COMMENT/REPLY

Do Confucians Really Care? A Defense of the Distinctiveness of Care Ethics: A Reply to Chenyang Li

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Chenyang Li argues, in an article originally published in Hypatia, *that the ethics of care and Confucian ethics constitute similar approaches to ethics. The present paper takes issue with this claim. It is more accurate to view Confucian ethics as a kind of virtue ethics, rather than as a kind of care ethics. In the process of criticizing Li's claim, the distinctiveness of care ethics is defended, against attempts to assimilate it to virtue ethics.*

" . . . caring is not in itself a virtue . . . . We must
not reify virtues and turn our caring towards them.
If we do this, our ethic turns inward and is
even less useful than an ethic of principles . . . "

Nel Noddings, *Caring*

" . . . when the way was lost there was virtue;
when virtue was lost there was benevolence . . ."

Laozi, criticizing Confucians

Chenyang Li argues that the ethics of care and Confucian[1] ethics share "philosophically significant common grounds," to the extent that it is possible to

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conclude that "Confucian ethics is a care ethics" (1994, 70, 81). This, I take it, amounts either to a claim, following Li's first expression, that Confucian ethics is philosophically very similar to care ethics (on some deep level), or to a claim, following Li's second expression, that Confucian ethics may best be conceived of as a *kind* of care ethics (perhaps a significantly different kind of care ethics than the feminist care ethics we are more familiar with in the West, but a care ethics nonetheless). As far as I am aware, no replies to Li's original paper have been published, prior to this one, which would have us reject both such ways of speaking about the relationship between care ethics and Confucian ethics.

My desire to write the present paper grew out of a dissatisfaction with the comparisons Li makes between the ethics of care and Confucian ethics; comparisons that I have come to think generally overemphasize surface similarities between these two ethics at the expense of missing philosophically more important differences between them. This paper hence provides a critique of the position I will call the Confucian care thesis; that is, the thesis that Confucian ethics is either philosophically very similar to care ethics or is, in fact, a form of care ethics. By attempting to rebut this thesis and through arguing that, on the contrary, Confucian ethics is better conceived of as a unique kind of role-focused virtue ethics, I hope to make a contribution to ongoing attempts to reach a better understanding of Confucian ethics through making use of contemporary philosophical conceptual resources.[2]

At the same time, this paper is also concerned with another, more general, philosophical thesis: that care ethics itself amounts to little more than a new approach to virtue ethics (as Slote 1998, 2000 suggests, for example). While I make no attempt in this paper to provide a detailed analysis of the differences between virtue ethics and care ethics, some key differences between the two ethics will, nonetheless, emerge in the course of the analysis of Confucian ethics. Thus, some ammunition will be provided to philosophers who wish to defend the distinctiveness of care ethics as an alternative to virtue ethics.

Forms of Particularism

I contend that the Confucian care thesis confuses the different moral foci of care ethics (people in concrete relationships) and Confucian ethics (people in role relationships and described in communally shared virtue terms). This specific error is closely related to a more general kind of philosophical confusion that involves overlooking the differences between varying approaches to particularism in ethics. In the present context, two forms of particularism need to be distinguished. Firstly, virtue ethics is an approach to ethics that encourages us to cultivate virtuous characters and to view other people in virtue (that is, *aretaic*) terms. Different communities' moral traditions may

call for the cultivation of different virtues, where virtues are understood to be aspects of good character, such as courage, benevolence, or filial piety (the last of these examples is perhaps parochial in origin, but not ipso facto morally unimportant). One may, in fact, refer to the different virtue ethics (in the plural) of different communities. Sophisticated forms of virtue ethics, whether in ancient China, in ancient Greece, or elsewhere, generally reserve a special place for practical wisdom that cannot be developed simply through the following of moral principles; wisdom that involves the filling out and refining of general principles or rules in relation to particular situations. Hence it seems appropriate to think of such sophisticated virtue ethics as particularistic, in contrast to principle-driven normative moral theories.

Secondly, there is the approach to ethics that has come to be known as care ethics. This approach focuses attention, not, in the first instance at least, on general character traits, but rather on the particular needs of people as they exist in concrete relationships (one might say the needs of people-in-relationship). These needs are seen to follow from the often unique or idiosyncratic qualities of individuals and the concrete relationships that sustain and to some extent constitute them. According to care ethicists, moral agents are not generally able to meet such needs through the following of moral principles. Hence care ethics is also a particularistic approach to ethics.

The ethics of care and virtue ethics are two distinct kinds of particularistic ethics, each of which arguably has its own strengths and weaknesses. I think care ethics is better suited to the real demands of caring, and since Confucians do not have a care ethics, they are not able to care—that is, respond sensitively to the often very particular needs and vulnerabilities of other persons—as well as people who do have such an ethics are able to (though they may be better placed to do other morally good things). My aim is not to defend or attack either the care ethics approach or the Confucian virtue ethics approach (or any other virtue ethics approach) to morality in any wholesale fashion, but to argue against collapsing distinctions between such varying approaches.

I understand the ethics of care to be the ethics that was first given voice to by Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nel Noddings (1984) in the early 1980s, and subsequently taken up and elaborated upon by a number of moral philosophers (see, for example, the essays in Kittay and Meyers 1987; Jaggar 1995; and Bowden 1997). I am interested in care ethics insomuch as it has something to offer moral philosophy in general. I am not directly concerned here with either the debate over empirical evidence concerning who it is that speaks with what Gilligan calls "a different voice," or the debate over whether promoting care ethics suits or damages feminist interests. In other words, I am not interested here with questions concerning whether or not one either can or should associate care ethics with the female gender (and, contrariwise, justice ethics with the male gender). Nonetheless, there are certainly places in the paper where I

discuss issues that I hope will be of interest to feminist scholars. In particular, I stress the hierarchical, and, traditionally, patriarchal nature of Confucian relationships, I discuss an example involving some Chinese women that suggests differences between their way and the Confucian way of understanding relationships, and I attempt to rebut the claim made by the contemporary Confucian scholars Chenyang Li and Henry Rosemont that Confucians and feminists are natural allies in the challenges they make to contemporary moral philosophy.

The virtue ethics I contrast with care ethics is the view of ethics that also began to come to prominence in the 1980s, especially, in this case, after the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1984).[3] Unlike care ethics, however, virtue ethics clearly had various Western precursors, particularly (but not only) in the tradition associated with Aristotle and his *Ethics* (2000). One of the most important and original features of the rediscovery of the importance of the virtues is that it now seems to some that virtue ethics might be capable of providing an alternative to deontology and consequentialism, either in the form of a superior normative moral theory, or a sensible antitheoretical position. In this respect the pretensions of the supporters of virtue ethics and of care ethics have been similar, although it is probably fair to say that virtue ethics has managed to garner more support among professional philosophers.[4]

The Confucians that I argue do not really care are those of the early Chinese philosophical kind (most notably Confucius and Mencius), particularly as they are understood through the charitable interpretative lens of their contemporary defenders.[5] I do not base any of my arguments on empirical questions concerning whether particular people who might, according to some set of criteria, be identified as Confucians are, in fact, caring individuals; instead, I ask whether Confucians *qua* practitioners of Confucian ethics, understood as an ethical framework made explicit by philosophical thinkers, are really capable of caring. In other words, for the purposes of this paper, I take Confucian ethics to be precisely the ethics that those who have so far been interested in drawing parallels between early Confucian ethics and care ethics have taken it to be.[6]

The most important attempt to draw parallels between the two ethics is Chenyang Li's. Li presents detailed arguments for the position that core elements of Confucian and care ethics are similar in nature in "The Confucian Concept of Jen and the Feminist Ethics of Care" (1994). Li argues that the moral ideals of *ren* (roughly translatable as humaneness or benevolence)[7] and care are similar, since both encourage the development of care or love, and that both the ethics of Confucianism and of care promote flexible moral decision-making without requiring recourse to moral principles. I will briefly examine each of these claims in turn before moving on to look at the role-focused aspect of Confucian ethics and the Confucian approach to particularity in

more depth. It will be necessary to turn away from Li's own text in these later sections to discuss other works (by Henry Rosemont and Sin yee Chan, in particular), in order to further develop the case against the Confucian care thesis.

