] I suggest construing Confucian rituals as prescriptions governing practices and standards that embody expressions of respect and related dispositions.[11, 12]

Construing Confucian ritual in this way helps to explicate its centrality to moral education. How morality is cultivated through ritual is arguably best elaborated in the *Xunzi*, although the ideals and methods are arguably also present in the *Analects* and, to a lesser extent, the *Mengzi*.[13] As such, I will draw primarily from Xunzi's writings for the purposes of explanation and argumentation, supplementing with other Confucian writings when appropriate.

To begin, an overarching aim of Confucian moral cultivation is harmony (*he* 和),[14] which is to be achieved at both the inter- and intrapersonal levels. Interpersonally, the structure that ritual provides enables a community of mutual respect and consideration among members. This is the case despite the hierarchical nature of relationships in the Confucian tradition, with Xunzi asserting that "there is to be respect for one and all."[15] Accordingly, even in hierarchical relationships, all parties involved should maintain a relevant respectful attitude (e.g., children owe parents filiality, while parents owe children loving kindness).[16] Thus, ritual maintains interpersonal harmony by helping to outline, actualize, and maintain a community of respect.

Ritual also engenders intrapersonal harmony. Ritual is not only a means of harmonizing society, but also the individual.[17] In particular, it helps humans to understand, organize, cope with, and transform their (sometimes chaotic) dispositions.[18] This is perhaps most notable in Xunzi's discussion of the importance of mourning rituals and sacrifices of remembrance. Xunzi states: "Ordinarily in funeral rites, one gradually alters the corpse's appearance and changes its ornamentation, moves it farther away, and over time returns to peaceful living."[19] Just as there is a desire to mourn for those one loves, so too is there a desire (or at least a practical need) to return to functional living. Ritual invites the practitioner to recognize a transition not only of life into death, but also between having a person actively in one's life and not. Ideally, ritual helps the mourner not only to fully embrace and express grief, but also to reorient to and carry on in a world in which a loved one no longer lives. This is achieved by giving a means of mediating between one's internal feelings and external, social world: ritual helps to structure one's thoughts and feelings about death and loss.

Of course, it is limiting to think of ritual as being solely about coping with grief. Rather, ritual is concerned with the expression and management of feelings and dispositions in general. When Xunzi is discussing the idealization of ritual enactment, for example, he speaks of feelings broadly rather than in reference

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10   E.g. *Xunzi* 9/39/15–16; 19/90/3–5; 27/127/22.

11   I should clarify that by 'respect and related dispositions' I include attitudes, traits, etc., that are generally prosocial or humanitarian in nature, acknowledging that respect alone may not be a sufficient focus. Respect is, however, a prominent disposition in this category due (ideally) to its facilitation of prosocial interactions and relationships among members of even large-scale communities. As I elaborate later, respect itself likely also admits of genres (see, for example, Robin S. Dillon, "Respect", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford Univ., 2018)). While different, these forms of respect are plausibly complementary of one another in this overarching pursuit of harmony and flourishing.

12   For an expansion of this view, see Colin J. Lewis, "Ritual Education and Moral Development: A Comparison of Xunzi and Vygotsky", *Dao* 17, no. 1 (2018). Additional recent work on the nature of ritual in early Confucianism can be found in Thomas Radice, "Li (Ritual) in Early Confucianism", *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 10 (2017).

13   Despite being one of the three most influential pre-Qin Confucian thinkers, Mengzi says relatively little on ritual. In contrast, ritual features prominently in both Kongzi/Confucius's *Analects* and Xunzi's eponymous text.

14   *Analects* 1.12/2/6–7.

15   *Xunzi* 13/65/18.

16   See also *Xunzi* 27/127/15: As for "proper conduct," it means conducting ritual. As for ritual, through it those who are noble are treated with respect. Through it those who are elderly are treated with filiality. Through it those who are senior are treated with fraternal respect. Through it those who are young are treated with kindness. Through it those who are lowly are treated with generosity, Eric L. Hutton, *Xunzi: The complete text* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2014), 291.

17   I do not have the space to elaborate this view here. For a more detailed expansion, see Lewis, "Ritual Education and Moral Development: A Comparison of Xunzi and Vygotsky".

18   *Xunzi* 19/90/3–5; 23/113/11–13.

19   *Xunzi* 19/94/3. See also *Xunzi* 19/97/20–19/98/1.

to specific states.[20] This suggests that rituals are intended to access, cope with, and utilize all sorts of feelings. As such, ritual allows individuals to reconcile and regulate their various states, ideally achieving a kind of harmony.

WHY BOTHER WITH RITUAL?

One might wonder how rituals can improve extant, modern programs in moral education. If moral education programs currently on offer can yield their target benefits, then why bother adding to something that is already doing well? I have two initial responses to this sort of question. First, although some moral education pursuits have demonstrated (at least initial, marginal) success, such findings are not universal. Character-education-based programs, arguably the most popular form of moral education in the U.S. at present, have been criticized for a lack of theoretical consistency or objectivity in structure (e.g., Leming 1993; Was, Woltz, and Drew 2006), an underdetermined philosophical account of what constitutes morality or "goodness" (Geren 2001; Kohn 1997), and insufficient data to support the claim that such programs reliably produce promoral attitudes and tendencies among participants (e.g., Davis 2003; Helwig, Turiel, and Nucci 1997). Perhaps most damningly, a 2010 report from the Institute of Education Sciences evaluated seven different U.S.-based social- and character-development programs over a period of three years (2004–2007), only to find that there was no evidence that participants demonstrated any improvement in moral or prosocial development when compared with their nonparticipating peers.[21] While these criticisms are limited in scope, they do suggest that additional work is necessary if there is to be serious development of moral education programs.

