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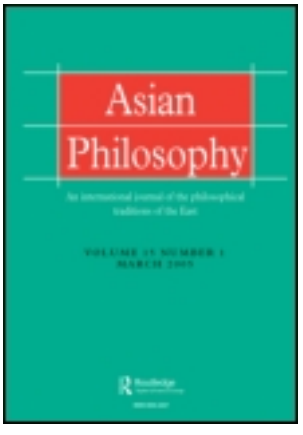

Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/casp20

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Version of record first published: 27 Jun 2012

To cite this article: JeeLoo Liu (2012): Moral Reason, Moral Sentiments and the Realization of Altruism: A Motivational Theory of Altruism, Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East, 22:2, 93-119

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2012.692534

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Asian Philosophy
Vol. 22, No. 2, May 2012, pp. 93–119

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Moral Reason, Moral Sentiments and the Realization of Altruism: A Motivational Theory of Altruism

JeeLoo Liu

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This paper begins with Thomas Nagel's (1970) investigation of the possibility of altruism to further examine how to motivate altruism. When the pursuit of the gratification of one's own desires generally has an immediate causal efficacy, how can one also be motivated to care for others and to act towards the well-being of others? A successful motivational theory of altruism must explain how altruism is possible under all these motivational interferences. The paper will begin with an exposition of Nagel's proposal, and see where it is insufficient with regard to this further issue. It will then introduce the views of Zhang Zai and Wang Fuzhi, and see which one could offer a better motivational theory of altruism. All three philosophers offer different insights on the role of human reason/reflection and human sentiments in moral motivation. The paper will end with a proposal for a socioethical moral program that incorporates both moral reason and moral sentiments as motivation.

I. Introduction

This paper begins with Thomas Nagel's (1970) investigation of the possibility of altruism. Altruism, by Nagel's definition, is 'merely a willingness to act in consideration of the interests of other persons, without the need of ulterior motives' (Nagel, 1970, p. 79). By this definition, the sufficient condition for altruism includes two mental states: a willingness to act altruistically and the absence of ulterior motives. The fundamental question Nagel investigates is: *how is altruism possible*? His theory only needs to investigate the rationale behind the agent's developing an altruistic mindset. In this paper, I want to push for a motivational theory of altruism. I will first modify Nagel's definition and define 'altruism' as '*acting* in consideration

Correspondence to: JeeLoo Liu, Department of Philosophy, California State University, Fullerton, CA 92834, USA. Email: jeelooliu@gmail.com

ISSN 0955-2367 print/ISSN 1469-2961 online/12/020093–27 © 2012 Taylor & Francis
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2012.692534

of the interests of other persons, without the need of ulterior motives'. This definition does not treat altruism simply as a mental proclivity. In my view, the agent's merely having a willingness to act in consideration of others' well-being but never acting on this intent cannot truly be said to be altruistic. It is a banal fact that an altruistic mindset does not readily lead to altruistic acts. The competition between self-interest and others-interest poses a great challenge for any motivational theory of altruism. When the pursuit of the gratification of one's own desires generally has an immediate causal efficacy, how can one also be motivated to care for others and to act towards the well-being of others? Nagel discusses various cases of 'motivational interference', such as weakness of the will, cowardice, laziness, panic, etc. (Nagel, 1970, p. 66). In addition, we can also imagine that attitudes such as procrastination, apathy, inconsistency, and consideration for one's future self all pose an obstacle to the causal efficacy of altruistic motivation. Therefore, a successful motivational theory of altruism must explain how altruism is possible under all these motivational interferences.

Furthermore, in this paper I want to push the question further: *how can altruism be realized in our contemporary society*? By 'realization', I mean the *propagation* of altruistic behavior in a given society. My interest is in delineating a moral program that could be useful in bringing about an altruistic society. I will be advocating a socioethical sentimentalist moral program informed by two Chinese philosophers, Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), who based their moral theories on Mencius' view of human nature but further developed it with different emphases. The paper will begin with an exposition of Nagel's proposal, and see where it is insufficient with regard to this further issue. It will then introduce the views of Zhang Zai and Wang Fuzhi, and see which one could offer a better motivational theory of altruism. All three philosophers offer different insights on the role of human reason/reflection[1] and human sentiments in moral motivation. The paper will end with a proposal for a socioethical moral program that incorporates both moral reason and moral sentiments as motivation.

Any motivational theory for altruism must be able to successfully address the following questions:

(1) The Question of Justification: One can be motivated to take up moral acts in different ways, but not all motivations are ethically justified. What kinds of motivation for altruism are ethically justified?
(2) The Question of Causal Efficacy: How can the motivation be deep and causally efficacious such that it will overcome other motivational interferences and result in altruistic acts?
(3) The Question of Causal Persistency: How can the motivation be consistent and long lasting?
(4) The Question of Accessibility: How can the motivation be prevalent and readily available to everyone?

The following explication of Nagel's, Zhang's and Wang's theories will show how they each would provide an answer to these questions.

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II. Nagel's Rational Altruism

Nagel takes altruism to be a fundamental requirement of human rationality, and he emphasizes that altruism is not a feeling and 'not to be confused with generalized affection for the human race' (Nagel, 1970, p. 3). Nagel writes,

> The general thesis to be defended concerning altruism is that one has a *direct* reason to promote the interests of others—a reason which does not depend on intermediate factors such as one's own interests or one's antecedent sentiments of sympathy and benevolence. (Nagel, 1970, pp. 15–16)

One can be motivated by one's reason to be altruistic, and such reasoning does not have to involve consideration of one's self-interest. Reason also does not need the supplementary enhancement of emotion. Nagel holds motivational internalism, 'the view that the presence of a motivation for acting morally is guaranteed by the truth of ethical propositions themselves' (Nagel, 1970, p. 7). On this view, moral justification, or merely *believed* moral justification, provides motivation for ethical action: *reason motivates*.

Nagel argues that the foundation of ethics must be sought in reason, in particular, in our practical reason. A practical reason is 'a reason to do or want something', as opposed to a theoretical reason that is 'a reason to conclude or believe something' (Nagel, 1970, p. 64). He constructs a system of practical rationality in which the interests of others pose a rational requirement on all moral agents. On Nagel's rationalist conception, it is simply inadequate to appeal to our moral sentiments such as sympathy and benevolence to explain the possibility of altruism. One's sympathy for others may indeed propel one to act altruistically on certain occasions, but it is too weak in contrast to the motivation based on self-interest. Furthermore, such an appeal is *superfluous*. Nagel believes that there is such a thing as *pure altruism*: 'It is the direct influence of one person's interest on the actions of another, simply because in itself the interest of the former provides the latter with a reason to act' (Nagel, 1970, p. 80). When an agent judges an act to be justified or accepts the justification for an act, according to Nagel, she *already* has a reason for doing it. The justification itself provides the 'motivational content' for the act (Nagel, 1970, p. 65).

Nagel's rational altruism not only places emphasis on reason alone, but also adds further constraints on justifiable reasons. To be ethically justified, the motivating reasons must meet the *constraint of objectivity*:

> [**Constraint of Objectivity**]:[2] The only acceptable reasons for altruism are objective ones. (Nagel, 1970, p. 96)

By 'objective reasons', he means that the reasons given must 'assign objective value to a certain kind of behavior, rather than to any goal of that behavior' (Nagel, 1970, p. 92). This is a way to ensure that the motivation is not target-relative: it does not change its strength simply because the person in need is a loved one or a stranger. A subjective principle 'can justify only a desire for things bearing a certain relation to *oneself*: one's interest, the interests of one's family or country, etc.' (Nagel, 1970, p. 117). Nagel thinks that the subjective principle is an obstacle to altruism because

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it leads to the 'disassociation' between the personal standpoint and the impersonal standpoint, and such a disassociation will nullify the purely altruistic act. Only an objective principle can warrant either a 'willingness to promote an end, or a desire for that end' (Nagel, 1970, p. 119). In other words, only through embracing the objective principle can one arrive at what Nagel accepts as an *ethically justified* concern for the interests of others.

Another constraint of Nagel's rational altruism is the '*constraint of impartiality*':

> [**Constraint of Impartiality**]**:** In one's motivation for altruistic acts, one must regard oneself as merely one individual among many.