Moral Ideals and Orientations

Beginning with the supposed parallels between *ren* and care that Li highlights, I think that at times Li overlooks important differences between *ren* and care, while at other times he demonstrates an awareness that there are some differences, but fails to appreciate how important these differences are. Care, Li begins by saying, is the highest moral ideal for the care ethicist, as *ren* is for the Confucian (1994, 71–75). This emphasis on moral ideals might encourage one to misconstrue the nature of care ethics, because it fails to draw attention to one of the essential differences between care and justice ethics, as Gilligan originally described them: the difference between relatively abstract and relatively concrete ways of thinking about ethical problems.[8] It is important to realize that the care ethicist views care not merely as an ideal, but also as a particular way of thinking morally; or, to use Gilligan's metaphor, the ethics of care represents a "different voice" (or provides a different "moral orientation").

Let me attempt to illustrate this point by referring back to Gilligan's original analysis of the ethics of care. Gilligan provides an illuminating example of the different moral orientations of care and justice through recounting the reactions of a young boy and girl to a classic Kohlberg test. This test involves an interviewer ranking reactions to a hypothetical situation in which a man, Heinz, has to decide whether to steal a drug that he cannot afford from a chemist to save his wife's life. Faced with this dilemma, Jake weighs principles of property and life in a very *formal*, abstract fashion—he says he considers the dilemma to be "sort of like a math problem with humans"—and makes a firm decision that Heinz should steal the drug (1982, 26).

Amy, on the other hand, seems intent on avoiding a clear-cut solution to the dilemma. Asked if Heinz should steal the drug she replies, "Well, I don't think so. I think there might be other ways besides stealing it, like if he could borrow the money or make a loan or something, but he really shouldn't steal the drug—but his wife shouldn't die either." Pressed on the question of why Heinz should not steal the drug, Amy makes it clear that she is viewing the dilemma in a *contextual* fashion, replying, "If he stole the drug, he might save his wife then, but if he did, he might have to go to jail, and then his wife might get sicker again, and he couldn't get more of the drug, and it might not be good. So, they should really just talk it out and find some other way to make the money" (1982, 28).

Of course, there may be instances when the same decision would be reached in a particular situation regardless of whether the ethics of care or the ethics of justice is being used, but only from the justice perspective (as Gilligan understands it) would the solution come about through reasoning that rests on assumptions of a sense of separation from contingent relationships and a sense that individuals are substitutable before universal principles. According to such reasoning, it is necessary to uphold the equality between, and the freedom of, independent individuals.

From the care perspective, on the other hand, the understanding that most affects judgments is the relatively *prereflective* sense that, as Gilligan puts it, the self is part of "a network of connection, a web of relationships that is sustained by a process of communication" (quoted in Kittay and Meyers 1987, 7). In the first case, the following of universal impersonal principles is the norm, whereas Gilligan argues that in the second case, carers,[9] while quite capable of following principles, tend to work from the assumption that they can be changed or ignored if necessary and that they are not essential for good moral decision making (1982, 44). Attachment, for the carer, rather than detachment, is considered to be intrinsically valuable; and it is taken as such prior to reflection—care is hence more than an ideal, it is a *pre-condition* for moral thinking of this kind.[10]

The ethics of care is prereflective only in a certain sense; not, I think it is clear, in the sense of promoting a lack of careful reflection on moral problems, for quite the contrary is the case. Rather, care ethics is prereflective in the sense of not requiring agents to go in the direction of reflecting on values or ideals considered in the abstract (not that doing so need always be thought of as incompatible with care ethics, but it is not where moral attention is directed). In other words, care ethics is not directly concerned with inculcating or developing virtues, any more than it is directly concerned with following principles. Parents who care for their children, for example, do not, from the perspective of the care ethicist, care as an act of realizing some virtue or in order to become good people, but do so instead from an imperative that arises from the concrete relationships they have with their own flesh and blood.[11]

Now, it might be said that the Confucian thinker Mencius, whom I would like to put in the camp of the virtue ethicists, rather than the care ethicists, also focused on the seemingly natural imperative to care. To some extent I have to concede this point, but I think Li falls into error by overlooking what Mencius does with this spontaneous foundation for care. He makes much of Mencius's famous parable of the child about to fall into a well. Mencius claims that because all people have a heart that is sensitive to the suffering of others, they would all be moved to save such a child without any need for reflection (2A:6). What Li fails to give enough weight to in his analysis is the fact that Mencius is actually using (the moral intuitions aroused by) this example to

provide support for an account of abstract moral ideals. In the same passage Mencius immediately moves on to talk of the "heart of compassion," the "heart of shame," the "heart of courtesy" and the "heart of right and wrong," each of which, he claims, corresponds to one of the four "sprouts" (the sprouts of benevolence, duty, rites, and wisdom, respectively). He emphasizes a need for people to bring these sprouts to fruition, and in so doing, develop their potential. This, I would contend, is the talk of a very particular kind of virtue ethicist.

Mencius may start with care, but he does so in order to end with virtue. In fact, articulating and reflecting on virtues often changes the way we relate to aspects of ourselves, as we come to see certain aspects of ourselves fitting certain conceptual categories, and act to develop such aspects accordingly. This is something I think the ancient Daoists, particularly the author(s) of the *Laozi*, recognized in their famous criticisms of the Confucians (the criticisms appear in chapters 18–20 and 38). Some of the paradoxical sounding phrases to be found in the relevant chapters of the *Laozi* can, I think, best be made sense of if we understand them as criticisms of the articulation and abstraction of values and virtues that the Confucians were busying themselves with: "A person of the highest virtue does not keep to virtue and that is why he has virtue . . . when the way [*dao*] was lost there was virtue [*de*]; when virtue [*de*] was lost there was benevolence [*ren*]; when benevolence was lost there was rectitude [*yi*]; when rectitude was lost there were the rites [*li*]" (from chapter 38).[12] Of course, I do not wish to claim that care ethics is natural and primordial (following how, on a common interpretation, Laozi would have us understand his ethics of *dao*); like virtue ethics, care ethics is often shaped by cultural factors, perhaps especially by the need to develop coping strategies for handling patriarchal oppression, as Bill Puka (1993) has argued. What it is important to recognize here, however, is that, unlike virtue ethics, care ethics is not necessarily bound up with any particular tradition.

Traditions, Virtues, and Care

Once particular virtues begin to be articulated it becomes possible, and is often considered desirable, for them to constitute elements of a communally accepted tradition. Alasdair MacIntyre has gone so far as to argue that there can be no coherent virtue ethics that is not grounded in a communal tradition (MacIntyre 1984, especially 204–25). Other virtue ethicists (such as Slote 2000) might downplay, or disagree about, the role traditions have to play. The problem is that even if we were to imagine the construction of a virtue ethics that could exist independently of any particular tradition,[13] we would still need to pay attention to the fact that, as Bernard Williams (1993, 129–30) has made clear, any sense of significance that particular virtues might have for agents can

only ever be maintained over time if there is continuity in the acceptance of the relevant "thick ethical terms" (of which virtue terms are a subset)—terms that are partly descriptive and partly evaluative—in the particular human languages being used by the relevant agents. In other words, even if downplaying references to tradition *within* virtue ethics theory can work (and MacIntyre would argue that it can not), there is still going to be a need for continuity in communally accepted and constituted understandings of the virtues.