Second, even if there are functional moral education programs, they can still be improved, and there is reason to think that ritual can do just that. For example, findings from a study conducted by Leanne Beaudoin-Ryan and Susan Goldin-Meadow implicate a relationship between the use of gesture[22] and the development of perspective-taking in children. In the study, subjects were placed into three groups (pro-gesture, anti-gesture, and neutral), exposed to a series of moral dilemmas, and asked to develop hypothetical resolutions to each. Interestingly, those subjects encouraged to gesture more reliably demonstrated multiple perspectives with a plurality of resolutions; equally interesting is the fact that those prohibited from gesturing displayed a diminished ability for perspective-taking.[23] This is good news for ritual given its emphasis on bodily performance: rituals often require practitioners to engage in full-body activities as part of the way in which they construct, convey, and inculcate their (moral) meanings.

Still, this does not clarify why ritual, let alone a Confucian notion of ritual in particular, is a worthwhile resource for moral education. One reason to consider ritual, I suggest, is its prevalence: even when overlooked, unappreciated, and untheorized, ritual remains present in a culture. Greetings are exemplary of this, as many cultures employ them but do not emphasize any specific form. In the case of U.S. public schools, ritual is not currently a focus,[24] but the school itself is nonetheless a ritualized space. Consequently, though one might anticipate that introducing ritual as a resource for moral cultivation would necessitate a radical overhaul of relevant programs, if extant school rituals (and ritual-like practices) were properly recruited, then the process of making ritual a focus of moral education (i.e., integrating something like a Confucian ritual method) would be eased. In order to begin planning for how to in-

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20   E.g., *Xunzi* 19/92/21–19/93/1.

21   Allen Ruby and Emily Doolittle, "Efficacy of Schoolwide Programs to Promote Social and Character Development and Reduce Problem Behavior in Elementary School Children.", *National Center for Education Research* (2010).

22   Leanne Beaudoin-Ryan and Susan Goldin-Meadow, "Teaching moral reasoning through gesture", *Developmental Science* 17, no. 6 (2014) depict gesture simply as "the hand movements spontaneously produced while talking" (985). I would add that gesture might extend to other physicalizations of the body as well, such as nods, postural shifts, and facial manipulation, though the relevant study does not cover such movements.

23   Beaudoin-Ryan and Goldin-Meadow, "Teaching moral reasoning through gesture", 5.

24   Schools with religious leanings may incorporate rituals into curricula, but these are often religious rituals and may not be applicable outside the context of a particular denomination. Schools outside the U.S. warrant further study.

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stitutionalize ritual for the purpose of moral education, it will help to examine how U.S. classrooms are ritualized (both in degree and manner), and whether increased ritualization can help moral education.

Admittedly, determining degree of ritualization poses a difficulty: one cannot measure how ritualized a classroom is in the same way that one can check its temperature. Nonetheless, it is possible to investigate whether ritual is at least present in the classroom. In a critique of the modern instrumentalization and bureaucratization of education, Bernstein, Elvin, and Peters note that a post-industrialization shift toward the socioeconomic function of schools (i.e., focusing on proficiency and occupational development) has led away from schools' "expressive culture" involving both ritualization of the educational space and the internalization of the values shared within the school community.[25] Their thesis is that ritual performs an integral function by helping to structure the educational environment in a manner that enables the transmission of the aforementioned values and helps to build consensus within the community.[26] Rituals such as assemblies, uniform dress, and pledges all contribute to such ends by providing the community's constituents with largely invariant practices that embody and express values. On the view of Bernstein et. al, when shifting focus away from such community-building and toward a proficiency-oriented, instrumentalist view of education, the utility of ritual is lessened, and its presence is reduced accordingly. While this shift can lead to a reduction in (sometimes problematic) stratification of the school setting, it also demotes the importance of value-internalization and consensus-creation in the community. The implication is that, while it is important to be wary of the nature of social control that ritual exerts, rituals should be emphasized in schools for their prosocial, promoral functionality.

More recently, Richard Quantz and his collaborators have examined the presence of ritual in classrooms and its applicability in improving extant pedagogy.[27] While acknowledging grand rituals like assemblies, Quantz's work focuses on "small" rituals, such as simple and mundane classroom procedures including the use of hand-raising, that help coordinate daily life at the school.[28] Quantz regards ritual as an even more pervasive phenomenon throughout daily experience and, accordingly, even more potentially influential for inculcating social values. In particular, Quantz suggests that ritual analysis can help to "find and illuminate the way in which material power is institutionalized into non-rational practices of our schools and lead us to replace them with new practices designed to celebrate democracy and justice."[29] The upshot here is that rituals help to cultivate a fully educative environment, one that involves both rational and non-rational aspects of growth and development, as well as encouraging more engaged, meaningful interactions between students and instructors.

