THE ETHICS OF VITAL RELATIONALITY:
CARE ETHICS, CONFUCIAN ROLE ETHICS, AND
THE CHALLENGE TO MODERN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

PHILOSOPHY

MAY 2016

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For my family,
unchosen and chosen
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people without whom this dissertation would not have been possible. This is my small way of trying to thank them.

I have presented several portions of this dissertation at conferences and workshops in recent years. I would like to thank the audiences and organizers of: the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy (SACP) panels at the 2009 and 2013 American Philosophical Association’s (APA) Eastern Division meetings; the 2011 SACP annual meeting; the 2013 Uehiro Cross Currents Graduate Student Philosophy Conference; the 2013 Comparative and Continental Philosophy Circle’s annual meeting; the 2013 University of Tokyo-University of Hawaii Summer Residential Institute for Comparative Philosophy; the 2014 International Workshop on Comparative Philosophy at Kobe University; the 2015 Forum for Japanese and Comparative Philosophy; the Association of Chinese Philosophers in North America and the International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy panels at the 2015 APA Pacific Division meeting; and the 2015 Pacific Association for the Continental Tradition’s annual meeting. Lijun Yuan, Qiong Wang, Mao Naka, Nobuo Kazashi served as commentators on several of these presentations and their feedback was critical to the development of my work.

Much of my travel to these conferences was generously funded by a variety of sources. I would like to thank Ruth Kleinfeld-Lenney for several travel stipends. The Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education provided support for the UTUH Summer Institute as well as my presentation at the 2011 SACP annual meeting. The University of Hawai’i’s Graduate Student Organization helped to fund several presentations as well. Finally, much of my dissertation research was generously supported by a UH College of Arts and Humanities Dissertation Award, a C.F. & Grace Ning Excellence in Chinese Studies Graduate Student Award, and a Mansfield Freeman Dissertation Award. I am grateful to all of these institutions and benefactors for providing me with invaluable opportunities for scholarly development.

I owe a huge debt to my committee: Roger Ames, Vrinda Dalmiya, Ken Kipnis, Joseph Tanke, and David McCraw. Roger’s encouraging feedback on every draft kept me writing even when I wasn’t clear on where I wanted the project to go. Vrinda’s close readings and thorough comments on each chapter kept me thinking and rethinking every detail of this project (and I will continue to do so for some time!). Ken kept me fair to those I disagreed with, and Joseph helped to clarify Foucault’s project. To David, I am grateful not just for feedback on the Chinese translations contained herein, but for two years of classical and Mandarin Chinese translation training when I first arrived in Honolulu.

Several faculty members helped along the dissertator, if not the dissertation. Ron Bontekoe and Arindam Chakrabarti offered continuous intellectual stimulation throughout my time at UH. To Ron, I am grateful for the dedication to my prose, and I must apologize for the typos and my occasionally inelegant language. To Arindam, I am thankful to have received a deep appreciation for intellectual rigor and clarity of argument, and I must apologize for those arguments I present here that are made far too quickly. I would also like to thank Thomas Michael for turning me on to Chinese
philosophy as an undergraduate. It has not only shaped my academic career, but shaped me as a person. I also owe a deep debt of gratitude to Masato Ishida, Tom Jackson, and Rajam Raghunathan. At various points in my graduate career these people reached out to say, “I’m here, and I care.” I cannot even count how often I’ve returned to those conversations since then.

Renee Kojma-Itagaki and Pat Pimental helped keep this project alive as I wrote from abroad and from the mainland. Without their help coordinating with faculty and administration, I don’t know how this would have been finished.

This dissertation was drafted in three different cities, and in each I benefited from a close group of friends who served as sources of support and personal growth. I’m grateful to Saya Aoki, Aaron Creller, Rika Dunlap, Matt Izor, Joel Lebel, Joshua Mason, Sarah Mattice, Syd Morrow, Kyle Peters, Cindy Scheopner, Ryan Shriver, Derek Skillings, Josh Stoll, Brandon Underwood, and Ben Zenk for making Honolulu home. I would also like to thank the entire Wong ‘ohana, especially Al, Trudy, and Shaaroni, for opening their doors to Laura and me without hesitation when we arrived in Hawaii. For my time in Kyoto, I am indebted to Anton Sevilla, Cathie Jao-Sevilla, Stevie Tong Shun Suan, Miku Akiyama, Itsuki Hayashi, Zoe Jenkins, and Yasuhiro Watanabe. In Seattle, I’ve had the pleasure of escaping the dissertation with Bobby O’Brien and Carey Nickels, Kurt Johannessen and Ale Yeomans, Paul Carduner and Meghan Urback, Mark Tumiski and Owen David, and everyone at Walter’s in Ballard, the coffee shop that provided me the space and the espresso to write and that has become the envy of all my colleagues. Lastly, though Thom and Alicia Green Gennaro never shared my time zone, they continue to be the sort of exemplary people that inspire my philosophy and my own growth as a person.

Of course, this dissertation would never have come about without my family. Nina, Brian, Mary Jo, Brendan, and Alex not only supported me through much of this process, but it is my life growing up with all of them that first piqued my interest in the philosophical questions I take up here. I am also grateful to Chris, Donald, Emily, and Drew for so warmly welcoming me into their family five years ago.

Laura has been since we first met my philosophical companion, my greatest love, and my best friend. Her patience and encouragement throughout this process kept me together when the doctoral abyss stared back.

While all of these people and many more have been integral in the production of this dissertation, all shortcomings and errors are of course my own.
ABSTRACT

Contemporary ethics focuses on practical and theoretical problems that spring from modern moral philosophy’s reliance on an independent, rational, self-interested individual. These problems range from the questionable primacy of rationality and impartiality in ethical discourse to the marginalization of non-Western cultures and the devaluation of traditional “women’s work” in practice. However, most of these contemporary projects remain committed to either an individualist ontology or an individualist discourse. This dissertation sets out to correct these trends through the positive construction of an ethics of vital relationality drawn from Confucian and care ethics. The starting point of this project is the vitally relational person as opposed to the discrete, rational individual. Vital relations are constitutive interdependent relations of trust and mutual concern that persons depend on for survival, a sense of self, and ultimately flourishing. When this vitally relational notion of persons is taken seriously, it requires a refocusing of our ethics to include the relational matrices out of which persons emerge. The foregrounding of relations entails the cultivation of emotional intelligence, empathic imagination, and a relational virtuosity in responding to the always changing and complex moral world in which we find ourselves. With this necessity for greater moral sensitivity to interpersonal relations comes a parallel necessity for a political consciousness of cultural norms and systemic social issues. When the vitally relational perspective is adopted, there is no strict distinction between our ethical and our political lives. This dissertation concludes with the initial development of a politics of vital relationality.
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CHAPTER ONE
LISTENING TO DIFFERENT VOICES

That which is vital is that without which one cannot continue living. Vital organs, such as the heart and brain, are necessary for life. Vital activities, such as breathing and eating, keep an organism alive and growing. Interestingly, while vital organs and their functions keep us alive and growing, we are rarely conscious of them. And while we may rarely be conscious of them, attentiveness to their health is a necessary prerequisite for biological flourishing. This dissertation develops an ethical and political orientation from an analogous insight into our lived experience: just as our organs and many of our biological functions are unnoticed yet vital to biological life, so too are relations of intimacy, trust, responsibility, and concern unnoticed and yet vital to personhood. The work presented here should be read as a direct challenge to the discrete individualism assumed in liberal theorizing about moral and political philosophy.

Academic philosophy has seen a rising number of critiques of liberal individualism in recent decades. Three particular points of critical focus are the primacy of rationality and the notions of freedom and equality. While in the public sphere the ambiguities and perceived antimonies of these characterizations of the autonomous individual do not rise above the level of being interesting topics for further philosophical work, the utter failure of these concepts to descriptively capture private life or to prescriptively function within the private sphere is alarming. For instance, if a child asks her mother why she always runs so quickly to her aid when she falls from her bike and her mother replies that responding to a child that falls from a bike is a universalizeable maxim, not only might the child be confused by such a response, but in all likelihood
genuine damage has been done to the child and the parent-child relationship by removing
the intimate connection from the mother’s justification of her action. The preoccupation
with providing a universalizeable justification has the tendency to remove the very heart
of ethical reasoning—persons themselves.

Similarly, the notions of freedom and equality do not seem to play out in the
private sphere as cleanly as they do in theorizing the public sphere. In fact, when
understood prescriptively, they actually serve to cause harm in the private sphere. For
instance, the assumption of freedom in the parent-child relationship is immediately
problematic. On the part of parents, the freedom of parents to abandon their young child
outright is intuitively wrong. One might respond that of course parents do not have this
freedom because in bringing the child into this world, they took on certain responsibilities,
presumably freely, and are therefore responsible for the child’s well-being. In this sense,
freedom as a moral concept still stands, though in a qualified sense.

But there is a way to look at this scenario that captures more of the lived content.
Instead of focusing on freedom, one can focus on responsibility. Why is there
responsibility to the child in the first place? The parents assume responsibility for the
child because children are vulnerable on their own and lack the capacity to care for
themselves. Bringing this insight back to the notion of freedom, the basic capacities for
living with positive freedom (a freedom to create rather than a negative freedom from
interference) for the parents and the child are unequal. In the private sphere, the assumed
freedom and equality of the public sphere do not obtain (at least, do not obtain as clearly
as they do in the private sphere). Moreover, to import them into the private sphere, even
with qualifications, misrepresents the dynamics of family relations and the nature of
private life. Critics of liberalism have extended these lines of critique from the notions of freedom and equality and the role of rationality in parent-child relations and brought their critical gaze back to the public sphere. I will focus on two such lines of critique here, care ethics and Confucian role ethics.

One persuasive explanation of the failure of liberal philosophy to offer an attractive and efficacious philosophy of private life has been that philosophers (almost all of whom have been male, historically) have been philosophizing from their own experience in the public sphere since the beginning of the practice of philosophy, and as such they have not thought it necessary to address the private realm. Margaret Urban Walker writes, “Dominant moral theories depict the self-images, prerogatives of choice, required patterns of moral reasoning, and anticipated forms of accountability of some people in societies like ours; those placed in certain ways, not just in any or every way.”¹ Walker observes that with the liberal perspective,

the picture suggests either the reciprocal social positions of participants or competitors in a rule-structured practice, or the positions of those with authority to apply law or policy impartially to cases. Since positions and operations like this characterize roles, offices, and activities that were historically reserved to men in Western societies, again it seems that theory makers know what some men (are supposed to) know.²

She concludes that this ethical and political perspective is thus exclusive of women, but it is also exclusive of children, people with disabilities, people “of disadvantaged economic,

¹ Walker 2007, 23.
² Walker 2007, 22.
educational, or professional position,” and people “of a despised racial, caste, ethnic, sexual, or religious identity.”³ In short, the agent of liberal moral and political philosophy “is none of us at all times, and many of us at no times. Gender bias, then, is one facet of a highly restrictive and broadly exclusive discourse that fails to speak for or to many, perhaps most, of us.”⁴

In a persistent attempt to correct this deficiency in academic philosophy, care ethicists have labored for decades to develop an ethical and political perspective drawn from women’s experiences. Development of the care perspective began in the early 1980s with the first care ethicists in philosophy and psychology—Sara Ruddick, Carol Gilligan, and Nel Noddings. In 1980, Sara Ruddick published “Maternal Thinking,” an “attempt to express and respect maternal thought.”⁵ Her paper identifies facets of the mothering experience that point to an alternative moral orientation and a set of moral values different from those found in liberal philosophy. Two years later, Carol Gilligan identified a “different voice” in the data from her work with Lawrence Kohlberg in developmental psychology. In analyzing the responses of adolescent girls and young women to moral scenarios, Gilligan found “a voice that insists on staying in connection and most centrally staying in connection with women, so that psychological separations which have long been justified in the name of autonomy, selfhood, and freedom no

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³ Walker 2007, 22. I would also add here that there is undoubtedly a sizeable minority of privileged men who were raised in the last quarter of the twentieth century who do not see their perspective represented in these dominant moral theories.

⁴ Walker 2007, 22.

⁵ Ruddick 1980, 345.
longer appear as the *sine qua non* of human development but as a human problem.”

Gilligan’s work served to broaden the symbolically maternal moral reasoning Ruddick found to include women generally. And then in 1984, Noddings’ *Caring* further contributed a full-fledged feminine ethics of care. Noddings begins from the observation that the symbolic voice of the father dominates contemporary moral philosophy and that “the mother’s voice has been silent.” She argues for a phenomenological approach to ethics based in “human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for.”

These three scholars are united in drawing from women’s experience to articulate an ethical orientation distinct from the individualist theories dominating philosophical and moral psychological literature at the time. Instead of a discrete individual, these philosophers begin with a person-in-relation. In particular, some care ethicists take as their starting point the mother-child relationship in which reciprocal responsibilities are starkly asymmetrical. As such, notions of freedom and equality so central to liberal moral and political thought are immediately problematized. Since these beginnings, the ethics of care has become a large family of ethical perspectives, some of which are incompatible with others. I will give a more detailed account later in this chapter of which care ethics I am referring to in this dissertation. For now, it is important only to note that the origins of care ethics are in women’s experience of mothering and caring for others more broadly construed, and that this experience that has been historically

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7 Noddings 1984, 1.
8 Noddings 1984, 1.
confined to the private sphere is not adequately conceivable in standard, liberal theories of moral and political life.⁹

Care ethics has not been an entirely uncontroversial development in moral philosophy. Not only are philosophers of the dominant moral theories skeptical of such a perspective, but many feminists are critical as well. However, it is my contention and the contention of most care ethicists that these criticisms are the result of the care perspective’s youth. Male experience has been theorized into the contemporary justice perspective for centuries, while female experience has been contained within the private sphere or reduced to the natural realm. Mothering has been considered “instinctual” and part of our “animal nature,” not the material meant for theorizing. I will here develop the ethics of care in dialogue with Confucian role ethics and in response to feminist demands. I take as my initial observation the corresponding emphasis on intergenerational familial relationships in Confucianism.¹⁰

Confucianism is in the broadest terms a cultural tradition incorporating both religious and philosophical elements as a way of life. The Chinese term, ruxue 儒學,
translates literally as “literati learning,” and picks out “the always-porous core of an aggregating Chinese culture” that evolved with each generation of ru 儒 (literati).\(^{11}\) As such, one might benefit from following the Chinese rather than the Jesuit term for this tradition and refer to Confucianism as Ruism.\(^{12}\) However, in the interest of maintaining some measure of consistency between the present work and the work to which I am responding, I will continue to use the conventional English terminology.

We might break the long history of Confucianism into roughly four eras. There is the classical era during the Spring and Autumn (770-481 B.C.E.) and Warring States periods (481-221 B.C.E.). This era is represented by Confucius (Kongzi 孔子 551-479 B.C.E.) and Mencius (Mengzi 孟子, c. 380-289 B.C.E.). Then there is the Han Imperial era where Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒, 179-104 B.C.E.) defined what would become the dominant state ideology of China for two millennia. During the Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, the Neo-Confucian era crystalized in the works of Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200), Wang Yangming (王陽明, 1472-1529), the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao 程顥, 1032-1085 and Cheng Yi 程頤, 1033-1107), and others as they appropriated various Daoist and Buddhist elements. Finally, scholarship culminating in the late twentieth century has seen the emergence of the fourth era, New Confucianism, where the focus of philosophical work is on the intersection of Confucianism and Western systematic philosophy. Scholars such as Xiong Shili (熊十力, 1885-1968), Ma Yifu (馬一浮, 1883-1967), Fang Dongmei (方東美, 1899-1977), Mou Zongsan (牟宗三, 1909-2001).

\(^{11}\) Ames 2011, 1.

\(^{12}\) It is indeed odd to call it “Confucianism” given both the lack of Confucius’s name in the Chinese term and Confucius’s role as transmitter rather than founder of an already-existing cultural heritage.
1995), and Tang Junyi (唐君毅, 1909-1978) exemplify this period of Confucian thought. In short, Confucianism is a living tradition that is reappropriated and rearticulated with each generation, and over the centuries it has manifested itself in a variety of ways, from philosophical way of life to institutionalized imperial bureaucracy to practiced religion and most recently to systematic philosophy.

More recently there has been a growing body of English-language literature on Confucian religion and philosophy, and in the late 1980s and early 1990s, comparative philosophers began uncovering a different voice—similar to the different voice of Gilligan’s care perspective—in classical Confucian texts. David Hall and Roger Ames observe that while English translations of classical texts show considerable improvement through the generations with regard to grammar, the glosses for central philosophical concepts have been handed down uncritically and are now obscuring the Confucian voice. For example, the translation of tian 天 as “Heaven” by well-intentioned but religiously blinkered Jesuits in the 1800s imposed a transcendental metaphysics on Chinese cosmology that is nowhere supported within the philosophical framework. The result of this sort of conceptually-thick gloss, along with others—such as ren 仁 as “benevolence,” li 禮 as “ritual,” yi 義 as “righteousness,” and xiao 孝 as “filial piety”—has been the rendering of the classical Confucian project as little more than an Oriental (and all-too-often “inadequate”) form of Western culture. The classical Confucian did not speak in modern English or with contemporary Western cultural assumptions, and Hall and Ames set out to think through Confucius and take Confucianism on its own terms.

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14 Hall and Ames 1987, 2.
Henry Rosemont also took up this Confucian voice in his own work critiquing Western liberalism. He writes that “the complex philosophical notion of the individual, the self, which underlies this account [of human rights] may not be the most appropriate, or the most advanced, or the most humane way to characterize members of our species. It is certainly not the account the vast majority of the human race would give.”\(^{15}\) In pursuing moral, social, and political theories based on this abstract individual, dominant moral theories are “no longer grounded in the real hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, ideas, and attitudes of flesh and blood human beings.”\(^{16}\) Rosemont goes so far as to declare this model of selfhood a “conceptual liability” for contemporary Western societies (though this is importantly not meant to ignore the debt the world owes to dominant moral theories and human rights historically).\(^{17}\)

The import of the Confucian voice these comparativists uncovered is that, like the different voice of Gilligan’s female subjects, the Confucian voice offers a vision of the moral life rooted in family relationships and family feeling. Rather than viewing persons as free and equal discrete individuals defined by their capacities for rational choice, Confucians see persons as the sons and daughters of particular parents, and the development of personhood is not the honing of one’s rational powers but rather the expansion of one’s moral circle and the deepening of one’s emotionally thick familial relations. Much like the mother-child paradigm above, Confucians identify the intergenerational father-son relationship as paradigmatic of moral relations. The task of

\(^{15}\) Rosemont 1991, 76.
\(^{16}\) Rosemont 1991, 84.
\(^{17}\) Rosemont 1991, 89.
this dissertation is to develop these ethical-political orientations rooted in the family through a close comparative analysis and a responsiveness to feminist concerns.

Essential to this task is recognizing the different histories of the notions and values at work in these two ethical perspectives. On the one hand, care ethics draws from women’s experience in Euro-American societies under patriarchy. As such, the values found in early care ethics are traditionally coded feminine (in the West) but require some reworking to be properly feminist or post-patriarchal. On the other hand, Confucian role ethics draws from Chinese men’s experiences, but it will become clear throughout this project that many of the values taken from this experience are traditionally coded feminine in Western discourse. I will elaborate on this point and what it means for feminist comparative philosophy later in this chapter. For now, it is important only to note that the paradigmatic parent-child relationships distinguish care ethics and Confucian role ethics from both dominant moral theories and traditional Western ethics.¹⁸

By “dominant moral theories” I mean those general ethical theories derived from the liberal tradition known as deontology, consequentialism, and contractualism. All three model selfhood on a notion of the rational, autonomous, discrete individual. As alluded to above, the parental relationships and the family units at the center of care ethics and Confucian ethics are not reducible to a contractual account of relationality, nor

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¹⁸ One might argue that what I consider traditional Western ethics is simply another species of dominant moral theory. My distinction here is meant to respect the fact that many who work in contemporary virtue ethics (i.e., the revival of traditional Western ethics) will agree with my critique of dominant moral theories, though in chapter 3 I will argue that the revival of virtue ethics does not go far enough in recognizing relationality.
are these persons-in-relation as found in lived, moral experience reducible to the discrete individuals presupposed in dominant moral theories. In short, neither the women’s voice of care ethics nor the Confucian voice of Confucian role ethics is represented in the dominant moral theories.

In recognizing the stark contrast between care ethics and Confucian ethics on the one hand, and dominant moral theories on the other, some scholars have been quick to align the former with traditional Western ethics. These traditional ethics, namely virtue ethics, are those pre-modern Western ethics and their contemporary iterations, including Platonic, Aristotelian, Thomist, and sentimentalist virtue ethics. However, while traditional ethics emphasize context and locate ethical value in character and virtues instead of abstract rules or quantifiable consequences, the discourse is again focused on individuals and their character traits, their growth as isolatable persons, and their practices of self-improvement. The emphasis on the familial constitution of the person in care ethics and Confucian role ethics is markedly different, as is the location of ethical value in relationships.

As distinct from dominant moral theories and traditional Western ethics, I consider care ethics and Confucian role ethics to be two species of what I call the ethics of vital relationality. These ethics take seriously the thickness of lived experience and of familial existence. The result is a foregrounding of several facets of moral experience that are often ignored. First, the self is better understood to be a relationally constituted person where narrative, embodiment, emotion, and interdependent/dependent connections constitute identity. This leads to a set of values that differs from the rationalist impartiality, equality, freedom, and universalizability of dominant moral theories as well
as the transcendent, teleological, often rational, and discrete values of traditional ethics. An emphasis on connection, dependence, receptivity to needs, trust, care, situational appropriateness, and deference is prioritized in a moral particularism unique to perspectives privileging the relationally constituted person. It is with this insight that this dissertation takes its start.

I am not the first to bring these different voices into conversation, and it is by recounting the conversation up until now that I will begin the present study. I should note at the outset that in the early essays, and to some degree with more recent work, there are no agreed upon definitions of several key notions—i.e., comparative philosophy, feminist philosophy, care ethics, and Confucianism. I will clarify and attempt to standardize the terminology following a survey of the early Confucian-Care project and its critics.\(^\text{19}\)

### 1.1 The Confucian-Care Project

Chenyang Li’s 1994 article, “The Confucian Concept of Jen [Ren] and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study,” first broached the comparison between care ethics and Confucianism.\(^\text{20}\) In this section I will summarize Li’s argument as well as the negative reactions it received. The purpose here is not to decide how Confucianism

\(^{19}\) The “Confucian-Care project” is to be distinguished from what Daniel Star refers to as the “Confucian care thesis,” which is a particular interpretation of the primary thesis of Li 1994. I mean to pick out with the “Confucian-Care project” all comparative engagements with care ethics and Confucianism, including critics who would dismiss the project altogether.

\(^{20}\) “Jen” is the Wade-Giles romanization of the pinyin “ren.” I will use pinyin throughout this dissertation and revert to Wade-Giles only where Wade-Giles is used in the original author’s language, as is the case with Li’s 1994 article. In those cases where Wade-Giles is used, I will provide the pinyin in brackets.
and care ethics can mutually influence each other, nor is it to decide if the Confucian-Care project yields a full-fledged ethical-political orientation or if it is better conceived of as a corrective to existing positions; these questions are reserved for later chapters of the dissertation. Here the concern is solely with the formal issues of whether or not Confucianism and care ethics can be brought into dialogue in the first place, and if so, how. I will demonstrate that much of the early debate over Confucianism and care ethics, especially the critical responses, is based on misunderstandings of comparativist methodology and a lack of precision among the scholars with regard to the key notions of feminist philosophy, care ethics, and Confucianism. In providing a synopsis of Li’s essay and those of his early critics, I will address these four sources of confusion while providing the modified framework for the present comparative work on Confucianism and care ethics.

Li aims to bring Confucianism and feminism into a constructive dialogue, and he attempts to do this through a comparison of the Confucian value of ren 仁 and the feminist value of care.21 His article divides roughly into two parts. The first argues for the similarities between care ethics and Confucian ethics; the second demonstrates that Confucian ethics can evolve according to such similarities into a post-patriarchal tradition. In comparing care and ren, Li argues that when compared to the dominant moral theories of Kantian deontology and utilitarian consequentialism, Confucian ethics and care ethics are similar in that (a) ren and care both serve as the highest moral ideals, (b) ren ethics

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21 Whether care, especially as defined in the early 1980s, is a feminist value is controversial. I use Li’s uncritical adoption of the term here to remain consistent with how he saw the project. The subsequent analysis of his argument will problematize this designation.
and care ethics are without general principles, and (c) ren and care both call for gradations of moral concern for others. From these similarities, Li concludes that Confucian ethics is a kind of care ethics, of which feminist care ethics is another kind.\textsuperscript{22} Importantly, Li does not conclude that Confucianism is as such feminist. It has historically treated women very differently from the way in which feminist care ethics has, and if a feminist Confucianism is to be constructed it will have to overcome this historical subordination of women.

In the second half of his article, Li demonstrates that Confucianism is capable of a feminist evolution through dialogue with feminist care ethics. Li’s first step is to diagnose Confucianism’s misogyny problem, and in doing so he argues the subordinated role of women in Confucianism is primarily an historical fact and not a philosophical premise of the tradition.\textsuperscript{23} Li observes that while Confucius and Mencius lived within a patriarchal society, the Confucian justification for the systematic subordination of women only began after the classical era and during the Han Imperial era with the metaphysics of Dong Zhongshu. With the beginning of Han Imperial Confucianism, Dong aligned yinyang doctrine with gender distinctions and then rearticulated the previously complementary relationship along strictly hierarchical lines.\textsuperscript{24} According to this historical analysis of classical Confucianism, there is nothing at the foundation of the philosophy to justify patriarchy (though, importantly, there is nothing to explicitly guard against it either). But this raises a second question: if ren is a form of care and care ethics is being

\textsuperscript{22} Li 1994, 81.

\textsuperscript{23} This argument is difficult to make, and it is perhaps more appropriate to argue that misogyny is not an essential philosophical premise of the Confucian project.

\textsuperscript{24} Li 1994, 84.
developed as feminist in Western society, how could ren have been coopted to subordinate women?

In surveying the history of other traditions, Li observes that any moral ideal can do harm to certain individuals and groups when one circumscribes the domain of application. Athenian slaves, for instance, were enslaved under the banner of democracy because they were denied citizen status. Similarly, African-Americans in the United States were enslaved despite the slavemasters’ belief in Christian brotherhood and sisterhood. Christian values did not apply to “non-humans.” In both cases, the application domain of the moral ideal was arbitrarily restricted so as to exclude certain persons or groups, and then these persons or groups were subordinated and oppressed. Li argues that the same logic applies to ren-as-care in Confucianism; women were arbitrarily excluded from the application domain, which allowed an ethic of care to perpetuate the subordination of women.25

From this analysis, Li draws three conclusions for care ethics in particular and for the future of the Confucian-Care project in general. First, despite the early formulations of care ethics in the United States, the care orientation is not inherently linked to biological sex. In Confucianism, ren-as-care is a moral ideal historically restricted to men and coded masculine.26 Second, care is not the exclusive orientation of one social group or culture. Contrary to the claims of some feminist critics of care, care ethics can be found outside of Western cultures as well as outside of subordinated groups. Caring is not necessarily a slave morality, since Confucian men were exemplary care ethicists (though

25 Li 1994, 85.
26 Li 1994, 85.
certainly not feminist care ethicists). Finally, the correspondence between feminist care ethics and Confucian ren ethics indicates that the coming clash of Western feminism and the Confucian patriarchal tradition is unlikely to result in an all-or-none victory for either side. Instead, a new form of Confucianism reconstructed as feminist is more likely to be the case. To be clear, Li concludes that since “Confucianism and feminism share common grounds, it is possible to reconstruct Confucianism to be feminist.”

The initial responses to Li’s article were overwhelmingly negative, with scholars rejecting the Confucian-Care project for a variety of reasons. In what follows, I will briefly summarize these objections, attending only to those arguments that pertain to the viability of the comparative project itself. I will address substantive critiques of Confucian ethics and care ethics in their own right throughout the course of the dissertation.

With regard to arguments against the project as a whole, all objections rely on a misunderstanding of at least one of the following notions: comparative philosophy, feminist philosophy, care ethics, or Confucianism. In the process of clarifying these four notions, I will dismiss the objections to Li’s project and indicate where the Confucian-Care project goes from here.

1.1.1 Clearing the Field: Negative Responses to Li and Their Confusions

There are four rejections of Li’s original thesis. Daniel Star and Ranjoo Seodu Herr both criticize the first part of Li’s argument and argue that the surface similarities

27 Li 1994, 86; emphasis mine.
between Confucianism and care ethics are in fact differences. Lijun Yuan grants the first part of Li’s argument, but criticizes the second, arguing that care ethics itself is not feminist and therefore the similarities between ren and care do nothing to further a possible feminist reconstruction of Confucianism. Finally, Nel Noddings argues that since Confucianism is a religion and historically patriarchal, Confucianism is incompatible with care ethics. As I will demonstrate in this section, all four evidence problematic understandings of at least one of the following four notions: comparative philosophy, feminist philosophy, care ethics, and Confucianism. I will articulate each critic’s argument and indicate the shortcomings briefly before moving on to the interpretations of these four notions I take to be most efficacious in the pursuit of the Confucian-Care project.

Before beginning, it is worth mentioning one more voice of objection to Li’s original paper. Some have also interpreted Virginia Held as being dismissive of the compatibility of care ethics and Confucianism. In The Ethics of Care, she writes that despite their parallel rejections of a strict division between public and private, Confucianism and care ethics should be kept distinct from one another. She reasons that to include nonfeminist versions of valuing care among the moral approaches called the ethics of care is to unduly disregard the history of how this ethics has developed and come to be a candidate for serious consideration among

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29 Yuan 2002.
30 Noddings 2010, 137-41.
31 See, for example, Rosenlee 2014.
contemporary moral theories. The history of the development of the contemporary ethics of care is the history of recent feminist progress.\textsuperscript{32}

This statement takes issue with Li’s claim that “Confucian ethics is a kind of care ethics.” However, as I read it, Held’s point is not so much that there is no room for dialogue but rather that subsuming Confucian ethics under the category of care ethics is problematic. I see Held’s objection to be an issue of semantics, and so long as dialogue remains open between the two and Li’s substantive grounds for comparison are not being challenged, it is an objection with which I agree.\textsuperscript{33} Just as we comparativists would find something unsettling with the declaration that care ethics is in fact a kind of Confucian ethics, we should also be wary of any “discovery” of a non-Western species within a distinctly Western genus. As I will argue in chapter 3, this same wariness should attend any virtue ethical interpretation of Confucian ethics. As will become clearer through the course of this chapter, I opt to frame the comparative Confucian-Care project as a study of the \textit{ethics of vital relationality}. I turn now to the purportedly substantive criticisms of Li’s project.

\textsuperscript{32} Held 2006, 22.

\textsuperscript{33} It is possible that Held in fact misunderstands the comparative project. Ultimately I do not see enough material in the text itself to decide one way or another. If her point is that care ethics only grows through internal dialogue among the various historical forms of caring as taken up by feminists, then I see her approach to the ethics of care to be the worse for it and only marginally better than Noddings’ gender essentialist approach. This direction for Held also leads to the dangerous conclusion that non-Western feminists may not have recourse to their own cultural resources if they wish to contribute to the development of care ethics as conceived by Western feminists.
1.1.1.1 Daniel Star’s Objections

Daniel Star’s argument against Li’s project is two-fold. First, Star argues that of Li’s three points of similarity between care ethics and Confucianism, two are in fact differences. With regard to ren and care being the highest moral ideals, Star claims that care is both an ideal and “a particular way of thinking morally…a different voice…a different moral orientation,” while ren is an “abstract moral ideal” of a particular kind of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Furthermore, despite both being ideals of some sort, there is, on the one hand, a distinction between ren as natural caring concern and ren as a highest moral ideal, while on the other hand, Star claims, caring is only the orientation of natural caring concern. Thus, Star concludes, ren and care are similarly ideal but different in that the former is a virtue and the latter is a natural orientation.

With regard to ren and care both showing an aversion to strict rule-following, Star argues that again ren and care are similar but notably different. Star argues that while it may be true that Confucian ethics and care ethics both dismiss the moral authority of a priori universal moral principles, Confucianism only goes so far as to claim “it may sometimes be necessary to break or revise rules,” while care ethicists would “have us move our moral attention right away from rules and principles.” As with his criticism of Li’s first point of similarity, Star’s argument is not so much that these positions are entirely different (e.g., that Confucianism uses deductive reasoning from absolute

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34 Star 2002, 81.
35 Star 2002, 83.
36 Star 2002, 86.
principles to make moral decisions while care ethicists respond \textit{in situ} to the needs of particular others), but rather that while both do indeed reject the absolute authority of rules, care ethicists do so more vehemently. Here it is worth pausing to point out the first confusion in Star’s framing of the problem.

Star’s first confusion is over the nature of comparative philosophy, and this results in two problems with how he frames the project. First, there seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding over how the comparativist values similarity and difference across cultures. As I will articulate in more detail later in this chapter, similarities are sought in comparative philosophy \textit{in order to} foreground differences. Responsible comparative philosophy is done with the intent of opening up one or the other perspective (or both) to a wider range of possible solutions or resolutions to contemporary philosophical issues. The objective of comparative philosophy is never to find \textit{identity} on certain concepts or questions across cultures. \textit{Similarity} as distinct from identity entails some measure of difference, and it is this difference that is of value to comparativists. For instance, if Hume is the same as Mencius, there is no reason to translate or to study Mencius. We already have Hume. In Li’s case, the similarities are highlighted in order to justify the more nuanced comparison that would follow in later work. His article is meant only to open up the topic for discussion. At the time, care ethics and Confucianism were seen as so radically different, bringing them into a productive comparison was a non-starter.

And this confusion over the nature of comparative philosophy gives rise to a second problem for Star’s argument. Star’s preoccupation seems to be exclusively with whether or not Confucianism is an ethic of care or an ethic of virtue. The assumption that
either categorization is appropriate across cultures is controversial at least and arguably outright condescending, as I will further argue later in this chapter. To claim that Confucianism is, lo and behold, care ethics or virtue ethics is to claim that the Western categorization of ethical theories is somehow complete and universal. What this does, in practice, is to rig the game against non-Western—or more specifically, non-Euro-American—ethics and to marginalize them as less complete, less rigorous, more mystical, more occult versions of their Western counterparts. These Western counterparts are unduly privileged in such comparisons because they are paradigmatic examples of these categories; Aristotle is not just a virtue ethicist, he defines virtue ethics, as evidenced by the fact that Saint Thomas of Aquinas is described as “more Aristotelian than Aristotle himself.” When wholesale cross-cultural comparisons are undertaken, instead of a non-Western species of a Western genus or vice versa, we are far more likely (and I would argue far more fortunate) to discover Western and non-Western species of a cross-cultural genus. I will have more to say on these methodological points later. What matters here is that Star’s methodological confusion does not amount to a compelling argument against pursuing the Confucian-Care project. In fact, as far as finding differences within similarities, Star’s analysis (if correct) actually furthers Li’s original project.