In any case, tradition has always played an important role in Confucian ethics, not only in the sense that tradition has been important for maintaining particular thick ethical terms (such as *ren* and *li*), but also in the sense that explicit references to tradition have generally been considered to be an essential element of that ethics. Confucius himself promoted a certain attitude towards tradition in the *Analects* that balances an appeal to the moral authority of tradition with an acknowledgment that virtuous people may often need to reinterpret and reconstruct tradition (see Alan Chan 1984 and Schwartz 1985, 62–67).[14] On the one hand, there is an appeal to the traditions of the past (especially, although not exclusively, those of the Zhou era [*Analects* 3:14]) and a denial of personal innovation on the part of Confucius himself (7:1), while, on the other hand, there is an understanding that traditional rites or norms (*li*) are not to be followed blindly (an example of sifting through rites is provided in *Analects* 9:3). There is also an innovative account of the need for normative language reformation—a "rectification of names" (*zhengming*).[15]

Unlike virtue ethics, care ethics need not be bound up with any particular tradition. In fact, far from being tradition-based, the ethics of care is often highly fragmented, as can be made apparent by considering the example of the traditional situation for rural women in China, following an analysis provided by the anthropologist Margery Wolf in her essay "Beyond the Patrilineal Self" (1994). Wolf observes that whereas Chinese men are usually born into a society that provides them with a strong sense of their place in a family lineage and a sense of self that is bound up with set roles in the life of their kinship and village communities, Chinese women soon learn that they are but temporary residents in their natal families; they are not encouraged to have a sense of identity that involves belonging to a family lineage. It is only after joining a husband's family, which often involves moving to a new village, that a woman may have an opportunity to *construct* some kind of network of concrete supportive relationships.[16] These relationships will, by their nature, be of a very different kind than the role-based relationships men find themselves fitted for from birth.

Wolf found that Chinese women become quite skilful at working around moral rules and role-based status positions as they use what she argues is very clearly an ethics of care, in order to care for the real needs of the people they become close to; needs that often enough can neither be seen nor dealt with

by men, who are forced to look at the world through a grid of more abstract role-based relationship categories. In one of the examples that Wolf provides, the village men were not able to do anything about a case of severe wife beating because of a perceived need to preserve the "face" of the perpetrator; the women, however, could send an old woman known to the couple to humiliate the man involved. In such situations, "women were well aware of the rules of propriety, filiality, and face, but felt they were simply not as important as the human suffering that resulted when they were the primary basis for decision making. Women also recognized the power they held by being outside the system. They could and did break the men's rules" (1994, 265). I will have more to say about Wolf's account of care in rural Chinese society below. I introduce it here to give an example that illustrates why and how care ethics is often fragmentary and counter-traditional in nature.

I would suggest (following the lead of Bowden 1997) that care ethics itself has a contextual basis to it. This means that we must look to particulars to understand what is essential to the ethics itself, relative to particular social contexts; just as the ethics itself would have us, as agents, focus on the particulars of situations. While it is true that one can talk very generally of an ethics of care that can be identified by an emphasis on the concrete particularities of relationships and situations, one can not go further than this to provide examples of general principles that guide that ethics, precisely because the nature of the ethics itself entails that one can only know what the ethics demands by looking at its use contextually, in relation to particular relationships and situations. This is not to say that different manifestations of the ethics of care may not share a large number of features, within or across cultural contexts, but just that these features are going to be something like Wittgensteinian "family resemblances," rather than absolutely essential features of care ethics. This, at least, is what Peta Bowden (1997) discovered in her analysis of care in the differing contexts of mothering, nursing, and friendships.

Turning to Li's claim that *ren* is the highest moral ideal for the Confucian, I will not worry about attempting to answer the question of whether, in fact, *ren* really is the highest ideal for the Confucian (perhaps *ren* does not always have a higher normative status than the ideals represented by other Confucian terms, such as *li* and *yi*). What I consider to be most problematic about Li's use of *ren* as the basis of a comparison with care is that Li accepts that *ren* has two dimensions that contemporary Confucians generally agree about (1994, 72), but fails to recognize (the significance of the fact) that the distinction between these two dimensions of *ren* does not correspond well to any similar distinction in care ethics. Confucians understands *ren* to be, in one sense, referring to affection or the natural ability to love, where love is understood as partial (at least initially), rather than universal. Confucius says "*ren* is to love others" (*Analects* 12:22, quoted in Li 1994, 72) and Mencius makes the ground of *ren*

as caring concern even more explicit. *Ren* is, in one sense, care or love (and in this sense *ren* may be thought of as one virtue amongst many—see, for example, *Analects* 9:29), but it is also, in another sense, the highest general virtue that encompasses all other Confucian virtues, and as such one must work very hard to cultivate it. As a general virtue, *ren* is not merely about loving those that are close to one, but also about the humaneness that comes through establishing a good moral character, where this involves cultivating a host of Confucian virtues, such as filial piety, courage, and wisdom.

The fact that *ren* is a virtue with a dual nature (or, alternatively, two related virtues) makes it very different from care for the care ethicist, and its central place in Confucian ethics encourages us to see it as more appropriate to label Confucian ethics a virtue ethics than a care ethics. It may be the case that *ren* as love or care plays an important part in this virtue ethics, but if so that should merely encourage us to speak of a care-originating or care-interested virtue ethics, or something to that effect, rather than speak of Confucian ethics as a kind of care ethics. In any case, this relatively structured care, care *as* a virtue—care approached in terms of widely shared communal norms—is, I would suggest, quite different from the relatively informal care that care ethicists are usually more interested in.

Moral Rules and Decision Making

Having addressed problems with the first part of Chenyang Li's article (that is, the part where Li draws parallels between the values of *ren* and care), let me now move on to respond to the second part of the same article, where Li deals with supposed parallels between care ethics and Confucian ethics on the matter of flexibility in moral decision-making vis-à-vis moral rules and principles. Confucians, Li claims, may see a need for rules concerning *li* (which Li here translates as "proper social behavior" but which can be better translated as ritual practices or norms) at a certain stage of moral development, but Confucius also indicates in the *Analects* (3:3) that without *ren, li* is of no use (Li 1994, 76). Li does not focus his analysis on the third important moral concept in Confucian ethics, *yi* (appropriateness or rightness). This is surprising, especially considering Confucius's statement in the *Analects*: "In his dealings with the world the gentleman is not invariably for or against anything. He is on the side of what is *yi*" (4:10). Nonetheless, Li manages to argue convincingly that Confucius is willing to allow that it may sometimes be necessary to break or revise rules. As we shall see, however, this needs to be distinguished from the claim, for which sufficient evidence does not seem to exist, that Confucians would really have us move our moral attention right away from rules and principles, as care ethicists would.

Li provides a number of examples from Confucius and Mencius that seem (on the face of things) to illustrate the appropriateness of breaking or ignoring rules if one is to do what is best in particular situations. What Li fails to take account of, however, is the fact that care ethics does not have a unique position in the history of Western ethics in allowing for flexible moral reasoning in relation to rules or principles. This means that providing examples from Confucius and Mencius that show that rules can be broken will not suffice to establish a deep parallel with care ethics.

For instance, Aristotle's account of virtue reserves a special place for flexibility in moral reasoning. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (2000), Aristotle provides the outline of a moral theory but insists before doing so that the nature of the subject matter is such that no more than an outline will ever be able to be provided (1094b). Furthermore, Aristotle reserves special places for the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, in his catalogue of the virtues, and *equity* in his account of justice. Practical wisdom may involve reworking general principles in the light of new particulars, and Aristotle's discussion of equity directs those involved with administering justice to put the spirit of the law above the law when the particulars of cases demand it (1137a–1137b).

Aristotle is a somewhat obvious example. But evidence also exists that Plato, who we often think of as a moral absolutist, does not always approach rules in an all or nothing fashion. In the *Republic* (1993), for instance, Plato gives us a good example of where it would be appropriate to break a rule in order to do the right thing—if one made a promise to return weapons to a friend who subsequently went insane, then one should not follow the normal rule of keeping one's promises and hence return the weapons (331c). The view expressed here seems strikingly similar to the view expressed in a quotation from Mencius that Li provides as evidence for his position: "A gentleman need not keep his word nor does he necessarily see his action through to the end. He aims only at what is right (appropriate) [*yi*]" (quoted in Li 1994, 78).