This requirement has two elements, the first is to elevate the status of others' existence in one's scale of values; the second is to reduce the self-importance of one's existence so as to regard oneself and others impartially. Nagel further stipulates two other psychological traits essential to this constraint of impartiality:

(1). *Empathetic Imagination*
Imagine this: 'How would you like it if someone did that to you?' If our reaction should be that we would not only dislike it, but even resent it, when someone else treated us in that way, then the judgment we would naturally (by the rational requirement on us) derive on *how we should act* is clear: refrain from doing what one did to others. This imagination places us in others' shoes and allows us to consider ourselves as the possible recipient of others' acts. The role-playing imagination should generate an understanding of what is expected from us.

(2). *The Impersonal Standpoint*
Nagel argues that for one to accomplish a vivid recognition of oneself as merely a person among others, 'one must be able to regard oneself in every respect impersonally' (Nagel, 1970, p. 102). The impersonal standpoint 'provides a view of the world without giving one's location in it' (Nagel, 1970, p. 101). According to Nagel, the impersonal description of the world 'will include a description of the person who is "I" in the personal description, and will recast in impersonal terms everything that can be said about that individual in the first person' (*Ibid.*). For example, we might see our own situation as one in which our house was destroyed by a wild fire and we did not have any insurance to cover the loss. We now see the situation as one in which *someone*'s house was destroyed without insurance coverage. With this shift of standpoint, we can assess objectively whether the situation is one that calls for others' assistance. In contrast, a personal standpoint takes the view of the world 'from a vantage point within it' and the subject is 'the locus of that vantage point' (*Ibid.*). When one is stuck with one's vantage point, then one's concerns and one's needs make the most urgent demand on one's attention. In Nagel's view, such a consideration cannot bring us out of our self-concern.

In a nutshell, what Nagel claims to be a proper supplement to the agent's empathetic imagination is the impersonal consideration of the agent's need—not as *his needs* but as *someone's* needs. Others should act to assist him not because *he* is in need, but because *someone* is in need. Following this way of conceiving the reason

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for action, one would recognize that if others should act when *someone* is in need, then one should also act when *someone* is in need. What is required for others to do *by my own reason* is also required for me to do. The agent would thus be rationally motivated to take altruistic acts.

We could suppose that a rational Nagelian moral agent would reason as thus:

(1) **Imagination**: I would not only dislike it, but also resent it, if others did nothing while I am in need.
(2) **Self-Conception**: I am merely an individual among many, and the reality of other persons is as vivid as my own.
(3) **Impersonal Standpoint**: I would want others to take actions because *someone* is in need.
(4) **Rationality**: By principle of parity, I would want myself to take actions because *someone else* is in need.

Let us imagine that an individual, T.N., is such a rational agent, with logical acuity and vivid empathetic imagination, who also embraces the principles of objectivity and impartiality. He would be someone with a 'detached' self-conception, viewing himself as merely *someone* among many. By reasoning that he would want others to take actions to assist him if he were that *someone* in need, he came to the conclusion that he should take actions to assist others in need. However, what would motivate such a rational agent to actually take actions in real situations? If reason can motivate, as Nagel claims, then the motivational content of reason could be explained in either of the following ways:

(i) I *should* do what is a rational conclusion of my practical reasoning.
(ii) I *should* perform what my rational judgment concludes as a true ethical proposition.

Nagel thinks 'ordinary first-person practical judgments possess motivational content already' (Nagel, 1970, p. 110); however, to derive

(iii) I *will* do what I judge to be the right thing to do

either from (i) or from (ii) seems to ignore all the practical problems of 'moral interruptions': weakness of will, laziness, cowardice, inertia, etc. People do not always do what their practical reason judges to be the right thing to do, even when the rationally concluded action is in their own best interest to perform. This is the well-known paradox of irrationality. Even if reason provides motivational *content*, it does not seem to have sufficient motivational *power* by itself. Reason cannot overcome such moral failings as procrastination, inertia, apathy, etc., which all lead to inaction. The causal efficacy of reason as motivation is highly questionable.

Furthermore, even if we agree with Nagel that the rationality of T.N. is a basic condition of human rationality, Nagel's rational altruism is founded on the rational agent's being motivated by his reason alone to take altruistic act, and doing so consistently. A Nagelian agent would have to be someone who has a detached sense of the self and a vivid imagination of others' plight, someone who has no moral

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frailty and suffers no temporal lapse between ethical thinking and moral action. Such a person must be in the company of saints and sages.

Brian Powell has pointed out a further problem of Nagel's theory. Powell argues that Nagel's argument fails to show that 'one must commit oneself to a requirement of altruism' (Powell, 2005, p. 257). Powell presents the possibility of consistent egoism: an egoist can accept Nagel's demand for the recognition of the reality of others, without also embracing the commitment to make the following claim: 'My needs and interests provide others with reasons merely in virtue of being someone's needs and interests' (Powell, 2005, p. 259). Such an egoist could be either thinking that everyone should merely self-help and thus her own needs and interests should not be the concern for others, or that she herself is special and hence that only her own needs and interests should provide others for reasons to act. What Powell's egoist would reject is either the first step of a Nagelian agent's reasoning: *I would not only dislike it, but also resent it, if others did nothing while I am in need*, or the last step of the reasoning: the principle of parity. Only the first scenario could preserve the kind of consistency that a rational agent would have. Under this scenario, a rational egoist believes that everyone should care only for himself, act for his own self-interest; furthermore, the world would be better off when no one relies on others for assistance. With this form of self-help egoism, assistance for others is not only unnecessary, but also immoral. If a rational Nagelian agent embraces this view, then such a person would still place himself among others and yet desist altruism. Reason alone does not compel altruism, all things considered.

Granted, Nagel does acknowledge that there is no necessary connection between a person's acknowledging the reason, and her taking the action or even her wanting to take the action. He writes, 'All I wish to claim is that such an acknowledgement is by itself *capable* of providing a motivation in the appropriate direction' (Nagel, 1970, p. 111, emphasis in original). His theory can be seen to have a very limited goal: *Given* that agent A behaves altruistically, A *could be* motivated completely by her acknowledgement of her reason, and her action *could be* completely explained by her justification of her reason. However, such a theory seems to be retroactively tracing the altruistic agent's behavior back to the motivation, to identify a justifiable motivation for the agent's behavior. If we want to have a successful motivational theory, we need to see what kind of mental state, be it belief, desire, or sentiment, *does* motivate. In other words, we want to know what *makes* altruism possible.

In conclusion, under Nagel's rational altruism, the only ethically justified motivation for altruism is reason. But this motivational content is empty and disassociated from one's own desires and sentiments. Even though Nagel thinks only reason can be an ethically justified motivation for altruism, his motivational theory fails the test of *causal efficacy* and *prevalence*. The theory provides a rational ground for acting altruistically, but whether most people would always act rationally is questionable.

The paper now turns to two Neo-Confucians to see how their theories can be reconstructed to address Nagel's question. The two theories will provide an interesting contrast to the contemporary Nagelian view, in that they are based on

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different metaphysics of human nature, different assumptions of interpersonal relationships, and they depict different moral ideals.

III. Zhang Zai's Theory of Moral Motivation

Zhang Zai, a Neo-Confucian in the eleventh century, established his theory of moral motivation on the basis of his moral metaphysics. He affirms a universal 'moral essence' in human existence, but also acknowledges various biological needs and temperamental differences in individuals. He calls the former 'nature endowed by Heaven and Earth (*tian-di-zhi-xing* 天地之性)' and the latter 'physical nature (*qi-zhi-zhi- xing* 氣質之性)'. Zhang Zai says,

> With the existence of physical form, there exists physical nature. If one skillfully returns to the original nature endowed by Heaven and Earth, then it will be preserved. Therefore in physical nature there is that which the superior man denies to be his original nature. (Zhang, 2006, p. 23; translation from Chan, 1963, p. 511)

Morality, for Zhang Zai, consists in transforming one's biological existence into a moral existence, and in elevating one's physical desires into a form of altruistic desire—desire for the well-being of others. This elevated moral state is called 'humaneness (*ren* 仁)', which is roughly tantamount, though not restricted, to the virtue of altruism discussed in this paper. Altruism is thus a major part of Zhang's theory of moral cultivation. Moral cultivation consists primarily in building a moral character, and the success is potentially guaranteed by our having inborn moral essence—our 'nature endowed by Heaven and Earth'. However, the real key to a successful endeavor is human intellect—one ought to think in the correct way to guide one's emotions and desires. This is what learning should accomplish:

> The great benefit of learning is to enable one to transform his physical nature himself. Otherwise he will have the defect of studying in order to impress others, in the end will attain no enlightenment, and cannot see the all-embracing depth of the sage. (Zhang, 2006, p. 274; translation from Chan, 1963, p. 516).