Before moving on, there is one final point on Star’s article that bears mentioning. Star addresses the second half of Li’s project and argues that Confucianism is antithetical to feminist ethics because of the emphasis on roles as constitutive of one’s identity. Star appeals to Rosemont’s articulation of the role-bearing person to demonstrate that the Confucian emphasis on social roles further distances it from a care ethical emphasis on
particular others while simultaneously reinforcing the sort of socializing forces that feminists are historically wary of. Star writes that

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.\(^{38}\)

Star goes so far as to claim that this sort of attitude toward relationships amounts to one’s parent being entirely fungible with another’s: “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…there seems to be no reason that I should happen to prefer that one of them in particular is my father.”\(^{39}\) For care ethicists, that this is my child and not simply a child makes all the difference in terms of my conduct toward that child.

In chapter 2 I will articulate the ways in which Star’s understanding of role-bearing persons is a caricature, but it is worth mentioning now a second foundational issue with Star’s paper that is distinct from the two-part confusion over the comparativists project mentioned above: Star misunderstands the nature of Confucian ethics. In arguing against the similarities between care ethics and Confucian ethics (i.e., the first half of Li’s article), Star utilizes a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethical interpretation of

\(^{38}\) Star 2002, 92.

\(^{39}\) Star 2002, 94.
Confucian ethics. But for his demonstration that Confucian roles can never be feminist or care ethical (i.e., arguing against the second half of Li’s article), Star appeals to a seminal article in what today is termed Confucian role ethics and is expressly distinguished from the Confucian virtue ethics Star previously relied upon. While the designation of Rosemont and Ames’s iteration of Confucian ethics as Confucian role ethics would come only in 2008, the fact that Rosemont never once mentions virtues or character in the article Star cites is a telling contrast with Star’s other sources. While I do not intend this to be a charge against Star’s scholarship since he could not have foreseen that Rosemont’s article would serve to ground a new interpretation of the Confucian classics, the fact that there is this confusion over the nature of Confucianism does undermine his own thesis that the Confucian-Care project is not worth pursuing. Ironically, it is the role ethical interpretation that Star attacks in the latter half of his paper that is precisely where the most fruitful comparative work can be done, as I will argue for in detail later in this chapter.

1.1.1.2 Lijun Yuan’s Objections

The second critic of the Confucian-Care project is Lijun Yuan, who challenges “the idea that Confucian ethics can ever be acceptable to contemporary feminists, despite its similarity to the ethics of care.” In particular, Yuan “challenges the idea that these two concepts [of ren and care] are so similar that traditional Chinese thought may be seen as a forerunner of feminist ethics,” and she does this by addressing two of Li’s

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assumptions: (1) “since the ethics of care is a culturally feminine way of thinking about morality it must therefore exemplify a feminist approach that is not oppressive to women,” and (2) “since Confucian ethics of jen [ren] is similar in many ways to the ethics of care, it cannot be oppressive to women, despite its origins in a hierarchical society rooted in systematic sexism as traditional Chinese society [was].”

There are two sorts of problems with Yuan’s criticism of Li. The first sort are problems of accuracy regarding Li’s original thesis, while the second sort are confusions over the nature of comparative philosophy and feminist theory. I will address the accuracy issues first so as to keep the Confucian-Care project as clear as possible. First, Yuan understands Li’s primary claim to be that “traditional Chinese thought may be seen as a forerunner of feminist ethics.” Despite having been published in various stages of revision in at least four different locations, Li’s original 1994 article and its later iterations never once attempt to establish Confucianism as a “forerunner” of care ethics. Instead, the objective is to “find common ground” to “make it possible for [care ethicists and Confucians] to learn from and support each other.”

Yuan’s articulation of Li’s second assumption is similarly inaccurate. Yuan claims that Li argues that “since Confucian ethics of jen [ren] is similar in many ways to the ethics of care, it cannot be oppressive to women, despite its origins in a hierarchical society rooted in systematic sexism as traditional Chinese society [was].” But as I underscored above, Li does not hold such a view. Li argues that Confucianism was oppressive to women, which is in fact the very motivation for undertaking the project in

42 Li 1999, 90.
the first place. (If Confucianism cannot oppress women, for whatever reason, why look for a feminist reconstruction?) Unfortunately for Yuan’s argument, even if these inaccuracies are corrected, there are confusions over the structure of the discourse that ultimately undermine her attempt to dismiss the Confucian-Care project.

Much like Star, Yuan’s approach to comparative philosophy is fraught with methodological issues. In framing Li’s article, Yuan alludes to Li and others when she writes, “some theorists argue that Confucianism is compatible with full human rights for women.” Here again one finds the evaluation of a non-Western philosophy according to a Western ethical system. In this case, Yuan assumes that a feminist Confucianism is simply a Confucianism that is compatible with “full human rights for women.” The rights discourse, however, is a distinctly Western—and more specifically Euro-American Enlightenment—ethical and political discourse. While there is no question that the rights discourse has greatly improved the lives of millions in the West and around the world, one cannot go so far as to claim that it is without its own problems with regard to freedom, equality, and the assumption of discrete, rational individuals.

Moreover, this confusion over comparative methodology results in a philosophical colonialism in which the game is rigged against Chinese thought from the beginning and ethical and political liberation is seen to be possible only through the adoption of Western conceptual


44 I do not wish to disregard the rights discourse. A theme throughout this dissertation is that the ethics and politics of vital relationality is meant to open up the conversation to more dimensions of human experience and more possibilities for a better future. In other words, the “move” to an ethics and politics of vital relationality is one of expanding the discourse, not shifting from one conversation to another as in a gestalt.
resources at the expense of native, Confucian resources. But this claim about full human rights for women raises a second issue for Yuan.

The second issue is the controversial reduction of feminism and feminist philosophy to the rights discourse—a discourse mired in the difficulties listed above regarding freedom, equality, and discrete individualism. While there is no denying the major social and political change the rights discourse has yielded for women in recent decades, or that its future promises more of the same in general, a proper feminist approach to the Confucian-Care project and care ethics in general will have to be as wary of an uncritical adoption of the rights discourse as it is of any uncritical appeal to family values (which is currently owned rhetorically by Christian neoconservatives in the United States). The recently articulated field of feminist comparative philosophy aims to address precisely this combination of difficulties facing cross-cultural feminist philosophy. I will provide a more detailed account of this later in the chapter. For now, it is important only to note that Yuan’s criticisms of Li are based on a narrow conception of feminism and feminist philosophy, and her application of this conception to comparative philosophy contradicts much of the recent work done in post-colonial philosophy.

Ultimately, Yuan’s dismissal of Li’s Confucian-Care project succumbs to its own argumentative inaccuracies and more problematically to its confusions over the foundational notions of comparative philosophy and feminist philosophy. With that said, I agree with Yuan’s challenge to Li’s first assumption that care ethics, as a feminine ethic, is necessarily a feminist ethic. One does well to heed Yuan’s warning that “such a narrowly oriented care ethics [as Noddings’ original Caring is] may not promote women’s emancipation but rather may reinforce and even intensify and justify the
unequal social arrangements and treatments of different sexes.”\(^{45}\) I will have more to say on the distinction between feminine and feminist ethics later in this chapter, and the second half of this dissertation will deal exclusively with the feminist concerns with care ethics and Confucian role ethics. Suffice it to say here that in the last three decades care ethics has evolved far beyond the narrow orientation of Noddings’ *Caring*.

1.1.1.3 Ranjoo Seodu Herr’s Objections

The third critic is Ranjoo Seodu Herr, who argues that the comparison of Confucianism and care ethics is perhaps misguided intellectual fancy. Herr highlights two primary points of similarity between care ethics and Confucianism. First, “both Confucianism and Care Ethics take intimate caring relationships as constitutive not only of our identities but also of moral goals.”\(^{46}\) And of these intimate relationships, the parent-child relation is the most important, though Confucianism allegedly values it only symbolically, while care ethics values it for the “manifestation of care usually found in such relations.”\(^{47}\) Second, both take emotions seriously in their conceptions of morality, which is to say that both see the cultivation of positive emotions rather than their rational control to be the goal of moral development.\(^{48}\) Having highlighted these similarities, Herr asks, “does it follow that the prescriptions of *ren* and care are equivalent and that Confucianism can encompass Care Ethics to become the East Asian feminism of the

\(^{45}\) Yuan 2002, 120.

\(^{46}\) Herr 2003, 480.

\(^{47}\) Herr 2003, 480.

\(^{48}\) Herr 2003, 480.
future.” To this, Herr offers an “emphatic ‘no.’” The reader will perhaps expect the following criticism at this point that Herr confuses the objective of comparative philosophy, much like Star and Yuan do.

As with Star and Yuan, Herr does not recognize the importance of difference to comparative philosophy. Responsible comparative philosophy does not aim to import values, concepts, or schemes from one philosophy, wholesale, into another. Nor does it presume that underlying these two philosophies there is a unified field of values and logic such that sufficient archaeology will allow the dedicated scholar to find “freedom” or “equality” in classical China. Our discomfort with seeking out the notions of ren 仁 (consummate conduct) and li 礼 (ritual propriety) in the contemporary United States should serve as a check against such colonial archaeology. The aim of comparative philosophy is to develop a nuanced understanding of the differences between philosophical perspectives against a necessary background of similarity and to then use the tension between these differences to open up new possibilities for reconfiguration and resolution of contemporary philosophical issues. Thus the supposedly conclusive dismissal of the Confucian-Care project on the grounds that care and ren do not produce “equivalent” prescriptions and that Confucianism cannot “encompass” care ethics errs twice. The goal was never, nor should it ever be, to find equivalences or to encompass one perspective in another.

Ironically, Herr also criticizes Li for his ahistorical analysis of classical Confucian ethics: “While ahistorically comparing and assimilating Confucianism and a branch of contemporary Western feminism may pique intellectual curiosity, what would be more

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49 Herr 2003, 480.
fruitful from a feminist perspective would be to engage in a historically grounded analysis of why the remarkable pre-Qin Confucianism has deteriorated into a sexist and classicist dogma.50 While an historical study of the deterioration of li (ritual propriety) would be of great benefit to producing a feminist Confucianism, I see two problems with starting here as Herr suggests. First, the historical study will be moot if after li are deconstructed it is then discovered that Confucianism is somehow essentially misogynistic. Li’s intellectually curious article demonstrates why Herr’s preferred effort in historical analysis would be worthwhile at all: if ren and care provide grounds for dialogue, there is the possibility of a future for Confucian ethics in a post-patriarchal world.

Second, it is not immediately apparent that the historical study would be any more “fruitful” than Li’s. Li’s aim is to lay the groundwork for a contemporary reconstruction of Confucianism along feminist lines. If Herr’s claim is that a philosophical analysis of concepts, even if meant for contemporary application, is not fruitful because it is detached from the everyday realities of those living with Confucianism, one would have to note that the historical scholarship she is calling for is no less detached from today’s Confucian families. It is my suspicion that a clarification here of what Li and Herr mean by “feminist” would further clarify whether or not a conceptual analysis or an historical genealogy would be more fruitful.

50 Herr 2003, 482.
1.1.1.4 Nel Noddings’ Objections

The final objection to the Confucian-Care project that I will address here is Nel Noddings’ recent argument against the comparison. Noddings concludes her own take on this debate by addressing the possible future for Confucianism and feminism. Basing much of her understanding of Confucianism on Star’s article, Noddings considers Confucianism to be “almost a religion” and states that as such it will probably not “reject outright” many of its “questionable doctrines” and then admit it was wrong.\(^5\) She concludes that to have a feminist future, “Confucianism would have to admit that it was wrong to claim the inferiority of women and, then, patiently locate and repudiate all the doctrines based on this claim.”\(^6\) What this demand reveals is a confusion over the nature of Confucianism that, I would argue, results from a lack of sensitivity to comparative methodology and the pitfalls of cross-cultural comparisons.

“Confucianism” can refer to a variety of interrelated but distinct dimensions of Chinese culture. The brief history I provided above demonstrates as much. Confucianism is a complex religious tradition, the bureaucratic infrastructure of Imperial China for centuries, a metonym for “Chineseness” or general “East Asian-ness,” and, not least of all, a philosophy.\(^7\) Li is addressing Confucianism as a philosophy that informs much of the Chinese sensibility, and therefore he is aiming to effect cultural change. There is no imperial bureaucracy to rail against, nor is there a centralized Church of Confucianism to

\(^5\) Noddings 2010, 137-41.
\(^6\) Noddings 2010, 140.
\(^7\) It is worth remembering that the Chinese term for “Confucianism” is actually “literati learning (ruxue儒學),” and that the “Confucians” are not monks and priests but rather members of the learned social class.
which he can submit his suggestions for a post-patriarchal future. So in demanding an apology from Confucianism, Noddings has betrayed a serious confusion over the nature of Confucianism, one that is, no doubt, also responsible for her claim that it is “almost a religion.”

As for repudiating the oppressive doctrines of Confucianism, there is no doubt that those arguing for the Confucian-Care project would like to do just that. But as with Herr there seems to be an issue of putting the cart before the horse, since without the philosophical work Li begins there is something groundless about any effort to repudiate gender biased doctrines. On what grounds are gender oppressive doctrines to be repudiated if Li’s project is to be dismissed? If the grounding reason is the universal human dignity of the Western discourse on rights, one finds a similar problem of cultural imperialism as was found in Yuan’s argument. If one seeks the internal resources within the Confucian living tradition for gender equity, then this is precisely what Li set out to do with his article in 1994. Before Noddings’ challenge to the Confucian-Care project can be taken seriously, clarifications of what she means by “Confucian” and how she understands comparative philosophy to operate must be offered.

Before closing, there is an ironic conclusion to Noddings’ take on the Confucian-Care project. After restating her pessimism that the Confucian “almost religion” could ever overcome its patriarchal past given how difficult a time Western liberalism is having (the very structure of this justification for pessimism underscores the cultural bias informing her argument), Noddings notes that the future of the feminist revolution in the

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54 If it turns out Noddings demands an apology from Confucianism as a philosophy, I am genuinely at a loss as to who would have the authority to offer such an apology. Who spoke on behalf of Kantians or Utilitarians or Aristotelians when they were welcomed into the feminist discourse?
West has to build from the last few decades of women being more like men and to invite men to be more like women. The irony is that the classical Chinese tradition she just dismissed places a remarkably high value on the cultivation of androgynous persons based on the complementarity of the genders. As Li points out in 1994, the real problem for classical Confucianism is that the prescription for androgynous cultivation was arbitrarily limited to biological males. As societies in contemporary Europe and the United States look for creative possibilities for the social constructions of gender in our present and future, they might do well to find inspiration in this ancient—yet living—“almost religion.”

These four critics represent the most persistent attempts to reject the premises of the Confucian-Care project. As I have indicated in this section, all rest on some combination of confusions over the nature of comparative philosophy, feminist theory, and Confucianism. Any attempt to rekindle their arguments for the contemporary discourse would also suffer from a confusion over the nature of care ethics, since Star’s, Yuan’s, and Herr’s articles were all published just before a flurry of publications of new perspectives in and deeper investigations into care ethics and feminist philosophy. In the following section, I will clarify my understanding on these four notions and how they will inform the present project.

1.1.2 Clarifying the Terminology

The present dissertation is a productive comparison of care ethics and Confucian role ethics that is responsive to feminist concerns. As such, the four key terms of
comparative philosophy, feminist philosophy, care ethics, and Confucianism will need to be clearly defined before any comparison or critique can begin.

1.1.2.1 The Methodology of Comparative Philosophy

Recall that Li’s objective is to compare care ethics and Confucian ethics in order to explore the possibility of a feminist reconstruction of Confucianism. This aim makes Li’s paper and the debate that followed one of the first forays into what is now called feminist comparative philosophy.55 I will begin with an explication of comparative methodology before defining feminist philosophy and then articulating feminist comparative philosophy.

As evidenced in the above analysis, the most pressing matter to address with regard to the critics of Li’s project is the methodology of comparative philosophy. Robert Smid defines comparative philosophy generally as the “attempt to move across the boundaries of otherwise distinct philosophical traditions—especially insofar as these traditions are divided by significant historical and cultural distance—thus enabling comparison of what lies on either side of the boundary.”56 In a similar fashion, Ashby Butnor and Jennifer McWeeny write that a work is comparative “insofar as it regards the ideas of more than one disparate tradition of thought as philosophically significant in a manner that respects each tradition’s individual integrity and promotes its expression.”57

55 This methodology is explicitly developed in Butnor and McWeeny 2014.
56 Smid 2009, 2.
57 Butnor and McWeeny 2014, 4.
Even in its general formulation, comparative philosophy is about *refocusing differences* across cultural and historical boundaries rather than uncovering latent identities.

There is a spectrum to the amount of emphasis comparativists will place on difference. At one end of the spectrum is what Hall and Ames call the *intercultural* approach, and at the other end is the *transcultural* approach. The intercultural approach “begins with the assumption of irrevocable differences and demonstrates what is distinctive about each cultural milieu in the broadest of theoretical strokes.”\(^{58}\) In terms of the present study, comparativists would limit themselves to portraying care ethics on the one hand and Confucian ethics on the other. These two perspectives would act essentially as foils for greater explication of each other. Exploring how these two could influence each other or open up new possibilities for the future would be to ignore the very premise of the intercultural approach.

In contrast, the transcultural approach “assumes the existence of a single hermeneutic community which putatively includes every thinker of importance…whose thought can be judged and compared transculturally in accordance with presumably neutral criteria determining the nature and character of styles of philosophizing per se.”\(^{59}\) Here there is cross-cultural exchange and dialogue. Unfortunately, the dialogue is almost inevitably one-sided since these comparativists often use the criteria of their own cultural situation to judge the other culture’s perspective. Star, Yuan, and Noddings all exemplify implicit and explicit Western biases in uncritically following the transcultural approach.

\(^{58}\) Hall and Ames 1987, 4.

\(^{59}\) Hall and Ames 1987, 4.
Borrowing the positive dimensions of each approach while guarding against the ineffective or unfair, Hall and Ames consider theirs to be a method of cross-cultural anachronism. In the context of Confucianism, cross-cultural anachronism is the attempt “to understand the thinking of Confucius by recourse to issues originating within contemporary Western philosophic culture, issues Confucius may well have not explicitly entertained.”60 This methodology follows the transcultural approach insofar as it is a “search for a single hermeneutic community,” but it does so while remaining “sensitive to those contrasting cultural emphases”—the starting point of the intercultural approach.61 In short, “difference is more interesting than similarity,” and “it is precisely this recognition of significant differences that provides an opportunity for mutual enrichment by suggesting alternative responses to problems that resist satisfactory resolution within a single culture.”62 This is what Li sets out to do in his article. Questions of a feminist future for Confucian culture and of the status of care within Western feminism stand to benefit from comparative analysis and cross-cultural enrichment.

In the introduction to The Tao Encounters the West, Li articulates his own approach to comparative philosophy, one that is arguably a version of cross-cultural anachronism. He observes that while the Chinese and Western philosophical traditions do not reduce to a single thinker, principle, or dogma, “there are…certain philosophies and philosophers who have had a defining influence within their own cultures and traditions, and…a comparative study of these philosophies and philosophers can be used to

60 Hall and Ames 1987, 7.
61 Hall and Ames 1987, 5.
demonstrate different thought patterns of the two cultures." These thought patterns are defined by a limited set of premises and acceptable methodologies for philosophical inquiry, which ultimately manifest in a limited philosophical horizon for philosophers working within a single tradition. Much like Hall and Ames, Li argues that “comparative philosophy across traditions can broaden our horizons” by offering new perspectives on issues and alternative resources for creative resolutions of these issues.

While comparative philosophers must responsibly attend to the history of philosophies with which they are working, the project is ultimately progressive and problem-oriented. It is situated according to the comparativist’s location and the problem being addressed. The importance of context to comparison means there is no presumption of an objective ground on which different traditions can be measured against each other. Li writes, “If in comparative philosophy the emphasis is upon philosophizing as the processing of ideas and beliefs, not in philosophies as a collection of static end products, then criticizing views as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ may not be as important or as interesting as explaining both their evolutionary development and their implications for the future.”

Since concepts and values are seen to be evolving through history, and since cross-cultural comparative philosophy will necessarily be comparing concepts and values with different histories, there is again a foregrounding of difference. Li suggests that this sort of “bridging” across cultures requires us not only to look for similarities, “but also to recognize differences, especially fundamental differences,” which “will enhance mutual

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63 Li 1999, 2.
64 Li 1999, 5.
65 Li 1999, 6.
understanding and tolerance.” Ames echoes this insight, writing that “if the field of comparative studies is to provide us with the mutual enrichment that it promises, we must strive with imagination to take other cultures on their own terms and appreciate fully the differences that obtain between them.” The omnipresence of difference in comparative work necessitates the use of terms like “similarity” instead of “identity” or “equivalence.”

Much of the work of cross-cultural comparative philosophy deals with the mutually entailing processes of translation and philosophical interpretation. As mentioned earlier, the barrier to the growth of Chinese philosophy in the West has not been an inadequate understanding of classical Chinese syntax among Western scholars, but rather the uncritical adoption of conceptually-burdened terms as glosses for central philosophical concepts. So how does one go about translating classical Chinese philosophy if one is not searching across cultures for identical or at least equivalent concepts? One utilizes metaphor. Li writes that “if one sees translation as a working process that provides a contextual direction in figuring out meanings in another language [as opposed to thinking of translation as a matter of matching concepts on a one-to-one basis across languages], then effective translation is definitely possible.”

In order to use metaphor for translation, a context for translation is necessary. Li writes, “Whether a metaphor is apt depends on the purpose for which the metaphor is

66 Li 1999, 6.
67 Ames 2011, 32.
68 Li makes much the same point in Li 2002 in response to Star and Yuan.
69 Li 1999, 7.
used, and without context or purpose, one cannot ask whether a metaphor is apt or not.”

And with a context, salient similarities and differences come into view, since “in order for the metaphor to work, that is, to communicate an idea, we need to focus on the similarities and ignore differences. The listener or reader does not get the point until he grasps these similarities. However, as soon as he overinterprets the similarities as the only characteristics present, he has pushed the metaphor too far.” This point here is what Ames describes as the difference between wholesale and retail analogies. In other words, rather than translating ren as “caring,” we can identify the similarities and draw out the differences. In doing so, Li observes, the chosen “translation can at the same time shed new light on the concept being translated.” Ames refers to this as the hermeneutical openness necessary for cross-cultural translation and interpretation. In short, the comparative project will draw from two or more different traditions through a responsible articulation of their useful similarities to broaden the horizons of the respective traditions and recast and reapproach philosophical problems. While there is a responsibility for historical accuracy at the foundation of the comparative project, this responsibility is balanced with a responsibility for creatively opening up the philosophies and cultures being compared for future relevance and real-life human benefit.

In addition to the context of the comparative project, I follow Rosemont and Ames in emphasizing the context of the concept, so to speak. As will become clear in

70 Li 1999, 7.
71 Li 1999, 8.
72 Ames 2011, 38.
73 Li 1999, 9.
74 Ames 2011, 37.
chapter 3, a fuller understanding of a given Confucian concept—e.g., *ren*—not only involves finding an efficacious bridging concept or analog in English—in this case, caring—but it also involves an articulation of the salient *concept cluster*. Understanding *ren* involves developing working understandings of *li* 禮, *yi* 義, *xin* 信, *zhi* 智, *shu* 恕, *zhong* 忠, and *xiao* 孝, among others, depending on the purpose of the comparison. The direct analogy between *ren* and caring grounds the similarity of the two ethics, while the attending concept clusters—for care ethics, we might list trust, responsibility, connection, labor, and empowerment in the concept cluster—underscore the important differences from which a creative tension can be harnessed for the development of care ethics and Confucian ethics for the future.

With this understanding of comparative methodology in hand, it is more apparent exactly how far off many of Li’s critics are in pointing to a lack of identity between *ren* and care or in uncritically assuming a universal view from nowhere in judging Confucianism unfit for comparison with care ethics or with feminist philosophy. It is now appropriate to turn to exactly what the purposive context of Li’s project is: the feminist reconstruction of Confucian ethics.

1.1.2.2 The Evolution of Feminist Philosophy

Margaret Urban Walker writes of the chapters of her own book, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, that they are properly feminist.

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75 To my knowledge, the first explicit mention of concept clusters for comparative philosophy can be found in Rosemont 1991, page 74.
not because they are about women, or because I am a feminist, or because I call them “feminist.” They are feminist because they are imbued with insights, commitments, and critical and interpretive techniques of feminist theories made by many women in the past several decades.\(^\text{76}\)

This passage reveals two things about the term “feminist” in contemporary philosophy. First, the term attaches to the work itself, including both content and methodology. Second, the application domain of the term is controversial even within feminist circles. While I do not intend the following to be the definitive articulation of what it means to be “feminist,” it will go a long way to clarifying how the term can be used, and also how it operates in the present context of the Confucian-Care project. In this section I will provide the working definitions of “feminism,” “feminist philosophy,” and “feminist ethics” that will inform this dissertation.

The first thing to note is what feminism is not. Feminism has no truck with misandry, though it does take serious issue with misogyny. Misandry is the hatred of men by women. Feminism is the rejection of misogyny—the hatred of women by men—and the struggle against the systematic subordination of women. It does not entail the hatred of men. Representative of the origins of feminism are the Women’s Suffrage Movement in Western societies in the early twentieth century and later the Women’s Rights Movement in the 1960s. As these indicate, much of feminism as a social and political movement has taken place within and thus been shaped by liberal societies. From this

\(^{76}\) Walker 2007, 20.
explicitly political movement we get feminist theory, and subsequently feminist philosophy, of which ethics is a category.

_Feminist theory_ begins with the realization that the subordination of women has been perpetuated in part through the denigration of women’s experiences and the silencing of women’s voices in all fields of theory.\(^{77}\) Women’s subordination in society may take on concrete forms, such as the denial of suffrage or the control of access to women’s health resources by men in a state’s legislature, but these mechanisms of power are justified through male bias at the theoretical level. Women’s experience in child birth and child rearing has been historically ignored as a resource for moral theorizing because women carrying and caring for children is “natural” and “instinctive.” Similarly, women have been denied access to education according to the double-bind that they have this natural duty that does not require education and because, being historically barred from receiving an education, they are therefore “demonstrably” incapable of benefiting from one. As feminists have begun rooting out misogyny and the subordination of women at the theoretical level, this has naturally involved both attention to philosophy as well as training in philosophy.

_Feminist philosophy_ falls into a variety of categories, and not particularly neatly. Feminists can be liberal, radical-libertarian, radical-cultural, Marxist, socialist, Freudian, psychoanalytic, care-focused, existentialist, postmodern, women of color, ecofeminist, global, postcolonial, transnational, and as I will expand upon shortly, comparativist.\(^{78}\)

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\(^{77}\) There is a strong argument to be made that “theory” itself is problematic for feminism since it reinforces male bias through a strict division between theory and practice. I mean here for “theory” to pick out that reflective discourse that emerges from and remains grounded in practice and our concrete lives.

\(^{78}\) See Tong 2014 for a similar list.
This panoply of species of feminist philosophy is significant, since many, such as postmodern, Freudian, or Marxist, question the historical basis of feminism in liberal philosophy. Bringing this to bear on the critics of Li above, objections like Yuan’s—which claim that Confucianism is incompatible with the full human rights of women—are misleading, since Confucianism is also theoretically incompatible with a strong sense of human rights for men. And, as argued above, the judgment of Confucianism as an ethical and political orientation in terms of Western Enlightenment sensibilities is highly problematic. Just as we should not judge Confucianism as an ethical-political perspective in terms of liberal philosophy, so too should we not judge the possibilities of a future feminist reconstruction of Confucianism in terms of liberal feminism. However, the observation that feminist philosophy is an umbrella term for a diverse range of philosophical and interdisciplinary work is not to deny the possibility of a working definition, however vague, of what these perspectives share in general.

Ashby Butnor and Jennifer McWeeny offer the following definition: “a given work of philosophy is appropriately labeled feminist insofar as it regards the voices and experiences of women as philosophically significant in a manner that is not sexist or discriminatory, but instead promotes the expression and flourishing of those who have been oppressed due to this social location.” It is worth pausing here to unpack this working definition of feminist philosophy. The first portion of the definition calls for regarding “the voices and experiences of women as philosophically significant.” This alone is properly feminine philosophy, or in the present context of the Confucian-Care project, feminine ethics. While this philosophical perspective is not limited exclusively to

79 Butnor and McWeeny 2014, 4.
the female sex, it is gendered feminine and so holds generally for women, though some
men may also identify with these voices and experiences. Rosemarie Tong writes that
feminine consciousness and ethics “regards the gender traits that have been traditionally
associated with women—in particular nurturance, compassion, caring—as positive
human traits.” But simply respecting women’s experience is not sufficient for a
philosophical perspective to be feminist, since showing token respect for women’s
experience under patriarchal oppression is in fact a popular anti-feminist strategy. Thus
Alison Jaggar writes, “although feminist ethics may begin with feminine ethics, it cannot
end with it.” In Butnor and McWeeny’s words, a philosophy becomes feminist when it
“promotes the expression and flourishing of those who have been oppressed due to this
social location.”

Feminist ethics builds a feminist perspective out of the feminine. These are
interrelated but distinct for important reasons. Feminist consciousness and ethics is
“political, not only in the sense that it sees that women are subordinated (repressed,
oppressed, suppressed) but also in the sense that it seeks to eliminate this
subordination.” Two shared assumptions of all feminist ethics are “that the
subordination of women is morally wrong and that the moral experience of women is
worthy of respect.” These shared assumptions contribute to the universally feminist
commitment “to eliminating male bias in ethics.” A feminist approach to ethics will

80 Tong 1993, 5.
82 Tong 1993, 6.
84 Jaggar 1991, 97.
thus work “first, to articulate moral critiques of actions and practices that perpetuate women’s subordination; second, to prescribe morally justifiable ways of resisting such actions and practices; and, third, to envision morally desirable alternatives that will promote women’s emancipation.”85

So why keep feminist perspectives and not simply offer a gender-blind or gender-neutral ethics? Jaggar writes,

In our present social and intellectual circumstances, it is more than likely that ethics that is not done with an explicitly feminist consciousness will embody at best unintentional forms of male bias…Silence about women’s subordination may often mean witting or unwitting consent to it. Although feminist ethics does indeed look forward to a world in which explicit feminist commitments have become otiose, that world is still far in the future.86

This echoes the cross-cultural anachronism of Hall and Ames where the uncritical application of one cultural paradigm to another imposes an imperial subordination of the other. As Hall and Ames note, while a transcultural global philosophy may be a perfectly desirable and laudable aim, the groundwork for such easy cross-cultural communication and dialogue is not yet laid.87

85 Jaggar 1991, 98.
87 Hall and Ames 1987, 5.
1.1.2.3 Feminist Comparative Philosophy

The Confucian-Care project, when adopted constructively, is a project at the intersection of comparative and feminist philosophy; it is a work of feminist comparative philosophy. Butnor and McWeeny offer the most detailed reflection to date on this convergence. In similarly aiming to give pride of place to difference, “feminist and comparative philosophy both treat diversity as a philosophical resource. Both traditions also recognize that a hermeneutic of openness and respect for difference are necessary for engaging this diversity.” They write, “In its most basic formulation, feminist comparative philosophy is the practice of integrating feminist and non-Western philosophical traditions in innovative ways, while still being mindful of the unique particularity of each, in order to envision and enact a more liberatory world.” The reason for integrating the two methodologies is that both stand to gain from such hybridity. The focus on gender in feminist philosophy has historically obscured class, race, ethnicity, culture, and other such intersectional factors in identity. Similarly, the focus on culture, language, and geography in comparative philosophy hides gender.

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88 Butnor and McWeeny 2014, 5.
89 Butnor and McWeeny 2014, 3.
90 For a critique of second-wave feminism and the search for the so-called “woman’s voice,” see Lugones and Spelman 1983. For the problems associated with speaking for and about others across categories of identity, see Alcoff 1991-92. For the practical dangers that non-intersectional approaches to feminist issues entail, see Crenshaw 1991. For the moral culpability attached to not opening up the discursive space for other voices, see Dalmiya 1998.
Together they stand to make a claim as a philosophical perspective and methodology that has the potential to account for all of these factors with some degree of success.\footnote{Butnor and McWeeny 2014, 7.}

Butnor and McWeeny state that their “express goal in fostering such comparative, coalitional thinking is to cultivate liberation at the philosophical level by examining, recovering, and reweaving the very conceptual fabrics and patterns of thought that are operative in our cultures and traditions of origin.”\footnote{Butnor and McWeeny 2014, 1.} Liberation at the philosophical level is achieved in a particular form of world-traveling; “the point of feminist comparative travel is not to discover new concepts, ideas, and problems that we can fit into our own frames of reference or worlds of sense, but to shift our frames altogether so that we see things differently from another perspective, a unique angle, and the standpoint of a new location.”\footnote{Butnor and McWeeny 2014, 11.} Again, the emphasis is on respecting difference and making \textit{difference}—not \textit{identity}—inspire imaginative resolutions to one’s own native problems. Butnor and McWeeny write,

What the feminist comparative philosopher endeavors to do through the activity of world-traveling is view reality from as many angles as possible, foster the expression of perspectives that are rarely considered essential, and avoid confusing what is visible from her own partial perspective with the whole of reality and the truth. By reorienting her very self (mind and body) along multiple lines of travel, the feminist comparativist breaks with her disciplined training and reconfigures what is possible—philosophically, personally, \textit{and} politically.\footnote{Butnor and McWeeny 2014, 13.}
This is a liberatory praxis because in drawing from and expressing itself through non-Western and non-masculine resources to do philosophy, (1) feminist comparative philosophy liberates the discipline of philosophy and opens new possibilities; (2) it aims to minimize and eradicate the harm theorizing has done to women and people of color; (3) “it provides a framework designed to support the development and articulation of feminisms that are compatible with a variety of cultural grounds. Women who live in and originate from non-Western cultures often feel at odds with the tenets and techniques of Western feminisms while also struggling with the patriarchal structures of their own cultures”; (4) it forms “effective coalitions amidst genuine differences” to resist the out of hand dismissal by mainstream philosophy of marginal philosophical positions like feminism, comparative philosophy, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, queer studies, postmodernism, disability theory, critical race theory, and so on; (5) “all philosophy is a political practice whether it intends to be or not.”