These examples of rule-breaking, or the downplaying of principle, drawn from Aristotle and Plato, respectively, do not, however, seem to necessarily follow from a focus on human relationships. Care ethicists are not just concerned to highlight a need for flexibility in moral thinking, but also wish to ground this flexibility in concretely caring relationships—it is because the particulars of relationships are more important than principles, for the caring agent, that principles do not always need to be followed. Li makes much of examples from Confucius and Mencius that seem to indicate that room is being made for breaking rules because of the requirements of relationships. Mencius tells the story of a man, whose actions he considers correct, who regularly lies to his father, answering in the affirmative when asked after meals whether

there is any food left in the house. Confucius gives an example where reporting a theft, which is generally the right thing to do, would be wrong: that is, if one found that one's own father had stolen something; although, it would be appropriate to gently remonstrate with him to right his wrong (Li 1994, 78).

Still, if we are impressed by such examples it might be a good idea to point out that Plato, who (to the best of my knowledge) no one has suggested is a care ethicist, also gives an example in the *Euthyphro* that is very similar to the one that I have just noted that Confucius provides. In this dialogue, Euthyphro is prosecuting his own father; and much follows from this being considered a very disrespectful and "unholy" kind of thing to do. The point is not that fathers should never be prosecuted for their crimes, but it is clearly considered to be the case that it should not be their sons who bring charges against them (the *Euthyphro* is in Plato 1997, 3–23; see also the translator's introduction, ix, xv).

Now it might be objected at this point that just picking out odd examples such as these from Plato, rather than talking about Plato's theory as a whole, does not show us that Plato's position is anything at all like the care ethicists',[17] but this is precisely my point. Picking out odd quotes from the Confucian texts that seem to show that in particular instances rules seem to be broken because of the requirements of relationships, examples that Li seems to base much of his case on, does not in itself establish that Confucians are care ethicists. The point of my examples is to provide a weak *reductio ad absurdum*. I say weak, because what I am doing is attacking the use of examples, but I am fully aware Li also wishes to study and contribute to the development of a larger Confucian theory, so it is to the relevant aspects of that theory that I now turn.

Merely providing a few examples of where rules or principles are broken or overlooked, even where this is clearly because of the requirements of relationships, will not in itself establish that there are deep parallels between Confucian ethics and care ethics. In the case of Confucian ethics, it can in fact be argued that, rather than moving away from rule-based thinking altogether (as the care ethicist would, more or less, want us to do), Confucians are: (1) talking about exceptions to the standard rules (exceptions that need not lead to the revision or downplaying of rules or principles); and (2) occasionally interested, in a way similar to Aristotle, in the possibility of revision of the general in light of the specific.

A very clear example of the first kind of rule-breaking attitude can be found in the *Mencius* (4A:17). Mencius confirms to an interlocutor that, following the rites, (unmarried) men and women should not touch each other, and then goes on to say that this rite-based rule would obviously not apply if it was necessary for a man to save his sister-in-law from drowning. Nonetheless, the rule is still understood by Mencius to hold in general, and no indication is given that it is in need of revision. Confucius himself said, "The gentleman is devoted

to principle but not inflexible in small matters" (15:37), and a contemporary interpreter of Confucian ethics explains the Confucian attitude to *li* thus: "In normal situations within a community, the *li* may be said to be absolute . . . they have no exceptions. But in dealing with exigent situations . . . one's sense of appropriateness (*yi)* must determine proper conduct. . . . The issue here has nothing to do with building an exception to the rule but with making an exception to the rule. The rule retains its absolute character, but judged as irrelevant to the exigent situation" (Cua 1998, 290–91). This attitude to *li*, it should be emphasized, is very different from the care ethicist's attitude that rules and principles are not where matters of real moral importance lie.

Confucians will also allow, however, that at certain critical junctures the revision of rules or norms may be appropriate. Where Aristotelians would have us focus on the revision of laws or principles in such cases, Confucians would have us focus instead on the revision of ritual norms or practices (*li*).[18] I have already suggested that the Confucian conception of tradition allows for this possibility. It is the two other key Confucian moral concepts *ren* (humaneness) and *yi* (appropriateness) that provide Confucians with the necessary conceptual resources to allow for the critical revision of norms, for increasingly virtuous people may come to see that certain norms (sexist norms, for example) neither provide fitting ways of behaving for the virtuously humane (*ren*), nor are righteously appropriate (*yi*) to changing cultural circumstances.[19]

Again, the Aristotelian and Confucian view that principles or rules are (at least sometimes) open to revision differs substantially from the care ethicist's purposeful downgrading of the importance of principles and rules (just as the Confucian understanding that it is occasionally possible to make exceptions to rules, while continuing to recognize their moral authority, was seen to differ substantially from the care ethicist's understanding of rules). I think both the Confucian and care approaches have certain strengths and weaknesses in this respect. Reforming practices is an important task that Confucians seem (at least in theory) conceptually better-equipped for than carers,[20] but one must remember that reforming practices (or, in Confucian terms, shifting ritual norms) usually requires collective efforts, and is typically slow and difficult work. Often there are definite limits to how many and how quickly changes can be made to social practices through concentrated moral efforts. Sometimes these limits are set simply by resistance, but at other times they may need to be set by reformers themselves if they do not wish to undermine their own efforts, or bring about other injustices. Such problems do not diminish the importance of virtue-led reform work, but carers may have a certain advantage over Confucians in being better able to give the kind of concrete caring attention that people suffering under oppressive practices may need, before relevant practices are successfully reformed or removed. Such examples of caring may not, in many particular instances, themselves be part of a process of reforming

practices, but they may, nonetheless, be morally important. Consider, for instance, the caring help that might be given to particular women labeled as housewives, who find themselves unfairly carrying the burden of housework. This caring help may be supplied by friends prior to, or at the same time as, work is done elsewhere to remove or weaken the practices underpinning the patriarchal division of labor that led to the existence of the category of "housewife" in the first place.

Despite these differences between care ethics and Confucian ethics, I agree with Li that there are some good reasons for thinking Confucian ethics provides some room for flexible moral decision-making (of a considerably weaker kind than that involved in care ethics). I also agree that the Confucian interest in flexible moral decision-making is combined with an understanding that it is the requirements of social relationships that often provide the basis for such flexibility (and this understanding does not seem to have a parallel in Aristotle). What is still not clear is whether these social relationships are in fact approached by the Confucian in the concrete particularistic way that the care ethicist approaches them. Perhaps, instead, they are primarily understood in terms of communally based categories, through which others are approached primarily (although not necessarily only) via general types, rather than as unique concrete individuals.[21] In order to explore this possibility, which concerns different conceptions of relationships, I will put Li's article to one side and turn to consider the work of some other authors.

Relationships and Roles

Let us first return to Margery Wolf's fascinating account of care in rural China. Wolf, as we have seen, argues that women in rural China have a form of care ethics. This indeed is her conclusion, but what is most interesting for present purposes is a problem she had when she first started trying to relate Gilligan's account of care ethics to her observations of Chinese social life. What she found particularly interesting was that it was the men, rather than the women, who *talked* about a need to pay attention to relationships; in fact the village men often complained that it was the women who did not appreciate the niceties of "human relations" (Wolf 1994, 264–65).

The apparent contradiction Wolf encountered had its basis in the fact that Chinese men had no problem combining a concern with the importance of maintaining relationships with what in fact turns out to be a kind of rule-based thinking. Wolf writes:

> Men speak of the importance of maintaining relationships and the necessity of following traditional rules in order to preserve the harmony essential to an orderly society. Women—who *define* themselves through their relationships with others—are

> much more adept at manipulating those relationships because they put little faith in the traditional rules. . . . the content of the relationships the two groups confront is not the same. One, the men's, involves relationships among statuses; the other, the women's, involve relationships among personalities with needs, frailties, and a capacity for suffering. Because the source of men's self-identity comes from a (theoretically) harmonious community maintained by traditional rules, there is an impersonal quality to the way in which men cultivate relationships. Because relationships are the *source* of their identity, women nurture and value them in their own right, rather than for their symbolic implications (1994, 265).