Consistent throughout these commentaries is the claim that ritual has been largely overlooked as a resource for pedagogical training.[30] This claim's force is partly derived from a dearth of actual studies on classroom rituals: most writing on ritual in the classroom takes place at the theoretical level and does not examine whether or how rituals are applied as part of teachers' pedagogies. Studies that do examine application of ritual are frequently small scale and anecdotal (e.g., Ensign 1997, McCadden 1997, Arslan

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25 B. Bernstein, H. L. Elvin, and R. S. Peters, "A Discussion on Ritualization of Behaviour in Animals and Man", *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B, Biological Sciences* 251, no. 772 (1966).

26 Admittedly, this study does not explicitly adopt a conception of ritual that is wholly congruent with the Confucian account that I advance. Nonetheless, given what Bernstein, Elvin, and Peters take some of the core sociomoral aims of ritual to be, I submit that their conception is at least relevantly similar for comparative purposes. The same applies to most other research on school rituals detailed herein.

27 Similar sentiments are offered by Bryan R. Warnick, "Ritual, Imitation and Education in R. S. Peters", *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. s1 (2009), who suggests that there might be ways in which ritual could be integrated into the classroom setting to make it compatible with a liberal education.

28 Richard Quantz, Terry O'Connor, and Peter M. Magolda, *Rituals and Student Identity in Education: Ritual Critique for a New Pedagogy* (Springer, 2011), 3–74.

29 Quantz, O'Connor, and Magolda, *Rituals and Student Identity in Education: Ritual Critique for a New Pedagogy*, 19.

30 This is not to suggest that educational theorists have no interest in at least concepts/values related to ritual (e.g., as in the case of literature on classroom management). See, for example, Catherine Cornbleth, "Ritual and Rationality in Teacher Education Reform", *Educational Researcher* 15, no. 4 (1986) on teacher education reform, Mary Bushnell, "Small School Ritual and Parent Involvement", *The Urban Review* 29, no. 4 (1997) on parental involvement, and Frances L. van Voorhis, "Reflecting on the Homework Ritual: Assignments and Designs", *Theory Into Practice* 43, no. 3 (2004) on homework.

and Saridede 2012); accordingly, while interesting, they lack rigor and, consequently, generalizing based on them would be dubious.

Moreover, and more important for the present project, these commentaries and studies often fail to specify what educators and education specialists take ritual to be; the term seems to be applied inconsistently. Brian Gatens, for example, values rituals for their ability to provide structure and reduce anxiety, but describes rituals rather reductively as "something we do all the time in the same way — like raising a hat in greeting and shaking hands when we meet people."[31] Gatens is no doubt correct that ritual practices are often formalized and repeated, but the concept of what a ritual is seems at best to be underdeveloped. Other education theorists, such as Steve Gruenert and Todd Whittaker, expand the notion of ritual by describing it as "stylized public expressions of our values and beliefs," which they distinguish from mere routines that exist solely for the purpose of order and efficiency.[32] In order to make progress on the question of whether ritual can make a positive and distinctive contribution to moral education, whether there is untapped potential in this resource, it is necessary to establish a more precise and consistent notion of what ritual is or involves and how it functions. To this end, I turn to the Confucian ritual model.

THE CONFUCIAN RITUAL MODEL

As noted earlier, for the purposes of this project I understand the Confucian concept of ritual to involve the prescriptions for those practices and standards in a community that embody (i.e., give form to) expressions of respect and related dispositions. With this conception of ritual in hand, I can elaborate the Confucian ritual education model and its integral role in moral cultivation.[33] According to Xunzi, ritual education is primarily a matter of reflective study and practice,[34] indicating that moral cultivation via ritual is akin to skill development, a feature that aligns with contemporary advocacy for competency-based learning in building effective curricula.[35] Competency is achieved largely by a process of scaffolding, in which the learner's proximate level of knowledge is built on by gradually introducing new, related material. The learner's competency gradually improves, eventually achieving fluency with the material.[36] In Confucianism, ritual provides a blueprint for what actions to perform in a given situation, giving normative guidance and a means of connecting appropriate actions with relevant feelings.

In this way, Confucian ritual is a means of establishing actions that are symbolic of certain emotions and dispositions: to perform a ritual genuinely, one must express the relevant emotion; to express the relevant emotion, one must actively possess said emotion (and ideally, one will also be receptive to others' ritual actions). A similar point is made by Karen Stohr, who notes that social conventions (e.g., etiquette) are the primary vehicles by which one expresses promoral sentiments.[37] The implication is that being a moral person requires one to understand and adopt social conventions as part of the expression and exchange of moral sentiments. This is not to suggest that morality is simply conventionalism: as Stohr points out, "the conventions are the starting point.... The thought may be what counts, but the vehicle for

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31   Brian Gatens, *Classrooms Need Rituals and Routines — But Don't Get Carried Away* (2016) *Room 241: A Blog by Concordia Univ.-Portland*, 18 July 2016.

32   Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker, *School Culture Rewired: How to Define, Assess, and Transform It* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2015), 34.

33   Further elaboration of such a ritual model can be found in Colin J. Lewis, "Xunzi's Ritual Program as a Response to Han Feizi's Criticism of Confucianism", *Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture* 34, no. 0 (2020), with a specific focus on how a ritual model of moral cultivation can respond to critiques of virtue ethics centered on role modelling.