Similar to Nagel's constructing a rational moral agent, Zhang Zai advocates the development of moral agency through thinking, learning and understanding.

According to Zhang Zai, 'Human mind unifies both moral essence (*xing* 性) and emotions (*qing* 情)' (Zhang, 2006, p. 374). One's inborn nature is good, and this can be viewed as one's moral essence. However, 'evil consists in the lack of moderations of emotions' (Zhang, 2006, p. 323). Therefore, human emotions must be moderated and this is where the faculty of understanding comes in. One needs to understand the principle of Heaven and its manifestation in the rites and rituals (*li* 禮) inaugurated by ancient sages, so that one can restrain oneself (*ke-ji* 克己) and return to ritual propriety (*fu-li* 復禮).

Even though Zhang Zai embraced Mencius' conviction of the goodness of human nature, he did not focus on what Mencius took to be the proof of good human nature: the sentiment of commiseration, the sentiment of shame and disgust, the sentiment of reverence and deference, and the sense of right and wrong—the four

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sentiments that Mencius called 'the Four Moral Sprouts (*si-duan* 四端)'. What he focused on instead, is the importance of studying, learning and moral transformation through one's volition.

Zhang Zai has a low evaluation of the moral weight of human desires: 'Everyone has the selfish desires, which work against one's moral cultivation. Therefore, scholars must learn to reduce desires' (Zhang, 2006, p. 281). He distinguishes 'desirable desires' from 'undesirable desires' and calls the former 'good': '[According to Mencius,] "what is desirable is good". [However,] what ordinary people take to be desirable is not completely desirable. Only what the sage and the worthy wish for is a desirable good' (Zhang, 2006, p. 324). Ordinary people have lots of material desires or other self-interested desires; highly virtuous and worthy men have additional altruistic desires. The content of this desire, in Zhang Zai's construal of the sages, would be such goals as giving universal humanitarian relief, taking care of the well-being of others in distress. As he put it in the famous *The Western Inscription*:

> The sage identifies his character with that of Heaven and Earth, and the worthy is the most outstanding man. Even those who are tired, infirm, crippled, or sick; those who have no brothers or children, wives or husbands, are all my brothers who are in distress and have no one to turn to. (Zhang, 2006, p. 62; translation from Chan, 1963, p. 497)

By Harry Frankfurt's classic distinction, 'someone has a first-order desire when he wants to do or not to do such-and-such', and 'he has a second-order desire when he wants to have (or not to have) a certain desire of the first order' (Frankfurt, 1971, p. 7). The first-order desire has the direct causal efficacy on action. If this second-order desire is turned into a will, then it inherits the causal efficacy from the first-order desire. Frankfurt calls the enhanced second-order desires 'the second-order volitions' (Frankfurt, 1971, p. 10). The second-order desire needs to be combined with volition to have causal efficacy. Both self-interested desire and altruistic desire can be desires of the first-order, while what Zhang Zai advocates in his moral program is to cultivate a second-order desire for what he calls 'the desire of the sage and the worthy (*sheng-xian-zhi-yu* 聖賢之欲)'. A morally complete person such as Confucius could go with whatever his heart desires without ever overstepping the bounds of propriety, while what the sage and the worthy desire is simply 'to learn to be like Confucius' (Zhang, 2006, p. 324). A moral agent, according to Zhang Zai, should *want to have* the desire of the sage and the worthy to be like Confucius in his moral grandeur, and she should *not want to have* the desire for her own self-gratification—what Zhang Zai calls 'selfish desire (*si-yu* 私欲)'. In other words, one would desire the alleviation of others' suffering once one has first adopted the desire of the sage and the worthy through the act of will (*zhi* 志). In Zhang Zai's theory of moral motivation, desire can indeed motivate moral behavior when it is a form of altruistic desire accompanied by the second-order desire to adopt the ideal personality of 'the sage and the worthy'. From the intellectual transformation and assimilation, one can eventually develop this

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volition (*zhi* 志). The highest goal for a moral agent can be expressed by Zhang Zai's famous four-line slogan:[3]

> Establish the volition for Heaven and Earth (*wei tiandi lizhi*).
>
> Expound *Dao* for all mankind (*wei shengmin lidao*).
>
> Renew ancient sages' supreme teachings that are dying out (*wei qusheng ji juexue*).
>
> Secure peace and prosperity for thousands of generations to come (*wei wanshi kai taiping*). (Zhang, 2006, p. 320)

This slogan depicts the volition and the desire of a moral agent. We can say that the sense of desire in this context is not the descriptive sense of 'what I naturally desire', but the evaluative sense of 'what is worthy of being desired' and the prescriptive sense of 'what ought to be desired'. What Zhang Zai asks from moral agents is to transform their first-order natural desire for the well-being of themselves as well as of their family members, by adopting this belief: *all people are related to me as my family members*. In other words, to develop altruistic desire, one must have the appropriate belief: the belief in universal kinfolk. This belief of universal kinfolk is that everyone in the world is related to one another as descendants of the same ancestors—and in Zhang Zai's moral metaphysics, such ancestors are metaphorically taken to be heaven and earth:

> Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. (Zhang, 2006, p. 62; translation from Chan, 1963, p. 497)

Through reflection on the common origin of humankind, one imagines that all human beings are descendants of Heaven and Earth and there is thus a universal kinfolk relationship among human beings. Once one gains this understanding, one would no longer have desires based merely on self-interest, but would develop an extended care for all sentient beings. This understanding, in Zhang Zai's moral theory, is what makes altruism possible.

To cultivate the second-order altruistic desire, one needs to learn from the sage and the worthy. Zhang Zai thinks that the way for a moral agent to be motivated by his or her altruistic desire is to read books written by the sages, to learn to think as they think and to learn to feel as they feel. It is a process of moral transformation through education. 'If one has the volition (*zhi* 志) to learn, then it does not matter whether one initially inherited good or bad physical nature. What counts is simply the volition' (Zhang, 2006, p. 321). Since everyone has an inborn moral essence, everyone has the potential to become a sage. What stand in the way of moral transformation are one's accumulated habits of pursuing self-gratification to the detriment of one's pursuit of *Dao*.

> There are those who are devoted to the study of *Dao* and suddenly get distracted by other thoughts, this is all due to the influence of old habits. When one is entangled in old habits and cannot get rid of them, there is no improvement to be made, but the enjoyment of old habits. (Zhang, 2006, p. 377)

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To overcome moral interferences derived from one's physical nature, one needs to retrieve one's moral essence, and daily practices of reading and reflection are indispensable.

In summary, under Zhang Zai's view, the concern for others' well-being can be established in a moral agent as long as she emulates the sage. Zhang Zai's moral theory tries to expand family love into worldly care, and to generate altruistic desire on the basis of one's natural desire for the well-being of family members. The second-order desire to have 'the desire of the sage and the worthy' must be cultivated by adopting the belief that everyone is related to one another as family members and that the whole world is just one large family under Heaven. Zhang Zai advocates the view that this cultivation can only be accomplished through education; in particular, through studying what ancient sages wrote and learning to assimilate how they thought. With the aid of moral education, one eventually transforms one's natural tendencies and becomes a purely virtuous moral agent in the company of the sage.

Since Zhang Zai calls the morally justified altruistic desire 'desire of the sage and the worthy', it is clear that he thinks the goal of moral education is to transform oneself to be like the sage and the worthy. We might interpret Zhang Zai's moral precept of *sagehood* as an ideal metaphysical conception of oneself. This kind of moral theories emphasizes ideal personality, a goal that one aspires to reach in one's lifetime. According to Flanagan and Rorty's explanation of ideal personhood, 'These ideals may be characterized by a life plan or a ground project, by an unfolding array of projects that change over the course of a life, and by a range of personal commitments' (Flanagan & Rorty, 1991, p. 4). For Zhang Zai, the ideal personhood is the sage, and the moral goal one should strive for is to *think*, *desire* and *act* like a sage would.

However, such an ideal moral agent must be exceptional. Zhang Zai's theory may have provided an explanation of the moral motivation of purely altruistic moral agents, and yet it fails to provide a practical strategy for realizing altruism in human society. We could perhaps apply Nagel's criticism of other desire-based motivational theory of altruism to Zhang Zai's theory as well: 'If one wishes to guarantee its universal application, one must make the presence of reasons for altruistic behavior depend on a desire *present in all men*' (Nagel, 1970, p. 28, emphasis added). It is hard to believe that ordinary people *all* have the ideal metaphysical conception of themselves that they will *all* want to cultivate the desire of 'the sage and the worthy'. Zhang Zai's theory would fail to address the question of accessibility, to say the least.