Although the Chinese men's rule-based thinking is not as abstract (and perhaps not as focused on principles) as that of the so-called justice ethics that Gilligan argues Western men tend to have, it nonetheless shares some of the abstract qualities of the thinking involved in that ethics. In the Chinese context it is not justice ethics that stands in opposition to care ethics; but rather another kind of ethics with a communitarian relational basis superficially resembling care ethics stands in opposition to it. Hence Wolf concludes that Gilligan's account of care and justice is culturally biased. I think the Chinese men's ethics can best be understood as sitting in between the two other ethics (care and justice), having precisely the degree of formal qualities that one would expect a tradition-based virtue ethics to possess.

At this point, I would like to make it clear that I do not wish to use Wolf's examples and conclusion as direct evidence against the Confucian care thesis. Tempting as it might be to try to do this, it would be an illegitimate way to proceed. Despite the fact that Wolf herself labels the ethics of ordinary male social life in rural China "Confucian," I think one has to be careful not to assign the "blame" to any Confucian ethical theory, because it is by no means clear that such a theory is what is guiding, or made concrete in, the actions of these Chinese men.[22] However, Wolf's analysis certainly does have the effect of problematizing descriptions of the ethics of male Chinese social life as care ethics, and more importantly for present purposes, of *suggesting* what might be wrong with the Confucian care thesis. Wolf's analysis suggests that what may look like an example of care ethics on the surface because of an explicit interest in relationships and situation-centered thinking may not really prove to be an example of care ethics once one has got past surface appearances. In particular, it suggests that relationships for the Confucian may in fact be understood through a lens of community accepted role-based categories.

Let us now focus on the Confucian ethicist's understanding of relationships to see how it differs from the care ethicist's understanding of relationships. Confucian ethics is often described as a role-based ethics, where roles and

the virtues that should attend them are understood to be particular to different kinds of relationships—that is, roles are understood to be relational. The paradigmatic list of such role relationships is to be found in the *Mencius* (IIIA:4). The so-called five relationships (*wu lun*) are those that can and should exist between fathers and sons, husbands and wives, older brothers and younger brothers, rulers and subjects, and friends and friends. Mencius connects each of these types of relationship to a particular virtue that each type makes paradigmatic: "love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and faith between friends" (IIIA:4). The basis of each kind of role and virtue are the ritual norms that underlie them, for, as the early Confucian philosopher Xunzi says, "the *li* [rites or norms] fix the different sorts of human relationships" (quoted in Cua 1998, 281).[23]

The centrality of the patriarchal family in Mencius's list of roles and concomitant virtues is clear; the relationship between ruler and subject is meant to reflect, to a large extent, that between father and son, and all of these relationships, with the possible (but by no means certain) exception of friendship relationships,[24] are to be understood as referring to hierarchical relationships between superiors and inferiors. The crucial importance of obedience to one's father is established near the beginning of the *Analects*: "It is rare for a man whose character is such that he is good as a son and obedient as a young man to have the inclination to transgress against his superiors. . . . The gentleman devotes his efforts to the roots, for once the roots are established, the Way will grow therefrom. Being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of a man's character" (1:2). It is interesting to contrast the Confucian focus on hierarchical patriarchal relationships with the relationships that tend to most interest Western care ethicists—namely the relationship between mother and child and the relationship between friends as equals (the last kind of relationship was the one that was of most interest to Aristotle as well, of course).

But let us not worry too much about the patriarchal conservatism and parochialism of the traditional *wu lun,* for the contemporary Confucian will no doubt claim that this list can be modified and extended as and when it is appropriate; the *li* (rites or norms), it will be said, can always be reinterpreted and reconstructed in line with the requirements of *ren* (humaneness or benevolence) and *yi* (rightness or appropriateness). I am more interested here in the formal and essential elements of Confucian ethics that cannot be changed without that ethics ceasing to be Confucian. In particular, I believe the Confucian is always going to be interested in understanding relationships through role-based categories, especially those of a hierarchical kind, and this is what prevents Confucian care from being deeply particularistic. The worry here is that Confucians care for people differently, not so much according to concrete

particularities, but more according to the particular requirements of the kind of role relationship that is judged to be of most relevance in the particular instance (hence Confucians will oftentimes not *really* care).

Henry Rosemont is a contemporary scholar of Confucianism who not only defends the hierarchical role-based aspect of Confucian ethics but also contends, quite wrongly I think, that it is an aspect of Confucian ethics that dovetails very nicely with feminist ethicists' concerns with social relationships. In "Confucian and Feminist Perspectives on the Self" (1997) and other similar works by Rosemont we find one of the most important contemporary reconstructions and defenses of Confucian ethics (see also Rosemont 1991, for example). Rosemont goes so far as to claim that Confucians grasp something essentially correct about personhood in general with their understanding of what he calls the "role–carrying person" (1997, 68). He sums up this Confucian understanding with the statement, "I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others" (1997, 71). He contends that our social roles taken together form our personal identity, so that, for example, "Marriage made me a different person, as did becoming a father . . . and divorce would make me a different person also" (1997, 71). Furthermore, Rosemont insists that there is something very sensible in understanding *all* human relationships as hierarchical in nature: "I am *yin* or *yang* depending on who I am interacting with, and when: I am largely a beneficiary of my parents, benefactor to my children . . . upon close inspection, even the relationships between friends, neighbours and colleagues can be cogently analyzed in this way" (1997, 74).

I cannot see how this hierarchical role-based understanding of human relationships can be compatible with (something that is right about) our modern understanding of friendships—that it is often desirable for friends to experience each other as equals—let alone with feminist concerns with gender equality. To suggest that friendship, for example, works on a benefactor-beneficiary model (even allowing, as Rosemont insists we should, that each person will be sometimes benefactor and sometimes beneficiary) is to risk reducing friendships to their instrumental value. If what is most important about a friendship is simply the fact that it will benefit me (and, in turn, benefit the other), then the friendship is really simply a means to the satisfaction of my (or our separate) preferences. Ironically, by leaving open the possibility of us making this reduction, Rosemont actually demonstrates that he has a lot more in common with the rights-based thinkers he spends much space attacking than he realizes, for he, too, is unwittingly guilty of misunderstanding ethical concerns through abstraction. Michael Stocker criticizes modern moral theories in a way that would seem to apply just as well to Rosemont's account of Confucian ethical theory when he writes, "What is lacking in these theories is simply—or not so simply—the person. . . . The person—not merely the person's general values nor even the person–qua–producer–or–possessor–of–

general–values—must be valued. The defect of these theories in regard to love, to take one case, is not that they do not value love . . . but that they do not value the beloved" (1976, 459).

I do not deny that there are elements of truth in Rosemont's account of human relationships. He is right, for example, that the role social relationships play in the formation of personal identity has been ignored or sidelined in the liberal (or justice ethics) tradition, which has instead had thinkers focus their attention on a rights-based understanding of personhood.[25] What is worrying is the way in which Rosemont's essentially reductionistic approach confuses one aspect of relationships with the many rich dimensions of relationships that exist in actuality—if this is what Confucian ethics is really about then I think it is in big trouble, philosophically speaking. Rosemont states, quite categorically, "when all the roles have been specified, and their interconnections made manifest, then I have been specified fully as a unique person" (1997, 72).[26] I would suggest that if we truly are identical with our roles then it ceases to matter who it is that fills these roles. While, on Rosemont's account, people are no longer understood as little more than fungible place markers for abstract rights, they are now understood as fungible in relation to roles—if two fathers are equally good fathers (in terms of the benefits appropriate to the role of father that they can provide) there seems to be no reason that I should happen to prefer that one of them in particular is *my* father.