As a feminist comparative project, the comparison of Confucian and care ethics with the aim of mutual enrichment along feminist lines is an exercise in appreciating difference, in both senses of “appreciation”: recognizing its presence and growing its value. And this effort has been received well and taken up by several scholars in the field of comparative philosophy. I will provide a brief summary of their positions before clarifying the final two confusions that have dogged this project: working definitions of care ethics and Confucian role ethics.

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95 Butnor and McWeeny 2014, 14-17.
Since those who have positively contributed to the Confucian-Care project will resurface numerous times throughout the course of this dissertation, a brief survey of the field is all I will offer here. Li himself has, of course, continued to explore the intersections of Confucianism and feminism. Rosemont has written an article on relational selfhood in care ethics and Confucianism. Julia Po-Wah Lai Tao published a constructively critical response to Li’s 1994 article, adding nuance to the comparison. Sin Yee Chan has written a dissertation on the ethics of love in care ethics and Confucian role-based ethics and has gone on to explore the intersections of Confucianism and feminist ethics more broadly. Karyn Lai has brought Confucian and Daoist resources to bear on contemporary Western ethical issues, including the development of care ethics. Shirong Luo has leveraged Confucian virtue ethics to help bridge the gap between caring relations and caring virtues. Vrinda Dalmiya has clarified several conceptual confusions in the early Confucian-Care project while also sketching its future directions. And Ann Pang-White and Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee have both taken up the

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96 Li 2000a, 2000b, and 2008.
97 Rosemont 1997.
100 Lai 2006.
102 Dalmiya 2009.
Confucian-Care project and published several articles between them on Confucian extensions of the care perspective and their import for contemporary society.  

Despite the positive reception, much of the groundwork of this project remains divided and incomplete. Some take Confucianism to be a virtue ethics akin to neo-Aristotelianism, while others argue for an interpretation of ren as a relational virtue. Even within virtue ethical interpretations there is division over which sort of virtue ethics should be employed, with some arguing care ethics is best understood in terms of sentimentalist virtue ethics. And while all utilize the most up-to-date resources on care ethics at the time of publication, the growth of care ethics has been rapid enough to render a comparative analysis of only ten years ago potentially misleading in the current discourse given the changing landscape of care ethics itself. With this sort of discursive instability, disagreements between scholars are at times moot since they are ultimately having different conversations. The present work aims to stabilize the discourse and further its positive evolution.

However, there is one point of criticism that I must mention with regard to the positive contributions to the project. Other than Rosemont and to some degree Lai, the scholars positively engaged the Confucian-Care project begin with a conceptual analysis of moral values rather than a dedicated analysis of the respective notions of relationally constituted personhood. This omission leaves their analyses inherently incomplete, since the practices out of which these values emerge are a direct consequence of how

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personhood is experienced in these two ethics. The result is the sort of intractable disagreements one finds over whether or not ren and care are virtues, relations, orientations, ideals, or relational virtues. The responsible comparative analysis called for with this project requires not only the analysis of the respective concept clusters, but also a dedicated articulation of the visions of personhood informing the practices that give rise to these values in the first place. In what follows, I will take as my starting point the position Rosemont took in 1997 and begin from the respective notions of relationally constituted personhood in order to better handle the multifaceted debate surrounding the nature and locus of moral value in Confucianism and care ethics. As a preliminary matter of form, I will now clarify the final two confusions mentioned earlier and identify my working starting points in the Confucian and care literature.

1.1.3.1 Care Ethics

The origins of care ethics that I detailed above all focus on relations of intimacy that shape women’s experience; in particular, they generally focus on the mother-child relationship to uncover and develop latent moral values and an alternative conception of persons. Since its beginnings in the early 1980s, care ethics has been taken in many directions, with many interpretations incompatible with each other. This ambiguity over what exactly is “care ethics” contributes to the confusion of the critical responses to Li’s article and also to the divergence of the positively receptive work. In bringing care ethics and Confucian ethics into dialogue, a more concrete understanding of what I mean by care ethics will come to light in chapters 2 and 3. However, I must at least declare a
provisional starting point. While emphasizing the plurality of the ethics of care, Virginia Held has offered five major features of these ethics:

(1) “The central focus of the ethics of care is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility.”

(2) Care ethics values emotion for moral epistemology.

(3) Care ethics is preoccupied with the contexts of moral problems and moral life as it exists for persons in caring relations with others.

(4) Care ethics reconfigures the relationship between public and private so as to better account for the social ties of non-contractual trust that characterize familial relations and friendship.

(5) The person of care ethics is the relational person, not the rational, autonomous agent of liberal politics or the self-interested individual of liberal economics.

In short, care ethics as understood here is an ethics oriented toward meeting the needs and addressing the vulnerabilities of those others for whom we have a responsibility to care. It is an orientation that has its origin—in terms of both moral development and moral

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107 Held 2006, 10.
108 Held 2006, 10.
109 Held 2006, 11.
110 Held 2006, 12.
111 Held 2006, 13.
theorizing—in the thickness of lived familial experience, in particular the parent-child relationship. As such, it begins moral reflection from unchosen connection rather than freedom, from asymmetrical power relations rather than equality, and from a richness of contextual detail rather than the abstractions of pure practical reason or a calculus of utility.

Importantly, I will begin from Held’s observation that care ethics ought to be understood and developed as a feminist ethic, but I will not take its feminist status as a given from the outset. The feminist ethics of care attends to and reflects upon practices of caring, in particular mothering, under patriarchy, but it aims to develop these values and practices for a post-patriarchal society where men and women share responsibility for caring and care is extended where appropriate to the public realm. As such, the continued development of care ethics involves a reformation of caring relations and caring practices as found under patriarchy so that they may be liberatory for women and men, parents and children.

1.1.3.2 Confucian Role Ethics

As mentioned above, Confucianism is a living tradition that has gone through several epochs and is constantly evolving. One of the most recent iterations of Confucian ethics, the one that follows the comparative methodology outlined here, is Confucian role ethics. Confucian role ethics focuses on the “centrality of family feeling in the evolution of a Confucian moral sensibility” and “takes as its starting point and as its inspiration the

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112 Held 2006, 22.
perceived necessity of family feeling as ground in the development of the moral life.”\textsuperscript{113}

The parent-child and other intergenerational relationships are central to the Confucian moral life, as supported by the claim that consummate moral conduct is rooted in family reverence.\textsuperscript{114}

In broad strokes, the role ethical interpretation of Confucianism differs from familiar dominant moral theories in the West, and as I will argue, from traditional Western ethics as well. In contrast to dominant moral theories, Confucian role ethics emphasizes the cultivation of moral feeling and the exercise of a contextualized imagination when meeting the demands of one’s everyday life. Confucian role ethics also begins with a conception of the person in (often hierarchical) connection with intimate others; individuation is an achievement, not the ground of personhood. Finally, Confucian role ethics extends the personal into the political along a spectrum. Social and political relations are seen to be metaphorically familial, rather than of a different kind altogether.

With regard to the feminist status of Confucian role ethics, Rosemont and Ames state frankly at the outset of their first articulation of Confucian role ethics that they have no truck with authoritarianism in any of its ideological disguises—sexist, patriarchal, racist, homophobic, or otherwise; to provide even implicit support for any of these “isms” is not what has motivated us to proffer the \emph{Classic of Family Reverence} to a contemporary audience [as an articulation of Confucian role ethics]…On the contrary, we offer our translation…in the firm belief that it has

\textsuperscript{113} Rosemont and Ames 2009, xii.

\textsuperscript{114} \emph{Analects} 1.2.
much to say to everyone…who would seek a more peaceful and just tomorrow than far too many of our fellow human beings enjoy today, and who would seek as well spiritual insight in an ever-increasingly secular world.\textsuperscript{115}

They continue later with the observation that while families and family values have historically (and presently, in many societies) oppressed many, especially women and children, “they have also been significantly responsible for much of the happiness enjoyed by human beings past and present, and have served to mitigate much human sorrow and grief.”\textsuperscript{116} My contribution to this project of letting Confucianism speak for itself through the lens of Confucian role ethics is to argue for a feminist-responsive Confucian role ethics during the course of this dissertation. In a time when systematic sexism still thrives in both China and the West, one must follow Jaggar’s insight that anything short of explicitly feminist ethics of vital relationality will only allow for the persistence of unidentified patriarchal assumptions in our intimate relations and the institution of the family.

More concrete conceptions of both care ethics and Confucian role ethics will emerge through the course of this dissertation. For now, suffice it to say that both Confucian role ethics and care ethics begin from persons-in-relation and then develop ethical values from those practices that demonstrably contribute to the growth and flourishing of concrete webs of relationships. I turn now to an outline of the chapters that will follow.

\textsuperscript{115} Rosemont and Ames 2009, xiii.
\textsuperscript{116} Rosemont and Ames 2009, xiv.
1.2 Outline of Chapters

In this chapter I have situated the Confucian-Care project within the larger ethical discourse as a feminist comparative challenge to both dominant moral theories and traditional Western ethics. I have also provided a survey of the current literature on the subject as well as an analysis of the discourse. Through the course of this analysis, I have made clear that dismissals of the project have rested on fundamental misunderstandings of feminist comparative aims and methodologies, the definition of care ethics, and the evolving nature of the Confucian tradition. When these misunderstandings are clarified, the current arguments for dismissal are seen to be groundless. I have also briefly surveyed those works that further the Confucian-Care project. While these works will resurface throughout the course of the remaining chapters, it has been worth noting here that all but two ignore the need to compare care ethics and Confucian role ethics in terms of their notions of relationally constituted persons. I take this task as my starting point for the remainder of the present work.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide a thorough comparative analysis of care ethics and Confucian role ethics with the aims of not only better grounding Li’s initial project but also more clearly distinguishing the general perspective of the ethics of vital relationality in contemporary ethics. Chapter 2 corrects an omission from many of the positive contributions to the Confucian-Care project and provides a detailed analysis of vitally relational persons according to care ethics and Confucian role ethics. In this chapter, I distinguish causally, internally, and vitally constitutive relations and argue that while causally constitutive relations—such as those power relations that causally shape an
individual in the work of Michel Foucault—and internally constitutive relations—such as those relations of interdependence that are necessary to one’s future becoming in Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialism—both challenge the discrete individualism at the heart of liberal ethical and political philosophy, vitally constitutive relations—those thickly felt relations of trust and responsibility with particular others—are unique to contemporary care ethics and Confucian role ethics. I develop their respective conceptions of persons as embodied, relationally constituted processes of growth.

Chapter 3 reexamines the ethical values put forth in care ethics and Confucian role ethics, but unlike previous comparisons it does so while attending to their respective notions of relationally constituted persons. This attention to the vitally relational person prompts a semantic shift in key virtue ethical terms and a broadening of the ethical conversation to include vital relations. After critiquing teleological and sentimentalist virtue ethics for maintaining an individualist discourse, I argue that care ethics and Confucian role ethics locate ethical value in our vital relations of trust and responsibility with others in a manner that is incompatible with a purely virtue ethical framework.

Chapters 4 and 5 critically engage care ethics and Confucian role ethics along feminist lines in order to create an ethical orientation for a post-patriarchal future. The motivation for these chapters is the recognition that any ethics of vital relationality offered in today’s society will have to be cognizant of the present reality of oppression and the dangers of not actively working against its perpetuation. Chapter 4 addresses ethical issues that are perceived to arise from the emphasis on intimate and trusting vital relations. For example, if vital relations are often, at least initially, unchosen relations, then what does one do when one finds oneself in a constitutive relation that is either
exploitative or destructive of one’s own person? The priority given to the maintenance of these relations in care ethics and Confucian role ethics would seem to obligate victims, traditionally almost exclusively women and children, to perpetuate their own victimhood. I argue that the rejection of discrete individualism in chapter 2 and the location of ethical value in relations in chapter 3 do not amount to an obligation of self-sacrifice.

Chapter 5 argues that despite the ethical focus on concrete, particular relations, care ethics and Confucian role ethics offer compelling insights into social and political philosophy. Taking the cultural as the most fertile ground for care ethics and Confucian role ethics to effect change in contemporary society, I identify the internal capabilities of care ethics and Confucianism for challenging systemic power relations. I argue that, contrary to the prevailing opinion that both Confucianism and care ethics require a gestalt shift away from the political perspective of rights-based justice theories, they in fact serve to ground many of the claims of social justice. The ethics of vital relationality is not a radical alternative to justice theories, but rather a more capacious account of moral life grounding socio-political action in a family metaphor for social order.

This dissertation ends with an epilogue that provides a summary of the arguments made herein and that identifies several areas for further development in future projects. I now turn to the respective notions of relationally constituted personhood found in care ethical and Confucian role ethical accounts of lived, moral experience.
In the previous chapter I argued that care ethics and Confucian role ethics represent two perspectives within an evolving relation-based ethical orientation and that this orientation represents a radical break from both deontological and consequentialist ethical theories, as well as virtue ethics. I also detailed the history of comparisons between care ethics and Confucianism and argued that the decision of previous scholars not to root their comparisons in the relationally constituted conception of personhood found in these two perspectives has led to an unresolvable debate over the compatibility of their respective values. In this chapter I aim to address this omission through a detailed articulation of the relationally constituted person as found in Confucian and care literature.

Chapter 3 follows this chapter on the vitally relational person with a discussion of ethical values rooted in these vital relationships and the corresponding model for moral thought and action. These two chapters on relational personhood and relational ethics provide the foundation for the critical chapters on interpersonal exploitation (chapter 4) and systemic oppression (chapter 5).

2.1 Three Types of Relations for Relational Selves

My analysis of relationally constituted personhood involves the introduction of a new delineation of relationality. While much of the previous work on relational selfhood has been happy to use the umbrella term of “relational self,” this has in practice produced
confusion. Authors from a variety of backgrounds—pragmatist, postmodern, feminist, comparative, communitarian, and so on—use “relational” to refer to different sorts of relations that often go unacknowledged in the literature. Those of us working on relationality have reached the point where we require useful categorizations of these differing conceptions in order to advance work in this field. It is with this in mind that I introduce three notions of relationality: causally, internally constitutive, and vitally constitutive. I will address each conception of relations in turn.

2.1.1 Causally Relational Selves

Relationally constituted selfhood is the notion that a person is in some way created or made by her relations with others. “To constitute” comes from the Latin verb constituere, meaning con- “together” and statuere “set up.” Thus constitutive relations are those relations that work to create, make, or set up a self. The first type of constitutive relation I discuss is the causally constitutive relation. With these constitutive relations, selves are understood to be discrete entities that can influence each other. Selves as billiard balls here is a good beginning metaphor. Each billiard ball (i.e., self) is discrete and isolatable. I can pick up the eight ball and understand it without reference to the other billiard balls. But when the eight ball is on the table it is subject to the possibility of being influenced by the movements of other balls (i.e., selves). Understanding how the eight ball came to be where it is now and where it is going requires accounting for the positions and trajectories of the other balls. As I will argue at length below, Michel Foucault’s
analysis of power relations provides an example of this sort of causally constitutive relation.

2.1.2 Internally Relational Selves

In addition to causally constitutive relations, some can be further identified as internally constitutive relations. Internal relations are not new to philosophical discourse. These are intrinsic or essential relations, and the added difference here is that whereas causal relations need only shape the particulars of who one becomes (i.e., one’s present position and trajectory in life), internal relations are necessary to who one is becoming. In other words, another self does not influence who one is in a discrete moment when we are talking about internal relations; to continue along a particular life trajectory requires the maintenance of the relation. To remove an internal relation is to remove a part of that person, whereas the absence of a causal relation need not be understood as removing a part of that person but rather as simply changing the possibilities of future development. The interdependence of self and other in Beauvoir’s existentialism detailed later in this chapter will provide an example of this type of constitutive relationality.

2.1.3 Vitally Relational Persons

Vitally constitutive relations are the smallest subset of constitutive relations. These are, in a manner of speaking, internal relations understood at the level of human experience. The insight here can be briefly cashed out with the example of two close
friends. The close friends are vitally related in that their relation goes beyond the case of one entity merely influencing another through, say, a powerful encounter (causal relati

friends (internal relationality). These two friends are perpetually “making friends” in that through communication, caring, trusting, and so on, they grow together in the relationship.

It is this shift from a more abstract ontological level to the richness of lived experience that distinguishes internal from vital relations and moreover requires shifting from the language of “selves” to that of “persons.” A self is an abstract entity, but persons are personalities, are personae, have personal qualities and personal lives, can be personable, personalize their spaces, and so on. When one focuses on constitutive relations at this level of concreteness and particularity, the relations are embodied, emotionally charged, and (as I will argue in chapter 3) the locus of meaning and value in life. In this sense, these constitutive relations are vital; they are life-giving in that they make life worth living. For both care ethics and Confucian role ethics, these vital relations are the constitutive relations at work in their conceptions of persons.

While these initial distinctions are admittedly thin, there is enough distinction among the three types to begin using them to distinguish several versions of “the relational self” from each other. I will begin with Michel Foucault’s subject of power relations as an example of external, causally constitutive relations. I will then turn to Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialist interdependence of self and other as an example of internally constitutive relations. With these two examples detailed, the unique contributions of care ethics and Confucian role ethics to the literature on “the relational
self” will be evident. I will conclude with a close comparative analysis of these two notions of the vitally relational person.

2.2 Michel Foucault and Causally Relational Selves

In this section I will discuss Foucault and his work on power relations and technologies of the self. Amy Allen observes that “in his genealogies of power, Foucault envisions the self as embodied, embedded in a social and cultural milieu, constituted by power relations, in short, thoroughly contextualized.”117 Add to this that Foucault’s later ethics emphasize the process of self-transformation and ethical work—i.e., a sense of directed growth—and a comparison with the vitally relational person articulated in care ethics and Confucian role ethics seems appropriate.118 The crux of the comparison will be whether or not the causally constitutive power relations Foucault discusses capture the insights into vital relationality one finds in care ethics and Confucian role ethics. I will conclude that Foucault’s inability to capture both the nature and significance of the intimate sphere is tied to his conception of constitutive relations as fundamentally 

external to the subject. In short, Foucault’s project is two-fold. First, there are the analytics of power that are meant to uncover the power relations constituting the modern subject so that they may be resisted. Second, there is his ethics of self-transformation in which the modern subject makes herself a subject out of the space she has cleared within these external power relations. In Foucault’s development of the ethics of self-

118 Koopman 2013, 529.
transformation, the relational dimension of his project becomes predominantly reflexive with the subject caring for herself, which leaves his only substantive analysis of constitutive relations to be the analytics of power and the agonistic paradigm of relational constitution. Without the internality described at the outset of this chapter, the power relations Foucault identifies cannot portray intimacy in the same vital way that care ethics and Confucian ethics do.

2.2.1 Foucault’s Project

While Foucault is a prominent figure in the Western philosophical tradition, his final works on technologies of the self are only recently getting attention outside of French intellectual circles, as such I will provide a brief introduction here. Colin Koopman argues that Foucault’s final works—those publications beginning with the second volume of the History of Sexuality, The Use of Pleasure, as well as the Collège de France lectures after 1980—“traverse two different, but related, spaces of inquiry.”119 On the one hand, one finds the familiar Foucault and his “genealogies of the formation of the modern subjects that we are.”120 I refer to these as his analytics of power. On the other, there is the final Foucault and his search for “an ethical response to the problematization of the modern subjects we have become that is intended to provoke the self-transformation of that subject.”121 I refer to this work as his ethics of self-transformation.

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119 Koopman 2013, 526.
120 Koopman 2013, 526
121 Koopman 2013, 526
In analyzing Foucault’s ethical works, Koopman further distinguishes between ethical orientations and ethical commitments. Ethical orientations are “metatheoretical elements structuring the way in which one orients oneself to ethics by positioning their [sic] ethical reflection in terms of certain questions, categories, structures, and other background features they [sic] take to be basic.”\textsuperscript{122} These are distinguished from commitments, “the products that emerge out of ethical inquiry—commitments take the form of principles, theses, positions, strategies, techniques, rules, concepts, and other contents produced in ethical inquiry and moral practice.”\textsuperscript{123} I note this distinction of Koopman’s in order to better structure how I will be utilizing Foucault here and to clear up the confusion in the literature that Koopman is addressing when he makes this distinction. I am not interested here in Foucault’s particular studies of the commitments of antiquity (e.g., care of the self, parrhesia, and so on). These practices draw directly from Greco-Roman philosophy and the distinction between the person in Ancient Greece and in Classical China has been thoroughly addressed in the literature already.\textsuperscript{124} Rather, I would like to argue that Foucault’s ethics turns from an analysis of relations to the reflexive work of individual subjects. As such, his ethical orientation is not a thoroughly relational project, and if one seeks a relational paradigm in Foucault’s work, one must rely on his analytics of power with its agonistic paradigm.

Foucault’s ethical turn follows his work on power relations and the constitution of the modern subject, most notably \textit{Discipline and Punish} and the first volume of \textit{The

\textsuperscript{122} Koopman 2013, 529.
\textsuperscript{123} Koopman 2013, 530.
\textsuperscript{124} See Hall and Ames 1987, 1995, and 1998 for just a few of the works that bring these two traditions into close comparison.
History of Sexuality. In these texts Foucault articulates various technologies of power, the techniques used to render the individual an object. One example is pleasure and the technologies of power surrounding sex. Foucault writes:

My main concern will be to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behavior, the paths that give it access to the rare or scarcely perceivable forms of desire, how it penetrates and controls everyday pleasure.¹²⁵

Similarly, in Discipline and Punish he writes, “the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.”¹²⁶ Here the technologies serve to control and shape the modern individuals through “dividing practices,” the processes by which a subject is either divided against herself or from others, e.g., as sick or healthy, mad or sane, criminal or “good.”¹²⁷ Following these analytics of power, Foucault seeks out technologies of the self—his ethics of self-transformation—those techniques that “permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”¹²⁸ These sorts of technologies, which also take place within the nested webs of power

¹²⁵ Foucault 1978, 11.
¹²⁶ Foucault 1975, 25.
¹²⁷ Foucault 2000, 326.
¹²⁸ Foucault 1997, 225.
relations in which the technologies of power operate, intersect in what Foucault calls *governmentality*. It is important to note that while *technologies* of power and of the self are distinguished, both technologies are working within *power relations*, where the former objectivizes the individual and the latter subjectivizes her. The difference, as I see it, is that technologies of power represent a process of relational constitution whereas technologies of the self are reflexive projects undertaken by individuals who have resisted these power relations and created a space for self-transformation. In Koopman’s words, Foucault’s ethics of self-transformation “involves the subject taking itself as an object of the activity of work.”

2.2.2 Contrasting Foucaultian Relations with Vital Relations

A few scholars have already noted the correlations between the final Foucault and either Confucian role ethics or care ethics. For example, Joanna Crosby argues that the Foucaultian study of power relations is compatible with the relationally constituted person in Confucian role ethics. She observes that the benefactor-beneficiary relation central to Confucianism, like the power relations Foucault uncovers, “focuses on the attempt to direct the conduct of another.” And against the negative interpretations of power where power is seen as inherently dominating or oppressive, she writes that “a conception of a fluid power relation entails that the exercise of power can produce oppressive or creative results…The forms subjectification can take are multiple and

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129 Foucault 1997, 225.
130 Koopman 2013, 530.
131 Crosby 2005, 39.
diverse, so subject formation just as likely can be empowering, creative, aesthetic, and beneficial as oppressive.” In other words, despite the usual focus on power in terms of domination and oppression, Foucault’s power relations can themselves be seen as empowering and thus similar to the benefactor-beneficiary relations of Confucian role ethics.

Arguing in a similar direction as Crosby, Margaret McLaren has noted correlations between Foucault and care ethics. She emphasizes that “Foucault characterizes power as positive and productive,” and that “power is everywhere, a multiplicity of force relations; it is always local and unstable.” According to McLaren, given that these local, multiple relations constitute all subjects and that the process of self-transformation often involves social practices and communication with others, the Foucaultian self found in his later works is “constituted through relations to others” much like the self of care ethics.

What I would like to highlight here is that both studies establish only that power relations are constitutive relations. When these constitutive power relations are examined more closely, however, we find that they are not internal relations of self and other but rather external relations of self to other and vice versa, because the only relational paradigm available when considering self-transformation is the agonistic paradigm uncovered in Foucault’s earlier analytics of power. A closer look at governmentality will draw out this conclusion.

134 McLaren 1997, 111.
Allen argues that while Foucault’s corpus delves into how various forces and relations constitute the subject, in all of his analysis one never finds a discussion of the sort of “mutual, reciprocal, communicative social interactions [that] are necessary for the formation, sustenance, and repair of the self.” Instead one finds two particularly problematic facets of relationality in Foucault’s work. First, she writes:

the movement is from an already formed self seeking to refine his existence so that it has the most beautiful form possible outward to others, not…from certain sorts of social relations that serve as necessary preconditions for attaining and maintaining a sense of self at all toward the formation of the self.136

Here Allen is commenting on Foucault’s account of the practice of care of the self. Given the distinction above between orientations and commitments (a distinction not in operation in Allen’s argument), we should not make too much of this divergence from vital relationality. The argument can be made that care of the self is not everything there is to Foucault’s ethics. He writes several times in his later works that his studies of power relations and technologies of the self are by no means exhaustive. What is of relevance here is that power relations, as constitutive of all persons and as pervading all social relations, should be seen as necessarily tied to those “certain sorts of social relations”

137 Foucault’s “Friendship as a Way of Life” (see Foucault 1997) is a fascinating example of how Foucault might have gone about developing a relational account of self-transformation in his ethical works. Moreover, it seems to be a prime example of the sort of capacity for social critique and change that Marilyn Friedman finds in friendship based on her analysis of care ethics in the 1990s (Friedman 1993).
Allen alludes to, what I have been calling here internal and vital relations. Yet Foucault did not see fit to draw this out and therefore will not be of much help here in the development of a paradigm of non-agonistic, intimate, and trusting relations. Allen’s second critique offers insight as to why that might be:

The sort of relation that does the work of linking self and other in this case is one of domination, mastery, and control, not, as in the feminist models of the relational self, communication, reciprocity, mutuality.\(^{138}\)

While communication, reciprocity, and mutuality could exist in different forms in both internal and external (i.e., causal) relations with others, domination, mastery, and control cannot. These are features exclusive to causally constitutive relations; they involve the subsumption of one under another, a wresting of any meaningful sense of individuation from one for the sole benefit of another. With internal relations, the diminishing of one person diminishes both. If we rely on the product of Foucault’s analytics of power, we are left with power relations that are strategic in a sense that precludes even the cooperative relations of feminist selves, let alone what I have been calling vital relations.\(^{139}\) This is clearly illustrated in the following passage from Foucault:

I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the

\(^{138}\) Allen 2004, 245.

\(^{139}\) Allen 2004, 249.
management techniques, and also the morality, the ēthos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible…let us take sexual or amorous relationships: to wield power over the other in a sort of open-ended strategic game where the situation may be reversed is not evil; it’s a part of love, of passion and sexual pleasure.\textsuperscript{140}

While the pervasive nature of these constitutive power relations is certainly in line with the relations found in Confucianism and care, the paradigm we are left with in Foucault’s analytics is one of \textit{strategy against} rather than \textit{strategy with} or \textit{strategy for}. This is to say, given his focus on democratic struggle against pernicious manifestations of power, much of Foucault’s language is about discipline, punishment, docility, and power, where the nature of the constitutive relations is external. As externally and causally constitutive rather than internally constitutive relations, the strategy is not one of bettering a situation for those involved, one of bringing enriched value to the present, it is about reversing power dynamics in one’s favor so that one may take on individual projects of self-transformation. Much of his focus is on the struggle against another, rather than the struggle with another for mutual growth.

While Crosby argues these power relations are meant to be without domination and could be productive and creative relations, the productive and creative vital relations at the heart of Confucian role ethics require a sense of intimacy and togetherness that we cannot find in Foucault’s published works, which is not to say future developments of a Foucaultian position will not ultimately meet this challenge. The sort of love that involves “wielding power over another” and “directing and controlling the conduct of

\textsuperscript{140} Foucault 1997, 298.
others,” even if this is tempered by the threat of a power reversal, seems to be at odds with the paradigmatic care of a mother for her child. At the very least, the agonistic paradigm can only partially account for the transformative power of such a parent-child relation. Even if one allows for the necessary changes to the particulars of the caring dynamic in a spousal relation, one cannot get the reciprocal, communicative, mutually vulnerable, and labor intensive caring relation to fit the image of this competitive power relation, however open-ended the game may be.

Without a sense of internality built into his conception of constitutive relations, Foucault’s analytics of power and his ethics of self-transformation remain outside the purview of the present study of vitally relational persons. While Foucault’s power relations perhaps capture the nature of relationality at the social and political level (see chapter 5), there is more to vital relations than Foucault accounts for. In the following section, I turn to a similarly underutilized resource for relationality and relational ethics—the existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir—to articulate the notion of internally constitutive relations.

2.3 Simone de Beauvoir and Internally Relational Selves

Existentialism is a promising resource for relationality given its emphasis on existence over essence and its focus on the self-other relation. The revival of Beauvoir studies is additional reason for excitement given that one finds in her *Ethics of Ambiguity* a greater appreciation of interdependence than one finds in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre

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141 I develop Beauvoir’s notion of relational selfhood further in Sullivan (forthcoming).
and the other existentialists. I will argue here that Beauvoir’s existentialism is based on internally relational selves and a strong sense of ontological interdependence, but that her notion of relationality nonetheless remains abstract and lacks the concreteness of vital relations.

2.3.1 Beauvoir’s Existentialist Project

In the existentialist framework existence precedes essence, which is to say that who one is and who one becomes are open to a multiplicity of possibilities; there is no predetermined human nature. Beauvoir follows Sartre in arguing “that man makes himself his lack of being in order that there might be being.”\(^{142}\) That one makes oneself a “lack of being” is to say that one acts as a free and conscious agent. In acting as a free and conscious agent one creates oneself and meaning in the world. The existentialist is a human becoming, rather than a human being, since “moral choice is free, and therefore unforeseeable.”\(^{143}\) As Beauvoir notes, “the child does not contain the man he will become,”\(^{144}\) and as a result, humanity is not understood as the “impersonal universal man who is the source of values,” but rather as “the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and as irreducible as subjectivity itself.”\(^{145}\)

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\(^{142}\) Beauvoir 1976, 12.

\(^{143}\) Beauvoir 1976, 40.

\(^{144}\) Beauvoir 1976, 40.

\(^{145}\) Beauvoir 1976, 17.
This account of existentialist becoming would seem to correspond well with the discussion of human becoming (renxing 人性) and narratives of identity below. However, Confucian role ethicists and care ethicists have been quick to distance their projects from existentialism. Hall and Ames note that the emphases on context and human becoming in existentialism “are false resonances to the extent that, in the Anglo-European tradition, existentialists have tended to be less concerned with interdependence than with the independent realization of excellence.”146 This lack of concern has two unfortunate consequences for any comparison with the vitally relational person below. First, the authentic existentialists do not recognize a correlativity between themselves and their social contexts, two mutually determining poles. Second, and related to the first, where there is an appreciation of interrelation with others, the relationship between self and other is characterized as a “war of each against all,” rather than a situation of interdependence, mutual need, and mutual growth.147

Nel Noddings also notes the potential correlations with Sartrean existentialism but she too makes a point to distinguish the relational person of care ethics from the authentic existentialist. She writes that existentialism poses a problematic “separation of body and consciousness, facticity and freedom, being and nothingness.”148 The strict dualism Sartre ultimately posits in emphasizing an absolute freedom of consciousness is not only an issue for correlating the existential self with the embodied and vitally relational person of

146 Hall and Ames 1987, 14.
147 Hall and Ames 1987, 14.
148 Noddings 2002, 100.
care ethics, but it is problematic for ethics in general as has been roundly concluded in philosophical circles.

It is for these precise omissions and mischaracterizations of the human condition along the lines of embodied consciousness and relational constitution that Sartre and other existentialists are a “bad fit” with a philosophy of vital relationality. However, Beauvoir’s notion of ambiguity represents an interesting irregularity within the existentialist perspective. As Kristana Arp notes, “The ambiguity of the human condition cannot be overcome because of this dependence of consciousness on the body and the self on others.”149 I would push Arp further and argue that these relations of dependence are themselves, when Beauvoir’s argument is logically extended, actually relations of interdependence.150 I will unpack these two relations in The Ethics of Ambiguity and in related works where necessary. As will become apparent, Beauvoir’s break from other existentialists brings her much closer to the ethics of vital relationality than has previously been appreciated. However, I will conclude that despite the necessary relation of body and mind and internally constitutive relations of self and others, these relations remain abstract; the emphasis on intimacy and thus the vitality of these relations so central to care ethics and Confucianism is omitted from the heart of Beauvoir’s analysis. As such, Beauvoir’s existentialist ethics can play at most the role of creative antagonist to the ethics of vital relationality as it develops throughout this dissertation.

It is important to note here that there is a difference between subjectivity and personhood for Beauvoir. While the subject is ontological freedom, a free consciousness,

149 Arp 2001, 49.

150 This may simply be a point of emphasis that Arp would agree with. Ultimately, I do not think Arp and I are in substantive disagreement about how to interpret these two relations in Beauvoir’s ethics.
the person does not reduce to subjectivity. The human condition is one of ambiguity, an insurmountable or irreducible subject-object and self-other relation. And as an ambiguity, a person either meets this condition morally or lives in dishonesty, a dishonesty that ignores the human condition. Since the immoral or dishonest persons are so because they does not recognize and assume their ambiguity, one can say that the image of the moral person is merely the assumption of one’s human condition and this condition is one of irreducibly embodied consciousness and the inseparable interrelatedness of self and other. I turn to these two relations now.

2.3.1.1 The Mind-Body Relation

The first element of ambiguity, and arguably the more well-known, is the mind-matter dualism with which Beauvoir opens her essay. There are several instances where it is clear that her distinction between freedom and facticity, consciousness and world, are meant to be understood as abstractions that cannot be divorced from each other. For instance, in the passage discussing the child who does not contain the adult he will become, Beauvoir observes that “it is always on the basis of what he has been that a man decides upon what he wants to be. He draws the motivation of his moral attitude from within the character which he has given himself and from within the universe which is its correlative.”\(^{151}\) Self and world are seen as correlatives that are evolving and adapting, or better yet, co-evolving and co-adapting. Revealing her phenomenological leanings, Beauvoir writes that one of the “irreducible truths” of existentialism is that the subject-

\(^{151}\) Beauvoir 1976, 40. Emphasis mine.
object relationship is “indissoluble,” an indissoluble relationship represented in the body.\textsuperscript{152}

For Beauvoir, the body is not a “brute fact” but rather “expresses our relationship to the world, and that is why it is an object of sympathy or repulsion.”\textsuperscript{153} While we all have the “body-object,” that living flesh that is the object of scientific study, the body of importance to existentialism is the “body lived by the subject,”\textsuperscript{154} for it is this body that “is not a thing,” but rather “a situation: it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects.”\textsuperscript{155} This explicit use of phenomenological language points us toward Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir’s review of *Phenomenology of Perception*.