Furthermore, the moral reasoning of a Zhang Zai's moral agent could be formulated as follows:

(1) **First-order desire**: I naturally desire the well-being as well as the alleviation of suffering for my family members and myself.
(2) **Belief in universal kinfolk**: I believe everyone in the world is related to one another as descendants of the same ancestors.
(3) **Reason**: If everyone in the world is related to one another as descendants of the same ancestors, then everyone in the world is related to me as my parents, siblings or children.

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(4) **Reason**: If I desire the well-being as well as the alleviation of suffering for my family, then I must also desire the well-being as well as the alleviation of suffering for everyone in the world.
(5) **Second-order desire**: I rationally desire to have the desire for the well-being as well as the alleviation of suffering for everyone in the world.

However, why would such a moral agent *act upon* his or her own reasoning? Even if the agent has developed the altruistic desire from having learned from the sage and the worthy, he or she still needs the volition to act upon the adopted belief and desire. What would *motivate* this moral agent to act altruistically and to continue to act this way? Zhang Zai's theory would just point to one's physical nature, one's lack of the right volition and one's continuing bad habits as the explanation for one's failure to act. It does not, however, offer an explanation for the causal efficacy of the above set of belief and desire.

Both Nagel's and Zhang Zai's theories fail in aspects of causal efficacy, causal persistency and in particular, accessibility. The fundamental problem is their overly idealistic conceptions of moral agency. As Owen Flanagan and Amélie Rorty point out, 'traditional moral theories have recently been criticized for being indefensibly utopian, enjoining an impossible reconstruction of our psychologies' (Flanagan & Rorty, 1991, p. 2). The next section introduces Wang Fuzhi's moral theory, which does not have such a utopian bent and is supported by a reasonable explication of human psychology.

IV. Wang Fuzhi's Theory of Moral Sentiments and Moral Motivation

In contrast to both Nagel and Zhang Zai who emphasize human reason and intellect in moral motivation, Wang Fuzhi takes morality to be rooted in moral sentiments, which are distinguished from, and preside over, our natural emotions. What makes altruism possible under his theory would be the combination of both moral sentiments and natural emotions, with the further requirement of *reflection* (*si* 思). It is a theory that incorporates both moral reason and moral sentiments.

Wang Fuzhi embraces the moral essence theory of Mencius, according to which human beings have four innate moral sentiments and moral senses. Mencius (1970, vol. 2A, p. 6). argues that we all have the sentiment of commiseration, the sentiment of shame and disgust, the sentiment of reverence and deference, and the sense of right and wrong. These sentiments constitute the 'sprouts' of human morality. Wang Fuzhi points out that the sentiment of commiseration is different from the feeling of love, which has a more restricted scope. It is a sentiment of commiseration for the misery of strangers. This sentiment is the beginning of a full-fledged virtue *humaneness* (*ren* 仁), and must not be conflated with family love. The sentiment of shame and disgust includes both the sense of shame for one's own wrongdoing or one's failure to do the right thing, and the sense of disgust for others' wrongdoing. A milder but associated sentiment of 'shame' might be likened to what Bernard William calls 'agent-regret'—'It indicates that though one may not be at fault for failing to meet

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a claim, one nonetheless feels some degree of responsibility' (Sherman, 1991, p. 151). A milder but associated sentiment of 'disgust' might be considered as 'disapproval' upon seeing another's wrongdoing. The sentiment of reverence and deference includes a sense of observance of the social context in which one finds oneself, as well as a sense of respect for others and deference in one's attitude towards those with authority. Finally, the sense of right and wrong is one's ability to perceive right from wrong; in contemporary terminology, this moral sense could be interpreted as moral conscience or moral cognition. Mencius as well as Wang Fuzhi thinks that we naturally have a moral perception of right and wrong, which is part of our natural moral sensibility. In other words, this moral sense is our natural endowment, not socially conditioned or constructed.

Moral sentiments should be distinguished from emotions (*qing* 情), according to Wang Fuzhi. The four moral sentiments constitute our 'moral essence (*xing* 性)'.[4] Wang Fuzhi also calls them 'the heart of *Dao*' (Wang, 1974a, p. 674). Emotions emerge from our delight in food and sex and develop into the myriad emotions we have, which include the seven modes of emotion typified in Chinese culture: joy, anger, sadness, pleasure, love, resentment and craving.[5] Wang calls them 'the heart of humans' (*Ibid.*). Emotions are the link between moral essence (*xing* 性) and desire (*yu* 欲): 'Emotions are directed by moral essence above and they direct desire below' (Wang, 1974b, p. 23). In Wang Fuzhi's evaluation, these emotions themselves are neither moral nor immoral: they are simply how human hearts naturally respond to people and things. A mother's love for her baby, for example, is an emotion, not a moral sentiment. Emotions are biologically based and are generally shared by humans and other animals. Emotions, if unchecked, could lead to immorality (*bu-shan* 不善). However, Wang Fuzhi thinks that these emotions can serve as the motivational foundation for morality, because they have the strongest motivational force for human conduct:

> Even though immorality can be the fault of human emotions, to do good one must also rely on emotions to achieve efficacy (*gong* 功). One's heart of *Dao* [i.e., one's moral sentiments] is elusive, and it needs to build on emotions in order to thrive and propagate with ease. (Wang, 1974a, vol. 10, p. 677)

For example, when we see people starving to death, we spontaneously feel sorrowful for them. This is one of our inborn moral sentiments. And yet most people would simply feel sympathetic without taking any action to assist. If those starving people were their family members, on the other hand, then most people would immediately try to alleviate their hunger. This reaction is prompted by our natural emotion of love. What is needed for altruistic behavior is thus the extension of natural emotions for the loved ones to the enhancement of moral sentiments towards strangers. There is a moral distinction between the motivational force of natural emotions and the motivational force of moral sentiments—only conduct motivated by moral sentiments can be considered ethically justified.

Emotions are tied to desires on the level of one's biological existence. Just as emotions are 'spontaneous and irrepressible', desires, once agitated, are also

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'what cannot be stopped' (Wang, 1974b, p. 22). Unlike Zhang Zai and many other Neo-Confucians who condemned human desires, Wang Fuzhi treated human desires as a natural and blameless part of our existence. We may say that his theory of moral motivation acknowledges what Michael Slote calls 'self-concern'—'concern about one's own wellbeing' (Slote, 2001, p. 77). To Wang Fuzhi, morality begins with the recognition of one's natural desires and extends to the recognition of the desires of others. He defines 'desire' as the mind's interaction with that which is desirable: 'Things like sounds and colors, goods and wealth, power and authority, achievement and success, anything that is desirable such that I would desire it, is called ''desire''' (Wang, 1974a, vol. 6, p. 369). In other words, desire has an intentional content—be it a material object or a state of affairs. As long as we are alive, we cannot avoid interacting with objects; once we interact with objects, we cannot avoid the generation of our desires. Therefore, 'to expect one to completely rid oneself of human desires is an impossible demand' (Wang, 1974a, vol. 6, p. 371).

Wang Fuzhi has a fundamental affirmation of what is essential to human existence: the need to survive. To survive, one must deal with one's physical needs. A moral agent is first and foremost a biological being; hence, there is nothing shameful or immoral about wanting to gratify one's physical needs and material desires. To reject human desires is to isolate human beings from the natural world and to cut them off from their biological nature. According to Wang, the highest moral principle—'Heavenly principle'—is manifested in human desires for food and sex: 'Ultimately Heaven is not a separate realm divorced from humans, and ultimately [Heavenly] principle is not a separate mandate detached from human desires' (Wang, 1974a, vol. 6, p. 519). If a moral agent does not have personal desires, then she is not able to relate to others and feel empathy for others' deprivation. The foundation for altruism lies in understanding that one is a biological and social being, sharing the same basic physical needs and material desires as others. Unlike Zhang Zai's considering the only worthy desire as the sage's desire to be like Confucius, Wang Fuzhi acknowledges the value of ordinary material desires. Sages have material desires too, and because they are not self-centered, they can 'empathize with others' desires on the basis of their own desires (*yi yu guan yu* 以欲觀欲)' (*Ibid*., vol. 4, p. 246). As a result, 'the desire of the sage is the principle of Heaven' (*Ibid*., vol. 4, p. 248).