Caring of the kind that Rosemont's Confucian is interested in is a very different thing from the care of the care ethicist. This must certainly be true for the feminist care ethicist, for as one feminist ethicist recently put it, "It has been important for women to say, and be able to say, that they are more than someone's daughter, or someone's wife, to assert that one's identity transcends the roles assigned to women" (Brennan 1999, 869). But even for the care ethicist more generally, social roles cannot have the same kind of importance, across the board, that they have for Rosemont. This is because caring well for a person, from the care perspective, involves paying attention, or listening, to many different aspects of the person being cared for (Jaggar 1995, 190), and not merely following the requirements of particular roles, nor approaching people primarily in terms of the ways in which they are constituted by particular roles. This is not to say that carers are unaware or inconsiderate of relevant roles, nor to deny that care is often bound up with or frustrated by roles. Carers realize, however, that to approach others primarily through preconceived role categories could well lead to an absence of genuine care being demonstrated for the individual persons being cared for.

To say that caring is not completely determined and limited by social roles or rules is not to suggest that the good carer takes up some transcendent position outside of communal social life, nor that in all instances caring will be incapable of being satisfactorily achieved simply through following the pregiven

requirements of a caring role or practice. Rather, the carer sees that it is not possible, in general, to have a great deal of faith in role practices—she or he must be able to continually ask whether what is expected by a role in a particular instance really is caring for the particular people involved, and good for the concrete relationships between them, and to act differently than the norms attached to the role dictate if it is not (as the Chinese women that Margery Wolf studied did, for instance). The criteria for caring in such cases do not float above all roles, but neither are they strictly determined by them; they emerge instead from the concrete specificities of the people and relationships involved.

Perhaps we can arrive at a more charitable interpretation of Rosemont's account of role-based Confucian ethics if we understand him to be purposely exaggerating for effect. Perhaps he merely means to say that roles are ethically the most important elements of a person's identity (rather than being strictly identical with the person). This view is generally shared by commentators on Confucian ethics. Li, for example, writes, "For Confucius . . . morality is a matter of fulfilling one's proper role in the society, as a son, a brother, a father, and further, as a ruler or subject under the ruler" (1994, 71–72). Such a view does not lead to absurdity in the way that taking Rosemont's claims at face value does. However, understandings of roles rest on communal norms, and role norms (even when conceived of in relational terms) can all too easily guide behavior in ways that are anything but concretely caring, as Margery Wolf's analysis clearly demonstrates. If we are mindful of this fact we will be led, I would suggest, to place Confucian ethicists squarely outside of the care ethicists' camp. This is what I have been attempting to do; and if I were to finish at this point I think I would, in fact, have accomplished my main task. In order to finish filling out my account of the differences between Confucian and care relationships, however, I think it may be helpful to turn to a work that accepts the weaker claim that roles are morally the most important elements of a person's identity, avoiding the extremes of (a literal reading of) Rosemont's account of Confucian ethics, and tries to combine this claim with a respect for concrete particularity. This may be understood as a last ditch effort to save the Confucian care thesis.

Strong and Weak Particularity

Sin yee Chan provides a sophisticated account of particularity and its relationship to the role-based dimension of Confucian ethics in her dissertation, *An Ethic of Loving: Ethical Particularism and the Engaged Perspective in Confucian Role-Ethics* (1993). The section of her thesis that deals directly with the topic of particularity in relationships is especially interesting (1993, 113–40). Chan begins this section by providing a general philosophical analysis of particularity

in which she distinguishes between weak and strong forms of particularity.[27] Weak particularity is the kind of particularity that I have suggested Rosemont accepts, where particularity is reduced to general qualities that individuals embody. Strong particularity, on the other hand, involves an understanding that persons are not reducible to even a very complex and unique set of general values or qualities. According to this understanding of particularity an individual is "non-replicable, not just because she possesses qualities that are de facto non-replicable . . . [for on this view] it is in the person herself [rather than in the qualities of the person] in which particularity truly adheres" (1993, 114).

Strong particularity is the kind of particularity Chan wishes to commit herself to for good philosophical reasons, and which she would like to be able to locate a commitment to in the early Confucian texts. Evidence of such a commitment is also something that I think needs to be uncovered if the Confucian care thesis is to remain at all tenable. Particularity in relation to types of role relationships will not do, as we have seen; this kind of particularity bears only a superficial resemblance to the deeper understanding of particularity essential to care ethics.

Chan agrees with the general consensus (which, as we have seen, Li also accepts) that "roles are essential in the Confucian account . . . because they help categorize people and thereby structure how the loving relationships should proceed" (1993, 130). It is precisely this fact (among others, which I have detailed in previous sections) that leads me to think Confucians are not care ethicists. Chan, on the other hand, does not see this fact as necessarily inconsistent with an acceptance of strong particularity. Regardless of which of us is right concerning whether a focus on roles and on strong particularity can logically (or comfortably) be combined in theory, there is still the empirical question of whether or not early Confucians actually combined them in practice to be considered.

The problem that Chan soon encounters, which she does not flinch from admitting, is that there seems to be no direct evidence in the early Confucian texts of an explicit commitment to strong particularity (1993, 130). She is hence left having to depend on indirect evidence. This consists of examples selected from the texts where Confucius and Mencius tailor their teachings to, or have their affections shaped by, the particular characteristics of their students and friends. For instance, in the *Analects* (11:11), Confucius, rather than following the norms specific to teacher-student relationships, ends up wishing he could have treated his disciple Yan Yuan like a son after his death, following the way Yan Yuan had treated him like a father when he was alive. Referring to the carrying out of a burial ritual that he hence considers inappropriate, Confucius comments, "[Yan Yuan] treated me as a father, yet I have been prevented from treating him as a son" (quoted in Chan 1993, 134). Chan

focuses on the fact that Confucius would, if he had is way, allow the particular characteristics of this relationship to override the norm. I cannot argue with this, and I admit it makes the Confucian approach to role relationships seem more complex than Rosemont's account did; but what I would focus on instead is the fact that Confucius is still using a small set of role-based guides or categories to determine how he should care for others; he has merely shifted from treating Yan Yuan as a student to wishing he could have treated him as a son. Hence, examples such as this do not convince me that the strong particularist position is being adopted. Perhaps what they do establish is an awareness that it is important to understand personal traits *in order to* apply the right role-guide (and sometimes the right role might not be the most obvious candidate), but such an instrumental approach to individual qualities would not take the Confucian very far beyond weak particularity.[28]

I suspect that Chan is wrong to think that such examples drawn from the texts provide any basis for thinking that early Confucian ethicists consciously embraced strong particularity. Even if it could be demonstrated through the use of such examples that the sense of particularity Confucius and Mencius accepted in practice (if not in theory) was not limited to the weak particularity that would be involved in always referring back to formal communal understandings of role relationships, this would not, I think, be enough; for what we are interested in when we study various ethical systems are precisely those aspects that are made explicit and focused on (rather than indirectly acknowledged), for it is these aspects that constitute an ethics, not the elements that get left behind or are underplayed. Every ethics makes certain features of the world salient and meaningful at the expense of others, or emphasizes some such features at the expense of others. I indicated near the beginning of this paper that I am interested in Confucians *qua* Confucians, and I think I have said enough to undermine the thesis that Confucians *qua* Confucians are followers of some form of care ethics, regardless of whether, as real flesh and blood people, particular Confucians—who were not just bearers of roles and virtues, or simply followers of a particular ethics—did, in fact, care for others in strongly particularistic ways. No doubt, like us, they did;[29] whether they should have, according to their own avowed philosophy, is another matter.