In opposition to the Sartrean view of the body as instrumental, Merleau-Ponty characterizes the body-world relation as one of expression. Things are “attractive or repulsive,” and “we respond to their calls and appeals.”\textsuperscript{156} This corresponds to the quote above from Beauvoir regarding the attractive and repulsive qualities of the body. In her review of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Beauvoir writes that while Sartre emphasizes the absolute freedom of the mind and privileges it over the body, the major upshot of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology is that it returns the body from the world of objects and thus gives us a better account of authentic human existence.\textsuperscript{157} She writes, “Our body is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[152] Beauvoir 1976, 72.
\item[153] Beauvoir 1976, 41.
\item[154] Beauvoir 2011, 49.
\item[155] Beauvoir 2011, 46. Arp, Heinämaa, and Ward have emphasized the two notion of body at work in *The Second Sex*: on the one hand there is the body-object, the object of abstraction and scientific enquiry; on the other there is the lived body, the embodied subject as experienced in the first person. We are here focused on the lived body.
\item[156] Heinämaa 2003, 78.
\item[157] Beauvoir 2004, 163 and 160.
\end{footnotes}
not first posited in the world the way a tree or a rock is. It lives in the world; it is our general way of having a world. It expresses our existence, which signifies not that it is an exterior accompaniment of our existence, but that our existence realizes itself in it.”

She sees the body as “a general setting [milieu] for…coexistence with the world,” and its role “is a vital communication with the world, an intentional network [tissu intentionnel].” This is one sense of our ambiguity; we are embodied consciousnesses. Not only does consciousness depend on the body, but the body is our consciousness. It is the expression of our correlation with the world. Noddings’ concerns with existentialism’s so-called strict dualisms, particularly those of Sartre, thus do not carry over to Beauvoir’s project. This leaves Hall and Ames’ concerns for to be explored, concerns over the self-other relation.

2.3.1.2 The Self-Other Relation

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir plainly states that a second “irreducible truth” of existentialism is that “I concern others and they concern me…The me-others relationship is as indissoluble as the subject-object relationship.” Given that I have just shown the subject-object relationship plays itself out as both mind-body and self-world correlativity, just how Beauvoir conceives of self-other correlativity will no doubt inform the present study of vital relationality.

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159 Beauvoir 2004, 161.
160 Beauvoir 2004, 162.
161 Beauvoir 1976, 72.
The key to self-other relationality in Beauvoir’s ethics is her distinction between ontological and moral freedom. Ontological freedom is the freedom we are all born with. It is a simple fact of the human condition that we are conscious and spontaneous persons. Moral freedom is the practice of authentic human becoming. Beauvoir writes that “to will oneself free is also to will others free,”\(^{162}\) because “my freedom, in order to fulfill itself, requires that it emerge into an open future: it is other men who open the future to me, it is they who, setting up the world of tomorrow, define my future.”\(^{163}\) She continues to describe the corollary to this positive interrelation with others, for in defining my future, they can also negate that future. And if others deny one an open future, they change one from a person to a thing.\(^{164}\) Thus the significance of others is not simply that they influence or shape one via external constitutive relations (cf. Foucault above); in Beauvoir’s existentialism, we are ontologically interdependent. There is no me without others, for I \textit{exist} only insofar as I move toward a meaningful and open future, and this meaningful and open future is co-created with others. To remove the particular others with whom I am internally related is to snuff out my project, to remove the grounds for my disclosure of a world.

This dependence upon others, rather than simple vulnerability to them, is made clear when Beauvoir writes that “it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom… the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom.”\(^{165}\) If moral freedom is the achievement of

\(^{162}\) Beauvoir 1976, 73.
\(^{163}\) Beauvoir 1976, 82.
\(^{164}\) Beauvoir 1976, 82.
\(^{165}\) Beauvoir 1976, 91.
authentic existence, and that moral freedom is conditioned by the moral freedom of others—in other words, my authentic existence is dependent upon the existence of others—then these constitutive relations are internal to my self. But are these internal relations of self and other intimate and vital?

Here one must examine Beauvoir’s characterization of the self-other relation closely, for she does at times allude to intimate relations. For instance, in criticizing communism, Beauvoir writes that “a collectivist conception of man does not concede a valid existence to such sentiments as love, tenderness, and friendship,” since the individuated person is *subsumed under* the collective. This absorption of individuating differences into the whole differs from her version of moral freedom, where “individuals recognize themselves in their differences” and “individual relations are established among them, and each one becomes irreplaceable for a few others.”

Later, in discussing parenting and other care-taking roles, Beauvoir writes:

> If I find myself in a position to do violence to a child, or to a melancholic, sick, or distraught person the reason is that I also find myself charged with his upbringing, his happiness, and his health: I am a parent, a teacher, a nurse, a doctor, or a friend…So, by tacit agreement, by the very fact that I am solicited, the strictness of my decision is accepted or even desired; the more seriously I accept my responsibilities, the more justified it is. That is why love authorizes severities which are not granted to indifference.

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167 Beauvoir 1976, 108.
168 Beauvoir 1976, 137.
These would seem to indicate a prominent place in Beauvoir’s existentialism for such intimate relations, relations in which one is irreplaceable and in which love and friendship entail responsibilities that grant one greater authority in caring for and repairing the other when things go awry.

2.3.2 Contrasting Existentialist Interdependence with Vital Relations

While Beauvoir does recognize our relations to others and our interdependence with regard to authentic existence, her examples of such ties are of a different sort from the familial bonds we will find in care ethics and Confucian role ethics below. In arguing for the particularized and partial ties persons have to each other, Beauvoir concludes that “it is fitting that the negro fight for the negro, the Jew for the Jew, the proletarian for the proletarian, and the Spaniard in Spain.”169 This passage is telling in that while Beauvoir recognizes privileged lines of obligation and the inherent interdependence and interrelation of self and others, she seems to be operating on a social and political level, which is to say that rather than familiarity she is thinking of solidarity. Our intertwined future and the ends of our moral freedoms are more likely causes than others, though the causes will naturally be achieved with others and for others. And this is the difference vital relationality brings to the table. It is not just that I require others to maintain my sense of self in the face of other oppressors or combatants, and it is not that I am inherently thrown into a social environment where others are always acting upon me; I

169 Beauvoir 1976, 144.
am not me without certain intimate others. A meaningful life is found in the relations with others, not in our interdependent projects and future goals.

Thus when Beauvoir writes that “the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals,” one could read her as answering the sorts of objections Noddings, Hall, and Ames raise against existentialism, but to do so would be to ignore the role of intimacy in vital, familial relations and to reduce the vitally relational person to a merely internally relational person.170 In looking back at her account of embodied consciousness, it is telling that whereas embodiment in the ethics of vital relationality naturally leads to our relations with others (it is how we communicate, interact, and re-pair each other), the body for Beauvoir remains exclusively a relation of mind to world. What this section highlights is the rich resources in Beauvoir’s own unique existentialism that have been largely left in the shadow of Sartre’s corpus, and in initially distinguishing these resources from the vitally relational conception of persons the uniqueness of care ethics and Confucian role ethics is coming to light. I turn now to a close comparison of Confucian role ethics and care ethics on the notion of vitally relational persons.

2.4 Confucian Role Ethics and Vitally Relational Persons171

In this section I will articulate the Confucian notion of the role-relational person and argue that the role-relational notion of persons is a form of vitally relational

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170 Beauvoir 1976, 156.
171 This section is further developed in Sullivan (forthcoming).
personhood. To make this argument I will highlight three aspects of the role-relational person. First, role-relational persons are not static, abstract entities but rather processes of growth, what Roger Ames calls *human becomings*. Second, role-relational persons are embodied particular persons. We are not discussing abstract subjects or core essences. Our focus is on unique, located persons in their concreteness. Finally, role-relational persons are located and constituted relationally and these constitutive relations are vitally constitutive relations. Indicative of the Confucian desire to focus on concrete persons and their relations is the emphasis on familial, rather than social and political, relations in articulating the role-relational person. I will follow this discussion in the next section with an analysis of vitally relational personhood according to care ethicists.

2.4.1 Role-Relational Persons as Processes of Growth

To begin, any discussion of personhood in the Confucian context is necessarily addressing *moral personhood*. Unlike the discrete individuals of the liberal tradition, Confucians are born as sons and daughters of particular parents in particular communities; they arise in relations to particular, nonfungible others with whom they have various attachments and responsibilities. In *Analects* 5.12, Zigong says to Confucius, “I do not want others to impose on me, nor do I want to impose on others.” In response, Confucius says, “Zigong, this is quite beyond your reach.” While this could be read as an observation of Zigong’s shortcomings, it also speaks to a general understanding of the human condition in early Confucianism: we are all born into a world in which we are co-constituted by our relations with others. This starting point for Confucian philosophy will
become clearer through the following consideration of the source of consummate conduct
(ren 仁) in early Confucian texts.

The following two passages are indicative of how early Confucians thought of
personhood. *Analects* 1.2 reads:

Exemplary persons (junzi 君子) concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root
having taken hold, the way (dao 道) will grow therefrom. As for filial and
fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of consummate conduct (ren 仁).\(^{172}\)

The final line of this passage is “qi wei ren zhi ben yu 其為人之本與,” but Roger Ames
and Henry Rosemont note in their commentary on this passage that “qi wei ren zhi ben yu
其為仁之本與” is a traditionally accepted variant.\(^{173}\) The substitution of the term
“consummate conduct (ren 仁)” for “person (ren 人)” can be found readily throughout
early Confucian texts, and *Zhongyong* 20 provides the conceptual justification for such a
substitution:

Consummate conduct (ren 仁) means conducting oneself like a human being (ren
人), wherein devotion to one’s kin is most important.\(^{174}\)

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\(^{172}\) All translations of the *Analects* are taken from Ames and Rosemont 1998. I note those I have modified,
as I have with this passage.


\(^{174}\) All translations of the *Zhongyong* are taken from Ames and Hall 2001.
Consummate conduct (ren 仁) is the principal concern of Confucius in the *Analects*, and while the canon naturally exemplifies various iterations of this notion over the generations, consummate conduct is always a key to moral cultivation. In these two passages, ren 仁 is the entirety of one’s person, i.e., “one’s cultivated cognitive, aesthetic, moral, and religious sensibilities as they are expressed in one’s ritualized roles and relationships,” thus it is “not something we are; it is something that we do, and become.”\(^{175}\) It is, to respond to Zigong again, the cultivated conduct of those who take as a fact their imposition on others and others’ imposition on themselves and who strive to best enrich the situation.

The Mencian discussion of renxing 人性 offers a more nuanced account of role-relational persons as relational processes of growth. Traditionally translated as “human nature” and compared to ancient Greek accounts of essences, renxing 人性 differs significantly from a static or categorical understanding of what it is to be human. In his later work, A.C. Graham writes that “the translation of *xing* 性 by ‘nature’ predisposes us to mistake it for a transcendent origin, which in Mencian doctrine would also be a transcendent end…. *Xing* is conceived in terms of *spontaneous development in a certain direction* rather than of its origin or goal.”\(^{176}\) In other words, *xing* 性 is a process of growth characterized by novelty rather than membership in a category, and renxing 人性

\(^{175}\) Ames and Rosemont 1998, 49.

as the xing 性 of persons is the always unique and particular history and trajectory of a concrete person.\textsuperscript{177}

Mencius grounds this process of growth in the four sprouts (siduan 四端) inherent to all persons. \textit{Mencius} 2A6 reads:

Those without a heartmind (xin 心) of empathy are not human, nor are those without a heartmind of shame, a heartmind of modesty and deference, or a heartmind of right and wrong. The heartmind of empathy is the sprout of consummate conduct (ren 仁);\textsuperscript{178} the heartmind of shame, of situational appropriateness (yi 義); the heartmind of modesty and deference, of ritual propriety (li 禮); the heartmind of right and wrong, of wisdom (zhi 智). Persons have these four sprouts just as they have four limbs. For persons possessing these four sprouts to deny their own propensities is for them to cripple themselves; for them to deny the propensities of their prince is for them to cripple the prince. If persons are able to develop all four of these sprouts that they possess, it will be like a fire starting up or a spring coming through. When these are fully developed, they can tend the whole realm within the Four Seas, but if they fail to develop them, they will not be able even to serve their parents.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{177}I will return to this distinction between “human nature” and “human becoming” as glosses for renxing 人性 in my discussion of concept clusters in chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{178}This is an iteration of the notion of consummate conduct discussed in the \textit{Analects}, and while a detailed analysis of ren would require a parsing of the difference between the two, that is unnecessary for our present purposes. For such an analysis, see Luo 2012.

\textsuperscript{179}All translations of \textit{Mencius} are my modifications of Lau 2003.
In other words, all persons are born with a heartmind (xin 心)—the whole of cognitive-affective thought and experience—and this heartmind has four basic modes of relation with the social world, the four sprouts (siduan 四端). Those who develop these modes of relation develop as role-relational persons, while those who deny these propensities cripple themselves and diminish their status as persons. Recall the above passages from Analects and Zhongyong where responsibility for and devotion to one’s family members are taken to be the roots of consummate conduct and personhood. Mencius argues that without these four sprouts—these four modes of relation—one is unable to serve one’s parents, i.e., one is unable to secure the root of one’s role-relational personhood. This is further supported in Mencius 4B19 where Mencius observes that only a slight difference exists between persons and animals, namely human insight into interpersonal relationships. This signifies a graduated scale of human becoming, and while one does not literally cease to be human, there is a sense in which some are better exemplars of role-relational personhood than others. The point to take away here is that role-

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180 By “the whole of cognitive-affective thought and experience” I mean that xin 心 covers both thoughts and feelings and cannot be reduced to either rationality or emotion. Moreover, this “whole” is unique to each person. Some will make more of it than others. Thus xin as heartmind is both one’s initial conditions (siduan 四端) and what one makes of those initial conditions (xing 性). In fact, “growing” (sheng 生) one’s “heartmind” (xin 心) is one’s “process of growth” or “human becoming” (xing 性).

181 In Mencius 6A15, Gongduzi asks Mencius for the reasons why some people are more exemplary than others and why some choose a life of immorality. Significantly, Gongduzi begins both questions to Mencius with the qualification that exemplary or not, moral or immoral, everyone is “equally human.” Given that they are discussing the graduated scale of human worth, these prefaces indicate that there is an acknowledgement of universal human dignity in a minimal sense and that the Confucian concern is with distinctions of moral authority and exemplary personhood above the minimal, biological qualifications for moral consideration. This aspect of Mencian philosophy should not be read as grounds for the dehumanization or moral neglect of others, as I will continue to argue in the later chapters of this
relational persons are unfolding processes of growth rather than any sort of essential or true selves. In other words, while humans share a common starting disposition at birth, namely the heartmind as the four sprouts, these four sprouts are “then articulated across the particular narrative of a distinctively human life as a collaboration between person and world to become one’s xìng 性.”\(^{182}\) This xìng 性 is “existentially achieved” and tracks the process of nurturance or neglect of the four sprouts and whether they are cultivated into the moral qualities of consummate conduct, situational appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom.\(^{183}\)

Having established the role-relational person as a process of growth as opposed to an abstract entity in Confucian role ethics, I now turn to its radical contextualization. The role-relational person is a process of growth that is both embodied and relationally constituted. I will address the embodiment of personhood before an extended discussion of relationality.

### 2.4.2 Role-Relational Persons as Embodied

Role-relational persons are embodied, as the Confucian term for self-cultivation, *xiushen 修身*, implies. While *xiu* 修 means “to cultivate, to repair, to mend, to build, to construct,” *shen* 身 means not just the self but what Deborah Sommer calls the dissertation, especially chapters 4 and 5 in my discussions of familial power dynamics and social justice, respectively.

\(^{182}\) Ames 2011, 143.

\(^{183}\) Ames 1991, 151.
“socialized and cultivated shen 身 body.”\(^{184}\) The shen 身 body is the “self that is self-aware and is the site of inner reflection and cultivation…[it is] the socially constructed self that is marked by signs of status and personal identity, and it is the accumulated corpus of a person’s moral values, character, experience, and learning.”\(^{185}\) I will have more to say about how precisely the body is marked in chapter 5 with my discussion of social justice. For now, the important thing to note is that the Confucian project of self-cultivation is as much mental as it is somatic.

The following passage from *Mencius* 7A21 makes clear that self-cultivation is an embodied process:

> The becoming (xing 性) of exemplary persons (junzi 君子), i.e., consummate conduct, situational appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom, is rooted in their heartmind and manifests itself in their faces, giving them a sleek appearance. It also shows in their backs and extends to their limbs, which express them to others without the use of words.\(^{186}\)

This passage indicates the moral development of the role-relational person is manifest in the person’s body. Here one sees that the cognitive-affective connotation of heartmind (xin 心) could be similarly fleshed out—quite literally—as psycho-corporeal. A person’s comportment, physical mannerisms, facial expressions, and even emotional responses are matters of cultivation since one’s “self” and one’s body are inseparable. Ames notes that

\(^{184}\) Sommer 2008, 294.  
\(^{185}\) Sommer 2008, 303.  
\(^{186}\) Modified translation.
xing 性 is “more than simply a physical expression of physical achievement—the physical countenance can itself have a shaping influence on positive psychical attitudes and postures.”

Mencius 7A21 points to another dimension of embodiment that one finds in Confucian role ethics, namely relationality. Sommer notes that “having a shen body places one in more specific, parallel relationships with other human shen bodies, with one’s clan, and with the state.” The shen body communicates with others just as readily as words. Becoming human is not simply a process of embodied growth and development; it is irreducibly relational. It is to this notion of relationality that I now turn.

2.4.3 Role-Relational Persons as Vitally Relational

As mentioned above, the four sprouts (siduan 四端) are modes of relation with others. The experiences of empathy, shame, modesty and deference, and a sense of right and wrong are the foundations for, respectively, interpersonal relations, meaning and value disclosing relations, societal relations of deference, and intellectual relations. Not only do these modes of relation necessitate other persons—I cannot be said to feel empathy or shame without another with whom to empathize or before whom to feel ashamed—but the cultivation of these sprouts facilitates the enhancement of these relations with others. In better empathizing, I can better perceive and understand the

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188 Sommer 2008, 303.
needs of another, just as greater senses of shame, modesty, and right and wrong allow for
greater communication and stronger communal ties. And it is worth emphasizing that
these sprouts and other persons are correlated in that I experience the sprouts in response
to others and my response to these experiences becomes more adept as my relationships
with others grow stronger.

These four sprouts are first stimulated in one’s initial community: the family. In
Mencius 4A27, Mencius observes that one’s family serves as the initial setting for one’s
personal development:

The seed of consummate conduct (ren 仁) is service to one’s parents; the seed of
situational appropriateness (yi 義) is following one’s elder brothers; the seed of
wisdom (zhi 智) is realizing these two and not quitting them; the seed of ritual
propriety (li 禮) is the regulation and adornment of them; the seed of music is the
joy that comes from delighting in them.

In short, the growth of one’s four sprouts occurs in relationships with others, most
notably one’s family. One needs others in order to learn how to express these senses
properly and to develop them into the moral qualities of consummate conduct, situational
appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom. The point at issue here is that personal
growth happens relationally, as Analects 6.30 further indicates. In response to a query
from Zigong, Confucius replies:

Consummate persons (renzhe 仁者) establish others in seeking to establish
themselves and promote others in seeking to get there themselves. Correlating
one’s conduct with those near at hand can be said to be the method of becoming a consummate person.\textsuperscript{190}

Not only are one’s modes of relation developed with others and not only do these modes facilitate deeper relations with others, but the growth of one’s person is a matter of contributing to the growth of these other persons. However, all this has shown so far is that relations in general are necessary to personhood. A closer look at these relations will reveal that not only are relations to particular persons necessary at a biological level (someone gave birth to me, someone raised me, and my continued sustenance relies on someone for some resources and goods), but these relations are necessary at an existential level; they are vital to who I am becoming in a far more radical way.

The role-relational person of Confucian role ethics is the focus of a field of role relations, which is to say that the person is socially located according to particular role relations with concrete others. The emphasis on role relations is linked to the traditional enumeration of the five relations (\textit{wulun} \text{五倫}). These are listed in \textit{Mencius} 3A4 as father-son, ruler-minister, husband-wife, elder-younger, and friend-friend; in \textit{Zhongyong} 20 one finds a similar list with elder-younger cast as elder-younger brother. Ambrose King observes with regard to the five relationships that all of the relationships are either literally or metaphorically familial relations.\textsuperscript{191} The father-son and husband-wife relations are unquestionably familial, and as the variation of elder-younger brother \textit{(xiongdi 兄弟)} in the \textit{Zhongyong} indicates, the elder-younger relation is usually understood in terms of

\textsuperscript{190} Modified translation.
\textsuperscript{191} King 1985, 58.
elder and younger siblings. Even the ruler-minister relationship is familial in that it was treated as analogous to the parent-child relationship in the early Confucian tradition, with the emperor often referred to as the parent of the people (min zhi fumu 民之父母). Finally, friendship is the relationship that extends the family circle; it is the “doorway through which erstwhile outsiders enter to join and add a remarkable depth to the ranks of family relations.” This role of friendship is often reflected in contemporary society where one incorporates intimate others into one’s social world according to a family metaphor as honorary “uncles” and “aunties,” “brothers” and “sisters.” These role relations operating according to a family metaphor contribute to the notion of the relationally constituted person in two important ways. However, before addressing these points, I would like to follow Mary Bockover in revising the enumeration of these central relations in light of contemporary sensibilities.

While the ruler-minister relation is not explicitly gendered in its language, historically it was an exclusively male relation, leaving only the roles of wife and friend as female roles. The husband-wife relation in particular is doubly problematic in that it supported the patriarchal subordination of women in Chinese history and in that it is a hetero-normative social order. While these biases may have been true of the society Confucius and his followers wrote in, they are not necessary to the Confucian role ethical view, and I will argue for this at length in chapters 4 and 5. Bockover revises these five relations so as to better reflect the insights of Confucianism into social relations in light of this historical issue; she writes that while she does not mean to insinuate that in fact

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192 Sishu Duben 四書讀本, Daxue 大學, chapter 10.
Confucius and his followers were proponents of women’s and gay rights, she is suggesting “that his relational model of a person, once all of the philosophically arbitrary features are removed, supports respect for women, gays and lesbians.”

In place of the five relations above, she proposes the revised relationships of parent-child, partner-partner, elder-younger, official-citizen, and person-person. The final relation, person-person, is meant to better incorporate the diversity of relations contemporary society imposes and offers, such as “friends, colleagues, teachers, students, and in a commercial society, the relations of consumer to clerk, artisan, technician, etc.” While accepting the other four re-articulations, I opt to keep the friendship relation as it stands since it helps to illuminate the role of intimacy in Confucian ethics. Rather than replacing the friendship relation with an all-encompassing human relation, I argue that while the five relations are an informative starting point for understanding relational constitution, these five relations need not be considered a comprehensive list of human relationships. Other relations, the teacher-student relationship for instance, are immensely powerful in Confucianism, as the story in *Analects* 11.10 indicates. Grieving with abandon for Yan Hui, Confucius is cautioned against such behavior by his students and replies, “I grieve with abandon? If I don’t grieve with abandon for him, then for whom?” Whether this is more appropriately characterized as a deep friendship or a metaphorical father-son relationship misses the point. The important dimension of the relationship is the formative intimacy at play, a feature that is lost if one broadens the

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friendship relation into a person-person relation.\textsuperscript{196} With this revision of the five relations, I will now expand upon the above-mentioned two ways in which role relations within a family metaphor contribute to our understanding of vitally relational personhood.

First, as was just noted with regard to friendship, the intimacy of these constitutive relations is a prominent feature, and this intimacy means our role relations involve us with concrete, particular others. One is a \textit{particular} someone’s child and a \textit{particular} someone else’s friend. The role identity Jack might have is not simply child-parent-partner-friend, but rather Jim and Ruth’s child-Nina and Helen’s parent-Betty’s partner-Michael’s friend, meaning his particular intersection of role relations is absolutely unique.

Second, just as the family is not constituted by a single, dyadic relationship, persons are not identified according to a single role relation.\textsuperscript{197} With regard to this multiplicity of role relations, Ames writes that “each person constitutes a veritable \textit{field} of selves through which each of their many roles and personae is expressed.”\textsuperscript{198} This notion has been otherwise articulated by Rosemont, whom I quote here at length:

\begin{quote}
For the early Confucians there can be no me in isolation, to be considered abstractly: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others. By using the term “roles” here I do not wish to imply that the early Confucians were the
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{196} In chapter 5 I will try to meet the demand of extension that Bockover is attempting to address. Rather than person-person, I will use citizen-citizen role relations and the social group identities the citizen roles entail.
\textsuperscript{197} Even a single mother with one child is someone else’s daughter, and while those parents may no longer be living the fact that this relationship shapes how the single mother presently relates to her child justifies the claim that even as mother she is still also living as daughter.
\textsuperscript{198} Ames 2011, 72.
\end{flushright}
forerunners of the discipline of sociology. They emphasize the interrelatedness of what I am calling “roles,” that is to say, they are cognizant of the fact that the relations in which I stand to some people affect directly the relations in which I stand with others, to the extent that it would be misleading to say that I “play” or “perform” these roles; on the contrary, for Confucius, I am my roles. Taken collectively, they weave, for each of us, a unique pattern of personal identity, such that if some of my roles change, others will of necessity change also, literally making me a different person. ¹⁹⁹

Both articulations emphasize the multiplicity and interdependence of these role-relations, which the family metaphor for social order underscores. Let us return to Jack’s family as an example. As Jack and Betty’s daughter and Helen’s sister, Nina cannot act solely as a child or solely as a sibling. Her relationships are intertwined and interdependent, as is illustrated when action on the part of her parents indirectly (yet quite directly) affects her. A divorce between Jack and Betty resituates Nina in relation not only to Jack and Betty individually, but also to her sister Helen, to whom she might now adopt a more parental role as older sibling. Taking the position of any of the other family members will yield the same interdependence across this web of role-relations. Such interdependence extends outward beyond the bounds of the immediate family as extended family and close family friends are forced to navigate a new social terrain when interacting with various members of the immediate family, e.g., the close relationship Betty and Ruth had before the divorce could now be in jeopardy, and exactly who Michael, the close friend of the couple, is supposed to invite to the next neighborhood barbecue is a difficult question to answer. Since one’s role-relational personhood—one’s process of growing one’s four

¹⁹⁹ Rosemont 1991, 90.
nascent modes of relation—is developed within these various role-relations with particular others, it is the case that one simply is the multiplicity of one’s interdependent roles. There is no “I” for Nina outside of all of her role-relations. Since the constitutive nature of these relations stands or falls with the meaning of “roles” in this context and since there remains a persistent misinterpretation of these roles as reified, historical ideals in the literature, I will pause here to address this misinterpretation and to clarify the present technical usage of “role.”

The ideal roles objection is most easily identifiable in the work of Philip Ivanhoe. He argues that the role-bearing person (i.e., what I have termed the role-relational person) lacks an inner mental life, amounts to nothing but scripts for social conduct, and is thus unpersuasive as a description of lived experience.200 This depiction of social roles as externally enforced scripts is even more serious for the Confucian role ethicist when read alongside Beauvoir’s account of women’s experiences of social roles in The Second Sex:

Slave to her husband, children, and home, she finds it intoxicating to be alone, sovereign on the hillside; she is no longer spouse, mother, housewife, but a human being.201

And also:

In her functions as wife, mother, and housewife, she is not recognized in her singularity.202

201 Beauvoir 2011, 657.
202 Beauvoir 2011, 667.
If Ivanhoe’s objection to the role-relational person is accurate, then the notion of the role-relational person is not only an unpersuasive account of lived experience but morally objectionable. I argue that the ideal roles objection is not truly an objection to the notion of a role-relational person, since it fundamentally misunderstands the evolving nature of roles.

Ivanhoe argues that while early Confucianism does emphasize social roles, Rosemont in effect strips any sense of a robust inner life from early Confucian accounts of personhood in his conception of the role-bearing person. Ivanhoe takes issue with the fact that “according to Rosemont, early Confucians understood the self as wholly constituted by the constellation of roles that one occupies.”

He writes that while it is true that the roles we fulfill help to shape the kind of person we become, Rosemont goes much further. At the very least, his position suggests that the core of the self evaporates up and condenses into the matrix of one’s social roles. At the extreme, his view is that there never was or shall be any core to the self.204

As I have argued above, it is clear that there is no core self of the role-relational person to “evaporate up.” But, Ivanhoe responds, “we are not just what we do but also what we feel, believe, intend, and aspire to.”205 In other words, “no matter how carefully one specifies a role, as opposed to a description of character, one is still describing a pattern of social conventions and behaviors and not a set of inner beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and

203 Ivanhoe 2008, 41.
204 Ivanhoe 2008, 41.
205 Ivanhoe 2008, 43.
dispositions. Seen in this light, the [role-relational person] ignores the depth and complexity of the Confucian self."^206

Summing up Ivanhoe’s position, the role-relational person is unconvincing because it holds that “early Confucianism offers a set of ideal roles, a set of various scripts for human life that offer one the way to the morally best life that one could lead. If people pick up and fulfill these roles, they and the society in which they live will realize the Way. They both will be not only good but as good as either can get."^207 This is precisely why I have used for the term *role-relational person*. It has never been solely about roles, and terms other than “role-relational person” do not capture the ambiguity between concrete relations and social roles. Betty is not a core self among other core selves; she is a focal integration of Betty-Helen’s-Mother, Betty-Jack’s-Wife, Betty-Jim and Ruth’s-Daughter, and so on. To claim a person is simply the sum of her *ideal* roles to the exclusion of her relations with others is to reduce at once the ambiguity of the intersection of roles and concrete relations and the indeterminacy of social roles generally. In other words, roles are made more constitutive and more determinate than the Confucian role ethicist claims.

To put this objection another way, the ideal roles objection holds that *li* (the ritualized forms of life that inform one’s roles) dominate our relations to others such that the interpersonal connection is occluded. But if *li* have normative force, “it is because they have been generated out of the human situation."^208 The creative and personalized

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^206 Ivanhoe 2008, 45.  
^207 Ivanhoe 2008, 37. Ramsey 2013 similarly overemphasizes roles at the expense of concrete relations in the articulation of the Confucian role dilemma.  
^208 Ames 1993, 171.
embodiment of *li* revitalizes the cultural tradition; imitation of the past is little more than death.\(^{209}\) Rosemont echoes this sentiment with regard to our conduct toward others when he writes, “We are *not* meeting our role responsibilities if we treat the other merely as a role-bearer, and not as a *unique* role bearer, else we cannot hope to maximize the appropriateness of our interaction with them.”\(^{210}\) That cultural legacies require revision is illustrated in *Analects* 2.11 where a teacher is described as someone who “reviews the old as a means of realizing the new” (see also *Analects* 9.3) and in *Analects* 2.12 where exemplary persons are described as “not mere vessels.”\(^{211}\) Finally, *Analects* 9.23 urges us to hold the youth in high esteem, for there is no telling what heights of culture they will achieve as they mature. While the past informs the present, there is an active role for teachers and moral exemplars to play in making the present meaningful with an eye to the future. Exemplary persons are not simply ritual receptacles for the preservation of the past. Just as Beauvoir gives primacy to freedom in the ambiguity of freedom and facticity, in the ambiguity of *ren* 仁 (intersubjective meaning-making) and *li* 禮 (objective social norms), a primacy is given to *ren*.\(^{212}\)

\(^{209}\) Ames 1993, 173.

\(^{210}\) Rosemont 2015, 104.

\(^{211}\) The term “vessel” here, *qi* 器, is usually translated as “tool” or “utensil.” However, I follow Ames and Rosemont’s translation and speculate that they use “vessel” here to link this passage to a later passage, *Analects* 5.4, where Confucius calls Zigong a *qi* and then specifies that he is a sacred ceremonial vessel (*hulian* 瑚璜).

\(^{212}\) *Analects* 3.3 asks, “What has a person who is not *ren* got to do with observing ritual propriety?” and *Analects* 3.26 and 13.19 emphasize the necessity of respect for others as unique persons (*jing* 敬, a constitutive component of *ren* conduct) in the observation of *li*. 99
What the primacy of *ren* in navigating role-relations does for the present study is underscore the concrete and experiential dimension of vital relations. Confucian role-relations are intimate relations with particular others. This achievement of personhood, moreover, is not simply an individual undertaking, for “much of who and what I am is determined by the others with whom I interact, just as my efforts determine in part who and what they are at the same time.”\(^{213}\) Here one finds added significance to Zigong’s opening remark above: we are born into a world in which our actions affect others and their actions affect us, but at a deeper level we are shaping them as persons just as they are shaping us. In Ames’ words, “to ‘make’ friends is quite literally to participate in the ‘making’ of each other to the extent that it is the friendship itself that becomes what is most concrete, while the ‘individuals’ who participate in the growth of the relationship become increasingly an abstraction from it.”\(^{214}\) Our vitally constitutive relations are internal to our persons, but moreover they are concrete and intimate. We are embodied persons living as processes of growth in intimate role-relations with particular others and as such we are vitally relational persons. Who we are is always interdependent with, and at times dependent on, others. There is a deep vulnerability in this vitally relational notion of person that will characterize much of the rest of this dissertation. Next I will explore the care ethical notion of personhood to draw out some parallels regarding vital relationality.


\(^{214}\) Ames 2011, 115.
2.5 Care Ethics and Vitally Relational Persons

In this section, I will argue that the care ethical relational person is a vitally relational person. I will begin with the observation that as with Confucian role ethics, the focus in care ethics is on persons as processes of growth rather than as abstracted, metaphysical identities. I will then analyze the caring relation in order to uncover several facets of human experience that premise the care ethical project. Having highlighted processual growth and embodiment in the first two sections, I turn to the paradigmatic caring relation, the mother-child relation. In analyzing this relation, I will focus on the non-dyadic and vital nature of these constitutive relations. The resulting picture of the vitally relational person in care ethics will bring care ethicists into dialogue with Confucian role ethicists and serve as the foundation for the discussions of ethical value, achieved individuation, and social justice that follow this chapter.