Wang Fuzhi takes this view from Mencius, who advised the king that if he loved material possessions and sexual gratification, he should just share his desires with the people (Mencius, 1970, vol. 1B, p. 5). Wang explains; 'In sights, sounds, fragrance and tastes, one sees the shared desires of everyone, and this is exactly the common principle of everything' (Wang, 1974a, vol. 8, p. 520). The difference between Heavenly principle and human desire, according to Wang, lies in 'the mere distinction between being altruistic and being selfish, between being sincere and being disingenuous' (*Ibid*., vol. 6, p. 372). Wang does not condemn the content of one's material desire, and draws the only moral difference in one's attitude in gratifying one's and others' desires.

Natural emotions and the gratification of one's own desires have the most immediate motivational force. From motivation to *moral* motivation, however,

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the required step is to recognize others' claim to the gratification of their desires. If one's self-gratification interferes with, or even deprives others from, others' self-gratification, then such a pursuit of self-interest is not morally permissible. If one can no longer satisfy one's desire in a morally permissible way, then it is no longer *good* to satisfy one's desire. In this sense we can say that natural desire for Wang Fuzhi is a 'conditional good'.[6] It is good in as far as the pursuit of it does not violate the principle of *fairness* (*gong* 公). Wang Fuzhi claims, 'Fairness lies in everyone's getting *a share of his own* ('*du de* 獨得')' (Wang, 1967, p. 141, emphasis added). 'When human desires are each gratified, it is the great harmony of Heavenly principle; when Heavenly principle achieves great harmony, there is no occasional divergence of human desires' (Wang, 1974a, vol. 4, p. 248). In other words, the moral precept is not to denounce each individual's personal desires to aim for absolute altruism, but to allow everyone a fair share of the gratification of his or her desires. The empathy of others' desires and the willingness to share is the key to transforming one's natural emotions to the realization of one's moral sentiments. 'A person of humanity (*ren* 仁) is simply one without *selfish* desires' (Wang, 1974a, vol. 6, p. 441).

To be free from selfishness, one simply needs to check one's own pursuit of happiness so that it does not obstruct others' pursuit of happiness. One also needs to balance one's self-concern with the concern for others' fair share of their well-being. This self-examination is what Wang calls '*reflection* (*si* 思)'.

Wang Fuzhi regards reflection as human's innate faculty and 'what one reflects on is the distinction between right and wrong as well as the consequences of benefit and harm' (Wang, 1974a, vol. 4, p. 266). Reflection is closely related to, but not identical with, the fourth inborn moral sentiment—the sense of right and wrong. One has the innate sense of right and wrong, which is endowed by Heaven, but to utilize this natural moral sense, one needs to put in one's effort: 'Humaneness and righteousness are one's nature—they are what Heaven accomplishes; reflection, on the other hand, is the function of the mind—it is what humans accomplish' (*Ibid*., vol. 10, p. 700). Wang thus concludes: 'When people commit evil deeds, it is only because they did not *reflect*' (*Ibid*., vol. 4, p. 268).

From the possibility to the realization of altruism, action is needed. Mencius (1970, vol. 1A, p. 6) argues that what made ancient people far surpass the rest is that they were good at extending (*tui* 推) their deeds. Wang Fuzhi interprets Mencius' notion of 'extend' as follows: 'To extend is to propagate (*kuo-chong* 擴充) and to propagate means to *realize* one's sentiment of not bearing to see others suffer in the governance of not letting others suffer' (Wang, 1974a, vol. 8, p. 512).

> To say that I respect the elders in my family and I care for the youth in my family is not just that I have the intent. I must really respect and care for them. When it comes to the elders and the youth in other people's families, how can I just have the heart of sympathy? *There must be realization* ('*shi* 實') of *my sentiments*. (*Ibid*., vol. 8, p. 513, emphasis added)

Realization of one's moral intent is thus the ultimate goal of Wang Fuzhi's moral teaching.

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Based on Mencius' theory of moral sentiments, Wang Fuzhi's proposal of moral motivation begins with the simple recognition of the self and the self's emotions and desires, aided by (1) the sentiment of sympathy for those whose basic needs and rights are gravely deprived, (2) the sentiment of shame when one does not act upon what one's sentiments call for, (3) the sentiment of conformity to what others consider to be the *proper* (situationally appropriate) thing to do in the given scenario, and (4) the perception of an altruistic act as the *right* (morally good) thing to do in the given context. His contribution to the Mencian theory of moral sentiments is the thesis of *complex sentiments*: these four sentiments are not independent of one another; they jointly form the morally justifiable motivational force. The sentiment of sympathy, for example, needs to be checked by the other three sentiments. As Wang puts it: 'The sentiment of sympathy and the other three sentiments branch out the same way and should be employed interchangeably. How could one allow sympathy to pour out without any restraints?' (Wang, 1974a, vol. 8, p. 551). The agent's sympathy could be a purely subjective mental state—whether one feels for another depends on how much sensitivity one has as well as other contextual but ethically irrelevant factors, such as the geographic distance, the age and appearance of the sufferer. However, the other three sentiments, shame, deference to others and perception of right and wrong, bring in the agent's self-awareness and her awareness of normativity set by social practices. Wang Fuzhi's theory of moral sentiments is not an atomistic theory of emotions that focuses only on the individual's subjective sentiment of sympathy, but is a theory of complex sentiments that include one's awareness of, and respect for, social standards. It would thus not lead to a radically subjective theory of ethics.[7]

We might conclude that the possibility of altruism lies in the recognition of the reality of others. All the above three theories stress the importance of 'recognizing the reality of others', but with different modes of imagination: Nagel asks the moral agent to imagine herself as merely *someone*; it is an agent-neutral approach that encourages the moral agent to abandon her first-person point of view.[8] Zhang Zai asks the moral agent to imagine others' being related to oneself as one's siblings from the common source of life—Heaven and Earth. It is an agent-centered approach that aims to extend one's love for immediate family members to cultivate a sentiment of humanitarian care for all human beings. Wang Fuzhi does not ask the moral agent to abandon her first-person point of-view; he does not beseech the moral agent to elevate herself to the moral status of a sage who is motivated by his universal humanitarian care for all sentient beings.[9] He asks the moral agent to imagine others as being *similar to himself*, having similar needs and desires as he himself does. It is also an agent-centered approach, which asks the moral agent to extend his self-concern to the adoption of *fair consideration* for others.

Nagel's theory allows reason to play the dominant role and assigns causal efficacy to reason itself. Both Zhang Zai and Wang Fuzhi combine belief/reason and desire/emotion as the motivation. Zhang Zai's theory acknowledges the motivational force of emotion and desire, but employs reason as the guiding principle of emotion and desire. It is a version of the ideal personhood theory, setting up *sagehood* as the ideal

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personality. Wang Fuzhi's theory treats desire as the primary motivation for action, and advocates the balancing of one's self-concern and one's others-concern to achieve *fairness*. The sense of fairness is rooted in reason's function of *reflection*. Hence, his theory of moral motivation is a form of sentimentalist theory with reason serving as the ultimate monitor for action. We might express the difference between the latter two moral motivation theories as building motivation either on reason-based desire (Zhang Zai) or on desire-based reason (Wang Fuzhi). Both reason and emotion-prompted desire are needed for the motivational force of altruism.

In the final section of this paper, I shall sketch a moral motivation theory largely based on Zhang Zai's and Wang Fuzhi's ideas. The 'realization' of altruism refers to the propagation of altruism in a given society. I shall explain how we can develop an effective moral program for realizing altruism in contemporary human society.

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V. A Socioethical Moral Program—From the Possibility of Altruism to the Realization of Altruism

The proposed moral program for altruism begins with the following (granted arguable) assumption: the pursuit of one's self-interest in itself does not necessarily obstruct one's performing altruistic acts; self-interest and altruism are not incompatible. It is commonly conceived that the major obstacle to altruism is egoism and self-interestedness. The received view is that we are primarily self-interested animals; hence, it is difficult for us to put aside our self-interest to perform acts that are primarily for the interests of others. However, according to Gilles Deleuze, egoism itself is not the problem. What has been the major mental block to altruism is that we conceive society merely as a collection of self-interested individuals in competition to maximize their own interests, and that the public good is always in conflict with immediate private goods. To remove this mental block, we need to abandon this conception of society and consider society as a *positively integrated totality* instead. Deleuze writes,

> What Hume criticizes in contractarian theories is precisely that they present us with an abstract and false image of society, that they define society only in a negative way; they see in it as a set of limitations of egoisms and interests instead of understanding society as a positive system of invented endeavors. (Deleuze, 2001, p. 39)

A false sense of society as a forced unit of negative limitations to one another's pursuit of self-interest is why altruism is considered to be imposing a difficult demand on individuals.