34   Consider the examples given in *Xunzi* Book 21, "Undoing Fixation."

35   For an overview of competency-based learning, see J. Gervais, "The operational definition of competency-based education", *The Journal of Competency-Based Education* 1, no. 2 (2016).

36   For other recent discussion of ritual and moral fluency, see Michael D. K. Ing, *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confucianism* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2012).

37   Karen Stohr, "Manners, Morals, and Practical Wisdom", in *Values and Virtues: Aristotelianism in Contemporary Ethics*: (Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 196.

expressing it is itself part of the thought."[38] These conventions are integral to proper moral practice and serve an important role in coordinating affect and action.

Additionally, ritual can be understood as introducing moral vocabulary units in a manner functionally akin to Ronald de Sousa's paradigm scenarios. Paradigm scenarios are the means by which humans are acquainted with and habituated to something like a vocabulary of emotion. They contain two components: (1) situation-type and (2) a set of "normal" responses, "where normality is first a biological matter and then very quickly becomes a cultural one."[39] The idea is that humans have a variety of instinctive responses that, via socialization, are shaped to be employed in the expression of promoral emotions. Through stories and habituating situations, such as reading morally charged fables to children or learning to use a smile to elicit a desired response,[40] humans learn to react to a given situation by channeling emotional responses in a manner that is conducive to conventional norms of propriety. A given emotional response to a scenario or stimulus (e.g., feeling sympathy for an injured person) is linked to cultural norms (e.g., the act of assisting that person).[41] Ritual education pursues this goal: one acquires a repertoire of ritual to help one understand how to behave in a given situation. Doing so provides a better idea of how to relate to others and how best to respond to, and sympathize with, them. As a result, one learns how to properly care for others, which is central to the Confucian ideal of humaneness (*ren* 仁).

Ritual can also enhance moral imagination: the capacity of an individual to visualize (or at least hypothesize) about morally charged scenarios.[42] Martha Nussbaum has repeatedly emphasized the importance of this capacity as part of her view of morality as a practical (as opposed to merely theoretical or rational) enterprise.[43] Nussbaum, drawing on the literary philosophy of Henry James, suggests that moral knowledge is

> not simply intellectual grasp of propositions…it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling.[44]

The moral imagination, then, undergirds an ability not only to *think* morally, but to *perceive* the morally salient features of situations. The images and ideas produced and contemplated in this imagination are not general and abstract, but specific and concrete. These features, according to Nussbaum, facilitate the development of the overarching moral capacity to be capable of going beyond mere rule-following and engage in genuine moral performance and improvisation.[45] In turn, the moral imagination helps provide the appropriate actions to undertake in response to them on both emotional *and* rational levels.

Along with literature (e.g., the *Odes*), the Confucians offer ritual as a plausible candidate for such a tool that makes use of and conjoins various metacognitive capacities. Consider the following passage from the *Xunzi*: "[In making offerings to the deceased,] one uses the semblance of moving house, but makes clear that the things will not be used, and these are all means by which to heighten sorrow."[46] Employing such imaginative capacity aids the coping process: the use of symbolic, nonfunctional tools

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38 Ibid., 195.

39 Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (MIT Press, 1990), 182. De Sousa seems to intend "normal" in the sense of statistical norms.

40 Similar ideas are presented by Daniel N. Stern, *The First Relationship* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2009), 13–14, 25–27.

41 An anonymous reviewer suggests that such functions or features are exclusive to a Mengzian view of ritual, but we should reject this reading. There is a clearly established relationship between the inculcation of attitudes and ritual prescriptions across the attributed works of at least the pre-Qin thinkers. Even Xunzi, sometimes mistakenly identified as holding a Hobbesian motivational view, notes ritual's role in facilitating the cultivation and deployment of feelings (e.g., 19/92/3–4 and 19/94/14–18; for examples of non-self-interested motives, see 19/96/10–13 as well as Eric Hutton, "Does Xunzi have a consistent theory of human nature?", *Virtue, nature, and moral agency in the Xunzi* (2000), and so I see no reason to treat this as an exclusively Mengzian feature of ritual.

42 I will not address the question of whether the moral imagination is a distinct capacity from other varieties of imagination, though there is at least some reason to suspect that it is not, Gregory Currie, "The moral psychology of fiction", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 73, no. 2 (1995).

43 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1990).

44 Ibid., 152.

45 Ibid., 156–57.

46 *Xunzi* 19/95/9–13.

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to represent actual, functional tools requires one to utilize a sort of nonliteral thinking in caring for the dead, similar to what is seen in pretend play; special meditative thought combined with fasting might be another means of altering one's psychology such that it is easier to engage with feelings and memories about lost loved ones.[47]

Relatedly, ritual facilitates development of an awareness of other minds by creating a system for sharing an understanding of emotions and attitudes between individuals. In "Against Physiognomy," Xunzi asserts that another's intentions, motives, and affective states are what should be of primary concern when evaluating that person's moral goodness.[48] Ritual provides practitioners with a means of "reading" the minds of others and, insofar as this is an intended purpose of the ritual, it presupposes that such minds exist. This means of assessing via ritual is possible because ritual is a medium for much of human moral interaction. It fills a much-needed role by augmenting the human capacity to relate to others on multiple levels, including an affective level. It is plausible, then, that ritual education entails learners developing awareness of the thoughts and feelings of others in order to comprehend and deploy ritual.