Conclusion

Confucians (*qua* Confucians) will often fail to care, assuming the care ethicist is right that in order to care well for others it is necessary to pay closer attention to the diverse and particular needs of the people one cares about than to the needs that are perceived to follow from the requirements of relevant social roles. However, it should also be said that followers of care ethics may fail to cultivate important virtues to the same extent as those (such as Confucians)

who understand themselves and others more in virtue ethical terms manage to. Carers may fail, for instance, to cultivate those aspects of benevolence or justice that would otherwise motivate them to adequately take account of the needs of distant others. I have not been arguing, however, that either approach to particularistic ethics is superior to the other. I have simply been arguing against assimilating Confucian ethics to care ethics, and likewise, against assimilating care ethics to virtue ethics.

If Confucian ethics is a virtue ethics it may differ from other virtue ethics in putting more emphasis on social role relationships than the other ethics would. Where Confucian ethics ties particularity to a role-focused (if not role-based) understanding of personhood, other virtue ethics may tie particularity to somewhat different conceptions of personhood.[30] Nonetheless, what all virtue ethics will share is a commitment to focusing moral attention on general character traits and the elements of deliberation that lead to the development of good characters. Virtue ethics more generally need not put such a heavy emphasis on social roles, but virtue ethics will always be bound up with formal, communal understanding of the virtues and personhood, unlike care ethics, which, instead, have us focus on the possibly unique requirements of particular individuals living in concrete relationships with others.

Care ethics and virtue ethics can hence be said to have fundamentally different normative focal points.[31] Gilligan (1987) has suggested that the relationship between the moral orientations of care and justice might best be approached through drawing an analogy with pictures that allow for Gestalt shifts, such as the well-known picture that can be perceived as either a rabbit or a duck, but never both at the same time. Perhaps we could benefit from borrowing this analogy for comparing, not care and justice, but rather care and virtue. The relationship between virtue ethics and care ethics could then be understood as involving differences (or different biases) in moral perception.[32]

Care ethics and virtue ethics each draw out important elements of how we are constituted as people, both by the unique qualities of particular relationships and the morally admirable qualities we are only able to cultivate in communities. This paper has not attempted to ascertain which ethics works best in general, either in terms of providing good moral solutions to a wide range of particular cases, or in terms of making the most sense of moral phenomena. What I hope I have done is provide some good reasons for thinking that the particularistic ethics of care and virtue are distinct and that both can offer something of interest to moral philosophers. I hope I have also made it clear, through my rebuttal of the Confucian care thesis, why it is that Confucian ethics is better thought of as a virtue ethics than a care ethics.

Notes

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1. The quotation in the third epigraph is from chapter 38 of the *Daodejing.* In this paper all quotations from Laozi's *Daodejing,* the *Analects* of Confucius, and the *Mencius* (the last of these texts is named after the person traditionally thought to be its author) are from D. C. Lau's translations of the ancient texts (Lao Tzu 1963, Confucius 1979, and Mencius 1970, respectively), unless otherwise indicated. Throughout the paper I follow the practice of referencing classical sources using conventional section numbers, rather than page numbers in modern translations. For example, if I were to mention "*Analects* 1:3" I would be referring to section 3 of chapter 1 of Confucius's text, whereas if I were to mention "*Mencius* 5B:6" I would be referring to section 6 of chapter 5B of Mencius's text (in fact, scholars now generally agree that neither text has a sole author, but it remains convenient to pretend that they do). The general practice of using an alternative numbering system will be familiar to readers of modern texts that reference Plato or Aristotle, for instance.

2. The claim that Confucian ethics is a kind of virtue ethics is not, in itself, a new claim (Cua 1998, 267–302 provides a sophisticated philosophical reconstruction of Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics and Yearley 1990 provides a detailed analysis of Mencius's theory of virtue, to take two examples), but, surprisingly, no one seems to have contrasted this claim with the claim that Confucian ethics is a kind of care ethics.

3. See Crisp and Slote (1997) for a selection of papers and excerpts from longer works that are good examples of this flourishing of writing on the virtues.

4. It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider whether either virtue ethics or care ethics is really capable of providing a genuine alternative to consequentialism and deontology, in terms of providing a satisfactory general moral theory (or anti-theory).

5. Our understanding of the early (that is, pre-Qin) Confucians is complicated by the fact that they were not categorized as Confucians at all in their own time. The most relevant categorization was that of *ru* (ritualists), but we should not assume that this category neatly coincides with the later category of Confucianism (*rujia*). It may be the case that some of the ritualists did not follow Confucius at all. For further details concerning the *ru* see Eno (1990, 6–7, 30–63).

6. This is not (at least, not necessarily) the same thing as the "Confucian" ethics that those who might wish to draw parallels between the ethics of everyday social interactions in contemporary China, or the Chinese diaspora, and care ethics, would take such ethics to be.

7. Rather than follow Li's usage of the Wade-Giles romanization system I prefer to use Pinyin, the official romanization system of the People's Republic of China since 1958 (so Li's *jen* refers to the same Chinese character and word as my *ren*, for example). I have made minor adjustments to the content of a few quotations, for the sake of consistency, but have left the names of authors and titles of published works unchanged.

8. One might thus be inclined to think that people who use a care ethics do so because they *choose*, perhaps through a process of abstract reasoning, one abstract moral ideal or principle, that of caring, over other abstract moral ideals, such as those provided by various accounts of justice (an "ethics of justice" being the main alternative for Gilligan). This would constitute a misunderstanding of care ethics.

9. Throughout this paper, I often use the (less than ideal) term "carer" to refer to what Noddings calls the "one–caring;" that is, to agents who deliberate from within a care ethical framework, or, in other words, have a care orientation as their basic moral orientation (as Gilligan would say). At no point do I mean to use this term to refer (necessarily) to professional carers, despite the fact that the word typically has this connotation.

10. Noddings would, as is often the case, agree with Gilligan here (despite the fact that they approach care from rather different directions), for Noddings writes, ". . . an ethic of caring locates morality primarily in the pre-act consciousness of one–caring" (1984, 28).

11. Michael Slote would argue that the fact that the good parent does not view her behavior in virtue ethical terms is not incompatible with the use of virtue ethical descriptions on the part of normative theorists (see Slote 2000, 343–44). Care ethicists, on the other hand, could argue that it is one of the strengths of care ethics that it does not have to open up such a gap between the carer's motivations and normative justifications.

12. I have made one small change in this translation, of "man" to "person." This is not anachronistic as the Chinese word being translated here is not gender-specific (unlike the English word "man"). Note also that *ren*, *yi* and *li* are the three key moral concepts in Confucian ethics.

13. Martha Nussbaum (1988) sketches a position on virtue ethics that stands somewhere in between MacIntyre's and Slote's, insomuch as it is based on an attempt to delineate a set of virtues that is both broadly Aristotelian in inspiration yet could also be accepted by people across all virtue ethical traditions, although there would be differences, no doubt, in the ways in which people from different traditions would describe the particular virtues. I am skeptical about the possibility of working out such a list of virtues (and corresponding vices), such that they would seem more or less equally attractive (or repellent, in the case of vices) to the adherents of all sophisticated virtue ethical traditions.

14. I say attitude towards tradition rather than account of the role of tradition because Confucius's attitude remained ambiguous enough for it to be taken in somewhat different directions by Mencius and Xunzi—the first focusing more on the self side of the self-tradition relationship and the second focusing more on the tradition side.

15. The denial of personal innovation was not disingenuous or self-deceptive

because Confucius did not think of the reformation of either language or rites as something individuals do independently of each other; such reformations as may be valid are rather the outcome of wise collective deliberations. That this is at least partly true descriptively (and does not just represent a normative ideal) can be seen by the fact (generally agreed upon by contemporary scholars) that the Confucian term for gentleman or superior person (*junzi*) was already losing its class-based reference, for social reasons (originally it referred to aristocrats by station), by the time Confucius brought to a head a process of changes by focusing attention on the fact that a "gentleman" may not be a gentleman. This is an example of the rectification of names; similarly, a "father" may not be a father, a "ruler" may not be a ruler, etc.—the key normative injunction is hence "Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son" (12:11). Despite the lack or downplaying of individualism in the above sense, Confucius can still declare, in a passage where he explicates the meaning of *zhengming*, that individual gentlemen have a moral responsibility to be careful in their speech—to make sure that their use of words lines up with reality—because social chaos will otherwise result (13:3).