The proposed theory is fundamentally a sentimentalist theory of moral motivation. From empirical studies of human psychology (Darley & Latané, 1968; Hoffman, 1981; Latené & Rodin, 1969), we learn that genuine altruistic behavior is most often a *spontaneous* reaction to either others' present suffering or their impending harm. These empirical studies of altruism are based on the criterion that an altruistic behavior 'is behavior that promotes the welfare of others without conscious regard

for one's own self-interests' (Hoffman, 1981, p. 124). Martin Hoffman cites others' (Darley & Latané, 1968; Latené & Rodin, 1969) as well as his own experiments to show that people usually do not think much before lending a helping hand to another in distress. He says, 'When I asked people what went through their minds when they helped someone in a real-life situation, the typical response was that they acted without thinking or because the other person obviously needed help' (Hoffman, 1981, p. 134). Such spontaneity is a manifestation of sentiments such as sympathy or empathy. Hoffman cites many empirical data from studies that demonstrate people's natural empathic arousal upon observing another person in distress. He concludes:

> The findings in these studies, taken as a group, suggest that (a) empathic arousal precedes helping, (b) the more intense the pain cues from the victim, the more intense the observer's empathic arousal, and (c) intensity of empathic arousal is systematically related to subsequent behavior. (Hoffman, 1981, p. 131)

Such empirical data shows that many, if not most, altruistic acts are prompted by empathetic sentiments. Prudential self-interest or egoistic reasoning about long-term benefits is not necessarily the foundation for altruism.

However, it is important to emphasize that this proposed sentimentalist theory of moral motivation for altruism is not based solely on the sentiment of sympathy or empathy. Again, the insight comes from Deleuze, according to whom, 'All the elements of morality (sympathies) are naturally given, but they are *impotent* by themselves to constitute a moral world' (Deleuze, 2001, p. 40, emphasis mine). Sympathy may be a necessary condition for *spontaneous* altruism (if I don't even care about other people's suffering, then I would not be motivated to assist in the first place), but it does not have sufficient causal efficacy. Take for example the calamity of the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011. Sympathy for those who lost their lives, family members, houses, belongings, etc. must be a common sentiment among those who have watched the news coverage, and yet the act of donating to charity organizations is not as prevalent as the sentiment felt. How people can move from feeling sympathetic to taking the action to lend a helping hand is what the proposed moral program aims to investigate.

The proposed moral program does not place motivational force on the moral sentiment of sympathy alone; rather, it advocates the combined force of the four sentiments proposed by Mencius and further developed by Wang Fuzhi. What the moral program emphasizes is that the four moral sentiments are to be treated as a 'complex', because they jointly constitute the foundation for one's moral behavior. For example, the natural emotions of anger and resentment are closely connected to the moral sentiment of shame and disgust. If one can combine these emotions/sentiments with the sense of right and wrong, and to be morally repulsed by any wrongdoing judged by one's own moral sense, then one would at least be inclined to refrain from doing it. The four sentiments include not just one's own sentiment of sympathy and one's own perception of the moral good, but also one's respect for, and one's desire to conform to, interpersonal practices in one's society, and the sense

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of shame one incurs from failure to perform what is socially expected of oneself. These four moral sentiments thus form the basis of our conforming to common ethical norms in our society. The proposed moral program is informed by social psychologists' observation that an individual's moral behavior can be heightened or inhibited by relevant socioethical practices in apt social contexts.[10] In other words, the moral program is not an individualistic, but a socioethical, program. Here I shall give some suggestions on how to construct an altruistic culture from the cultivation of our inborn moral sentiments.

First, to build on the sense of commiseration, we need to enhance sympathy with empathetic imagination. By common usage, 'sympathy' is the compassion for another's suffering from one's vantage point, while 'empathy' is putting oneself in the circumstances of the other and employing a vivid imagination of the other's suffering. Empathy requires the ability of imagination. As Adam Smith points out: 'As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.' Our senses cannot give us direct access to others' feelings, and 'it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations' (Smith, 1817, p. 2). I argue that empathetic imagination carries more motivational force for altruism than mere sympathy does.

To enhance empathetic imagination, we need to locate the basis for a *vivid* imagination of others' sorrows and concerns, and family love is one of the natural passions to which we can easily relate. The empathetic imagination derived from Wang Fuzhi's theory is not combined with the *impersonal standpoint* as in Nagel's theory. Rather, this empathetic imagination is built on one's relatedness to one's family members and the passion of family love. According to Deleuze, family is a natural unit of care in the state of nature:

> What we find in nature, without exception, are families; the state of nature is always already more than a simple state of nature. The family, independently of all legislation, is explained by the sexual instinct and by sympathy—sympathy between parents, and sympathy of parents for their offspring. (Deleuze, 2001, p. 39)

If the basic structure in the state of nature is family relationship, then the individual's consideration from his point of view *as a member of his own family* is a natural human tendency. The function of *empathetic imagination* must be associated with the *personal standpoint* in the multi-relations of family. The next step is to *extend* (*tui* 推) one's feelings for one's own family to cultivate one's concern for strangers.

To achieve this empathetic extension, it is not required that one love others' parents or children *as if they were one's own*, but that one imagine how *others* would feel if their own parents or children were in harm's way. One's considerations for strangers are not just extended from *any one* individual to another, but from *one-individual-situated-in-one's-family-relations* to *another-individual-situated-in-his-or-her-family-relations*. If one has sincere and deep feelings towards one's own parents, siblings and children, then one would be able to relate to these strangers not as mere strangers, but rather as *someone else's parents, someone else's siblings*

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or *someone else's children*. A common practice in the media can be seen as an employment of this empathetic extension. News coverage of disasters often chooses the angle of interviewing family members to talk about their loss. Implicit in this method of reportage is the assumption that family passions are sharable and relatable. If we want to enhance altruism in our society and thereby to foster an altruistic culture, then we could encourage the reportage of major calamity using family stories and personal anecdotes. When distant victims are no longer faceless strangers or sheer numbers, but the lost loved ones of someone whom we see or hear, we will be more easily moved to donate to disaster relief agencies. It may be a simple practice, but it has been proven to be effective time and time again.

Second, to build on the sentiment of shame and disgust, we need to propagate the thinking that not offering a helping hand when someone is in distress is a shameful act. The murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964 sparked a series of psychological articles on the bystander apathy phenomenon. Genovese was assaulted right in front of her home. She screamed for help but no one came to her aid or called the police. The assailant came back to the scene ten minutes later and found her still lying on the ground. He stabbed her several times more and sexually assaulted her. In total, 38 neighbors witnessed the attack from behind their curtains, but only one of them eventually phoned the police. It was too late for Kitty Genovese. Two social psychologists, John M. Darley and Bibb Latené set out to investigate why the witnesses demonstrated 'such apparently conscienceless and inhumane lack of intervention' (Darley & Latené, 1968, p. 377). Darley and Latené's hypothesis was that the more bystanders there are to an emergency situation, the less likely any one bystander will intervene to provide aid. Their experiments showed that when the subject thought she was the only witness, she was more likely to take action to assist (85% assisted when they thought they were the only bystanders in contrast to only 31% of the subjects assisted when they thought others were also witnessing the same distress: Darley & Latené, 1968). Latené and Rodin (1969) further shows that 'the presence of an unresponsive bystander strongly inhibited subjects from offering to help' (p. 194). However, an interesting discovery Darley and Latené made was that the subjects were in an emotionally conflicted state even when they did not respond to the call of distress: 'subjects worried about the guilt and shame they would feel if they did not help the person in distress' (Darley & Latené, 1968, p. 382). Darley and Latené conclude that bystanders' unresponsiveness is not necessarily a reflection of apathy or other personality deficiency (*Ibid*., p. 383). The bystanders were actually sympathetic toward the person in distress, but they were simply not motivated to take the appropriate action to assist or even to call for help. This observation would support the Mencian thesis that sympathy is a natural human reaction to others in distress, but it also supports Deleuze' conjecture that sympathy alone is impotent.