To summarize: the ritual education method includes emphases on inculcating moral fluency via symbolic practices and distinctions, training and appropriately associating promoral dispositions, enhancing moral imagination, and developing awareness of other minds. The model is thus a multifaceted approach to moral education through (meta)cognitive development.

DO THE DATA SUPPORT RITUAL?

If ritual is to be seriously considered as a tool for moral education, then it will help to provide evidence of its being a worthwhile investment. To start, there is at least tentative support for the claim that ritual can aid inculcation of sympathy and empathy. As I have argued, ritual can facilitate such developments by providing an effective means of sharing emotions and attitudes between members of a community.[49] Research in early childhood behavior depicts emotional and moral development as related. Kristin Lagattuta and Drika Weller, for example, note that moral development positively correlates with the capacity for awareness and understanding of others,[50] suggesting that increasing feelings of sympathy or empathy can lead to more reliable displays of moral behavior. Given the importance of empathy to the development of moral competence, then, it is desirable that a moral education program work on eliciting such responses when cued, and the ritual model should be capable of doing so.

Other findings resonate with the Confucian belief that ritual can contribute to cultivating or channeling emotions that encourage promoral behavior. Tina Malti and Sophia Ongley claim that emotions play a key role in children's development by guiding moral decision-making via either anticipating outcomes of courses of action or providing feedback concurrently.[51] Negative consequent emotional outcomes are incorporated into a child's memory and, in turn, moral thought process, ultimately discouraging the associated behavior(s). In subsequent, similar interactions, the child anticipates a similar emotional outcome and considers this prior to acting.[52] Recall that, for Xunzi, moral cultivation involves emotional refinement by providing suitable social forms (i.e., rituals) for the situationally relevant emo-

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47   Mark Berkson, "Xunzi as a Theorist and Defender of Ritual", in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi*, ed. Eric Hutton (Springer, 2016).

48   See in particular *Xunzi* 5/17/11–13: "Physiognomizing a person's outer form is not as good as judging his heart; judging his heart is not as good as ascertaining his chosen course…so long as one's heart and course are good, it will not obstruct one's becoming a gentleman. Even if one's outer form is good, if one's heart and chosen course are bad, then it will not obstruct one's becoming a petty person." Hutton, *Xunzi: The complete text*, 32.

49   E.g., *Analects* 10.25/25/24: Upon seeing someone in mourning garb, even if it was a mere acquaintance, he would alter his countenance [to one of reverence].

50   Kristin Lagattuta and Drika Weller, "Interrelations Between Theory of Mind and Morality", in *Handbook of Moral Development*, ed. Melanie Killen and Judith Smetana (Psychology Press, 2014), 387, 390, 399–400.

51   Tina Malti and Sophia Ongley, "The Development of Moral Emotions and Moral Reasoning", in *Handbook of Moral Development*, ed. Melanie Killen and Judith Smetana (Psychology Press, 2014), 167–68.

52   Similar findings exist for positive emotional outcomes.

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tions. The result is that particular emotions come to be associated with specific circumstances and moral understandings. That an associative feedback loop of emotion and experience appears to occur in development also implies that the ritual model can realistically contribute to moral education.

Another empirically supported aspect of ritual is its usefulness as a concrete resource for the purpose of education. The Confucians seem to assume that humans tend to best understand morality by piecing together actual, emotionally accessible examples of behavior and *then* forming principles to make coherent patterns out of said behaviors.[53] Xunzi, for example, indicates awareness of such facts when discussing how, in attempting to debate with and educate others, one should utilize examples that are both fitting to a situation and accessible to one's audience: if learners cannot relate to the cases being discussed, let alone access them in a useful way, then the educational pursuit is a nonstarter.[54] Against the backdrop of empirical findings, these features of ritual suggest that it would be highly efficacious for moral education. As noted by Wainryb, Brehl, and Matwin, when confronting morally charged scenarios in which they had participated, subjects between five and sixteen years of age constructed their reports in manners that showed greater awareness of the mental states of their co-participants compared to reports in which subjects were asked about hypothetical cases.[55] This suggests—in support of the Confucian ritual model—that when recollecting specific, personal experiences, humans are more prone to engaging their own emotions in their moral reasoning *and also* taking into account the emotions of others than when asked to reason at the more abstract level of hypotheticals.

Finally, and more speculatively, ritual and its emphasis on respect may have further implications for cultivating additional metacognitive functions. In a recent exploration of how to improve appeals to critical thinking skills in the context of moral education, Duck-Joo Kwak offers the following insight, tying critical thinking to ethical reflection:

> Ethical reflection on our own practice does not merely require self-examination of our motives, but also needs to involve theoretical understanding of other kinds to be able to explain how and why a certain practice was derived, how it has shaped our experiences, and in what way our beliefs and desires are connected to it…[E]xplanatory criticism would create in us a highly self-conscious awareness of what we are doing, including the consideration that we cannot be fully free from the practice. … [E]thical reflection…can bring to our students the learned ownership of their moral beliefs along with a broader understanding of their ethical practice based upon them—namely, the possibilities and limitations of the practice.[56]

Ritual study and practice (at least as envisioned by the Confucians) require reflection on the part of the learner.[57] If this connection is correct, then cultivating respect may also enhance other capacities such as sensitivities to morally salient features of situations and other minds, as well as a more general capacity for

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53 A similar point is made by Amy Olberding, "Dreaming of the Duke of Zhou: Exemplarism and the Analects", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (2008), who discusses "exemplarism" in the Confucian tradition. According to Olberding, appeal to particular individuals (e.g., sages, Kongzi, Yan Hui etc.) is intended to direct readers not merely to illustrations of ideal behavior, but to exemplars who are the "genesis" of the more abstract ethical concepts in Confucianism. This idea garners additional support from Xunzi's explicit treatment of the origin of ritual and *yi* as being a product of the behavior of the sage kings, rather than something extant independent of human artifice.