2.5.1 Second Persons as Processes of Growth

Discussions of personhood in care ethics focus on moral personhood rather than metaphysical identity due to the primacy of the person’s social situation as opposed to her abstract individuality. In her work on moral development and psychology, Carol Gilligan observes that from the care perspective the self is “seen as responsive” and “by definition

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215 I do not intend to imply that the following is the care ethical position, since care ethics itself has a variety of different and often conflicting interpretations at play. What I am doing here is drawing from several central articulations of care in order to work up a model of the vitally relational person that brings care ethics and Confucianism more broadly into dialogue.
connected to others.” Similarly, Nel Noddings writes that in care ethics human relations are “taken as ontologically basic” while the caring relation is seen as “ethically basic”; by “ontologically basic,” Noddings means “that we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence.” Annette Baier broadens this understanding of relationality, arguing that if “self-consciousness depends upon exercise of the cultural skills, in particular linguistic ones, acquired during our drawn-out dependency on other persons,” then we are essentially second persons, persons who were “enough dependent upon other persons to acquire the essential arts of personhood.” I will use “second persons” throughout this section to identify the relational notion of persons in care ethics. This image of second persons is not simply a recognition that discrete individuals spend considerable time interacting with others. The ontologically basic, constitutive relations these care ethicists identify are foundational to the development of persons. The dependency of an infant or a small child on others, as Baier notes, is the initial familial relation out of which a person emerges.

As with Confucian role ethics above, the argument is not that no one experiences life as the liberal individual making free and autonomous choices in the marketplace of ideas, but rather that these individuals are the product of human relations within which an interdependence of needs displaces any fundamental independence. Virginia Held notes, “we may imagine each other as...independent, autonomous, and rational...But we should

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216 Gilligan 1987, 36.
217 Noddings 1984, 3.
218 Noddings 1984, 4.
219 Baier 1985, 84.
220 The role of culture and tradition in constituting personhood is also important to both Confucian role ethics and care ethics. I address this more directly in chapters 4 and 5.
not lose sight of the deeper reality of human interdependency and of the need for caring relations to undergird or surround such constructions.”\textsuperscript{221} While caring relations are not synonymous with constitutive relations, human relations are ontologically basic, i.e., persons are internally related.\textsuperscript{222} And since these caring relations are ethically basic, that is to say the premise of care ethics is that the relational self requires care to grow, the nature of these internal relations is defined by intimacy. In short, the second person of care ethics is a relationally constituted person rooted in vital relationality. In the following, greater nuance will be added to this notion of relationality and the significance of caring to personhood will be fleshed out. I turn now to these caring relations that undergird and surround persons, and while they have been variously articulated in the literature,\textsuperscript{223} the five-faceted caring relation described in Vrinda Dalmiya’s work on care-based epistemology provides the most advantageous starting point for the present discussion.

Dalmiya builds upon the work of Baier, Noddings, and Joan Tronto to delineate five aspects of the “very specific kind of interpersonal relationship” that I am here calling the caring relation: caring about, caring for, taking care, care reception, and caring

\textsuperscript{221} Held 2006, 43.

\textsuperscript{222} Caring relations modeled on the mother-child relation can be understood as the positive form of internal relations in that the parent-child relationship, as we saw with Betty and Nina above, necessarily forms a person’s identity, but it can do so in positive or negative ways (and often a combination of the two). Dalmiya’s caring relation, articulated below, serves as an ethical standard for care. Persons who engage in failed caring relations, as either carers or cared-fors, in most cases still form internal relations in that they interact with others during periods of heightened vulnerability and dependence (e.g., childhood). Their ability to meet the needs of another or to respond to the other’s care has weighty repercussions for those involved.

\textsuperscript{223} See Noddings 1984, Tronto 1993, and Held 2006.
In what follows, I will describe this ethical relation in order to draw out the ontological assumptions informing it. The ethical values involved will be addressed in chapter 3. My purpose here is to establish second persons as fundamentally vulnerable, possessing various needs that they cannot meet themselves, and thus ontologically interdependent. While the nature of analysis requires the abstraction of two individuals out of the relation, namely the carer and the cared-for, it is important to understand these relations of interdependence and dependence as primary; before there is a second person, there is a relation of dependence. As will become clear in the subsequent discussion, the relations are experienced concretely as vital relations.

The first aspect of the caring relation is caring about. Caring about is the evaluative aspect of the caring relation and is “the birth of care in [the] normative moment of valuing ‘particularized others’ irrespective of properties that might make them naturally attention-worthy.” We experience this when someone becomes valuable to us on a personal level in an irreplaceable way. The teacher who notices that one of her students is absent and thinks, “Is Christina alright?” instead of “There is a student absent today,” can be said to care about her student, Christina.

In addition to caring about someone in this sense, there is the motivational shift of caring for, which involves “first and foremost a reorientation of interests” through “a process of simulating the cared-for and thereby entering her ‘world.’” Dalmiya here alludes to María Lugones’ notion of “world,” where world-travelling allows us to

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224 Dalmiya 2002, 34.
225 Dalmiya 2002, 35.
“understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes.”\textsuperscript{227} One does this through the imaginative and empathic process of \textit{simulation} that Alvin Goldman articulates in his work at the intersection of philosophy and cognitive science. In simulation, one imagines oneself “in the other’s shoes,” and from this position engages the imagined situation affectively. This affective engagement produces similar feelings to what the other person experiences, and the simulator then cognitively applies them to the other.\textsuperscript{228} While no simulation will be perfect—in fact differences in cultural backgrounds and personal histories make simulation increasingly difficult—this simulation process along with caring about the other person explains the empathic step in the caring relation in which the carer takes on the needs and goals of her cared-for as her own at a motivational level.

Importantly, what the carer comes to recognize are the cared-for’s needs and vulnerabilities. Having come to identify the other as a unique particular (caring about) and then empathically identifying with them (caring for), the carer now experiences the world through the cared-for’s eyes. Vulnerabilities and needs become salient for the carer, thus allowing the carer to properly \textit{take care} of the cared-for.

This motivational shift in which the carer takes on the interests and projects of the cared-for as her own entails a parallel volitional shift, \textit{taking care}. Here the carer “is acting \textit{in accordance with the point of view of the cared-for herself} for her good.”\textsuperscript{229} Taking care involves the \textit{work} of caring, for if Christina’s father, Tom, claims to care about Christina and comes to recognize her needs and vulnerabilities but then fails to

\textsuperscript{227} Lugones 1987, 17. Original italics.
\textsuperscript{228} Goldman 1995, 189.
\textsuperscript{229} Dalmiya 2002, 37. Original italics.
respond when he hears her crying in her room, one would have to doubt the sincerity of Tom’s claim to care. The response, moreover, would have to meet her needs in an adequate fashion. If she is crying because her close friend has just been critically injured in a car accident, the care work for Tom may involve sitting with her and talking for hours, driving her to and from the hospital, and perhaps altering the household’s daily routines to provide her a more accommodating pace of life and level of energy. On the other hand, if she is crying after an exhausting week of exams and obligations, Tom’s response after inquiring into the situation may simply be to leave her alone and inform her little brother that she needs some space to unwind. Whatever the response, it involves work and often considerable labor on the part of the carer to meet the needs of the cared-for.

In fact, the labor of caring is monumental when we consider it in terms of society as a whole. Baier’s second persons must learn the arts of personhood from those on whom they are dependent. Without others as models and guides to teach them these arts over the course of childhood and adolescence, second persons may fail to materialize at all. The feral child returned to society in his teens offers a telling image of what role parental carers play in the maintenance and continuation of society. That this labor has long gone unacknowledged in the public domain is a (if not the) driving motivation for feminist care ethics. Without infants and children being raised as second persons, we are also losing out on the next generation of citizens. I will return to the role of citizen in chapter 5.

See Baier’s “The Need for More than Justice” in Baier 1995 for this point.
Care reception is the fourth aspect of caring relations and is necessary to a caring relation for two reasons: first, without acknowledgement and feedback from the cared-for, a carer cannot know whether or not her caring efforts have met the cared-for’s needs or if they were effective in furthering the interests of the cared-for; second, lack of recognition denies the carer her small reward of gratitude for her investment in the cared-for’s well-being. Taking up the first point, not only does this ignorance of the caring labor’s effects distress the carer, for in taking on the cared-for’s needs as her own she has a vested interest in seeing that they are met, but they should distress the cared-for. In ignoring or neglecting the voice of the cared-for, the carer is shielded from rejection or criticism and free to impose on the cared-for any manner of “caring” actions. The simulation of other worlds mentioned above is admittedly an approximation. With growing familiarity, a carer’s simulation of the cared-for’s world will be increasingly accurate, but simulation is never a form of telepathy or mind-reading. Elision of these two forms of understanding is both irresponsible and dangerous, and effective caring thus requires the voice of the cared-for.231

With regard to the second point, without acknowledgement from the cared-for the carer is committed to a unidirectional outpouring of physical, emotional, and spiritual effort on behalf of the cared-for. A more pointed interpretation of the common phrase, “Your smile is enough,” is “Anything short of your smile or a similar acknowledgement of my efforts is not enough.” Without recognition from the cared-for that the carer’s efforts have been beneficial and are appreciated, the carer, especially in more demanding

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231 Iris Marion Young’s “Asymmetrical Reciprocity” speaks to this issue (see Young 1997).
caring relations, runs the risk of “disillusionment, fatigue, and eventually burnout.”

The caring relation is sustainable only so long as it is mutual, however asymmetrical this mutuality may be, and this means that the carer both wants and needs the cared-for to acknowledge that she in particular is the source of her care. In this fashion, the caring relation is a relation of interdependence. For these reasons, Noddings argues care reception is an essential element to the caring relation.

Staying with this notion of care reception for a moment, this aspect of the caring relation drives home the vulnerability inherent in constitutive human relations and moreover that these relations are relations of growth. As a dependent second person, one is doubly at risk to the parent or carer. The parental figure is meeting needs, not simply furthering interests, which is to say that one’s life is in the parent’s hands. If the parental carer were to withdraw care, the child dependent’s survival would be in jeopardy. Moreover, the parental carer is responsible for the well-being of the child dependent. A good parent does not just make sure the child survives to adulthood; a good parent helps the child thrive and flourish both in and outside the home. Here is the second risk: parental carers who impose themselves on their dependent second persons risk stifling their personal growth, risking their future well-being, and possibly instilling in them values or habits that compromise their abilities to broaden their relational network or develop a positive sense of self-esteem. In a strict sense, the parental carer is responsible for the life and well-being of the dependent as well as the dependent’s own sense of self. And this responsibility is long-lasting. A parent’s influence on a child lasts well after

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adulthood begins, and the maintenance of an adult’s sense of self at times falls back on the parent-child relationship that gave it its initial form. In other words, the work done is these relations is not the sort of one-off interactions one finds in causally constitutive relations. The work here is contributing to a process of growth. The person is an open-ended project that the parental carer has taken responsibility for. As I will argue shortly, these relations are also, therefore, vitally constitutive relations and precede individuated persons.

The final aspect of the caring relation is caring about caring, “a commitment to both the caring as well as to the object of care.” This is the reflective aspect of the caring relation where the particular dynamics of the relation can be either endorsed or rejected. This aspect of the relation accounts for how a carer might go about terminating or radically altering a caring relation. Care reception protects the cared-for against paternalistic interference or misguided harm, but caring about caring protects the carer against exploitation by the cared-for, self-sacrifice, or the adoption of undesirable or un-endorsable interests on behalf of the cared-for. I will have more to say on this dimension of the caring relation in chapter 4 and will now highlight three aspects of this caring relation that shed light on the underlying structure of the vitally relational person relacional person in care ethics.

This final aspect of the caring relation further underscores that persons in care ethics are processes of growth. Who one cares for and who cares for one are important because these relations shape who one will become. If we are ready-made individuals,

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234 Dalmiya 2002, 40.
235 Dalmiya here uses the example of Hitler’s carers and the dilemma they would face in having to adopt his interests as their own.
choices about caring come down to economic considerations: how much will this relationship cost me, financially or otherwise, and what benefits are there to my taking on or terminating this relationship? But this deep sense of vulnerability, especially on the part of the cared-for, gives an existential import to the caring relationship. Who each of us is today is in large part due to who it was that raised us as second persons and who it is today that helps to repair us when we are vulnerable. Second persons are processes of growth with their initial settings in familial relations of parental carer to child dependent, much like the role-relational persons of Confucian role ethics.

2.5.2 Second Persons as Embodied

When one examines second persons in the care literature, one finds that they are always embodied. Caring for others often entails addressing their physical vulnerabilities, as one encounters readily in both childcare and elder care. However, care ethicists hold the stronger position that being either cared-for or carer is a matter of embodiment, i.e., to be a person is to be embodied. Poignantly underscoring this notion of embodiment is Susan Brison’s work on personhood and trauma. Brison observes that while personhood does not reduce to the body, “the body and one’s perception of it are nonetheless essential components of the self,” and as such “one’s ability to feel at home in the world is as much a physical as an epistemological accomplishment.”\(^{236}\) The notion of accomplishment here is important. Just as moral growth manifests in one’s body according to Confucian role ethics, so too is the body a site of growth and learning in care

\(^{236}\) Brison 1997, 18.
ethics. Noddings notes that knowledge and control of the body as well as patterns of bodily response are essential to successful caring relations,\(^{237}\) and Maurice Hamington goes further in arguing that habits of care are a matter of “acquiring comfort with comportment and disposition” in the giving of care.\(^ {238}\) Moreover, according to Hamington, the “common nexus for human-to-human empathy is embodiment,” for “the knowledge of similar experiences is in my body,” and it is from working imaginatively from these embodied memories that I meet the other in her “world.”\(^ {239}\) This point is important to care ethics. If understanding the other is a matter of empathic identification, as I argued above, then the body is essential to relating, for it is the body’s simulated responses of fear, discomfort, joy, pain, and so on that inform the carer of the needs and desires of the cared for.\(^ {240}\)

The emphasis on needs and vulnerabilities further emphasizes the embodiment of second persons. The abstracted rational faculty—and thus any conception of the rational individual that prioritizes this faculty—has no vulnerabilities or needs, except for its dependence on the body. In foregrounding these vulnerabilities and needs in its conception of second persons, care ethics takes seriously our embodied lives. From a care perspective, we are not only rooted in our bodies but our growth is always with our “inspirited, thinking bodies.”\(^ {241}\)

\(^{237}\) Noddings 2002, 124 and 134.

\(^{238}\) Hamington 2012, 60.

\(^{239}\) Hamington 2012, 60.

\(^{240}\) I do not pursue a detailed comparison of xin 心 as “cognitive-affective thinking and feeling” with the fusion of empathy and reflective thought in the caring relationship, but the parallels are too strong not to note.

\(^{241}\) Noddings 2002, 124.
2.5.3 Second Persons as Vitally Relational

Returning to the caring relation described above, in caring about someone one is caring about her as an irreplaceable and non-fungible person, what Seyla Benhabib has termed a *concrete, particularized other*. The other person in a caring relation is someone with “a concrete history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution,” where in relating to this person “we seek to comprehend the needs of the other, his or her motivations, what he or she searches for and desires.” In relating to the cared-for, the carer confirms in her not only her humanity but her human individuality. This particularized other is juxtaposed with the generalized other, who is abstracted from her concrete and particular needs, desires, and affects in order to be seen as “a rational being entitled to the same rights and duties we would want to ascribe to ourselves.” In other words, when the carer sees the cared-for as a generalized other, she sees her simply in terms of her humanity, thus failing to genuinely *care about* her.

That the caring relation is a deeply affective, embodied interaction between two concrete particularized others indicates that the underlying, ontologically basic human

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242 Benhabib 1987.
243 Benhabib 1987, 164. While Benhabib draws from the work of Carol Gilligan in developing her feminist critique of justice and autonomy, her reliance on Habermas and communicative ethics distinguishes her project from the care ethical project I am analyzing and hopefully furthering here. As such, I do not intend to imply any further concordance with Benhabib’s work other than the articulation of the concrete other as summarized here.
244 Benhabib 1987, 164.
245 Benhabib borrows this term from George Herbert Mead with considerable conceptual alterations. See Benhabib 1987, 174n22.
246 Benhabib 1987, 163.
247 Benhabib 1987, 164.
relations in care ethics are themselves understood as vital. This should come as no surprise given the emphasis on the mother-child relationship throughout the care literature.

The mother-child relation is the paradigmatic caring relation, and a brief return to this paradigm yields further insight into the relational constitution of persons in care ethics. In discussing the mother-child relation, Held observes a stark contrast between it and the contractual model of relationality. With a contractual relation, “the natural condition is seen as one of individuality and privacy,” where two independent persons ally themselves in some form of exchange and cooperation. But with a mother-child relation, “the starting condition is an enveloping tie, and the problem is individuating oneself.” Without restricting ourselves for the remainder of the discussion to biological motherhood, we can observe here that the biological relation underscores this original relationality in that the mother’s body quite literally envelops the child at the beginning of the relationship. This reversal of the traditional schematic to claim that the philosophical question is one of individuation not relation is a cornerstone of care ethics.

Baier’s notion of second persons mentioned above describes this process of individuation. She writes:

Persons are essentially successors, heirs to other persons who formed and cared for them, and their personality is revealed both in their relations to others and in their response to their own recognized genesis. Not only does each earlier phase causally influence each later phase, as in all enduring things, not only is there

\[248\] Held 1993, 208.

\[249\] Held 1993, 208.
growth, maturation, and aging, as in all living things, but in persons each later phase is a response to earlier phases, caused not only by them but by some sort of partial representation of them and their historical and causal relationships.\textsuperscript{250}

In this sense, consciousness develops into self-consciousness through mastery of the personal pronoun “you,” where the child understands that she is the addressee when her mother says “Are you hungry?” and that her mother is the addressee when she calls to her mother, “Where are you?”\textsuperscript{251} Baier argues that the first- and third-person pronouns, “I” and “me,” build from this initial grasp of “you,” and as such the initial, conceptual grasp of subjects and objects is a product of interpersonal, second-person communication. In this sense, individuated persons arise out of relations and not just in a metaphysical or biological sense. Persons are always responding to others, to past experiences, to shared histories, and so on. This highlights the narrative dimension of these affective, particularized, embodied, and relational persons.

Part of our development as moral persons is a series of responses to previous phases of our lives; we come to understand ourselves, at least partially, in terms of narratives. This is not just as children in our initial period of dependency on others. Returning to Brison, the process of recovering or reconstructing oneself after trauma is tied up in narratives of identity as well. We must manage to make sense of what has happened, how we have gotten to where we are now, and where we are going, but Brison adds that “we need not only the words with which to tell our stories but also an audience

\textsuperscript{250} Baier 1985, 85.
\textsuperscript{251} Baier 1985, 89.
able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them.\textsuperscript{252} In the story of Tom and Christina earlier, one of the possible scenarios of taking care of Christina involved Tom’s spending hours talking with Christina. Being an effective carer here can amount to being a receptive and attentive listener to Christina as she works out what has happened, how it affects her, and what she can do about it. For Brison, it was in expressing herself to trusted others and having her narrative received that she could construct and reconstruct her identity. It is not just having a narrative, but having a narrative that is received by others that (re-)builds an identity.

It is worth pausing here with this account of second persons and narrative identities. If care ethics were working with a causal notion of constitutive relations, Baier would not emphasize the iterations of responsiveness to previous phases of our lives. A causal relation is important during the moment of encounter. A stranger holds the door open at the bus station and the rest of one’s day seems somehow a little brighter, for example. With second persons understood in this narrative sense, the constitutive relations are enduring. The meaning of one’s life emerges through telling one’s story and having one’s story received. Over the course of time, it is the relation itself that is giving rise and shape to individuated persons. Margaret Urban Walker develops this point at length.

In her account of narrative persons, Walker focuses on the “moral construction (and reconstruction) of lives” and observes that the ethics of responsibility begin from those “personally distinctive ‘constitutive’ commitments” that “carry a life forward, giving it meaning and making it one’s own,” and from a “conception of a person as

\textsuperscript{252} Brison 1997, 21.
identified at least in part by a history…as constituted by patterns of action and response over significant periods of time, and actions themselves as conceived and reconceived in terms of their relations to what precedes and what follows them.”

From a care perspective, many (though certainly not all) of these constitutive commitments are other persons—those for whom one cares or those from whom one receives care—and the patterns of action and response over time are the relationships themselves. In this sense, who we are is a matter of who and what we are committed to. While her account of narrative identity thus far echoes Baier and Brison, Walker makes a stronger claim.

In discussing the connection between narratives of relationships and narratives of identity, Walker writes that these two “inevitably intertwine,” since “our identities, moral and otherwise, are produced by and in histories of specific relationships, and those connections to others that invite or bind us are themselves the expression of some things we value.” That our identities are produced by and in histories of specific relationships is a stronger claim than that our narrative identities include a history of our relationships or that our narrative identities need a receptive audience to come to life. In these caring relationships with trusted others, one makes and remakes one’s person. In childhood, much of one’s personhood is conferred from one’s social situation. One’s parents raise one as a second person with certain values, habits, practices, and so on. But as one’s interactions with the outside world increase and one’s relations expand outside of the immediate family, new relationships are formed and new experiences begin shaping

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253 Walker 2007, 113-16. Walker writes more broadly on the ethics of responsibility among which she includes the ethics of care
one’s narrative. When these are positive relations, one adopts new values and new interpretations of old values; new meaning is brought to one’s life. When these are negative relations or experiences, as happened with Brison, one turns to existing caring relations for self-repair and reconstruction. In this sense, identity arises from a shared history, but in a stronger sense identity is created and maintained in these caring relations. Personhood, as an embodied narrative constituted by relations to particularized others, is itself trusted to one’s intimates. One’s ability to continue caring is a matter of other caring relations helping to repair one’s person. It is in this manner that I see care ethics as putting forth an image of the vitally relational person.

While this closely parallels the construction of the vitally relational person in Confucian role ethics, it is worth noting a few important differences. First, the ultimate culmination of self-cultivation in Confucian role ethics is sagehood, a deeply religious achievement bringing the power of one’s person to cosmic levels. While an argument might be made that second persons ultimately extend themselves to the environment, the person is certainly seen as more finite in care ethics. Additionally, there is a greater emphasis on relations to the dead and as-yet unborn in Confucianism, and not just to our loved ones who have passed but to our more distant ancestors and our future progeny as well. While I will discuss the role of tradition more fully in chapter 4, the difference worth mentioning here is that constitutive relations are more localized in care ethics than in Confucian role ethics.

It might also be argued that care ethics differs from Confucian role ethics in its conception of vital relations as well in so far as care ethics advocates a dyadic relationship of carer to cared-for and Confucianism understands social order according to
a family metaphor of multiple interconnected and interdependent relationships. It would be a mistake to tie the care perspective to the dyadic paradigm, because analysis of caring relations should not focus exclusively on the carer and cared-for as an isolated dyad. It is here that I would like to highlight a latent resource within the care perspective that has been underutilized. Walker’s work on narratives of identity and relationships indicates that lived identities are always involved in a multiplicity of commitments and relationships. Moreover, in distinguishing the justice and care perspectives, Carol Gilligan argues that the constitutive relations are not dyadic, but rather a network or web of relationships of attachment and detachment.\(^{256}\) Eva Kittay develops these insights in her work on vulnerability and dependency with her notion of secondary dependency.\(^{257}\) Secondary dependency highlights the fact that needs and dependency are not restricted to a unique group within society, i.e., dependents; needs and vulnerability radiate out into society as carers and dependency workers, in taking on responsibility for the well-being of others, become partially dependent on others. The nurse at the end of a long day turns to her close friends for self-repair, and the mother tasked with the role of primary caregiver in turn relies on her partner for her needs and well-being. What we are dealing with in care ethics then is not dyadic relationships of dependency, but rather caring communities of interdependence. The mother-child paradigm itself points outside of the dyadic paradigm in that the mother-child relationship is a familial bond; human relations within a family are multiple and complexly interconnected.\(^{258}\) One’s actions as a mother

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\(^{256}\) Gilligan 1987, 22-23.

\(^{257}\) Kittay 1999, 46-47.

\(^{258}\) Held makes a similar point in her discussion of the post-patriarchal family as a model for social relations (Held 1993).
toward one child focus and affect one’s relations with one’s other children, the father, the grandparents, and so on. This family metaphor is already present in the care literature, and thus its emphasis here should be seen not so much as an introduction from Confucian role ethics as a shift in emphasis teased out in the course of comparative study.

One further point to raise is the emphasis on role-relations in Confucianism and their apparent absence in care ethics. First, the relations found in care ethics are, technically speaking, role-relations. The carer will always be a parent, a nurse, a doctor, and so on. These roles will directly influence what sort of care is acceptable. Second, these asymmetrically reciprocal relationships between carer and cared-for are similarly mirrored in Confucian role ethics. If one abstracts from the particular role-relations, the relational dynamics are understood in terms of beneficiary and benefactor. My point here is not to say that these conceptions of vitally relational persons are the same. They are not. But the differences here between the focus on the more abstract roles of carer and cared-for and the focus on a multiplicity of concrete roles should not be overemphasized. In both care ethics and Confucian role ethics, the conceptions of vitally relational persons are sufficiently similar to justify moving forward with a study of the ethics of vital relationality.

For the ethics of vital relationality, a person is an embodied focus of vital relations with particular others, and these relations are structured according to a familial model of interconnection and interdependence. Furthermore, what is at stake in these relationships is not just projects or aspirations but persons themselves. An infant does not become a person without the care of a parent figure; a trauma victim does not recover and re-pair herself without a trusted support network; and even when personhood is not so
clearly vulnerable, vital relations structure the social environment in which and from which we grow everyday as moral persons.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that care ethics and Confucian role ethics exemplify a unique subcategory of constitutive relationality that I have here called vital relationality. This represents a unique perspective on personhood in that in addition to claiming that relations with others shape who we become, and going beyond the claim that we are dependent on others for developing meaningful lives, the perspective of vital relationality shows us that who we become and how meaningfully we live our lives is a matter of our intimate relations with others, initially and most centrally our biological and honorary families.

The intimate nature of these vitally constitutive relations has far-reaching effects for moral philosophy. Most notably, vital relations are the locus of value for the ethics of vital relationality and the radical particularity of these relations makes existing modes of moral thinking that draw from external or abstract sources of value ineffective and inappropriate. In the following chapter I will explore this dimension of vital relationality through a close comparison with virtue ethics.
CHAPTER THREE
FOCUSING ETHICS ON VITAL RELATIONS

The previous chapter argued that persons are vitally related in ways liberal individualism cannot acknowledge. Through a close comparison of the notions of personhood in care ethics and Confucian role ethics I developed the general notion of the vitally relational person. These vital relations were juxtaposed to those power relations and relations of intersubjectivity found in Michel Foucault’s analytics and Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialism, respectively, in order to underscore the radical nature of vital relations as those intimate, trusting relations that constitute who we are and give meaning to our lives. Without any given one of our vital relations, we are different persons; without any of them, we do not exist. Such a view of persons makes the ethics of vital relationality—which I develop in this chapter—distinct from dominant moral theories of liberalism, such as deontology and consequentialism, with their presumption of discrete individuals.

The present chapter carries vital relationality from the ontological to the ethical level, thus focusing ethics on complex and unique relations rather than abstracting from the ongoing process of relation to focus on acts, consequences, or as I argue now, characters and their persistent traits. In this chapter I will argue that the adoption of a virtue ethical framework to explain care ethics and Confucian role ethics necessarily impairs the project of living better together because it focuses our attention on individual characters and their traits rather than the life- and meaning-giving relationships that
structure our lived experience. While there are many similarities between virtue ethics and what I term the ethics of vital relationality, their respective loci of ethical value differ in a subtle yet significant way. Whereas virtue ethics locates value in the individual’s well-lived life—which may include social relations generally—the ethics of vital relationality locates ethical value in vital relations (the particular kind of social relation identified in chapter 2). This is not a binary distinction between the lives of individual characters and the growth of relations. It is an expansive distinction, meaning that the ethics of vital relationality is more capacious than virtue ethics; in turning to the language of vital relationality, we are accounting for vital relations and the persons these relations shape. This difference manifests in the respective ethical orientations and models for ethical discourse found in virtue ethics and the ethics of vital relationality, with the former focusing on states of character and the latter attending to relations of interdependence and trust. I draw out this distinction through a comparative analysis of teleological and sentimentalist virtue ethics, on the one hand, and care ethics and Confucian role ethics, on the other.

Having distanced the ethics of vital relationality from the discrete individualism of dominant moral theories in chapter 2 and from the discursive individualism of virtue

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259 There will be points in this chapter where I must refer to those interpretations of care ethics and Confucian ethics that make use of a virtue ethical framework. Here I will make clear that I am engaging “virtue ethical care ethics” or “virtue ethical Confucian ethics.” In neither instance do I intend to endorse such interpretations of these ethics. I hold that virtue ethical care ethics does philosophical harm to the fundamental insights of care ethics, and virtue ethical Confucian ethics is at best a misleading translation of key concepts and at worst an instance of cultural imperialism. For virtue-based care ethics, see Slote 2001 and 2007. For virtue-based Confucian ethics, see Ivanhoe 2002 and 2013, Luo 2007, Sim 2015, and Van Norden 2013.
ethics here in chapter 3, I will turn to a critical examination of the ethics of vital relati
relationality in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 takes up issues related to intimate exploitation, domination, and oppression. Chapter 5 addresses systemic issues of social justice and whether the ethics of vital relationality can identify and address such issues.

3.1 Concept Clusters and Loci of Ethical Value

Concept clusters are an analytic tool to facilitate the comparison of or translation between differing philosophical perspectives. The cluster is composed of those key terms that structure the discourse. The Kantian concept cluster, for instance, is pure practical reason, duty, maxim, categorical imperative, the will, autonomy, universality, individual, and means-end. This concept cluster provides the key concepts that positively define Kantian ethics, but it also omits other possible ethical concepts and thus implies boundaries to the Kantian ethical discourse. Sentiments, habits, human nature, and character are noticeably absent from the concept cluster. Virtue ethicists, then, are working with a different cluster and thus having a different conversation than the Kantian deontologists. Internal to the concept cluster are various connections among the concepts themselves. Autonomy, for instance, entails the will, individual, duty, and pure practical reason. The categorical imperative, as a concept, is tied closely to universality and the individual. Concept clusters provide insights into the structure of a particular ethical discourse.

Within the care ethical and Confucian role ethical literature, concept clusters have been used to distance these perspectives from dominant moral theories. Concept clusters
are helpful to the present project because the question of whether or not virtue ethics is a compatible framework for care ethics or Confucian role ethics cannot be answered through a side-by-side comparison of individual terms of art (e.g., “pure practical reason” versus “practical wisdom”) or even individual philosophers (e.g., Aristotle versus Confucius). The comparison of concept clusters helps to illustrate not only differing discursive structures (the concept clusters taken holistically), but also how terms shared in different concept clusters have different connotations (those conceptual connections within a concept cluster). The present chapter is a discursive comparison; when we adopt a virtue ethical framework, we adopt a different ethical orientation and attend to a different locus of value. How we discuss ethics and thus how we act on our ethical insights differs fundamentally between all species of virtue ethics, on the one hand, and the vitally relational species of care ethics and Confucian role ethics, on the other. The discursive shift from vital relations to virtuous characters ultimately occludes our interdependent human condition and thus impedes our abilities to live well together.

When virtue ethics and the ethics of vital relationality are taken together and contrasted with dominant moral theories, there are many similarities. Instead of an act-focused ethical orientation attending to intentions or consequences, these ethics are more holistic, generally emphasizing intentions and consequences in moral evaluation. Also, these ethics emphasize the importance of cultivating moral practices rather than mastering moral theory and thus offer more concrete visions of the moral life. Moreover, both take seriously moral luck and the unchosen nature of many of our situations. And finally, both focus on concrete persons and take seriously the context of actions. Given the closeness of these ethical frameworks, then, it is no wonder that care ethics and
Confucian role ethics have been so quickly swept up in the virtue ethical turn of recent decades.

Those who have tried to distinguish care ethics and Confucian role ethics from the virtue ethical framework have often focused on a particular form of virtue ethics, such as Aristotle’s ethics, to ground their disagreements. However, the recent developments of virtue-based care ethics and Confucian virtue ethics (i.e., those interpretations of care ethics and Confucian ethics that make use of a virtue ethical framework) are too nuanced for such an approach. These ethics are now presented as being “of a kind” with Aristotle’s or Hume’s virtue ethics, and positioned to stand alongside them as unique virtue ethics with much to offer traditional virtue ethics; they are species of virtue ethics in their own right, and we should study them for precisely those differences that distinguish them from Aristotle or Hume. What I argue here is that when analyzed at the discursive level according to their respective concept clusters, the adoption of a virtue ethical framework necessitates the obfuscation and philosophical neglect of the vital relations that lie at the heart of care ethics and Confucian role ethics. Put another way, the attempted extension of virtue ethics, broadly construed, to properly incorporate vital relations fundamentally changes the ethical perspective in a way that is incompatible with virtue ethics. In short, the narrowing of the vitally relational perspective to focus on individual characters and their traits puts vital relations and the values they entail outside the scope of our ethical discourse.

It is worth repeating here that this is not a binary distinction between vital relations and virtues. The ethics of vital relationality is more capacious and holistic than virtue ethics in that it does not begin the conversation with abstracted characters and their traits. It remains rooted in our lived, social experience and thus maintains focus on our relations as well as our persons.
To demonstrate this point, I turn first to the respective concept clusters. When these concept clusters are identified, they point to different loci of ethical value, which in turn entail conflicting ethical orientations. Virtue ethics, on the one hand, focuses ethical work on individual characters. Care ethics and Confucian role ethics, while developing different ethical commitments (e.g., cultivating relational virtuosity versus the labor of taking care), are in agreement in their focus of ethical work on relations. This distinction will complete the identification of care ethics and Confucian role ethics as species of the ethics of vital relationality.

### 3.2 Virtue Ethics

Justin Tiwald observes that “virtue ethics” itself as a category has become something of a “catch-all” for “any character-oriented position that stands outside purer forms of consequentialism and rule-deontology.”\(^{261}\) Martha Nussbaum goes so far as to suggest that we stop using the term “virtue ethics” in any substantive sense; many so-called virtue ethicists overlap with their deontological and consequentialist competitors, and moreover they rarely share much common ground among themselves.\(^{262}\) Even so, she would agree with Tiwald’s general characterization of virtue ethics given her identification of the universal orientation of virtue ethics toward the moral agent.\(^{263}\) Thus while the definition of “virtue ethics” may lack satisfactory analytical precision, there is no reason we cannot speak of virtue ethics generally without a rigorous and

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\(^{261}\) Tiwald 2010, 57.

\(^{262}\) Nussbaum 1999b.

\(^{263}\) Nussbaum 1999b, 170.
comprehensive set of defining criteria. In fact, that this diverse group of ethics is at the very least *character-* or *agent-focused* is precisely what precludes the inclusion of *relation-focused* care ethics and Confucian role ethics within it.