On 22 October 2011, a two-year-old girl in China was hit by a car in a busy alley, and several passersby walked by without stopping to help the girl off the street. A second car ran over the girl lying on the street, and still several witnesses did not come to her aid. The surveillance camera caught 18 passersby who went past the

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bloody girl lying on the street without stopping. Eventually, an old garbage woman dragged the girl away from the middle of the alley and called for help. The girl died in the hospital a day later. This event provoked heated discussion in the Chinese media on the apathetic culture in Chinese society. Few people sympathized with the 18 passersby; the majority of the expressed opinions reflected shame, disgust and indignation. I think we need to continue this kind of social examination, and develop this sense of disgust and indignation into our social conscience. Our social critique of apathetic bystanders is one of the ways to foster a more altruistic society. The factor of social inhibition of intervention may be a manifestation of a culture that emphasizes 'minding one's own business' and 'not meddling with others' affairs'. To construct an altruistic culture, we need to first instill a different social attitude about human relationships and interpersonal interactions: one is *prima facie* morally obligated to assist those in distress when (i) one is able to, and (ii) there are no other overriding *morally significant* considerations. Once this normative moral principle is ingrained in the social conscience, failure to comply would generate the sense of shame from the agent and the sense of disgust from others. These sentiments would motivate the agent to do the right thing.

A third and related suggestion is that based on our innate sentiment of reverence and deference, we can modify an individual's moral expectations of herself as well as her view of justified behavior through altering societal normativity. Both Darley and Latené (1968) and Latené and Rodin (1969) show how when viewing someone in distress, each bystander may look to others for guidance before acting. In their experiments, other bystanders' unresponsiveness often influenced the tested subject to take no action. However, even though the presence of other bystanders inhibits intervention, the presence of observers or evaluators with an altruistic bent would have a different effect. They call this factor the 'social influence' process. These studies prove that we do have the tendency to defer to others in judging what would be the appropriate action in a given situation. When others do not intervene to assist those in distress, we are more likely not to lend a helping hand. What is needed for a proper social influence process that enhances altruism then, is a social practice that treats altruism as a norm.

The proposed moral motivation theory differs from other sentimentalist theories of moral motivation in that it places a strong emphasis on social sentiments and social contexts that are embodied in cultural practices and ritual propriety (*li* 禮). The third moral sentiment advocated in this theory, the sentiment of reverence and deference, conjoins the spheres of the public and the private. From having reverence for what others do in a given social context, one is acclimated to be in tune with social sentiments and to develop compliance with social practices. The individual's moral sentiment of reverence can thus be viewed as the psychological basis for humans' social cooperation and civil compliance. To build on our innate sense of reverence and deference, we thus need to promote the right kind of social practices and moral attitudes.

Cultural practices and ethical normativity can come together, and when they do (*and only when they do*), it is good that individuals comply with social practices

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and conform to established norms. For example, in some Asian societies such as China and Taiwan, there are designated seats for senior people on public transportations. Youth becomes habituated to give up their seats when an elderly person gets on the bus or the subway. This small gesture can lead to other courteous attitudes towards the elderly and it fosters the virtue of 'respecting the elderly' underscored in Confucian ethics. It is an example of how social practices could generate individual morality.

Zhang Zai's emphasis on the appropriateness of social institutions and ritual propriety (*li* 禮) can be incorporated into this proposed moral program. As Zhang Zai sees it, rites and rituals (*li* 禮) are not mere formalistic ceremonies and arbitrary conventions. They are the manifestations of the Heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理) as their reasonableness and functionality have been guaranteed by ancient sages who instituted them. He also argues that a society's normative system (such as its institutions, set of etiquette, etc.) can regulate people's conduct in a way to foster certain desirable moral traits. Therefore, 'ritual propriety can nourish one's virtue' (*Ibid*., p. 279). For example, he suggests that we employ the system of building houses in the center of neighboring farmlands (*tianzhongzhizhi* 田中之制) as recorded in *The Rites of Zhou* (*zhouli* 周禮), to make 'the people draw to one another as if they were siblings . . . so that they would handle others' affairs as their own, and would consider the masses as their own family' (Zhang, 2006, p. 282). To construct altruism as a social norm, we need to find the kind of social institutions and ritual propriety that would work in our society to reduce human alienation and reinforce individuals' willingness to render aid to those in distress.

Finally, with the individual's sense of right and wrong, we need to find a balance between conformity and independent thinking. Conformity to social practices and ritual propriety is not always good, as one could become lost in the herd. Hagop Sarkissian points out this dilemma: 'Without participating in social rituals and conventions, a human being cannot even begin to learn virtuous conduct, yet the ''ritualistic'' aspect of propriety can desensitize or blind the virtuous agent to the need for particularized response' (Sarkissian, 2010, p. 7). The Asch Experiment (Asch, 1955, 1956) famously shows that peer pressure to conform could often influence an individual's judgment. The tested subject (Asch calls it 'the minority of one') was placed among a group of strangers who unanimously gave the wrong answer on a simple fact of perception. Even though the subjects initially gave the right answer, a high percentage of them (37 out of 50 in one such study) compromised and yielded to the wrong answer unanimously voiced by the majority. The

> yielding subjects . . . endowed the majority with a quality of rightness or authority that went beyond the immediate question at issue, granting it a general and undefined superiority that was capable of overriding their convictions about their own rightness in the specific case. (Asch, 1956, p. 50)

Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb (1952) and others (Orive, 1984; Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1980) depict the loss of sense of individuality and critical thinking as 'the

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deindividuation effects'. The deindividuation effects are sometimes needed for socialization and group assimilation, but could lead to the loss of critical thinking and self-confidence in one's opinion as in the case of Asch's experiments. This shows that conformity to peer pressure and social norms could also destroy individuality. Therefore, the separation of public thinking and individual thinking is needed. It is important to conform to social norms when they are *good norms* rather than just blindly following whatever others in the society do. One needs to have one's own moral judgment. The individual's own moral sense and moral judgment play an important role in weighing whether the communal sentiments are worth respecting. In Asch's series of experiments, there were a significant number of individuals who remained independent thinkers and held onto their correct answer even when they were faced with the majority's unanimous opposing view. According to Asch, 'The most significant fact about them was not absence of responsiveness to the majority but *a capacity to recover from doubt and to reestablish their equilibrium*' (Asch, 1972 [1955], p. 7, emphasis mine). I argue that to cultivate this capacity of self-reliance in the case of judging right and wrong, we need to strengthen the individual's 'reflection (*si* 思)'.

Mencius (Mencius, 1970, vol. 11, p. 15) suggests that reflection is the faculty of the heart/mind, and it is the employment of this faculty that distinguishes a person of grandeur (*daren* 大人) from the ordinary petty people (*xiaoren* 小人). Based on Mencius' view, Wang Fuzhi further stresses the importance of reflection. According to Wang, reflection is the only thing that separates humans from other animals (Wang, 1974a, p. 705). He defines the function of reflection as the metaphysical contemplation on humaneness (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義). It is only when one thinks about humaneness and righteousness is one employing one's faculty of reflection; thinking about material desires, on the other hand, is not 'reflection' (*Ibid*., p. 702). Wang Fuzhi distinguishes reflection from cognition, which is related to perceptual knowledge gained through our senses. He thinks the objects of reflection are not perceivable things. What one reflects on, according to him, is simply the metaphysical *Dao* (*xingershang zhi dao*) (*Ibid*., p. 701). Therefore, the faculty of reflection enables individuals to confirm the *objectively right* standard for judgment. The distinction of right and wrong ultimately lies on a universal, objective normative principle: *Dao*. It is not determined by social conventions or societal norms alone. Individuals must employ their faculty of reflection to discern when the social practice is one to conform to, and when it is not.

The importance of individual's *reflection* in the contemporary world can be further explicated by Owen Flanagan's analysis:

> Reflection is good in two respects: First, it can help ultraliberals to understand themselves in less atomic terms and thereby to see the grounds on the basis of which they incur communal obligations. Second, reflectiveness is good because it provides one with the critical tools needed to assess the content of one's life form so that one can judge the *ethical* basis for such communal obligations. (Flanagan, 1991, p. 62, emphasis in original)

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With the individual's rational reflection on her moral sentiments, she is not likely to blindly succumb to communal pressure, or to do simply *what the Romans do*. As Flanagan points out, 'Having communitarian sentiments is good if one's community is good, but it is obviously not good if one's community has bad values, values that one is motivated to sustain and maintain because of these sentiments. This is where the second, content-sensitive aspect of reflectiveness becomes important' (*Ibid*., pp. 62–63).