54 *Xunzi* 5/19/17–5/20/1.

55 Cecilia Wainryb et al., "Being Hurt and Hurting Others: Children's Narrative Accounts and Moral Judgments of Their Own Interpersonal Conflicts", *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 70, no. 3 (2005).

56 Duck-Joo Kwak, "Re-conceptualizing Critical Thinking for Moral Education in Culturally Plural Societies", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 39, no. 4 (2007): 469.

57 Indeed, the Korean Neo-Confucian philosopher Yi Hwang (known also by his pen name, Toegye) not only emphasizes respect as a central value for sagely cultivation (as in his Ten Diagrams), but also regards it as something like mindfulness: a concentrated awareness that ties together both the theoretical and practical aspects of moral goodness. For recent elaborations of this position see Michael C. Kalton, "Toegye: His Life, Learning and Times", in *Dao Companion to Korean Confucian Philosophy*, ed. Young-chan Ro (Springer Netherlands, 2019), Hyoungchan. Kim, "Toegye's Philosophy as Practical Ethics: A System of Learning, Cultivation, and Practice for Being Human", *Korea Journal* 47, no. 3 (2007), Uchang Kim, "Confucianism, democracy, and the individual in Korean modernization", in *Transformations in Twentieth Century Korea*, ed. Yun-shik Chang and Steven Lee (Routledge, 2006), and Diana Yuksel, "Korean Confucian Moral Self-accomplishment and Postmodern Ethics", *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Philologia* 58, no. 1 (2013).

reliable moral judgement. Consequently, ritual practice might even be relevant for the development of critical thinking in the context of ethical reflection.

BUILDING RITUALIZED MORAL CURRICULA

There is, then, *at least* tentative reason to think that ritual can enhance moral development. How, though, can ritual like that of the Confucians be incorporated into modern moral education programs?[58] It is not clear that contemporary humans can, or should, attempt to follow the *exact* rituals in the *exact* manner that Confucians like Xunzi prescribe; indeed, it is not even clear what such rituals would entail. Instead, to harness the psychosocial benefits of ritual, I advocate looking at the more general concept of ritual as it has been depicted thus far and address how best to institutionalize it for a contemporary school setting.[59] Consequently, even if we do jettison some Confucian features, the Confucian *conception* of ritual and the *model* of education just described still hold merit for their ability to inculcate and help deploy promoral dispositions.

As mentioned earlier, that others have previously advocated introducing or emphasizing ritual (in some form) for the classroom is encouraging, since it implies that the integration of ritual into moral education practices is feasible and perhaps even desirable. Nonetheless, extant research does not answer the question of how to institutionalize and deploy ritual. Ideally, future studies on classroom ritualization should: (a) establish a common understanding of ritual, as well as how to identify instances of it; (b) formalize a methodology for data collection, preferably beyond anecdotal reports; and (c) encourage collaboration among a more diverse collection and larger number of classrooms and institutions. I have provided, at least partly, a working definition of ritual in the relevant sense, namely "the prescriptions for those practices and standards in a community that embody (i.e., give form to) expressions of respect and related dispositions." Researching the presence of these sorts of prescriptions would facilitate searches for patterns of ritual that emerge in classroom settings, as well as the diversity of rituals involved and how or whether said diversity relates to other features of the classroom (e.g., student demographics, class size, subject matter, etc.). Such data would provide a more objective and useful look at how ritual is or is not being employed in classrooms and, consequently, would aid subsequent determinations how to further institutionalize ritual for the specific purpose of moral education.

While this empirical project must be left for future research, it is still possible to engage the important task of selecting or designing the rituals for moral education programs. Before proceeding too far along this line, I should point out that the latter option (i.e., designing wholly new rituals) is probably largely unnecessary. While it is certainly possible to design new rituals for moral education,[60] there is no need to do so when there are already extant rituals or conventions that could be reframed as educational rituals. Almost all communities have patterns of practices used for organizational purposes, so the key is to integrate the practices and the target moral content that are to be internalized by learners; this is ritualization. When rituals are inculcated effectively, learners do not simply perform a certain practice because it is customary or orderly; they do so out of something like respect or a more general sense of morality.[61]

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[58]   Robert C. Neville, *Ritual and Deference: Extending Chinese Philosophy in a Comparative Context* (SUNY Press, 2008) asks a similar question regarding modernizing Confucian ritual for moral education.

[59]   A separate issue regards moral education in non-school contexts. Due to the constraints of space, I cannot address such domains, but more can (and should) be said regarding both moral education and ritual outside of the school.