While there are many species of virtue ethics—e.g., Homeric, Aristotelian, Thomist, Humean, Nietzschean—there are two families of virtue ethics pertinent to the present discussion. On the one hand, there are teleological virtue ethics of the Aristotelian sort that focus on human flourishing. The majority of Confucian virtue ethicists ascribe to this form of virtue ethics (e.g., Philip Ivanhoe and May Sim). On the other hand, there are the sentimentalist virtue ethics of the Humean sort that focus on human psychology. Michael Slote is a prominent representative of this latter approach, and has published extensively on care-centered virtue ethics. For my purposes here, I refer to these two families of virtue ethics as *teleological virtue ethics* and *sentimentalist virtue ethics*, respectively, and use these two perspectives to develop a general virtue ethical concept cluster. These two forms of virtue ethics align most closely with Confucian role ethics and care ethics, respectively, and so represent the best case virtue ethicists have for incorporating these ethics of vital relationality into a virtue ethical framework.

In what follows I articulate teleological and sentimentalist virtue ethics in their own right as well as how they are used to interpret Confucian and care ethics, respectively. Having detailed their respective concept clusters, I then identify the locus of ethical value in the virtue ethical framework and the entailed ethical orientation.

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Ivanhoe distinguishes these two families as the *virtue ethics of flourishing* (VEF) and the *virtue ethics of sentiments* (VES). I am not making a substantively different distinction from Ivanhoe’s, but I am opting for a less cumbersome terminology.
3.2.1 Teleological Virtue Ethics

Teleological virtue ethics hold that ethics is a matter of perfecting the potential of human nature. Philip Ivanhoe identifies teleological virtue ethics—in his words, the “virtue ethics of flourishing”—according to two criteria: (1) they are “grounded in a comprehensive and detailed conception of human nature that seeks to describe the content, structure, and overall shape of human nature,” and (2) they are “developed in terms of a teleological view about the flourishing of human nature expressed in an ideal or paradigmatic model of what it is to be human.”265 As this family of virtue ethics is derived from Aristotle’s model, I detail Aristotelian virtue ethics on these two points before turning to the teleological interpretation of Confucian ethics.

3.2.1.1 Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics

Aristotle’s virtue ethics is a teleological account of human flourishing grounded in a detailed account of human nature. According to his account of human nature, there is a particular highest good, i.e., human flourishing, that is the best life for human beings. The virtues are those states of character that contribute to this highest good. Here the focus is on where value is located and how the virtues relate to value, not so much the particular virtues Aristotle enumerated; a discussion of particular Aristotelian virtues is not included below. I am arguing against the virtue ethical framework for vital relations in general, not a particular virtue ethicist’s version.

265 Ivanhoe 2013, 29.
Aristotle’s understanding of human nature rests on his metaphysical biology—the notion that each kind has a unique function (ergon). Taking as a starting point the set of all living things, Aristotle distinguishes plants, animals, and humans to determine the essence of human nature. We share with plants the life of nutrition and growth, so that is not what is essentially human; we share with animals the life of perception, so this too cannot be the essence of human nature. But rational activity is unique to human beings, and therefore the function of human beings is to perfect this rationality. It is in fulfilling this function that human beings fulfill their teleological essence and flourish.266

We are naturally inclined to pursue our natural function, since the good life is tied to fulfilling our teleological function. Aristotle argues, “that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to intellect is best and pleasantest, since intellect more than anything else is man. This life therefore is also the happiest.”267 In other words, since humans are uniquely rational, the humans who are the most rational will be the most fully human, and therefore they will be considered to have flourished the most and to be living the best life.

The highest good is the end pursued for its own sake. This end is more complete than those ends that are pursued for the sake of other ends (e.g., I seek better tooth brushing skills in order to have better health, and in turn better health is sought so I may live the good life). Human flourishing (eudaimonia) is this natural and complete end for human beings.268 This highest and complete good is also self-sufficient since it makes a

266 Aristotle, 1098a 1-8.
267 Aristotle, 1178a 5-10.
268 Aristotle, 1097a 30-35.
life complete and worthwhile without the addition of any other goods. If I am
flourishing, there is no need for anything else. It is a comprehensive happiness. And so
we find that Aristotle relies on a substantive account of human nature to determine
teleologically what the highest good is for human beings.

Importantly here, this highest human good is not solitary. Aristotle writes that
“self-sufficient” does not mean “that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one
who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends
and fellow citizens, since man is sociable by nature.” That human beings are political
animals speaks to the social nature of the good in Aristotle’s ethics. Aristotle notes that
personal management requires a well-structured household and political system, that
we need others to help us out of misfortune, and we need to benefit others when we are
well-off; that friendship is necessary for the good life and that this requires us to see
ourselves intertwined with our friends through a life shared in conversation and
thought; and that virtuous action is how we should act as human beings who by
definition live among other human beings. However, the focus of his ethics is not on
the maintenance or vitality of these relations, but rather on their instrumental value in
supporting the development of the virtues.

269 Aristotle, 1097b 15.
270 Aristotle, 1097b 9-12. See also Politics 1253a 2-4 in the same volume.
271 Aristotle, 1142a 9-10.
272 Aristotle, 1169b 16.
273 Aristotle, 1170b 11-12.
274 Aristotle, 1178b 5-9. Elsewhere Aristotle writes, “Surely it is also strange…to make the blessed person a
solitary; for no one would choose to possess all good things on condition of being alone, since man is a
political creature and one whose nature is to live with others…Therefore the happy man needs friends”
(1169b 17-23).
Aristotle argues that to achieve eudaimonia, individuals must perfect the virtues. The virtues are states of character that reflect deep-seated habits of the agent. He writes that “virtue…is of two sorts, virtues of thought and virtues of character. Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching, and hence needs experience and time. Virtue of character results from habit; hence its name ‘ethical,’ slightly varied from ‘ethos.’” Ethical virtues, then, are states of character, and “a state of character arises from the repetition of similar activities. Hence we must display the right activities, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in the states.”

Each virtue exists as the mean or middle ground between the excess and the deficiency of a given category of action. For instance, courage is a virtue existing as the mean between rashness and cowardice. This mean is always agent-relative and thus context-dependent. Thus virtues are character traits of individuals situated in particular contexts. But how does one determine the mean? The moral agent knows how to act virtuously because she has developed her practical wisdom (phronēsis), which is “a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good and bad for man.” It is a capacity to determine the best course of action given the complex particularities of the given situation. But while this might seem to admit of a plurality of “good lives,” Aristotle offers the paradigmatic good life of human beings based on his conception of human nature and the resulting list of virtues.

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275 Aristotle, 1106a 9-10.
276 Aristotle 1103a 15-18.
277 Aristotle 1103b 21-23.
278 Aristotle, 1106b 5-8.
279 Aristotle, 1140b 5-7.
For Aristotle there is ultimately only one *best* life, namely the life of the wise person. He writes:

Now he who exercises his intellect and cultivates it seems to be both in the best state and most dear to the gods. For if the gods have any care for human affairs, as they are thought to have, it would be reasonable both that they should delight in that which was best and most akin to them (i.e., intellect) and that they should reward those who love and honour this most, as caring for the things that are dear to them and acting both rightly and nobly. And that all these attributes belong most of all to the wise man is manifest. He, therefore, is the dearest to the gods. And he who is that will presumably be also the happiest; so that in this way too the wise man will more than any other be happy.\(^{280}\)

It is clear from this passage that Aristotle believes the philosopher is the most capable of human flourishing and in this way is the most complete human being.

With Aristotle then, we have a virtue ethics built on a teleological account of human flourishing rooted in a detailed account of human nature where the cultivation of virtues is the means to achieving the highest human end. Social relations are necessary only for the good life, but not necessary for life itself, and where the social dimension of life is discussed, it is not discussed in the vitally constitutive way one finds in care ethics and Confucian role ethics.\(^{281}\) I turn now to those Confucian ethicists who interpret early Confucian ethics according to a similar schematic.

\(^{280}\) Aristotle, 1179a 23-33.

\(^{281}\) It is worth noting that Alasdair MacIntyre (1999) does emphasize this sense of our human dependencies and vulnerabilities. However, in remaining focused on virtues and individual character, MacIntyre’s virtue
3.2.1.2 Confucian Virtue Ethics

May Sim, among others, argues for a virtue ethical account of Confucianism. She writes, “if ‘virtue ethics’ were more loosely defined as an ethics that emphasizes the dispositions, character, motivation, and virtues of the agent for evaluating morality, in short, an ethics that focuses on the agent’s exemplary excellence,…then there are interpreters who agree that Confucius’ ethics is a virtue ethics.” In particular, Sim along with Ivanhoe and others hold that Confucian virtue ethics is a form of teleological virtue ethics, since it offers (1) a detailed account of human nature in terms of the four sprouts discussed in chapter 2 above and (2) a correlated account of human flourishing.

It is important not to conflate Confucius and Aristotle at the outset. While Confucian virtue ethics corresponds favorably with teleological virtue ethics, there are significant differences at the particular level of description between Confucian and Aristotelian species. One point of difference is the lack of emphasis on rational activity as the defining characteristic of human beings in Confucianism. With Confucianism, emotional and intellectual life are not separated, as the translation of xin 心 as “heartmind” indicates. But while there is a particular difference from Aristotle regarding human nature, there is a detailed enough account of Confucian human nature to fulfill the first criterion of teleological virtue ethics, according to Ivanhoe and others.

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ethics for “dependent rational animals” succumbs to the same criticisms I am bringing to the virtue ethical framework.

282 Sim 2015, 63. My emphasis.

283 Ivanhoe 2013, 29.
Ivanhoe identifies three claims addressing human nature’s content, structure, and proper course of development that form the core of Mencius’ theory of human nature (renxing 人性).\textsuperscript{284} The characteristic content of human nature for Mencius is our tendency to care.\textsuperscript{285} We all begin with our “innate moral tendencies,” the four sprouts (siduan 四端). Ivanhoe translates the four sprouts of Mencius as benevolence (ren 仁), righteousness (yi 義), propriety (li 礼), and wisdom (zhi 智).\textsuperscript{286} These sprouts are also referred to as our “innate heart and mind” (liangxin 良心) and our “fundamental heart and mind” (benxin 本心).\textsuperscript{287} Next there is the structure of human nature. In the natural hierarchy of human capacities, the “heart and mind” has the natural function to reflect and think, which is the distinctively human feature.\textsuperscript{288} In short, the heart and mind has the natural function “to govern the self.”\textsuperscript{289} Finally, human nature also has a proper course of action, a Confucian telos, since morality is neither “existential” (to use Ivanhoe’s term), nor the result of reason alone.\textsuperscript{290} Ivanhoe leverages Mencius’ use of agricultural metaphors to develop this telos, arguing that Mencius implies that so long as human beings develop “normally,” they become morally good.\textsuperscript{291} For human beings (ren 人) to
become good, they must undertake a program of cultivating the four sprouts, the culmination of which is sagehood or “complete moral perfection.”

This agriculturally teleological human nature provides a particular conception of human flourishing. But just as Confucian human nature is not Aristotelian, so too is Confucian human flourishing different. Ivanhoe observes that the Mencian conception of human flourishing inextricably links the flourishing of the individual with the flourishing of larger social units, including the family and society at large, and that there is a relational “oneness” of individuals with the world around them. This gives normative content to the notion of Confucian harmony (he 和), but as with Aristotle’s use of social relationships, there is a lack of appreciation here for the importance of relationships to life itself, not just the good life. The exemplary person, from this view, is one that achieves this form of human flourishing through a cultivation of the Confucian virtues, and need not attend to vital relations.

In describing the exemplar of human flourishing, Sim enumerates the Confucian virtues. I include the detailed list so that the translation of key terms can be contrasted later with their vitally relational counterparts. Of the exemplary person, Sim writes:

Confucius’ exemplary person (junzi 君子) is truthful (xin 信) and does his best (zhong 忠) not only with respect to his own character, but also in relation to others. Moreover, the junzi values knowledge (zhi 知) and learning (xue 學), acts with

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293 Ivanhoe 2013, 42.
294 Ivanhoe 2013, 43-44. Ivanhoe attributes the full development of this claim to Wang Yangming, but holds that it is present in a nascent form in Mencian philosophy.
reciprocity (shu 恕), appropriateness (yi 義), and by according to the ritual proprieties (li 禮). Ultimately, the junzi possesses the highest virtue of humaneness (ren 仁). 295

She later translates de 德 as “exemplary virtue” and xiao 孝 as “filial piety.” 296 These English translations pick out individual traits and the actions of discrete agents as opposed to characterizations of collaborative living. The following case is particularly telling.

The virtue ethical framework is well illustrated in Sim’s account of truthfulness or trust (xin 信), where she writes,

an emphasis on the virtue of truthfulness or trust in a virtue ethics framework is multiply relative to: the agent’s own excellence; the particularity of his situation (or the specific problem he is to address); his relationships to those toward whom his action is directed; and the actions that are appropriate. 297

The exclusive focus of Confucian ethics, according to this interpretation, is on the agent and his situation, his relationships, and his actions. As we will see later in this chapter, the vital relationality of persons gives ethical primacy to relations and situations, and only in abstraction to the persons in these relations and situations.

For the Confucian virtue ethicist, Confucian ethics comes down to a socially situated agent with inborn natural tendencies and an inclination to promote social

295 Sim 2015, 64. My emphasis on English terms.
296 Sim 2015, 65 and 68.
297 Sim 2015, 66.
harmony. The means to achieving such social harmony is the self-cultivation of a virtuous character. This virtue ethical interpretation of Confucian ethics is now gaining greater popularity as a corrective to Western forms of virtue ethics.\textsuperscript{298} However, if we are to take vital relations seriously and locate them at the heart of the Confucian vision of the moral life, we will need to reconsider this framework.

While I appreciate and agree with both Ivanhoe and Sim on how Confucianism can augment teleological virtue ethics as developed in the Western narrative, the very features they point to as correctives for traditional Western virtue ethics are themselves going to distance Confucianism from a virtue ethical framework altogether.\textsuperscript{299} However, I will defer this argument until after an examination of sentimentalist virtue ethics, since the primary reason for distancing Confucian ethics from teleological virtue ethics is the same reason for distancing care ethics from sentimentalist virtue ethics.

\textit{3.2.2 Sentimentalist Virtue Ethics}

Sentimentalist virtue ethics hold that certain psychological dispositions are conducive to better social interactions, and thus ethics is a matter of identifying and

\textsuperscript{298} Ivanhoe 2013, 43.

\textsuperscript{299} One powerful point to make here is that Ivanhoe and Van Norden both claim that Confucian virtue ethics offers an “expanded sense of self” that could challenge “the radical (and metaphysically unwarranted) individualism that is too often taken for granted” in Western virtue ethics (Ivanhoe 2013, 45; Van Norden 2013, 225n12). As is apparent now, expanding the self along its relations does little for virtue ethics so long as individual characters and their traits remain the locus of value and the focus of moral attention. It is precisely on this point—the need to restructure our \textit{terminology} for discussing ethics—that the ethics of vital relationality makes a positive contribution to broader ethical discourse.
cultivating those dispositions. The difference from teleological virtue ethics above is that the sentimentalists do not ground their virtue ethics in metaphysical claims or predetermined visions of what the virtuous exemplar would look like. British sentimentalists like Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith represent this family of virtue ethics. 300 Ivanhoe identifies as the key features of this family of virtue ethics that (1) they are “grounded in a general conception of human nature that focuses on aspects of human psychology,” 301 and (2) that they describe “the virtues in terms of dispositions conducive to smooth, agreeable, and beneficial interactions between individuals within and between different societies.” 302

Differences from teleological virtue ethics are immediately apparent. Sentimentalist virtue ethics are less metaphysically focused and more pragmatic; it is not human nature in a comprehensive sense that is the starting point for these virtue ethics, but rather people’s “emotional resources, tendencies, and capacities.” 303 Moreover, teleological virtue ethics tends to require a unity of virtues in accordance with the metaphysical foundations of human nature; without this starting point in metaphysical human nature, sentimentalist virtue ethics tends to leave virtues in a loose collection that is shaped by social context and historical location as much as by one’s membership in the human species. The focus, then, of this family of virtue ethics is on “ideal traits and their benefits” rather than “ideal persons and their character.” 304 In other words, sentimentalist

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300 Ivanhoe 2013, 29.
301 Ivanhoe 2013, 29.
302 Ivanhoe 2013, 30.
303 Ivanhoe 2013, 30.
304 Ivanhoe 2013, 30.
virtue ethics “has a firm but general psychological foundation, not a specific trajectory or goal.” I turn now to Hume’s account of the virtues before examining Slote’s development of care ethics as a form of sentimentalist virtue ethics.

3.2.2.1 Hume’s Virtue Ethics

Hume’s moral philosophy is structured around the pursuit of the general principles of human nature as experienced and empirically studied with particular attention paid to the mind. For Hume, human nature is “imperfect,” and thus not subject to the ideals of abstract theory. The feeling of humanity or fellow-feeling, namely a feeling of human connection, serves as the cornerstone of human nature and is accepted as a universal trait of human beings. Hume argues that this sense of fellow-feeling is to be developed into the social virtues of benevolence and justice. Grounding the social virtues is the observation of their usefulness to social cohesion: “every thing, which contributes to the happiness of society, recommends itself directly to our approbation and good-will. Here is a principle, which accounts, in great part, for the origin of morality.” When considering which virtues are best, Hume responds that they

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305 Ivanhoe 2013, 30.
306 Hume 1998, 1.10.
308 Hume 1998, n.19: “No man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness or misery of others. The first has a natural tendency to give pleasure; the second, pain.”
309 Hume 1998, 1.11.
310 Hume 1998, 5.2.17.
are the set of qualities that “capacitates a man best for the world, and carries him farthest in any undertaking.”

In addition to rejecting a substantive account of human nature, Hume also rejects the supposition of a persisting, substantive self. We are instead psychological beings and importantly self-less insofar as there is no substantive core self. As such, we become more contingent and more social from the sentimentalist’s perspective. Hume writes of the persistent core self that

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death, and could I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate, after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is further requisite to make me a perfect nonentity. If any one, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of himself, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls himself; though I am certain there is no such principle in me.

What follows from this eradication of a guiding principle of being human is a general account of human nature grounded in human psychology.

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311 Hume 1998, 6.1.17.
As one would expect, Hume’s conception of virtue is much different from the teleological account above. Hume defines “virtue” as “a quality of the mind agreeable to or approved of by every one, who considers or contemplates it.”

Motives and mental qualities are all that we must take into account when assessing whether certain actions were praiseworthy or blameworthy. The approval of these qualities is broadly social in that Hume means there is “a history of public approbation” rather than a unanimous agreement in the present situation. Thus virtues are socially determined qualities of persons rather than the logical entailments of a given conception of human nature. For Hume, the possession of one virtue does not imply the capability to possess all other virtues nor does it imply the capability to derive the others. One discovers and cultivates the virtues through social interactions, and the cultivation of one virtue does not necessarily entail the capability of cultivating another. I cannot discover what it means to be courageous and extrapolate from this a process for discovering what it means to be benevolent or trustworthy. The virtues do not exist as theoretical means between vices, but rather as qualities my community and tradition (and species, in some cases) have determined to be agreeable and useful.

Furthermore, being determined both socially and biologically within particular social communities for particular individuals, there is no reason to believe these qualities would be compatible with each other. For instance, discretion—perhaps better understood as prudence—is a quality considered to be virtuous in many people. It is the quality “by which we carry on a safe intercourse with others, give due attention to our own and to

313 Hume 1998, n.50.
their character, weigh each circumstance of the business which we undertake, and employ the surest and safest means for the attainment of any end or purpose.” But given a particular person’s life project or particular situation, the virtue of discretion may in fact be a fault. Jonas Salk tested his experimental polio vaccine on himself. One could argue that his courage and benevolence precluded discretion. The point here is only to illustrate that it may not be possible for a single individual to hold all Humean virtues, or to put it differently, the virtuous life need not entail the same set of virtues for all individuals.

In sum, Hume’s virtue ethics focuses on the development of socially useful and agreeable qualities of the agent without positing a universal human nature or metaphysical conception of human being. As such, these virtues are socially determined and form an inconsistent set of qualities that persons can appeal to in navigating their social lives and living well. The linchpin of this conception is the universality of fellow-feeling or sympathy, which serves as a natural inclination for persons to respond to the praise and blame, joy and misery of their fellow persons. However, just as teleological virtue ethics is focused on individual characters and their virtues, Hume’s sentimentalist ethics remains focused on individual minds and their psychological traits. I develop this point following my account of Slote’s sentimentalist virtue ethics of caring.

3.2.2.2 Caring Virtue Ethics

Michael Slote has championed a virtue ethical form of care ethics. While he develops this position in *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, he grounds his care-based

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315 Hume 1998, 121.
virtue ethics in an earlier book, *Morals from Motives*. In Slote’s own words, he is following through “on the philosophical impulse to work out…an ethic of caring as a total or systemic view of individual moral motivation and action.” Slote writes that “the focus [in virtue ethics] is on the virtuous individual and those inner traits, dispositions, and motives that qualify her as being virtuous.” The two questions he pursues, then, are (1) “What it is to be a virtuous individual?” and (2) “What it is to have one or another particular virtue, conceived as an inner trait or disposition of the individual?”

Slote argues that care ethics is “in fact best understood or at least best defended as a form of agent-based virtue ethics.” To do so, he applies the notions of caring, benevolence, and love to “questions of individual morality (the morality governing an individual’s actions).” Agent-based virtue ethics can be of two general sorts. On the one hand there are “cool” virtue ethics, like that of Plato. Cool agent-based virtue ethics ground value in health and strength. In contrast, “warm” virtue ethics grounds value in benevolence. Of the warm virtue ethics, there are two kinds. First, there is morality as universal benevolence, and second, there is morality as caring.

Returning to Slote’s main thesis regarding care ethics, Slote observes that care is somewhat ambiguous in Noddings’ early writings. On the one hand, care is a

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319 Slote 2001, ix.
320 Slote 2001, x.
motivational attitude, and as such care ethics “is most plausibly defended in agent-based terms.” But, he notes, it also seems to be a situation or relation, at least as far as Noddings develops it. This relational aspect does not fit Slote’s agent-based framework, which he considers necessary for a systematic ethics, so he dismantles it. He writes,

If parental love, say, is obligatory and virtuous because it is essential to the good(s) of family life, why isn’t a child just as obligated to take love or other things from her parents and accounted morally virtuous or admirable for doing so? The difference here seems to depend on a fundamental difference in admirability between caring for and being cared for, and that sits well with an agent-based morality that deems caring to be morally virtuous as such and apart from its constitutive role in certain goods.

He goes on to give the example of a tutor and a mentally handicapped child:

The moral admirability or virtuousness of such caring seems not to be grounded in the desirability of a relationship, but to stand in need of no further justification; and so, once again it would seem that a virtue-ethical morality of caring is best conceived and formulated in specifically agent-based terms. The caring individual needs to be responsive to the particularities, nuances, and complexities of a larger interpersonal and social context, but that doesn’t have to mean that values attaching to that context determine the moral value or admirability of caring.

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324 Noddings admits this ambiguity in her early formulation of care ethics, but emphasizes that the attention to situation and relation is the primary focus of care ethics. See Noddings 1999.
What is interesting here is that having adopted the virtue ethical framework is exactly what precludes his access to the insights of care ethics. The concern in care ethics is not who is admirable, nor is the purpose of ethics from a care perspective to figure out who deserves more credit or admirability in a given situation. The concern in care ethics is whether or not we are flourishing together, whether or not we are all growing.

In a telling footnote to this passage, Slote writes

Noddings…makes the moral value of caring depend in part on whether the person cared for receives the benefit of knowing he or she is cared for, and this too takes us away from agent basing. But critics have questioned her assumption here, because it seems invidious to make the moral value of caring depend on accidental or uncontrollable circumstances…I propose we drop the assumption from any account of the ethic of caring.\textsuperscript{327}

In other words, Noddings’ care ethics seems to understand the success of our moral lives as vulnerable to the actions of other and contingent circumstances, \textit{which is precisely the point}. The virtue ethics of caring grants us considerably more control over our lives by remaining focused on the individual agent and her inner dispositions alone. This restricted focus enables us to properly assign moral credit to those individuals involved in the caring relation.

In order not to unfairly characterize Slote’s sentimentalist virtue ethics based on his earlier work, it is worth briefly mentioning his latest book, \textit{From Enlightenment to Receptivity}. Here he characterizes receptivity as a virtue and as representative of an

\textsuperscript{327} Slote 2001, 31n21.
ethical orientation that could directly challenge the overtly individualistic, rationalistic, and control-focused perspectives of the European Enlightenment. However, the lack of attention to relationships, and the entailed vulnerability, remains. Slote writes,

care ethicists and others have stressed feeling, emotion, and empathy—and the relationships or personal connection that depends on them—in new and important ways. But some of the most striking examples of receptivity we have discussed don’t particularly involve these other factors. Thus receptivity toward what one’s life has brought one or toward what it may bring one in the future is not, in any obvious way, a matter of being properly emotional or empathic, of having certain commonly identifiable feelings, and so the values articulated and defended in this book take us beyond the recent emphasis on feeling and emotion to a somewhat new intellectual/ethical terrain.328

As has become the theme so far, Slote shoehorns the vitally relational insights of care ethics into an individualist discourse.

With the virtue ethical interpretations of Confucian and care ethics accounted for, I now turn to their respective concept clusters and the shared ethical orientation of teleological and sentimentalist virtue ethics.

3.2.3 The Virtue Ethical Concept Clusters

Let us examine the concept clusters we have found in teleological and sentimentalist virtue ethics. They indicate that the locus of value for virtue ethics is in the

328 Slote 2013, 226. My emphasis.
individual agent’s life, however socially embedded she may be. Moreover, this locus of value entails an ethical orientation toward discrete characters and their persistent traits. In short, while a social conception of persons may be present, there remains a discursive individualism in the virtue ethical framework. This discursive individualism is ultimately incompatible with the vital relations emphasized in care ethics and Confucian role ethics.

From the teleological virtue ethicists, one finds the following concept clusters.

For Aristotle, there is:

Human nature, human flourishing, virtue, character, function, teleological essence, intellect, political animal, social animal, friendship, practical wisdom, the good life, and the wise man.

For the Confucian virtue ethicists, we have:

Self, family, society, agent, action, disposition, motivation

Along with the Chinese technical terms:

Human nature (renxing 人性), human beings (ren 人), teleological sprouts/innate moral tendencies (duan 端), benevolence/humaneness (ren 仁), righteousness/appropriateness (yi 義), propriety/ritual proprieties (li 礼), wisdom/knowledge (zhi 智), innate heart and mind (liangxin 良心), complete moral perfection (sheng 聖), harmony (he 和), exemplary person (junzi 君子), truthfulness (xin 信), doing one’s best for self and others (zhong 忠), reciprocity (shu 恕), learning (xue 学), exemplary virtue (de 德), and filial piety (xiao 孝)
From the sentimentalist virtue ethicists, one finds similar clusters. Hume’s cluster is:

Human nature (generally and imperfectly), mind, psychology, fellow-feeling/sympathy, human beings, social utility, virtue, agreeable/disagreeable, approval/disapproval, mental quality, motivation

And finally Slote provides the following:

Agent, action, virtue, motivation, individual, benevolence, love, receptivity, admirability, inner trait, disposition, emotion, feeling, care (as a virtue)

It should not be surprising that having analyzed the general structure of four versions of virtue ethics, they all confirm the general definition of virtue ethics we started with.

Virtue ethics is an ethical orientation focused on the individual agent’s character and attending traits or virtues. What I argue now is that the discourse represented in this set of concept clusters is inherently incapable of persuasively capturing the vital relationality at the foundation of care ethics and Confucian role ethics as I have presented them.

To demonstrate this incapacity, let us focus on Shirong Luo’s attempt to bridge the gap between Slote’s agent-based virtue ethics and Noddings’ more radically relational care ethics. Luo introduces Confucian virtue (de 德) as a relational virtue. He argues that the cared-for’s “positive response (or appreciation) itself is a manifestation of her de

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329 It is worth noting that “human nature” appears in three of the four particular clusters, but in each cluster the connotations shift as a result of the attached concepts. This semantic shift is evidence of the internal connections within concept clusters.
[presumably 德, though the text omits the character].”330 With these relational virtues, Luo concludes that “the caring relationship obtains if and only if both the carer and cared-for exhibit their respective de. So such a relation may be defined as the manifestations of two relational virtues: caring and gratitude.”331 He writes, “Noddings stresses the contribution and responsiveness of the cared-for [in arguing against a virtue ethical interpretation of caring] but fails to realize that such reactions can be described as various manifestations of the cared-for’s de.”332 The caring relation is simply a pair of virtues. But why divide the caring relation into a pair of virtues? Luo writes, “Giving the cared-for moral credit because of her appreciativeness and giving her credit on the grounds of the caring relationship are essentially the same thing since whenever the cared-for manifests her de, which presupposes caring, there will be a caring relationship.”333

This immediate turn towards assigning moral credit and judging individuals to be virtuous or vicious betrays the general motivation behind the virtue ethical form of moral philosophy. This appraisal of virtue ethics is further supported by Margaret McLaren’s observation that what the concept “character” affords the ethicist is “another register by which to judge oneself and others as good or bad, praiseworthy or blameworthy.”334 These virtue ethicists subscribe to a form of what Walker calls the theoretical-juridical model of moral philosophy. The preoccupation is with developing acceptable principles

of morality and judging others accordingly. As I will now argue, the truly remarkable dimension of care ethics and Confucian role ethics in their sustained focus on vital relations is that this vital relationality and interdependence pervades the discourse, from lived experience to metaphilosophical orientation. There is a fundamentally different conversation being had.

3.3 The Ethics of Vital Relationality

In the previous section it became clear that no matter how important virtue ethicists such as Ivanhoe, Sim, and Slote find the relational dimensions of individuals to be, and no matter how central they feel this relationality should be to ethics, the adoption of a virtue ethical framework—teleological, sentimentalist, or other—obscures this relationality at the discursive level. Furthermore, it promotes a tendency toward judgment of self and others rather than collaborative growth. What I argue now is that the ethics of vital relationality avoids this issue by carrying vital relationality not only through our conception of personhood but to the concept cluster of our ethical discourse.\textsuperscript{335} In other words, the adoption of vitally relational personhood requires a similar extension of our ethical concept cluster from individuals and their traits to include the vital relations that constituted these persons in the first place.

\textsuperscript{335} It is worth noting that many terms will overlap and some will seem to have either a virtue ethical reading or a vitally relational reading. For instance, caring can be a relation or a virtuous action. It is this imprecision at the level of individual terms that requires the turn toward concept clusters inclusive of both conceptions of personhood and ethical values.
In the following I develop concept clusters for Confucian role ethics and care ethics. I then examine them as representative of the ethics of vital relationality and distinguish them conclusively from the virtue ethical discourse.

3.3.1 Confucian Role Ethics

Confucian role ethics is generally identifiable according to five criteria. First, “morality” is not a circumscribed dimension of human conduct, rather it “is a continuing process that attends all human activity.” As such, role ethical holism captures more than most virtue ethical holisms in that the distinction between moral and non-moral virtues, and thus moral and non-moral conduct, is not present in Confucian role ethics.

Second, “loving others is a precondition for behaving morally,” and more importantly, “there is a violence in ignoring others.” Much like sentimentalist virtue ethics, moral conduct is grounded in the fact that we all care, or have cared, about some others. Furthermore, unlike the virtue ethicists described above, the mutual vulnerability and interdependence of the vitally relational human condition applies moral weight to ignoring others.

Third, “one can only learn to love others by being loved oneself.” Firmly rooted in parent-child relations, Confucian role ethics observes that human conduct does not spring forth ex nihilo. Actions are better understood as reactions. The motivation

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336 Rosemont and Ames 2009, 49.
337 Rosemont and Ames 2009, 50.
339 I am indebted to Vytis Silius for this insight into classical Confucian ethics.
for, capacity to, and acquired proficiency in relating to others comes first from receiving parental attention and affection as a child.

Fourth, everyone has a family. This point is important for Confucian role ethics at the philosophical level. Just as no one is an abstract, discretely and completely autonomous individual, not everyone is a Confucian. But one thing we can posit is that everyone living today and participating in any degree within a social community has at one time had someone who raised them with some degree of proficiency. This makes role ethics generally, or what I will be calling the ethics of vital relationality, capable of having global import.

Fifth, “the immediate implication of a relational understanding of oneself is that, if other members of your family flourish, you flourish too, and by extension, if your neighbor does better, you do better.” In short, the vitally relational person as a starting point for our ethical reflection, means that relations, not individuals, are of primary import. Also, the fifth point can be put more strongly. In order to flourish, your family must flourish, and in order to flourish in your neighborhood, your neighbors must flourish. It is not a bidirectional relation of virtues, as Luo would have it, but rather a rejection of the self/other split—and therefore the egoism/altruism debate—altogether.

As for the concept cluster associated with Confucian role ethics, we have several terms already at our disposal courtesy of the work done in the previous chapter. Recall from chapter 2 the discussion of renxing 人性 as human becoming rather than human nature. There I translated renxing as the spontaneous development of certain human

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tendencies rather than the accomplishment of a teleological human nature. These tendencies, the duan 端, were four facets of xin 心, translated more accurately if not more awkwardly as heartmind. Also recall that the development of this set of spontaneous tendencies was a process of xiushen 修身, personal cultivation, where shen 身 (“personal”) picked out the socialized and cultivated body, not some core or essential self. Recall also that ren 仁 consummate conduct (not benevolence or humaneness) was inseparable from ren 人 person (not human being), and that our discussion of vitally relational persons always situated them within moral contexts, or put another way, there is no dimension of lived experience that is not potentially of moral import. These terms form the beginning of our concept cluster for Confucian role ethics. I turn now to the ethical concepts that will fill out this cluster.

Roger Ames writes that the central message of the Daxue (Great Learning 大學) is that “while personal, familial, social, political, and indeed cosmic cultivation is ultimately coterminous and mutually entailing, it must always begin from a commitment to personal cultivation.”342 This personal cultivation (xiushen 修身) is captured in the notion of “learning” (xue 學). The “learning” of the Daxue “is the cultivation of productive, transpersonal habits of conduct.”343

Ames translates the text as follows:

The ancients who sought to demonstrate real excellence to the whole world first brought proper order to their states; in seeking to bring proper order to their states,
they first set their families right; in seeking to set their families right, they first cultivated their own persons; in seeking to cultivate their persons, the first knew what is proper in their own heartminds; in seeking to know what is proper in their heartminds, they first became sincere in their purposes; in seeking to become sincere in their purposes, they first became comprehensive in their wisdom. And the highest wisdom lies in seeing how things fit together most productively.\footnote{Ames 2011, 93.}

When this process is attended to and the real excellence of the ancients is demonstrated to the whole world, there is peace.