Another way to avoid blind conformity is to integrate Wang Fuzhi's emphasis on individual reflection with Zhang Zai's teaching on the importance of *learning from the sage*. In Zhang Zai's usage, the sage is to be seen as the ideal personality, who stands for the expositor as well as the regulator for objective universal moral principles. Zhang Zai beseeches us to learn from the sage by studying the books they wrote (he singled out the *Analects* and *Mencius* in particular). He thinks if someone does not study but simply employs his own intelligence to assume superiority to others, then that person is actually an idiot (*chi* 癡) (Zhang, 2006, p. 272). 'Books help us maintain our heart-mind (*xin* 心). As soon as we put down the books, we interrupt the cultivation of our virtue' (*Ibid*., p. 275). To Zhang Zai, studying keeps our mind on the right path and is an essential component in our moral cultivation. Confucius emphasizes the importance of integrating studying and reflection: 'One who learns without reflecting is lost; one who thinks without learning is in danger' (*Analects*, vol. 2, p. 15). Wang Fuzhi elaborates on this claim:

> When we learn from the ancients, we see that the law and rules are already set. We thus consider them in our own mind: are the reasons for these rules completely expounded or do they need further investigation? . . . When we exert our mind to speculate on the principle, we also need to verify it against what the ancient people have taught and inquire whether its *dao* can be appealed to as the norm or whether it still needs amendments. (Wang, 1996, vol. 7, p. 301)

Both learning from the sage and reflecting on the universal moral principle (*Dao*) constitute our moral reason. In this way, we see how moral reason supplements what our moral sentiments can accomplish: it reestablishes our individuality and independent thinking in our tendency to be socially converted.

To recap this final section: the paper argues for a socioethical motivational theory for altruism. The socioethical aspect of the moral theory is built on the complex of our four inborn moral sentiments taken together. Sympathy or empathy has been singled out by psychologists such as Hoffman as the key sentiment for moral motivation. However, I have argued that sympathy alone cannot be sufficient for altruism, because it is often defeated by other moral failings such as procrastination, inertia, laziness, etc. Shame and disgust alone cannot be sufficient for altruism either, since it could be accompanied by total apathy for others' suffering. Both of them need the supplement of the moral judgment that a total self-concern to the neglect of others' misery is *wrong*, and hence one can be motivated by the sense of shame to act on the sentiment of sympathy for others. Finally, in a social environment in which altruistic acts are the norm of its members' conduct, every capable member may be propelled by their sentiment of respect and deference to others to adopt the same

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behavior. The four moral sentiments form the foundation for our becoming socially as well as ethically cultivated. The mental 'complex' of these four moral sentiments extends one's love for family members into a humanitarian concern. In addition, we need to stress the importance of the individual's reflection and learning, so that his or her moral judgment does not become blind conformity to the social norm or a desensitized response in accordance with the norm.

When others are suffering, I may be moved by the sentiment of sympathy to desire the alleviation of their suffering, but such a sentiment is transient, forgettable, and consequently is often causally impotent. However, if I am situated in the society where others like me all took the action to alleviate the suffering of strangers, then I would be further propelled by my sense of shame, my desire to do the right thing, and my reverence for what is considered 'proper' in my social context, to take the action. Failing to live up to one's social standards can bring up the sense of shame or disgust, and to avoid shame, embarrassment or others' contempt, one is likely to follow social norms. If altruism is a social norm, then altruistic acts will become much more prevalent than when it is not. In other words, the realization of altruism cannot be founded solely on the individual's moral sense, but must also rely on the society's moral expectations. If an individual feels *morally bound* to be altruistic, then this individual's initial sentiment of sympathy receives the further enhancement that is needed to generate altruistic acts. Private sentiment of sympathy alone does not suffice to bring out altruistic acts; what is further required is a social context (or what Deleuze calls 'the moral world') in which altruism is the norm rather than the exception.

Traditional ethical theories all focus on the individual's moral reason, moral sentiments, or her ability for moral self-cultivation. What I have argued in this paper is that moral cultivation demands not just the individual's own effort, but also the appropriate moral culture and social context. Altruism is empty without realizability, and realization of altruism requires societal cultivation. To construct a moral project that *realizes* altruism, it is not enough to focus only on the moral agent's *isolated* moral conscience or moral sentiments. The conscience or moral sentiments has to be integrated into the whole society, such that altruism is no longer considered *supererogatory*—acts that are 'nice' but not morally required. When altruism is integrated as a shared moral conscience in the social culture, then it is no longer an idealistic feat that only the saints or sages could accomplish. We have seen how members of particular social groups or religious organizations perform altruistic acts with fewer mental struggles, and it is because how others act affects how individuals act. When other bystanders are unresponsive and appearing apathetic, the individual would be less inclined to lend a helping hand to the one in distress. However, other social psychological studies have shown that when the individual is situated among similar others who are helping, he or she is more likely to assist the one in distress too. As social psychologist Ruben Orive concludes,

> Thus the likelihood of action in the similar group appears to depend not only on the intensity level of the prevailing opinion, but also on action cues that

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> similar others provide. These external cues may act as either facilitating or restraining forces, depending on the situational inclinations of the group. (Orive, 1984, p. 736)

Social culture is *affective*, and we thus need to construct an altruistic culture in our society. After all, humans are *social animals*!

Notes

[1] As it will be clear in the paper, the function of reason is viewed differently in Nagel's and the two Chinese philosophers' views. Nagel focuses on practical reasoning that can be formulated as syllogism, while the two Chinese philosophers focus on one's ability to think, read, and reflect.

[2] Nagel says, 'The thesis which I propose to defend is simply that the only acceptable reasons are objective ones; even if one operates successfully with a subjective principle, one must be able to back it up with an objective principle yielding those same reasons as well as (presumably) others' (Nagel, 1970, p. 96)

[3] This quote is from his Recorded Sayings. There are slightly different versions in his Collected Work.

[4] Even though our physical needs and material desires are also what we were born with and hence can be said to be within our 'nature' (xing 性), they must be in accord with the four virtues (humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom) to be included as our nature (Wang, 1967, p. 80). Wang Fuzhi argues that human nature is different from those of other animals, and the difference lies in the moral essence that only humans possess (Wang, 1974a, vol. 10, p. 677). This moral essence is the principle or Dao of Heaven, and in humans it is called 'xing' (Wang, 1967, pp. 79–81).

[5] The taxonomy of emotions here is a common conception in Chinese folk psychology. It does not, of course, exhaust all human emotions, nor is the taxonomy scientifically based.

[6] This term is derived from a Kantian notion of 'unconditional good': 'A thing is unconditionally good if it is good under any and all conditions, if it is good no matter what the context. In order to be unconditionally good, a thing must obviously carry its own value with it—have its goodness in itself (be an end in itself)' (Korsgaard, 1996, p. 257).

[7] This defense is inspired by Marcia Lind. Lind argues that Hume's theory of moral sentiment should be considered a complex theory, rather than an atomistic theory, of sentiment. She claims, 'I argue that emotion in Hume can be analyzed as a complex . . . I then apply this particular idea of emotion as a complex to moral emotion in Hume and show that this analysis allows Hume to avoid at least the standard objection that he is committed to a radically subjective moral theory' (Lind, 1990, p. 133, emphasis in original). I think that the same interpretation and argument can apply to Wang Fuzhi's theory of moral sentiment as well.

[8] An agent-neutral theory of value is one 'according to which the reasons for an action are a function of its value, impersonally construed' (Flanagan & Rorty, 1991, p. 11).

[9] Since Wang Fuzhi was a great admirer of Zhang Zai, the two views are frequently conflated and their differences often overlooked. If we read Wang's commentary on Zhang's Rectifying the Youth (Zhengmeng), we can see that Wang does not completely embrace Zhang's worldview. In the Western Inscriptions, for example, where Zhang wrote 'Heaven [Qian] as my father and Earth [Kun] as my mother', Wang's commentary explains it in terms of one's biological parents instead of the abstract Heaven and Earth: 'To be more precise, then there is no so-called Qian—my father is the Qian that begot me; there is no so-called Kun—my mother is the Kun that completed my life . . . If one tries to abandon one's parents in order to serve Heaven and Earth as parents, then even if one could expand one's heart to aim for it, there must be some hidden irrepressible sorrow' (Wang, 1967,

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pp. 265–266). This quote shows that Wang places individuals first and foremost in their biological families.

[10] Examples of some social psychological experiments are given in the following sections.

Acknowledgments

This paper was first presented at the APA Pacific Division Mini-Conference on Neo-Confucian Moral Psychology in 2009. I wish to thank my commentator Owen Flanagan for helpful suggestions.

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