[60]   In point of fact, as of 2015, Stanford's Institute of Design launched under the guidance of Kursat Ozenc and Margaret Hagan, "Ritual Design Lab | Bringing meaning into experience & service design", last modified April 3, 2021:36:50, https://www.ritualdesignlab.org/, with an aim of using rituals to "help people to make sense of their life-stages, to construct meaning at personal and societal levels, and to color their rather uneventful ordinary lives." While the Ritual Design Lab is not specifically geared at moral education, its existence suggests that generating new rituals is a live interest and that such projects may be applicable to moral education pursuits.

[61]   A relevant parallel may be the distinction between harmony/harmonizing (*he* 和) and merely agreeing or following along (*tong* 同) as it appears in the *Analects* (i.e., 13.24/36/11: "the noble person harmonizes and does not merely agree; the petty person merely agrees and does not harmonize").

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Consider the practice of raising a hand to request an opportunity to speak in a classroom setting: this practice is a common convention, but it is also an important ritual in helping to establish a dynamic of respectful interactions between teachers and students in the space of the school. If such cultivation through practice proves to be an effective means of encouraging the respectful dynamic and, in turn, prosocial, promoral behavior in general, then it could be said that such an existing convention has been successfully recruited into the moral education process as a ritual.

Furthermore, presumably it is desirable that rituals utilized in the context of the classroom be continuous with general social practices to ensure the transferability of moral education. As discussed earlier, many cultures and communities already possess a variety of rituals, at least some of which fit the definition to which I have been appealing throughout the essay. If ritual is as important for the perpetuation and maintenance of (pro)moral dispositions within a community as I have postulated, then unless there exists a community in which members are completely incapable of consistently expressing respect and humanitarian dispositions through a shared collection of behaviors, there is reason to be skeptical of the need for completely new rituals. One of the issues I noted, however, is that sometimes rituals are not focal points of the culture in general, let alone moral education curricula in particular. Bringing such rituals to the forefront could augment moral education programs with additional resources for inculcating promoral dispositions in students that will also be applicable throughout the general community. It might be necessary to slightly modify the rituals for the sake of making them more salient within the program, but generating all new rituals seems both unnecessary and potentially counterproductive.

Having said this, I do not mean to imply that there can be no modification of extant ritual; indeed, any programmatic development will involve at least some degree of innovation. Rather, I recommend appropriating extant rituals and practices, and incorporating them into a more ritualized approach to moral education (i.e. the ritual education model). This resonates with the aforementioned line of thinking adopted by Gruenert and Whitaker, who note the ability to transform mere routines into meaningful, value-laden rituals that help to bond the school community together. Such observations have influenced proposals for how to improve extant school culture, one recent example being the work of Sam Redding and Julie Corbett, who note that identifying, understanding, and engaging extant rituals in the school are all integral procedures for shifting the overall school culture to promote social and academic growth for constituents.[62]

If one hopes to draw on extant rituals, then, how ought one to select them? To begin, I suggest first returning to the specific notion of ritual with which I am operating: the prescriptions for those practices and standards in a community that embody expressions of respect and related dispositions. Keeping this in mind will help in delineating the rituals that are relevant to moral education from those that are not (e.g., a practice of turning lights on and off due to compulsive tendencies). Using this account of ritual as a metric, and via collaboration with experts in other fields (e.g., psychology, sociology, and anthropology), is the beginning of identifying the rituals (or at least classes of rituals) with which to populate moral education programs.

Additionally, when choosing and establishing rituals to morally educate, it must be remembered that this curriculum is not merely a matter of habituating behaviors, but also cultivating understanding and valuation of certain precepts and ideals. In ritualizing a practice, architects of moral education programs must conceptualize and infuse the relevant value(s) or precept(s) into the practice. This means that there must be a cognitive or meta-cognitive component of reflection involved in ritual education: as mundane practices are transformed into morally laden rituals, learners will need help in grasping the distinction between a practice as mere routine and meaningful ritual. Accordingly, learner-practitioners should be encouraged to not merely adopt and maintain said ritual (lest it devolve into habit), but also reflect on its meaningfulness, including attitudinal content and socio-ethical importance.[63] In so doing, one bridges

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62   Sam Redding and Julie Corbett, *Shifting School Culture to Spark Rapid Improvement: A Quick Start Guide for Principals and Their Teams.* (Center on School Turnaround at WestEd, 2018).

63   Compare with Xunzi's remarks on the importance of examining ritual in cultivating a critical mind (19/92/14–17).

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the so-called rational and non-rational, helping learners develop a more complete moral fluency by binding performance, affect, and understanding with a prosocial, promoral orientation.

These are good first steps toward identifying rituals for integration, but additional filters are still necessary. Although I am deriving my account of ritual from the Confucian notion, I also need to distance the account from elements of the very same tradition.[64] This is, in part, due to the fact that the Confucian tradition (broadly construed) includes a number of sociomoral precepts that may not be desirable for all communities,[65] but the concern also extends to rituals from any culture or belief set: they may espouse, reflect, or represent values or dispositions that are incompatible with idealized moral education programs. It is important, therefore, to examine the rituals under consideration based on the values and dispositions that one hopes to inculcate.