The question in this section then is whether or not the associated concept cluster for *xiushen* 修身 and *xue* 学 points to a project of personal cultivation that is the cultivation of traits attached to a discrete character or to one that is a series of patterns of collaborative living within radiating and overlapping social ties. This “learning as personal growth” (*xue* 学) that we might consider to be synonymous with “personal cultivation” (*xiushen* 修身) is the process of becoming *ren* 仁 (consummately human), and as demonstrated in chapter 2, becoming human begins with *xiao* 孝 (family reverence).

For Confucian role ethicists, *ren* 仁 is “consummate conduct or person.” “Consummate,” as the key word, captures the irreducibly relational and collaborative sense of *ren* 仁 with the prefix “con-,” while *summa* “is that form of ‘completion’ that suggests disclosure more than closure, a transactional maturation and fruition more than the actualization of some given potential.”\footnote{Ames 2011, 179.} In other words, “*summa* is the highest
efficacy in some particular achievement and not merely a replication of something previously accomplished.” With regard to the virtue ethicists above, this sense of “completion” does not lend itself to any sense of “perfection.”

Importantly, ren is not self-oriented. In characterizing ren, Confucius says, “Consummate persons establish others in seeking to establish themselves and promote others in seeking to get there themselves.” It is a relational achievement of “correlating one’s conduct with those near at hand.” Ren is inherently relational and contextual. When offering tentative definitions or descriptions of ren conduct, the following passage is illuminating:

A person who is able to carry into practice five attitudes in the world can be considered consummate…Deference, tolerance, making good on one’s word (xin), diligence, and generosity. If you are deferential, you will not suffer insult; if tolerant, you will win over the many; if you make good on your word, others will rely upon you; if diligent, you will get results; if generous, you will have the status to employ others effectively.

Note that is a matter of collaborative interaction, a relationality. As Ames writes,

Ren is not a “good” but an efficacious “good at, good in, good to, good for, good with” that describes a relational dexterity within the unfolding of social experience…By requiring that the quality of action be determined and evaluated

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346 Ames 2011, 179.
347 Analects 6.30.
348 Analects 17.6
relationally—that is, by asking after what persons do with their interdependence and mutuality both in terms of motivation and consequences—*ren* is the difference between efficacy and waste, between elegance and ugliness, between healthy relations and those that are injurious.\(^{349}\)

In chapter 2 I illustrated the family rootedness of *ren* 仁 and personhood. In ethical terms, the root of *ren* 仁 consummate conduct is *xiao* 孝 (family reverence, feeling, deference, or responsibility). Originally, *xiao* 孝 was *lao* 老 (aged) and *zi* 子 (child), representing generational deference. Rosemont and Ames observe that “ideally, each generation instructs and inculcates in the succeeding generation a reverence for the family by modeling the appropriate conduct toward the generation that preceded them, thus suffusing the family with unconditional love and a sense of belonging.”\(^{350}\) The intergenerational tie, or more specifically the parent-child relationship, is the bedrock of Confucian role ethics and establishes the family as the generative source and governing metaphor for our other ethical concepts.\(^{351}\) This is what Confucius means when he states that filial and fraternal responsibility (*xiaodi* 孝弟) are “the root” of his *ren* 仁 ethics.\(^{352}\)

While *xiao* 孝 (family responsibility) is the root of Confucian role ethics, *shu* 恕 (putting oneself in the place of another) lies at the conceptual heart of *ren* 仁. *Shu* 恕 “expresses both moral perplexity and the creative search for the most appropriate

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\(^{349}\) Ames 2011, 182.

\(^{350}\) Rosemont and Ames 2009, 1.

\(^{351}\) Rosemont and Ames 2009, 22-3.

\(^{352}\) *Analects* 1.2.
response,” and underscores the importance of imagination to Confucian role ethics.\textsuperscript{353} It is an “analogical deference” to others in what we do.\textsuperscript{354} This is cultivated, as are the others, first in the family setting, and is “an omnipresent and indispensible disposition for living life responsively and thoughtfully."\textsuperscript{355} Importantly, this is receptive and not projective; when asked if there is one expression to guide all of one’s actions, Confucius replies that there is \textit{shu}: “Do not impose on others what you yourself do not want."\textsuperscript{356} Whereas the Christian Golden Rule to do unto others as you would have them do unto you is thoroughly projective—one’s own self is fungible with the self of another—the Confucian Jade Rule leaves space for difference and obliges one to refrain from any action one would not oneself want. As Ames writes, “in the absence of some assumed universal standard, to begin from the presumption that one already knows what is most appropriate for someone else is disrespectful and condescending.”\textsuperscript{357}

\textit{Shu} is a strand of the “one thread” running through all of Confucius’s teachings;\textsuperscript{358} closely tied to \textit{shu} is \textit{zhong} (doing one’s utmost), which is the “indefatigable commitment to a positive outcome.”\textsuperscript{359} This is not loyalty, since this is a much narrower and later meaning for the character. Moreover, it is not really doing one’s best for oneself and others, as Sim translates it, since this imposes a split between self and other that is not present in a relational framework. \textit{Zhong} is similar to \textit{taking care}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[353] Ames 2011, 195.
\item[354] Ames 2011, 195.
\item[355] Ames 2011, 196.
\item[356] \textit{Analects} 15.24.
\item[357] Ames 2011, 198.
\item[358] \textit{Analects} 4.15.
\item[359] Ames 2011, 200.
\end{itemize}
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(discussed in chapter 2 and again below) in that it is the explicit requirement that action be undertaken. Confucian role ethics will not accept a positive assessment of someone based solely on motivations. However, unlike taking care, there is no clear political import to zhong 忠. Whereas both mean laboring on behalf of others, only taking care has a ready-made connection to labor as a political resource.  

The importance of zhong 忠 is clear when Confucius considers one’s “mainstay” to be “doing one’s utmost (zhong 忠) and making good on your word (xin 信).” And later when asked about accumulating excellence (de 德), Confucius says that accumulating excellence is chiefly about doing one’s utmost (zhong 忠), making good on one’s word (xin 信), and seeking out what is appropriate (yi 義).” Thus while zhong 忠 and shu 恕 make up the one thread of Confucius’s teachings, in terms of frequency, the Analects ties it more closely to xin 信.  

Xin 信 is not “a tendency to trust” or “trustworthiness.” Rather, xin 信 is both good intentions and the achievement of practical results. It is situational rather than agential, and connotes “both the increased credibility of the benefactor and the increased confidence and trust of the beneficiary. Xin 信, then, like friendship, is the consummation of a fiduciary relationship with agency being an abstraction from the concrete situation.

360 That all conduct has an inherently political dimension will be pursued further in chapter 5.
361 Analects 9.25. See also Analects 1.8.
362 Analects 12.10.
363 E.g., Analects 1.4, 5.28, 7.25, 9.25, and 12.10.
itself.” In relation to *cheng* 誠 (sincerity/integrity/in-situ-creativity), we get further connotations; “*Xin* as a habit of making good one one’s word is a specific and concrete way to promote the credibility and trust that must ground all personal growth.”

The importance of *xin* 信 to the Confucian way is made explicit in *Analects* 2.22 when Confucius says, “I am not sure that anyone who does not make good on their word (*xin* 信) is viable as a person. If a large carriage does not have the pin for its yoke, or a small carriage does not have the pin for its crossbar, how can you drive them anywhere?” The point here is that the vital relations identified in chapter 2 are relations of vulnerability and interdependence that can only be strengthened by trust and collaboration. Making good on one’s word is essential to the role ethical project.

The additional concepts of *yi* 義 and *li* 禮 appear in the description of the exemplary person (*junzi* 君子) in *Analects* 15.18. Here an exemplary person is a matter of having a sense of appropriate conduct (*yi* 義) as one’s basic disposition (*zhi* 質), developing it in observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮), expressing it with modesty, and consummating it in making good on one’s word (*xin* 信).

*Yi* 義 (appropriate conduct) is “achieving optimal appropriateness in one’s relations,” or “the satisfaction of moral uncertainty through an acquired sense of what is most fitting in the situation.” In other words, *yi* 義 “reflects one’s best judgment on how one might

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367 Ames 2011, 201.
dispose oneself in one’s relation to others in order to accomplish the recommended action, and confidence that what one is doing is appropriate in the circumstances.” This notion operates in tandem with shu 忍 and zhong 忠 when moral deliberation is required.

Analects 4.10 notes that “Exemplary persons (junzi 君子) in making their way in the world are neither bent on nor against anything; rather, they go with what is appropriate (yi 義).” This passage illustrates a sense of impartiality, and I would argue we should understand impartiality in two senses of being without prejudice. First, there is no a priori approach to addressing the demands of a particular situation. Context reigns supreme in the Confucian ethical orientation. Second, one’s own preferences are set aside, as the frequent contrasts of yi 義 with a sense of person gain (li 利) demonstrate. Ultimately, “Yi is the fittingness in relations that over time galvanizes the trust and credibility of the fiduciary community and the feelings of mutual confidence and reliability that give members a true sense of belonging within that community.”

In addition to yi 義, Confucius emphasizes li 礼 (ritual propriety). Analects 12.1 reads: “Through self-discipline and observing ritual propriety (li 礼) one becomes consummate in one’s conduct.” Consummate conduct is a sort of cultural fluency, “a process of personal articulation—the cultivation and expression of an elegant disposition, an attitude, a posture, a signature style, an identity.” It is an expression of one’s person and one’s vital and larger communities, “a public discourse through which one

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369 E.g., Analects 4.12, 4.16, 14.12, 16.10, and 19.1.
370 Ames 2011, 205.
constitutes and discloses oneself qualitatively as a unique individual, a whole person, to the benefit of all.”³⁷²  *Analects* 1.12 reads,

Achieving harmony (*he 和*) is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety (*li 禮*). In the ways of the Former Kings, this achievement of harmony made them elegant, and was a guiding standard in all things large and small. But when things are not going well, to realize harmony just for its own sake without regulating the situation through observing ritual propriety will not work.

Confucianism is in an important sense a philosophy of harmony (*he 和*). ³⁷³ *Analects* 13.23 reads, “Exemplary persons seek harmony not sameness; petty persons, then, are the opposite.” *He 和* is more than the absence of conflict, be it through the resolution of discord or a coerced homogeneity; the Confucian sense of harmony is one exemplified in a communal setting where difference enriches both persons and their relations with others.

The culinary use of the word is illustrative. ³⁷⁴ *He* (harmony) “is the art of combining and blending two or more foodstuffs so that they come together with mutual benefit and enhancement without losing their separate and particular identities.” This is a substantive sense of harmony. A harmony “that is effected by simply imposing external

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³⁷³ Ames 2011, 169.
constraints as a means of enforcing order—the application of laws, edicts, principles, or rules—is dehumanizing to the degree that it precludes personal participation and confirmation.”

Finally, there is the term most responsible for perceiving Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics: de 德. For the Confucian role ethicist, there is a distinct sense in which de 德 picks out “both the achieved quality of the conduct of the particular person and the achieved ethos of the collective culture.” In other words, “de is what we can truly do and become if in living wisely we ‘realize’ (zhi 智) satisfying personal lives as members of a flourishing community.” In agreement with David Nivison, Ames writes that de 德 involves both the person’s intentions as well as the attractive power of garnering support for those intentions. In this sense, de 德 “is the disposition of both benefactor and beneficiary through productive, noncoercive communal relations.” However, from this sense of de, Nivison concludes that it is a sort of virtue, what Luo above calls a relational virtue. But there is something not quite right with considering de 德 to be a state of character or a persistent psychological trait.

*De 德* is better translated as “excelling ethically.” Ames writes, “putative ‘virtues’ are in fact a virtuosity—a quality of conduct itself when it is informed by our best efforts.

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376 Ames 2011, 207.
379 Ames 2011, 209.
at cultivation and personal growth, thereby making our actions efficacious and qualitatively productive." This conduct, according to our vitally relational understanding of persons, is thoroughly collaborative: action is always at bottom the abstraction of a reaction from concrete conduct. Within the interpersonal and political settings of Confucian ethics, de 德 as an achieved quality of conduct represents “a celebration of the value of inclusive, consensual, and optimally productive cooperation as the ultimate source of personal, political, and religious satisfaction. Value itself so construed is nothing more or less than enhanced worth in relations” As a relational quality, de 德—like many of the other ethical concepts in this cluster—may focus on an individuate person, but it requires that person’s vital relations to exist and to persist. There is no de 德 without the response of others, and the value of de does not reside in a person’s motivations, actions, or character. It diffuses radially from the person outward along their relations of trust and collaboration, meeting the demands of the inherently interdependent human condition. Before relating this concept cluster to the broader category of the ethics of vital relationality, I will develop the related care ethical concept cluster.

3.3.2 Care Ethics

While the iterations of care ethics are diverse, Virginia Held enumerates five features that are uniform throughout the literature. First, “the central focus of the ethics of

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380 Ames 2011, 159.
care is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility.” 382 She continues, “Moralities built on the image of the independent, autonomous, rational individual largely overlook the reality of human dependence and the morality for which it calls.” 383

Second, “in the epistemological process of trying to understand what morality would recommend and what it would be morally best for us to do and to be, the ethics of care values emotion rather than rejects it.” 384 Importantly, this is not simply raw emotion, but a cultivated emotional intelligence. She writes, “we need an ethics of care, not just care itself.” 385 I would push this further to say that this reasoned emotional intelligence also requires a great deal of moral imagination and creativity. As I argue in the concluding section, the radical particularity of these vital relations and the messiness this particularity entails often require a pragmatic creativity rather than cultivated states of character or psychological traits.

Third, “the ethics of care rejects the view of the dominant moral theories that the more abstract the reasoning about a moral problem the better because the more likely to avoid bias and arbitrariness, the more nearly to achieve impartiality.” 386 The ethics of care attends to an oft-neglected middle ground between abstracted individuals and abstracted groups: persons in caring relations with others. She writes, “Persons in caring relations are acting for self-and-other together. Their characteristic stance is neither

382 Held 2006, 10. My emphasis.
383 Held 2006, 10. My emphasis.
384 Held 2006, 10.
385 Held 2006, 11.
386 Held 2006, 11.
egoistic nor altruistic; these are the options in a conflictual situation, but the well-being of a caring relation involves the cooperative well-being of those in the relation and the well-being of the relation itself.” Already, conduct in caring relations is poorly captured by the virtuous biconditional: “a caring relation obtains if and only if person A and person B manifest x, y, and z traits.” This caring conduct is a deep collaboration in which “moral credit” is not the concern. Moreover, in addition to attending to the parties in the relationship, care ethics has one attend to “the well-being of the relation itself.” From a care ethical perspective, good relations do not follow from the interaction of good characters alone. There are more facets to the situation on which one must focus.

Fourth, “like much feminist thought in many areas, [care ethics] reconceptualizes traditional notions about the public and the private.” Family, friend, and social ties are based on trust in noncontractual contexts that a contractual model would “undermine or at least obscure.” In other words, the ethics of care take seriously unchosen, emotional, and unequal relations.

Fifth and finally, care ethics begins with relational persons—persons are morally and epistemologically relational and interdependent—as opposed to either the rational autonomous agents of liberal politics or the self-interested individuals of liberal economics. This point was established in the previous chapter and holds that after childhood we are fundamentally interdependent and varyingy vulnerable throughout our lives; “that we can think and act as if we were independent depends on a network of

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388 Held 2006, 12.
social relations making it possible for us to do so. And our relations are part of what constitute our identity." 391

When care ethicists develop an ethics from this vitally relational picture of so-called independence supported by deeply interdependent relations, they argue that ethical discourse should focus “on social relations and the social practices and values that sustain them.” 392 Caring relations are ethically basic; that is to say the premise of care ethics is that the vitally relational person requires care to grow. Recall the caring relation articulated in chapter 2 above. There I followed Vrinda Dalmiya in analyzing the relation into five aspects, caring about, caring for, taking care, care reception, and caring about caring. Caring about is a matter of attentiveness and recognition of other persons in their particularity. Caring for involves motivational displacement and empathic identification with the cared-for’s needs and vulnerabilities. Taking care is the labor of caring. Care reception is the acknowledgement of the carer’s labor. And finally caring about caring is the reflective endorsement of a caring relationship.

In the next section I analyze the concept clusters of care ethics and Confucian role ethics in contrast with the virtue ethical framework and identify a relational locus of ethical value as well as an alternative ethical orientation. I argue that this new framework, the ethics of vital relationality, provides not only unique resources for ethics but also a different approach to ethics.

391 Held 2006, 13.
3.3.3 The Vitally Relational Concept Clusters

Turning first to the concept clusters for care ethics and Confucian role ethics, we find many concepts consistent with some forms of virtue ethics. From care ethics we have the following in common or consistent with virtue ethical concept clusters:

Vulnerability, dependence, unchosen situations/relations, emotional intelligence, empathy, responsiveness, receptivity

From Confucian role ethics:

Learning, personal cultivation, tendencies, harmony, empathy, ritual propriety, situational appropriateness, heartmind

But once we highlight the focus on relations, the concept clusters of care ethics and Confucian role ethics diverge from those of virtue ethics. In care ethics one finds:

Noncontractual trust, needs, responsibility, interdependence, cooperative well-being, the relation itself involving caring about (attentiveness and recognition), caring for (motivational displacement and empathic identification), taking care (labor), care reception (acknowledgement), and caring about caring (reflective endorsement)
And in Confucian role ethics one finds:

Human becoming, intergenerational relations, relational virtuosity/consummate conduct, making good on one’s word, trust, interdependence, mutuality, family feeling, excelling ethically

In and of themselves, the concept clusters do not carry us all the way to distinguishing these families of ethics, but notice the locus of value for the virtue ethical groupings and the locus of value for the latter groupings.

When one surveys the care ethical and role ethical concept clusters in relation to the virtue clusters earlier, there is a clear difference in focus. The virtue ethicist remains focused on individual agents, internal states of character, and dispositions. For instance, translating ren as benevolence reduces the richness of this concept to a psychological disposition; similarly, translating it as “humaneness” suggests that it is simply an inborn potential, a latent human nature, when in fact it is an achievement, it is “what one is able to make of oneself given the interface between one’s native, initial conditions and one’s natural, social, and cultural environments.” In comparison, the above vitally relational cluster is foundationally relational, and corresponds to a vitally relational person, as described in chapter 2. Qualities, such as trust, attach to persons, situations, and relations, all at once. The conversation Confucian role ethicists are having is more holistic than that of the Confucian virtue ethicists.

Care ethics offers a similar view. Noddings observes that while much of moral theory, traditional and contemporary, is deeply interested in relations in terms of how we

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393 Ames 2011, 177.
should be treating each other, these relations are not considered ethically basic; the perspective of dominant moral theories and virtue ethics differs in that “it looks analytically at individuals, at how they construct relations, make choices, and conduct themselves in relations. *It rarely recognizes relation as the incubator of both individuals and virtues.*” 394 Held argues along the same lines that “virtue ethics focuses especially on the states of character of individuals, whereas the ethics of care concerns itself especially with caring relations. Caring relations have primary value.” 395

Locating ethical value in relations, as opposed to individuals, entails a shift in ethical orientation from traits, dispositions, decision procedures, utility, and so on, to situations, trust, ongoing collaborative growth, and the like. A (perhaps overly) simple distinction between virtue ethics and the ethics of vital relationality is the driving question behind each conversation. Ames and Rosemont note with regard to Confucian role ethics that it “begins by considering what is happening and ends by trying to make what is happening happen better.” 396 I argue the same holds for care ethics. This is subtly different from the virtue ethical question of “What kind of character must I have to live a good (or the best) life?” As will become clear in this section, the former promotes interdependent collaboration and interpersonal expression while the latter promotes individuated judgment and an analytic split between self and other.

The ethical orientation of care ethics and Confucian role ethics takes vital relations as its starting point. Starting with those relations near at hand involves far less judgment of individuals, actions, or habits, and far more attention to the critical need to

395 Held 2006, 19.
396 Ames and Rosemont 2011, 23.
better our current situations and strengthen our relations of interdependence. In short, care ethics and Confucian role ethics, in taking persons to be vitally relational in nature and ethical relations to be fundamentally of trust and mutual interdependence, sees an individualist discourse—such as that found in virtue ethics—to be antithetical to the project of living well together. As such, both are prospective, focused on growth and learning, attendant to relational dimensions of life, and oriented toward living better together.

Held characterizes the moral epistemology of the ethics of care in the following way:

It stresses sensitivity to the multiple relevant considerations in particular contexts, cultivating the traits of character and of relationship that sustain caring, and promoting the dialogue that corrects and enriches the perspective of any one individual. The ethics of care is hospitable to the methods of discourse ethics, though with an emphasis on actual dialogue that empowers its participants to express themselves rather than on discourse so ideal that actual differences of viewpoint fall away.”

In beginning with concrete relations of vulnerability and interdependence and extrapolating from this situation the need for trust, mutual concern, and collaboration, ethical discourse has formed differently in the care ethical and Confucian role ethical conversations. The concern is not with theory building or conclusive moral judgment. Something else is going on.

Starting from a similar insight into moral life, Margaret Urban Walker proposes the *expressive-collaborative model* of ethical discourse. She writes that “this view prescribes an investigation of morality as a socially embodied medium of mutual understanding and negotiation between people over their responsibility for things open to human care and response.”\(^{398}\) Morality is *expressive* in that it “allows and requires people to understand themselves as bearers of particular identities and actors in various relationships that are defined by certain values.”\(^{399}\) In this way, “people learn to understand each other…and to express their understandings through *practices of responsibility* in which they assign, accept, or deflect responsibilities for different things.”\(^{400}\) Morality is *collaborative* in that “in all of its expressions, morality is fundamentally *interpersonal*; it arises out of and is reproduced or modified in what goes on between or among people…we construct and sustain it together.”\(^{401}\)

Walker has four premises to her project: First, “morality itself consists in practices, not theories.”\(^{402}\) She writes that, “theories of morality are attempts to find out what people are doing in bringing moral evaluation to bear (in judgment, feeling, and response) on what they and others do and care about, and whether some ways of doing what they are doing are better ways than others.”\(^{403}\) Second, “the practices characteristic of morality are practices of responsibility.”\(^{404}\) The insight here is that “in the ways we

\(^{398}\) Walker 2007, 9.

\(^{399}\) Walker 2007, 10.

\(^{400}\) Walker 2007, 10.

\(^{401}\) Walker 2007, 10.

\(^{402}\) Walker 2007, 15.

\(^{403}\) Walker 2007, 16.

\(^{404}\) Walker 2007, 16.
assign, accept, or deflect responsibilities, we express our understandings of our own and others’ identities, relationships, and values.”

Third, “morality is not socially modular.” It is not socially modular because “social segmentation and hierarchical power relations are the rule, rather than the exception, in human societies,” and therefore “the commonplace reality is different moral identities in differentiated moral-social worlds.” And finally, “moral theorizing and moral epistemology need to be freed from the impoverishing legacies of ideality and purity that make most of most people’s moral lives disappear, or render those lives unintelligible.”

The ethics of vital relationality that is emerging here fits this model of ethical discourse. In starting with vital relations of vulnerability and interdependence, ethics is a matter of a growing efficacy in responding to others and nurturing those relations that shape oneself. We are all in a constant process of growth, and this process is irreducibly relational. Not just flourishing but surviving is a matter of navigating a social landscape and nurturing vital relations through collaborative living and the cultivation of trust. Importantly, the nurturance of these relations and cultivation of trust is not served through the constant application of principles or other standards to actions or individuals in order to judge them to be good or bad, right or wrong. Built into this perspective is the understanding that we are all in this together and must focus on making things better, not determining the value of what happened. This is not to say that determining certain actions to be right or wrong, or determining certain character types to be good or bad, is not

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405 Walker 2007, 16.
408 Walker 2007, 19.
valuable and at times necessary. The point here is that we cannot narrow our ethical discourse to these questions alone. Doing so, as I have demonstrated virtue ethics does, necessarily obfuscates and neglects the vital relations structuring our lives. One cannot develop the ethics of vital relationality within a virtue ethical framework.

3.4 Conclusion

We can now resolve the question that was raised in chapter 1: Are care ethics and Confucian role ethics simply species of virtue ethics? Decidedly not. When the respective concept clusters are analyzed along with the respective conceptions of relational personhood, it is clear these ethics are oriented toward relationships and relational persons. The addition of relationships to the discourse makes these ethics more capacious than virtue ethics as variously conceived today. Moreover, as virtue ethics stands now, it seems implausible that a virtue ethical orientation could be expanded to include these vital relations without simultaneously ceasing to be a true virtue ethics. Preoccupations with assessments of individual characters or their persistent traits impedes the sort of collaborative living that vital relations demand. But the ethics of vital relationality, as it stands now, is not without its own philosophical challenges.

The effect these two chapters have had is to distance care ethics and Confucian role ethics—the ethics of vital relationality—from both liberal individualism and the virtue ethics inspired by those disenchanted by liberal individualism in recent decades. This raises a host of questions regarding the viability of these ethics as contemporary ethical and political orientations.
The first set of concerns focus on persons within intimate relations. Without recourse to discrete individualism and autonomy, can the ethics of vital relationality adequately conceptualize and then also concretely address relationships of intimate oppression, exploitation, and violence? This is especially important for women and children, who are disproportionately the victims of such situations. The individualist discourse I have just derided seems to have an important role to play in being able to live collaboratively in an imperfect world. Is the ethics of vital relationality capacious enough to accommodate such conversation?

The second set of concerns extends outward from the family. Having developed in contrast with the rights-bearing individual and the justice perspective, can the ethics of vital relationality address the moral status of distant others or is this perspective inherently local and parochial? Related to this is the question of whether or not the ethics of vital relationality can accommodate a political perspective. In focusing on individuated persons and their particular relational contexts, does the ethics of vital relationality ignore systemic issues of sexism, racism, classism, and so on? If the ethics of vital relationality can identify these issues, does it have the resources to address them? I treat these two sets of problems in chapters 4 and 5, respectively.
CHAPTER FOUR
UNIQUE PERSONS AND CRITICAL RELATIONALITY

This project began with the observation that both care ethics and Confucian role ethics have something unique to contribute to contemporary ethics, namely the richly relational foundation of our human condition and the implications this has on how we talk about persons and value. In chapter 1 I described the ways in which these two “different voices” have been marginalized and argued for developing and incorporating them into the contemporary philosophical conversation. In chapter 2 I argued for the vital relationality of persons as a distinct sort of relational constitution. In chapter 3 I argued that the popular transition to a virtue ethical framework may mitigate against an individualistic ontology and may work to value relationships as social goods but such a virtue ethical framework remains committed to an individualistic discourse that ultimately covers over the valuable contributions vital relationality makes to ethics. A focus on characters and their traits does not adequately accommodate the existential trust necessary for the development and persistence of such characters. Value is relationally located, and exclusive focus on character traits cannot accurately identify value as such.

These three chapters taken together establish what an ethics of vital relationality is in its own right, and many accounts of care ethics and Confucian role ethics have stopped here. For instance, Grace Clement writes, “The ethic of care focuses on preventing conflicts. Preventing conflicts seems at least as important as resolving conflicts that have
already arisen, and is not restricted to one sphere of activity. Similarly, Henry Rosemont and Roger Ames write of their Confucian role ethics that

The ultimate contribution that cultivated family relations makes to the vision of a moral life is preemptive rather than retributive. Rather than offering a strategy for rational and principled calculations when confronted by difficult cases, it provides a fabric of family solidarity that in important degree can preclude the emergence of disintegrative conduct. Better to preclude spousal abuse in the first place than to address the unhappy problem after the fact.

I agree that the preemption of future conflicts is essential to our betting our lives and the world we live in and that the ethics of vital relationality is well-suited to this task. However, I think the present analysis of vital relations must go further than offering preemptive visions. We do not enter ethical reflection as blank slates, nor do the arguments put forth here enter communities with as-yet unshaped values. The present work on vital relations must now take responsibility for how they will be received in contemporary society and recognize that the close relations I have identified as vital are not necessarily beneficial but are often repressive, abusive, and violent. Something must be said about the internal resources available here to resist and resolve existing social issues. To take a concrete example, the valuing of the mother-child relationship without proper attention to how the mother-child relationship can be exploited can serve to perpetuate abusive interpersonal relations as well as exploitative gender relations at the social and political level. It is to the positive project of critically developing the ethics of

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409 Clement 1998, 82.
410 Rosemont and Ames 2009, 52.
vital relationality that I know turn by way of responding to a series of concerns raised regarding an ethics grounded in relationality.

The foundational relationality argued for thus far is open to serious objections, and not without justification. Individualism is the basis for the rights and justice discourses that are protecting and bettering the lives of millions, if not billions, of people. Moreover, rooting value in familial relations is precisely what those on the wrong side of this justice debate are doing, as traditional versions of the institution of the family ground some of the worst oppression we see, and exclusive focus on familial, communal, and political ties are used to justify horrific acts of violence. In this chapter and the next I take this cluster of issues head on.

Here I will address questions of interpersonal exploitation and abuse, arguing for the development of a sense of integrity that does not preclude relationality, but rather grounds itself in relations. This sense of integrity as reliability also calls for the autonomy competencies that have gained considerable traction in feminist literature. From classical Chinese philosophy, I then introduce the notion of cheng 誠 as an ideal that resists the false opposition between individuated persons and relations that persists in the discussion of relational integrity and autonomy.

In chapter 5 I will build from this notion of cheng 誠. This notion leads naturally to the extension of moral concern to distant others and to the provision of a baseline level of moral obligation to all persons. I end with the observation that this extension to distant others also entails recognizing the inherently political dimension of all of our relations, thus arguing that consummate persons in the ethics of vital relationality must be cognizant of the political implications of and influences on their actions. This analysis
concludes with the articulation of a sense of social justice that is grounded in a social and political relational ontology consistent with the relational ontology discussed in chapter 2 with regard to persons.

I turn now to the interpersonal concerns that arise through a so-called devaluing of persons in favor of relations.

4.1 “Sacrificing the Self”: An Overview of Objections

As mentioned above, the ethics of vital relationality brings our constitutive relationality to the foreground in our conception of personhood and focuses our moral attention and ethical discourse on relations of trust and interdependence. Feminists have rightly raised concerns about how such a relational focus could prevent us from identifying issues of exploitation and could possibly encourage the continued self-sacrifice of those who usually take on the caring or benefactor roles in these relations, namely women. There is the correlated danger that those with power and authority in the relationships could dominate others in relationships, projecting their own values onto those unable to resist. In short, the shift to a relational discourse is seen as sacrificing the notion of selfhood, which has the result of sacrificing the selves of some to those who would exploit, abuse, and dominate them. In response to this group of concerns over “self-sacrifice,” dominant moral theorists and virtue ethicists alike argue that relational
ethics (of any sort) fails to recognize the common core of humanity in all individuals. This can manifest in a variety of related problems.

First, vitally relational persons, when responding to the needs of others, could be overwhelmed and subsumed by their relations. Following Margaret Urban Walker, I refer to this as the “plague of commitments” objection. Second, in being relationally constituted by, at least initially, unchosen relations, the vitally relational person may be morally obligated or ontologically damned to maintain and to identify with corrupting, exploitative, or abusive relations. Following Vrinda Dalmiya, I refer to this as the “no exit” objection. Third, there is the concern raised by some that the focus on responsiveness to needs or the maintenance and cultivation of constitutive relations precludes the pursuit of otherwise personal projects. Since this issue identifies the fear that the vitally relational person cannot have meaningful or creative self-fulfilling projects, I term this the “truncated freedom” objection. Common to all three of these objections is the fear that a focus on vital relations at the ontological and ethical levels neglects the uniqueness of persons. Taking each objection in turn, I will argue here that grounding an ethics in vital relations need not mean we cannot value unique persons, and moreover that there are internal resources in care ethics and Confucian role ethics that can respond to all three objections and thus enrich the conception of the vitally relational person.

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411 Martha Nussbaum champions this line of critique. In “Golden Rule Arguments: A Missing Thought?” she identifies the notion of human dignity as the “missing thought” in Chinese philosophy, and in “The Feminist Critique of Liberalism” she takes care ethicists, communitarians, and other non-liberals to task for failing to appreciate individualism (Nussbaum 2003 and 1999a).
4.2 The “Plague of Commitments” Objection

Having established that we are relationally constituted and that value is located in vital relations characterized by trust, intimacy, and a profound interdependence, there is the real concern that in running from discrete individualism and the specter of the self-sufficient person, we have landed ourselves in the more problematic position of losing ourselves to the needs of others. Margaret Urban Walker has identified this issue as the “plague of commitments,” and rather than turning to individualist forms of autonomy and freedom to justify ignoring the needs of others—the rejection of which began this present study of vital relations—Walker develops a sense of integrity aimed not at discrete wholeness or completeness, but rather at a sense of reliability over time.

In developing her ethics of responsibility, Walker emphasizes the obligations we all have to those who are dependent upon us, but she also observes that many of these privileged lines of obligation are unchosen, and that even those that are chosen can become overwhelming as they evolve (or devolve). She asks,

Is there any end to the number or types of demands that on this view morally claim my attention? Could a life responsive along these lines exhibit the commitments and concerns distinctive of the one who lives it? How could a person make, or keep, this life her or his “own”? Responsibility ethics might seem to defeat personally meaningful life ordering by visiting a veritable plague of commitments on each of us. It might even be claimed that such a view ignores, thwarts, or threatens a person’s integrity.⁴¹²

⁴¹² Walker 2007, 114.
Carol Gilligan identifies this issue in her seminal work on care ethics when she writes of several women subjects that “their various resolutions of this problem reveal, successively, the self-blinding nature of the opposition between selfishness and responsibility, the challenge of the concept of rights to the virtue of selflessness, and the way in which an understanding of rights transforms the understanding of care and relationships.” Gilligan refers to this plague of commitments as “the conflict between integrity and care,” a conflict between the ambiguity of our connections and separations, a conflict between the so-called selfish motivations and our so-called selfless moralities. In other words, “any human being, immersed in the complex, varied, and changing relationships and episodic contacts of real life might be scattered, depleted, and ‘constantly compromised’ (Gilligan 1982, 157) by an unlimited demand for responsiveness.”

We can recognize the existence of this same concern within the ethics of vital relationality presented here. But all of this hinges on what one means by “integrity,” for whatever we take that to mean, it will have to preserve and value our vital relations for it to be of any benefit to the present work. It will also have to account for the unfolding narrativity of our persons, our existence as unique human becomings.