16. Of course, it is important not to exaggerate the degree of freedom to choose relationships that Chinese women traditionally had (if Wolf is right that they had more freedom than men on one level, it is still the case that they had much less on another, more general, level). There are interesting parallels between Wolf's critique of the Confucian self and Marilyn Friedman's (1989) critique of the communitarian self. Friedman argues that communitarians make the error of ignoring the moral importance, especially for women, of communities of choice. Focusing on given, rather than chosen, relationships (the given arising from "communities of place"), communitarians fail to grasp the need for moral progress on the level of expanding possibilities for women to form new friendships (Friedman links this progress, when it arrives, to processes of urbanization).

17. In fact, Plato argues against conventional rules of morality in order to direct us towards correct moral principles, rather than away from moral principles altogether, but my point is that this can only be ascertained by looking at his arguments in more detail, rather than at a couple of examples in isolation.

18. Perhaps the difference here is somewhat like the difference between the American (written) and British (unwritten) political constitutions (although this is partly a matter of emphasis, since Aristotle would not demand that we spell out all of our guiding principles and the American constitution is also probably best viewed as incomplete).

19. Cua argues that in one sense *li* is prior to *yi*, for, even when exceptions are made (such as in the example from Mencius mentioned in the previous paragraph), *li* are always considered in the first instance, in order to see whether they furnish any guidance; while, in another sense *yi* is prior to *li*, for *yi* is also the sense of judgment that has to determine whether and which *li* is relevant to the particular case, and may sometimes (together with *ren*) determine that the *li* themselves are in need of revision (1998, 281–82).

20. It could be argued, however, that a lack of conceptions of universal impartial justice and equality will prevent Confucians from reforming (or even becoming aware

of) many practices that really should be reformed (at least before certain concepts are brought in from outside the Confucian tradition).

21. Benhabib (1987) distinguishes between the "generalized other" (which is how Kohlberg's justice ethics encourages us to think of others) and the "concrete other." I am effectively suggesting in this paper that there is another kind of "other" that lies between these two extremes, and that is the "generalized *type* other"—an "other" which, I believe, is brought to the fore in Confucian ethics.

22. I tend to think that contemporary Confucians need to be very careful to avoid the charge of wanting to have their cake and eat it too—a charge that might well be deserved if Confucians were to claim that Confucian ethics is of particular relevance to contemporary Chinese societies yet were not willing to accept that many negative things often labeled Confucian are really Confucian. Either there is something essentially "Confucian" already there in the ethics of Chinese social life that might well make the further application of Confucian ethics particularly suitable, but that should also lead us to think that criticisms from social evidence concerning patriarchal authoritarian oppression have to be taken seriously—as criticisms that can be leveled against Confucian ethics itself—or there is actually nothing much that is really "Confucian" there, which means that Confucian ethics cannot have any special appeal or application.

23. This is also made clear in a few different places in Confucius's *Analects*, as Karyn Lai points out, before commenting, "*Li* serve to mark out differentiated roles; they support and uphold these hierarchies: actions were considered appropriate or inappropriate according to one's status in a particular relationship" (1995, 254).

24. Even the kind of relationship that should exist between friends may more naturally be thought of, by Confucians, as unequal, because it may be understood to mirror the kind of relationship that should exist between elder and younger brothers (Ci 1999, 330).

25. Li (1994, 71) similarly draws parallels between Confucian and feminist understandings of the socially embedded self, which he contrasts with the self as it has traditionally been approached in the Western contractarian rights tradition. He argues that care ethicists and Confucian ethicists would both reject any view that based understanding our fundamental relationships with one another in contract-relational or absolute right-protecting terms, but he fails to take note of, let alone recognize the significance of, the fact that this kind of atomistic understanding of the self has come under criticism in the West, not just from care ethicists, but also from communitarians such as Charles Taylor (1985) and Michael Sandel (1998) (and it seems clear to me that virtue ethics and communitarianism are natural allies). Feminist ethicists, however, have disagreements with communitarians concerning their conceptions of the social self (see Friedman 1989 and Weiss 1995). Li provides no reasons for thinking that on this point the parallel with feminist ethics is more important than the parallel with communitarian (virtue) ethics.

26. In response to Rosemont his friend Angus Graham wrote: "When nursing suspicions of what his friend has in his suitcase on the journey to New York, Henry would perhaps say that he must now act not as a friend but as a human being. I would object that he was always a human being, and if he was always a human being who became friend, teacher, philosopher, we may as well switch to my usage and speak of

the viewpoints of persons who are friends, teachers, and philosophers. . . . it becomes right for him to stop being a friend because he has become aware of the possibility of a plot to blow up New York" (1991, 320).

27. The distinction between these two approaches to *particularity* in relationships should not be confused with the distinction between two types of *particularism* in ethics. The first distinction concerns understandings of individuals in relationships, the second concerns understandings of the role that principles have to play in ethics.

28. Chan (1993, 133) in fact admits that this is a way one could argue against her thesis. I, on the other hand, have to admit that *Analects* 11:22 contains an example where Confucius seems to tailor his teachings to fit the needs of his students in a way that does not seem to be directly related to the roles that they occupy.

29. Because, arguably, human beings generally do (need to) relate to each other in strongly particularistic ways. Thus, Confucius feels deep genuine sadness at the death of Yan Yuan (*Analects* 11:9, 11:10). My point is simply that Confucian ethics does not encourage agents to be morally attentive to the possibly unique needs of concrete individuals.

30. Alasdair MacIntyre has recently argued that virtue ethics should, for good moral reasons (following a consideration of the dangers of compartmentalization, as made very apparent by the example of Nazi Germany), provide some space for agents to stand back from roles: we should accept ". . . some more or less shared conception of what it is to be a good human being that focuses upon those qualities which individuals possess or fail to possess *qua* individuals, independently of their roles, and which are exemplified in part by their capacity or their lack of capacity to stand back from and reconsider their engagement with the established role-structures" (1999, 317).

31. I should add that normative focal points can be used either to distinguish between ways in which agents themselves conceive of their own moral deliberations (using either a care or a virtue orientation, in the present case), or to distinguish between different normative frameworks that attempt to explain what is morally right and wrong about agents and their actions (regardless of whether agents being considered would wish to make sense of their own processes of deliberation in a way that makes use of the same normative focal point as the framework does). Either of the moral perspectives that are based on the different focal points of care and virtue may be able to be used to cast someone working from the other perspective in a morally admirable light—a caring parent may well be described from an external position as a virtuous agent (for she can be seen to have many virtues that are accepted by a community), or, alternatively a person using a virtue ethics can be judged externally according to how they are perceived to meet the requirements of concrete caring (a relevant example here might be the one I used earlier in the paper, where Wolf observed the failure of men in a community that focuses on role-based virtues to care for a particular person, in contrast to the way caring women were able to).

32. Useful as this analogy is, however, it breaks down when we consider that in ethics, unlike in visual perceptions of an actual picture, the way in which we see an aspect of reality is intimately bound up with how we will subsequently act (either on the external world or on ourselves). Furthermore, acting—either focusing on the development of virtues or on the unique qualities of people-in-relationship, to use the

two examples we have been dealing with—will tend to reinforce our confidence in our ways of describing what is morally important (unless, that is, we come up against problems which lead us to doubt the validity of our moral orientation). Of course, it is possible that some people may be inclined to move from one perspective to the other with a high degree of flexibility, or, alternatively, that while a person is accustomed to using one perspective most of the time the other perspective may still have an indirect or unacknowledged role to play in ethical deliberations (as perhaps the strong particularity that is more at home in care ethics might be used by Confucian virtue ethicists *qua* flesh and blood people).

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