This is a philosophically interesting issue, especially given this account of ritual's focus on respect as a core disposition of expression and inculcation. Thus far, I have spoken of respect in rather general terms; in point of fact, respect admits of a plurality of notions. Consider, for example, the distinction between the respect one might hold for a talented artist and a respect for human rights: the first case might be conceived in terms of esteem or admiration, as one is impressed by the artist's performance or product; the second case involves a slightly different attitude, what one might think of as something like approbation, as one regards human rights as a policy by which one should abide.[66] Variety among kinds of respect is also present within the Confucian tradition from which I have abstracted my notion of ritual. As argued by Sin-yee Chan, respect in Confucianism (at base) involves acknowledging, valuing, and responding accordingly to not only a person's worth, but also the worth of that person's projects.[67] How that respect is conveyed, and its contents, vary depending on features of one's relationship to others (e.g., respect is shown to a parent as filiality, but respect is shown to a sibling as fraternity). Thus, even within a tradition, it is possible for respect to admit of a plurality.

On the one hand, this observation about respect is innocuous. That there are varying forms of respect does not preclude the possibility of stable, even harmonious communities.[68] In fact, different forms of respect may even be conducive to such harmony: respect for a superior or instructor simply is different from the respect that one shows to a colleague or peer, and maintaining certain boundaries as part of demonstrating this respect contributes to maintaining a functional space of practice (be it a classroom, office, or even a sporting event). A pluralism about respect, then, is arguably healthy and even necessary, and the rituals employed in moral education should be expected to accommodate this pluralism.

On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that certain notions of respect might not be conducive to an ideal system of moral education. In the U.S., for example, moral frameworks are typically built around philosophically liberal ideals such as democracy, fairness, and equity. Not all varieties of respect, or modes of expressing it, are conducive to such frameworks. In Confucianism, the sometimes rigid, hierarchical system of divisions inherent in the notion of ritual utilized by Xunzi might not be wholly compatible with liberal, democratic ideals.[69] A similar example from Western culture manifests

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64   Indeed, the topic of whether humans could, or should, draw from the particulars of such a tradition has been recently explored by Owen Flanagan, "Modern Times and Modern Rites", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32 (2019), particularly with regard to ritual's fit in liberal societies.

65   Confucianism, or at least the cultures with which it has been associated, have garnered attention at various times for problematically sexist or xenophobic leanings. For examples of contemporary discussions of these issues, and whether these features are essential to Confucianism, see Bryan van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 330–31 and Feng Zhang, "Confucian Foreign Policy Traditions in Chinese History", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8, no. 2 (2015).

66   Stephen L. Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect", *Ethics* 88, no. 1 (1977) distinguishes these as *appraisal respect* and *recognition respect*.

67   Sin Y. Chan, "The Confucian Notion of *Jing* (Respect)", *Philosophy East and West* 56, no. 2 (2006), 229.

68   Even varying moral systems need not pose opposition, provided they fall within certain parameters.

69   An anonymous reviewer questions whether such potential incompatibilities undermine the argument I am making for the utility of ritual as a resource for moral education. Three points — (1) while I am focusing on the example of liberal democratic ideals here, it is not my present aim to advocate or advance liberalism in particular; (2) relatedly, we should be wary of assuming that liberalism should serve as a default sociopolitical stance given its moral limitations (e.g., as critiqued from the perspective

in the notion of chivalry, as well as notions of respect derived from religious laws and customs (e.g., halakha, sharia, catechism, etc.). It is not obvious that these notions of respect, and their accompanying rituals, would (or could) fit within the parameters of the liberal framework that a U.S.-based moral education program would hope to inculcate.[70] This applies not only to notions of respect, but also to the promoral values to which said notions attach (e.g., filiality, equity, etc.). Accordingly, rituals will need to be selected against a backdrop of agreed upon values that are conducive to a particular moral framework. This may require a constrained value pluralism. Developing the constraints for such pluralism, as well as examining its applications and ramifications, are both well beyond the bounds of this project. Given the importance of such pursuits, however, they should remain additional matters for investigation in future research on ritual's utility for moral education.

Despite the uncertainties posed by these questions, I do not think that they are overly worrisome for ritual's potential as a tool for moral education, especially considering that (in principle) there do not appear to be any negatives associated with this pursuit. Furthermore, and as I have argued throughout the essay, there is good reason to think that ritual can perform a number of functions that make it an ideal resource for helping learners to cultivate promoral dispositions. In fact, it is arguable that there is at least as much reason to think that ritual can benefit moral education programs as other instructional tools (e.g., surveys, clickers, social media, etc.) for general education. The specifics of how to employ ritual remain incomplete, but we should be optimistic about ritual's ability to inculcate morality and continue exploring this possibility.

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of feminist care ethics); (3) as scholars such as Joseph Chan have repeatedly argued, it may be possible to establish compatibility between Confucian ideals and the liberal democratic tradition. Cf. Joseph Chan, "Democracy and Meritocracy: Toward a Confucian Perspective", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2007), Joseph Chan, *Confucian Perfectionism: A Political Philosophy for Modern Times* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2013).

70 Furthermore, if considering the application of rituals specifically within the space of the school, then some of these concerns might become non-issues depending on how one conceives of concepts such as democracy. For example, if by 'democracy' one means the political equality of persons, then it is not clear that schools even within liberal societies are genuinely democratic given the hierarchical nature of relationships and obligations between teachers, students, administrators, and staff (families pose a similar complication). Indeed, democracy (at least in this incarnation) might be incompatible with effective education practices, while the Confucian conception of ritual might be conducive to (and even enhance) the school structure.

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