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4.2.1 Integrity as Reliability

Standard accounts of integrity are incompatible with the model of personhood at work here. Integrity often carries with it the connotations of wholeness, completeness, intactness, or purity of the self. It is the capability to withstand the pressures of others, to preserve one’s true self in the face of opposition, and to remain true to oneself over the course of a lifetime. All of these implications point to an individualism of some sort or another that has been dismissed in the previous chapters. Acknowledging this conventional interpretation of integrity, Walker takes the notion in a different direction to account for how a person can maintain a sense of uniqueness within constitutive relations.

4.2.1.1 Walker and Narrative Persons

I have already highlighted Walker’s work on the expressive-collaborative model for ethical theory. Here I will focus on her work on integrity as reliability. First and foremost, her description of the person is attractive, given the present work on vital relations. She writes, “within any life there may be multiple actual narratives of a given type—more than one story of identity, relationship, or value. With respect to relationships this is obvious. I am someone’s daughter, sister, lover, friend; a colleague, teacher, and neighbor to more; a friend of several kinds to many others; and so on.”416 The parallels here with the vital role-relations elaborated in chapter 2 are clear. We are

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416 Walker 2007, 123.
related to particular others, and these relations themselves are relatively particularized.

She writes later that the sort of self that fits her ethics

is one in which a self itself is understood in terms of a history of relationships among its various temporally distant and concurrent aspects. We are layers of various overlapping histories of traces of many encounters and relationships; these coexist in various states of stratification or alternation as we live our lives.\textsuperscript{417}

Importantly, Walker does write that “personally ‘constitutive’ commitments [i.e., relations] carry a life forward, giving it meaning and making it one’s own.”\textsuperscript{418} While she does not necessarily point to caring relations, she does state that she sees this conception of the person to be consistent with care ethics (her ethics, is, after all, an ethics of responsibility).

4.2.1.2 Walker’s Integrity as Reliability

In beginning her response to the plague of commitments objection, Walker first distinguishes integrity from autonomy. Displaying integrity is not the same as possessing autonomy. Not choosing one’s lot in life and having circumstances override one’s own desires can illustrate a lack of autonomy, but one can still respond to these situations with integrity.\textsuperscript{419} Integrity is also not tied up in rational control over or endorsement of one’s

\textsuperscript{417} Walker 2007, 125.
\textsuperscript{418} Walker 2007, 114.
\textsuperscript{419} Walker 2007, 130.
“true” core self, but it does imply a sense of being “true to” oneself as a process of
growth in relations with others.

She also distinguishes her sense of integrity as reliability from predominant
conceptions where one’s “whole life” is meant to be integrated according to a “career self”
or life plan. She writes, “When I try to imagine maximal integration I find myself
imagining something either desperately simple or intolerably suffocating.”
Thus integrity as reliability will allow for relatively localized, and perhaps relationally partial,
manifestations of integrity. The ethics of responsibility “does not support a view of
integrity that equates it with maximal evaluative integration, unconditional commitments,
or uncorrupted fidelity to a true self,” since these qualities are in conflict with “the
changing, deeply relational character of human lives and the ways we make sense of
them” and “do not reckon with how much and how inevitably most lives are entangled
with and given to others, as well as to chancy circumstances beyond our control.”

“Integrity” for Walker entails something different.

For Walker, integrity is a reliable accountability. The purpose of integrity as
reliability is “to maintain—or reestablish—our reliability in matters involving important
commitments and goods.” Rather than “global wholeness,” “inexorable consistency,”
“inward solidity,” “true selves,” and “certain overly ambitious or monopolistic narrative
demands on selves,” the focus with integrity as reliability is “local dependability,”
“responsiveness to the moral costs of error and change,” “flexible resiliency,” “to what

420 Walker 2007, 127.
421 Walker 2007, 112.
422 Walker 2007, 113.
and to whom a person is true,” and “the role of stories in making sense of lives.”\textsuperscript{424} Here we are focused on a “reliable accountability” and a “resilient dependability,” which is to say a continued positive contribution to constitutive relations with others.\textsuperscript{425}

Walker argues that it is the coherence of our narratives of relationship, of identity, and of values, “and the connections among them, that make a distinctive moral life out of what could otherwise be an odd lot of disparate parts.”\textsuperscript{426} And just as the person is contextualized, so too are the standards of what counts as “genuine” integrity. There is no formulaic answer to the question of how much coherence or continuity satisfies the demands of this sort of integrity, but we do have a notion of \textit{reliability} at our disposal.\textsuperscript{427} Since by “integrity” Walker is referring to a view that “reckons with how much of our lives is given to others, to change, and to things we cannot hope (and sometimes shouldn’t wish) to control,” our metaphor for integrity should be “the sturdiness of structures people have built, the property of holding up dependably given the purposes to which they are put and the conditions they might encounter.”\textsuperscript{428} Put into moral terms, we must aim for “reliability in the accounts we are prepared to give, act by, and stand by…and dependable responsiveness to the ongoing fit among our accounts, the ways we have acted, and the consequences and costs our actions have in fact incurred.”\textsuperscript{429}

Thus one can begin to see where integrity as reliability corresponds to traditional notions of integrity. A central aspect of integrity as reliability is “responsibly contributing

\textsuperscript{424} Walker 2007, 113.\textsuperscript{425} Walker 2007, 126.\textsuperscript{426} Walker 2007, 121.\textsuperscript{427} Walker 2007, 121.\textsuperscript{428} Walker 2007, 122.\textsuperscript{429} Walker 2007, 122.
to the common deliberative weal by testament of conviction and action under social pressure."\(^{430}\) Integrity as reliability means entering a situation with “firm and coherent convictions” and the courage to publicly express them, but it also means returning to a past situation with “various reparative responses” including possibly “changes of moral course.”\(^{431}\) This sense of integrity, then, maintains a sense of resiliency on a local level while allowing for a measure of moral transformation and human becoming that is often precluded in principled views of the moral life. Walker writes, “The point coming and going is our being reliably responsible in matters of our own and others’ goods, as well as keeping clear and vibrant the shared understanding of them.”\(^{432}\) Integrity as reliability is thus processual and social.

As just noted, integrity need not refer to an entire life. Integrity as reliability is “more or less local.”\(^{433}\) This sense of integrity does not require “a moral actor whose life is ‘of a piece,’ whose defining commitments are unconditional, or who is being faithful to a true self.”\(^{434}\) And in this sense, the vitally relational person is precisely the model of personhood that could benefit from such a notion of integrity as reliability, and Walker’s integrity as reliability is compelling. It establishes for us how a unique person could morally persist within a social environment with potentially overwhelming social demands. In other words, Walker provides us a piece of what we conceptually need to establish our value as unique persons within webs of constitutive relations. Those with

\(^{430}\) Walker 2007, 123.

\(^{431}\) Walker 2007, 123.

\(^{432}\) Walker 2007, 123.

\(^{433}\) Walker 2007, 125.

\(^{434}\) Walker 2007, 125.
reliability integrity help to maintain relations of responsibility and thus maintain those vital social connections we all need to grow, but they do so without sacrificing themselves to the group.

However, there is a worry that this is too descriptive, perhaps too focused on mere survival within a given social situation. Integrity as reliability is a laudable ideal, and it is especially valuable to those who find themselves with the bulk of caring and relational labor. One must not fragment due to the pulls of one’s various obligations and responsibilities. The concern is that maintaining reliability in one’s relations does not value the unique person enough. To push this concern as far as is reasonable: integrity as reliability only requires us to value unique persons enough to prevent them from “going to pieces.” “Reliability” is an other-oriented quality of our self-oriented “integrity,” and we thus risk valuing persons like carers only insofar as they continue to support and benefit others. This stops short of the sort of valued individuation we need to justify resisting interpersonal and social exploitation. We cannot settle for maintaining the existence of a future, especially since many of these constitutive relations are unchosen. We need the conceptual resources to justify severing or exiting unhealthy relations, and the justification cannot simply be that if one person monopolizes my time and efforts then I cannot help another deserving of my reliability. It is here that Victoria Davion and Diana Meyers are able to contribute a valuable conceptual resource.
4.3 The “No Exit” Objection

Whereas the “plague of commitments” objection is concerned with the dissolution of the unique person within a mass of others, the “no exit” objection focuses on specific relations. Dalmiya identifies the no exit objection as the concern that “caring can be a recipe for self-denial or self-sacrifice” since “many socially sanctioned relationships are exploitative and abusive—the relation of mothering included—and women need to learn, if necessary, to leave and sever such bonds.” In effect, the concern is that “the emphasis on the construction of a caring or relational selfhood is...at odds with the feminist goal of autonomy that supports breaking away from oppressive relations.”

This concern arises most directly as a response to Noddings’ early work on care ethics. In Caring, Noddings argues that we must be receptive to the needs of others, but she also acknowledges that sometimes we cannot meet these needs. When carers cannot meet the needs of particular others, even if this so-called failure is due to circumstances outside their control, they are acting under a “diminished ethical ideal.” If the carer actively severs the relationship and turns her back on someone who needs care, for whatever reason, she is irredeemably evil, without qualification. The first point—that we may be overwhelmed by our commitments and when that happens we are operating with a diminished ethical ideal—is answered with integrity as reliability above. We must value ourselves at least in so far as we can maintain enough of a sense of uniqueness to

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435 Dalmiya 2009, 196.
436 Dalmiya 2009, 196.
438 Noddings 1984, 115.
meet the needs of others. Therefore, the preservation of one’s person in these extreme situations represents an alternative emphasis rather than a diminished ideal. The second point—that carers possibly escaping exploitative and violent relations are themselves committing some evil act—must be addressed here.439

Claudia Card develops the no exit objection in terms of “the evils intimates do to intimates”440 and argues that “resting all of ethics on caring…seems in danger of valorizing relationships that are sheerly exploitative of our distinctively human capacity to take another’s point of view. It thereby threatens to exacerbate the positions of women and other care-takers in a sexist society.”441 By “sheer exploitation,” she means “valuing others and their capacities sheerly for what they contribute to ourselves and our projects, by contrast with valuing them for themselves, apart from our own development and projects.”442 This is precisely the danger I alluded to in my critique of integrity as reliability. We need more in our valuing of persons in their uniqueness than the acknowledgement that they should not be torn apart by conflicting and overwhelming interpersonal commitments.443

439 It is important to note that Noddings does not phrase her judgment of a carer’s flight in this way. The objection is rather the intuitively objectionable possibility that she leaves open and cannot address in her early formulation of care ethics.
440 Card 1990, 102.
441 Card 1990, 102.
442 Card 1990, 102.
443 It is worth noting here that when people are living well in their vital relations, these hard cases do not arise. In other words, the vision of flourishing in vital relations and social harmony are preemptive; situations that give rise to a plague of commitments and a need of “exits” only manifest when vital relations are ignored or targeted for abuse. My purpose here in addressing these hard cases is to bridge the gap between the moral vision of living well in relations and contemporary society. The vitally relational moral vision is not manifest in the world right now, and addressing these hard cases is necessary for any positive
The sorts of problem relationships Card has identified range from outright abusive intimate relationships to those where reasonable reciprocity does not take place. In particular, Card takes issue with the misleading characterization of the cared-for’s response to care. If deemed to be “reciprocity” (i.e., reciprocity as acknowledgement of care), it falls far short of what a mature, able-bodied partner should provide to complete the caring relation. It is at most “complementary behavior,” and “reciprocity” should be reserved for the genuinely caring labor the present carer receives later. Again, part of the issue here is reducing the caring relationship to a dyad, which by now is clearly understood to be an overly zealous analysis and perhaps nostalgia for the cleanliness of discursive individualism. But that there seems to be an undervaluing of the carer herself in care ethics is a point well-taken.

Barbara Houston has picked up on a similar issue with early care ethics. She notes that

if this ethic could be taken as an accurate description of women’s moral thinking, it might explain what reduces the ability of women to resist physical and sexual abuse. I thought Noddings had captured what it is that often induces a kind of moral paralysis in the one-caring in situations where she needs to act to protect herself: we feel responsible for the moral goodness of those who abuse us, exploit us, harm us.  

\[\text{transformation to occur. That key here is to address these hard cases without recourse to an individualistic ontology or discourse.}
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\[444\] Card 1990, 106.

\[445\] Houston 1990, 116.
She roots this problematic orientation in three features of early care ethics: “(1) the ambiguity of the moral worth of persons; (2) the valuation of caring relations in abstraction from their social, political and economic contexts; and (3) the inordinate value placed on caring in contrast with other moral values.” In short, there is nothing within the ethic as presented in Noddings’ first book to justify the termination of abusive and exploitative relations, especially when the ethic is adopted within a sexist society.

So the question for the present project is: How do we value ourselves as foci of vital relations to a degree where we can not only preserve our unique persons in the face of multiple conflicting commitments but can also assert our uniqueness over and against the demands of certain others? Moreover, how do we conceptualize this assertion in a way that does not ultimately undermine the vital relations model developed in the preceding chapters?

4.3.1 Relational Autonomy and Autonomy Competencies

To be fair to Noddings, she now acknowledges this issue. In her most recent work she writes, “the most damaging feminist objection to care theory is that it seems to endorse the self-sacrifice and subordination of women. It is, therefore, especially important for care theorists to suggest and elaborate upon a defensible view of autonomy.” She prefers the term “limited control” to “relational autonomy,” but

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446 Houston 1990, 116.
447 Noddings 2013, 111.
understands the strategic importance of such terminology.\textsuperscript{448} Care theorists must acknowledge that “although we are defined in relation, we are individuals—separate physical entities and different selves.”\textsuperscript{449} I believe Noddings goes too far in asserting that relational persons are separate individuals, but it is the case that we must be able to think for ourselves and where necessary recraft our identities to protect ourselves against exploitative and abusive relations. What the relational ontology of chapter 2 provides to this problem is (1) a sense of urgency in remedying exploitative and abusive relations, since these relations are shaping how we will grow in the future by instilling certain values and habits in us, and (2) a recognition that relations with others are a crucial resource to be cultivated and leveraged. However, the ability to navigate between the negative and positive relations involves certain skills.

Virginia Held has done considerable work to make care ethics a feminist ethics, and to this end she endorses Meyers’ autonomy competencies and reminds us that “as we modify and often distance ourselves from existing relations, it is for the sake of better and often more caring relations, rather than for the splendid independence, self-sufficiency, and easy isolation of the traditional liberal ideal of the autonomous rational agent.”\textsuperscript{450} She argues that as opposed to the descriptively false liberal individual that is “impoverished also as an ideal,” care ethical relational autonomy “is a capacity to reshape and cultivate new relations, not to ever more closely resemble the unencumbered abstract rational self of liberal political and moral theories. Those motivated by the ethics of care would seek

\textsuperscript{448} Noddings 2013, 111.
\textsuperscript{449} Noddings 2013, 113.
\textsuperscript{450} Held 2006, 49.
to become more admirable relational persons in better caring relations."^451 Sarah Hoagland voices a similar position when arguing that “I must be able to assess any relationship for abuse/oppression and withdraw if I find it to be so. I am not full of guilt; I feel none. *I have grown, I have learned something.* I understand my part in the relationship. I separate. I will not be there again. *Far from diminishing my ethical self, I am enhancing it.*"^452

Continuing from the above analysis of integrity as reliability, one can now see that the valuing of one’s own relational integrity entails a sense of relational autonomy, where resistance to coercion while remaining within a relational web is possible. Victoria Davion argues that moral integrity requires an unconditional commitment “to keep track of oneself, not to betray oneself,” which “requires that in each situation one pay careful attention to what one is doing and who one is becoming in doing it” as a dynamic being who is “constantly growing and changing.”^453 This “growing and changing” involves, at the very least, broadening one’s inner circle of vital relations, and in the difficult cases we have been discussing in this chapter, it may also involve moving to a new “family” of intimates altogether. Davion’s sense of integrity in turn requires careful selection and evaluation of who one is being transformed by, and this evaluation can be accomplished with autonomy competencies (to be discussed in detail below).^454 Important to note before developing a notion of relational autonomy is that the so-called autonomy of a responsible and relational person is always in service to a relational sense of moral

^451 Held 2006, 14.
^452 Hoagland 1990, 111. Emphasis mine.
^453 Davion 1993, 175.
^454 Davion 1993, 176.
integrity. In other words, the capacity for even limited self-determination in circumscribed situations is not a value in itself. It is valuable in so far as it enhances a processual and relational integrity of the individuated person.

Diana Meyers begins her analysis of autonomy competency with “the conviction that autonomy is not a figment of the philosophical imagination; rather it is a phenomenon that most people have some experience of and that they commonly value (in my opinion, rightly so).”\(^{455}\) Meyers continues that the “experience of self-understanding and self-realization has been crystallized in the ideas of authenticity and self-governance.”\(^{456}\)

“Authenticity” here should not be understood as a predetermined core self or as a career self. Meyers recommends “viewing the authentic self as the collocation of attributes that emerges as an individual exercises self-discovery and self-definition skills.”\(^{457}\) In particular, she is discussing the possibilities for authenticity in intersectional subjects. She writes that autonomy competencies allow intersectional subjects to “analyze their position in social hierarchies, interpret the psychic impact of their social experience, and reconfigure their identities as members of social groups. In so doing, they constitute authentic intersectional identities.”\(^{458}\) The authenticity, then, is between blind adherence to the forces of socialization and complete immunity to socialization. Instead, “it entails analyzing the social significance of one’s community of origin, disclosing to oneself the ways in which associated norms have become embedded in one’s own cognitive and

\(^{455}\) Meyers 2000, 151.

\(^{456}\) Meyers 2000, 152.

\(^{457}\) Meyers 2000, 154.

motivational structure, appreciating how entrenched they are, and assuming responsibility for the ways in which one may enact them. *Autonomy unfolds in situ, and autonomous individuals must work with whatever material is at hand.* 459 Thus the project of achieving an always-evolving sense of authenticity is in service to achieving some measure of autonomy or self-governance.

For Meyers, relational autonomy requires this sense of authenticity (i.e., self-knowledge and self-definition) and self-direction, all of which are difficult for intersectional subjects, and, I would add, for vitally relational persons as well. 460 Self-definition requires the following autonomy competencies: 461

1. Introspective skills that sensitize individuals to their own feelings and desires, that enable them to interpret their subjective experience, and that help them judge how good a likeness a self-portrait is
2. Imaginative skills that enable individuals to envisage a range of self-concepts they might adopt
3. Memory skills that enable individuals to recall relevant experiences not only from their own lives but also experiences that associates have recounted or that they have encountered in literature or other artforms
4. Communication skills that enable individuals to get the benefit of others’ perceptions, background knowledge, insights, advice, and support
5. Analytical and reasoning skills that enable individuals to compare different self-concepts and to assess the relative merits of these alternatives
6. Volitional skills that enable individuals to resist pressure from others to embrace a conventional self-concept and that enable them to maintain their

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460 Meyers 2000, 156.
461 Meyers 2000, 166. Enumerated skills quoted directly.
commitment to the self-portrait that they consider genuinely their own, that is, authentic

7. Interpersonal skills that enable individuals to join forces to challenge and change social norms

This sort of self-definition is incredibly difficult. It requires a heterodox appropriation of one’s own cultural resources and often the borrowing of resources from other cultures to be synthesized and used in novel ways. These subjects “are exceptionally dedicated and intrepid, and they need proficiencies that are sadly uncommon.” Ultimately, “self-definition is best viewed...as an open-ended process of reflection, reconsideration, revision, and refinement, and self-portraits are best viewed as works in progress. Authentic intersectional selves are never finalized,” but rather always cocreatively evolving with their respective group identities.

Meyers writes, “we should understand personal integration as the emergent intelligibility of an individual’s autonomous self-discovery and self-definition. Moreover, since authenticity relies on intrapsychic tensions to spark personal development and social dissent, since it is compatible with ambivalence, and since it languishes if an individual cannot tolerate provisionality and rushes to closure, having an authentic self is best understood as the result of an ongoing activity of persons.” Self-knowledge and self-definition are “akin to improvisational orchestration.” The capability behind this orchestration is autonomy competency.

462 Meyers 2000, 166.
464 Meyers 2000, 172
In the previous section, Walker offered us the foundations for valuing unique persons; the ethics of vital relationality involves the relational sense of integrity as reliability. As such, the ethics of vital relationality values unique persons at least enough to ensure they are not overrun by a plague of commitments. Here I have taken the valuation of unique persons a step further. If integrity is a processual quality and we are constituted by vital relations with others, then the protection and cultivation of our persons requires some sort of self-direction. Meyers’ autonomy competencies meet this requirement and provide the conceptual resources for valuing ourselves as a focus of vital relations of responsibility while also taking some measure of responsibility for our own person as an evolving narrative. This element responds to the no exit objection in that it offers us a vantage point from which to evaluate our relations and determine if they are conducive to the sort of future we wish to have. Put another way, integrity as reliability illustrates how a vitally relational person responds to immediate demands and repairs past ruptures within relations, while autonomy competencies are the skills that allow vitally relational persons to shape the future.

Autonomy competencies fall short, however, of providing the sort of content necessary for making said judgment. In other words, they offer the formal capacity for self-direction and valuing individuated persons as they assert themselves over prevailing relations or others, but they do not provide the vision of what a consummate uniqueness would be. We want a sense of integrity that synthesizes relational and personal consummation. For this, the Confucian canon will again prove helpful, and the benefit of

466 Meyers 2000, 173.
this comparison will go both ways as the discussion of autonomy competencies should add a critical dimension to Confucian role-relationality.

4.4 The “Truncated Freedom” Objection

Thus far I have argued that vitally relational persons need not necessarily succumb to a plague of commitments or become overly diffused throughout a field of social relations. Integrity as reliability requires an ability to withstand the various social forces pushing and pulling on one, a more or less localized ability to persist as a unique person. I have also argued that this sense of dynamic and relational integrity makes use of autonomy competencies in order to achieve with varying degrees of success a measure of self-knowledge and self-definition and therefore self-direction. This allows one not simply to preserve oneself within a social environment but to positively assert oneself and cultivate one’s relations—and thus one’s person—with a certain ideal in mind. However, a question remains as to how these responses to potential objections do not in fact return us to the individualist discourse I pushed away from in chapter 3. Am I not, after having rejected individualist frameworks, utilizing those same frameworks and conceptual resources to respond to the individualist objections to vital relationality? This concern must be taken seriously, for a false distinction between relational constitution and individualism has persisted in the literature and held back meaningful advances in the new direction I see care ethics and Confucian role ethics pointing. I will turn to the Zhongyong for a persuasive vision of what the consummation of constitutive relations in
unique persons looks like, and in turn will introduce a critical element to what is typically read as a religious text.

What the use of *cheng* 誠 provides here is a persuasive account of how to value both self and others in relation and to do so in a manner that optimizes and enhances value in our everyday lives. Hoagland calls for this mutual consummation with attention to difference when she identifies the unnecessary opposition of relations to individuals in her critique of Noddings’ *Caring*. Hoagland observes that the other-directed nature of caring and the relational constitution of self as portrayed by Noddings means “the only time I may focus on my own goals and have that be an ethical matter is as a cared-for—when it is important to someone else that I pursue my goals as a way of having their caring received.”\(^\text{467}\) As Hoagland observes, relations are central to ethics, but relations involve at least two beings. Why does care ethics focus so exclusively on one of those beings? “One who cares must perceive herself not just as both separate and related, but as ethically both separate and related; otherwise she cannot acknowledge difference,” which masks all the pernicious power relations of contemporary society.\(^\text{468}\)

Ivanhoe’s objection to the role-bearing person exemplifies this false opposition. In focusing on the cultivation of one’s role-relations, Rosemont has allegedly omitted any sense of a distinct personality. The role-bearing persons view has “implications concerning the degree to which cultivated Confucians lack a substantial sense of being individuals with distinct personalities.”\(^\text{469}\) That consummation of one’s personhood

\(^{467}\) Hoagland 1990, 110.

\(^{468}\) Hoagland 1990, 111.

\(^{469}\) Ivanhoe 2008, 42.
involves becoming one’s various roles “leaves little room for any distinctive sense of such people as individuals with their own projects and personalities.”

In searching for a classical Confucian notion to resolve our individuation problems, the most promising place to start is perhaps cheng 誠, which carries with it a robust sense of uniqueness entailing integrity, sincerity, and in situ creativity.

4.4.1 The Etymology and Translation of Cheng 誠

In Mencius 4A12 one finds the following line: “For those who are true to themselves [cheng 誠] not to be able to move others has never happened; for those who are not true to be able to move others has also never happened.” This notion of being true to oneself seems to be the notion we are searching after here. According to Roger Ames and David Hall, cheng 誠 “is more than being true to oneself” since one’s so-called self is relationally constituted. Cheng 誠 “expresses the dynamic process of fostering ‘true relations’ through effective communication...[and] means being trustworthy and true in one’s associations.” They note that the character itself is “etymologically constituted by ‘to speak (yan 言)’ and ‘to consummate (cheng 成).’” Cheng 誠, then, is shaping up to be a qualitatively rich ideal of personal uniqueness that would respond well to the truncated freedom objection. Ames and Hall write that cheng 誠

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470 Ivanhoe 2008, 42.
471 All translations of Mencius are taken from Lau 2003 with my own minor modifications.
is effectively integrating oneself in one’s social, natural, and cultural contexts. At a cosmological level, integrity is the ground from which self and other arise together to maximum benefit. It is not what things are, but how well and how productively they are able to fare in their synergistic alliances. This sense of “abundance” or “plenty” is evident in cheng’s cognate, sheng [盛] which means “ample,” “to prosper,” “to flourish.”\footnote{475}{Ames and Hall 2001, 33.}

To develop more fully this notion of cheng 誠, I turn now to the Zhongyong, where cheng 誠 encapsulates a world where “fully functioning human beings are more than merely reactive agents overwhelmed by their overall environing conditions (tian) or, more specifically, by their natural tendencies (xing). They are, on the contrary, co-creative beings that have a central role in realizing both individual selves and the eventful worlds around them.”\footnote{476}{Ames and Hall 2001, 34.}

There are three prevailing translations of cheng 誠 in Confucian role ethics—“integrity,” “sincerity,” and “creativity”—all of which require some explanation. As mentioned above, conventional uses of “integrity” carry with them the connotations of wholeness, soundness, completeness, and purity of will. Given the vital relations model of Confucian ethics, however, something more dynamic is needed. Reinterpreting integrity for a processual world, Ames and Hall argue that cheng 誠 is a creative process, the process or dynamic of “becoming whole”\footnote{477}{Ames and Hall 2001, 32.} or “becoming one.”\footnote{478}{Ames and Hall 2001, 24.} More recently, the
process of “resolving” and “becoming resolute” has been offered as a gloss to capture the simultaneously ethical and aesthetic qualities of cheng where a field of vital relations are brought into a qualitative focus in the unique person.\textsuperscript{479} For this sense of focal resolution one can turn to Mencius 7A4:

All the ten thousand things are there in me. There is no greater joy for me than to find, on self-examination, that I am true to myself [fan shen er cheng 反身而誠]. Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to consummate conduct [ren 仁].

What we see here is a focal sense of personhood, like that described in chapter 2. What we also find is that the Confucian person engages in rigorous self-examination, an introspection similar to Meyers’ notion of self-knowledge but in this case attentive to one’s relational achievements. The goal of this is the discovery or adherence to some sense of authenticity, not in the sense of a true core, but in a sense of being true to those one is responsible to and for, as Walker urges. This notion of integrity is underscored in Zhongyong 10 where it is repeatedly stated that the exemplary person is someone with tenacity.

“Sincerity” is another gloss for cheng 誠 and is important here because it provides, in a sense, the more subjective side of cheng 誠. While integrity gives a sense of structure, sincerity provides the feeling of cheng 誠. One is constituted by these interdependent relations of trust and concern. Thus integrity as reliability, or here integrity as becoming resolute or resolved, is an achievement within one’s relations of trust. It is bringing a

\textsuperscript{479} Ames 2015.
qualitative resolution to one’s multiple relations. Trust is partially constituted by one’s sincerity, or “absence of duplicity.” The Zhongyong does not use the character for qing 情 (feelings) as one would expect in a document associated with Zisizi, and Ames and Hall “suggest that one important reason for the absence of explicit reference to qing 情 is the fact that cheng 诚 carries an important emotional connotation…and is thus doing the work of qing 情.”

Cheng 诚 as sincerity “underscores the emotional tone—the subjective form of feeling—that makes this creative process uniquely perspectival.” They write, “The virtue of the term ‘sincerity’ is that it describes a commitment to one’s creative purposes, a solemn affirmation of one’s process of self-actualization. This commitment or resolve, as the unremitting attention to task, is itself an abiding condition in the process of self- or world-enlargement that culminates in the sagacity (sheng 聖) of the sage (shengren 聖人).”

When cheng 诚 is understood as “creativity,” we are referencing the integrative process itself. But this is obviously not creatio ex nihilo or the creativity of some audacious and usually anti-social genius. It is a thoroughly intersubjective creativity, a creatio in situ, creativity as the “spontaneous production of novelty.” Ames and Hall write, “Cheng [誠] is process defined by the uniqueness and persistence of the constitutive relationships that define a particular ‘event (wu 物),’” and when that “event”

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480 Ames and Hall 2001, 32.
481 Ames and Hall 2001, 38.
482 Ames and Hall 2001, 38.
484 Ames and Hall 2001, 38.
is a person, “creativity involves both the realization of the focal self and of the field of events, the realization of both particular and context. Self-actualization is a focal process that draws upon an aggregate field of human experience. And the field and focus are reciprocally realized.” In this sense, we are getting a highly productive valuation of unique persons where they are resolute in their stance and embodied a focal resolution of their field of role-relations.

4.4.2 Cheng 诚 and the Zhongyong

Reminiscent of the Daxue, Zhongyong 20 traces social order back to finding and maintaining cheng 诚 in one’s person:

When those in inferior positions do not gain the support of their superiors, they will not be able to bring order to the common people. There is a way of gaining the support of one’s superiors: If one does not have the confidence of one’s friends, one will not gain the support of one’s superiors. There is a way of winning the confidence of one’s friends: If one does not get on well with one’s kin, one will not gain the trust of one’s friends. There is a way of getting on well with one’s kin: If on introspection one finds a lack of cheng 诚 in one’s person, one will not get on well with one’s kin. There is a way of being cheng 诚 in one’s person: If one does not understand efficacy (shan 善), one will not find cheng 诚 in one’s person.

486 Ames and Hall 2001, 32.
Here, as with the passage from the *Daxue*, *cheng* 誠 is identified as the qualitative resolution of the unique person that makes social order possible. Moving beyond mere social order, *Zhongyong 20* continues with *cheng*’s implications for cosmic harmony:

Creative resolution (*cheng*) is the way of *tian* (天); bringing creative resolution is the proper way of becoming human (人之道). Creative resolution is achieving equilibrium and focus (*zhong* 中) without coercion; it is succeeding without reflection. Freely and easily traveling the center of the way—this is the sage (*shengren* 聖人). Bringing creative resolution is selecting what is efficacious (*shan* 善) and holding on to it firmly.

The extension to the cosmic through the social is emphasized again in *Zhongyong 22*:

Only those of utmost resolve (*zhicheng* 至誠) in the world are able to make the most of their natural tendencies (*xing* 性). Only if one is able to make the most of one’s own natural tendencies is one able to make the most of the natural tendencies of others; only if one is able to make the most of the natural tendencies of others is one able to make the most of the natural tendencies of processes and events (*wu* 物); only if one is able to make the most of the natural tendencies of processes and events can one assist in the transforming and nourishing activities of heaven and earth; and only if one can assist in the transforming and nourishing activities of heaven and earth can human beings take their place as members of this triad.

This establishes the importance of *cheng* 誠 on sociopolitical and cosmic levels. But what does it mean to become a person of *cheng* 誠?
Just as the practical ideal of ren 仁 (consummate personhood) is embodied in the exemplary person (junzi 君子), so too is the exemplary person held up as one who embodies at least the personal and social qualities of cheng 誠. Zhongyong 25 reads:

Resolve (cheng 誠) is self-consummating (zicheng 至誠), and its way (dao 道) is self-directing (zidao 自道). Resolution is a process (wu 物) taken from its beginning to its end, and without this resolve, there are no events. It is thus that, for exemplary persons (junzi 君子), it is resolve that is prized. But resolution is not simply the self-consummating of one’s own person; it is what consummates events. Consummating oneself is authoritative conduct (ren 仁); consummating other events is wisdom (zhi 智). This is the excellence (de 德) of one’s natural tendencies (xing 性) and is the way of integrating what is more internal and what is more external. Thus, whenever one applies this excellence, it is fitting.

As Zhongyong 28 clearly underscores, the achievement of cheng involves a synthesis of one’s own person and social situation, a middle-ground between subjectivity and relations with others:

The Master said, “Being foolish and yet insisting on depending upon themselves, being base and yet insisting on taking charge of themselves, being born into the present generation but returning to the ways of old—such people as these will bring down calamities on their own persons.”

Depending only on oneself or self-governing in a solipsistic fashion will bring ruin. Similarly, relying on the previous generation’s way of living without refashioning or
refocusing the values for the present will also bring ruin. What is required is a sincere and creative integration of the past with the present, of others with self, and of society with the individuated person.

4.4.3 A Critical Dimension to Cheng 誠

What this notion does not yet exemplify, however, is the sort of autonomy competency that Meyers discusses. At the point in the analysis, a person of cheng is certainly integrated in a social and processual sense, but that they can be *productive* and not simply *reproductive* of values has yet to be seen. I will now argue that grounding cheng and thus the way of human becomings (*renzhidao* 人之道) in our focusing of the familiar affairs of the day gives us the mechanism necessary for social progress and the evolution of cultural norms. *Zhongyong* 1 reads:

> The moment at which joy and anger, grief and pleasure, have yet to arise is called a nascent equilibrium (*zhong* 中); once the emotions have arisen, that they are all brought into proper focus (*zhong*) is called harmony (*he* 和). This notion of equilibrium and focus (*zhong*) is the great root of the world; harmony then is the advancing of the proper way (*dadao* 達道) in the world. When equilibrium and focus are sustained and harmony is fully realized, the heavens and earth maintain their proper places and all things flourish in the world.

We are born and exist prior to emotions in a state of nascent equilibrium (*zhong* 中).

Naturally, emotions arise. However, our self-cultivation is not a transcendence of these
emotions, but rather an attention to them and a responsiveness to them in how we craft our social world that allows for a sense of authenticity. One’s meaning-invested social and natural environment is the uniqueness of role-relational persons the Zhongyong points to. Ames and Hall write that “Equilibrium, as the ability to remain centered within the natural, social, and cultural environments that both contextualize and constitute one, is productive of a thriving ‘harmony (he 和)’ achieved through patterns of deference.”

Thus we seek harmony and a sense of equilibrium in our emotions. Harmony should be seen here to emphasize difference, as many critics of care ethics have demanded: “To the extent that persons pursue virtuosity in the various discourses that dispose them one to another, they generate a mutually interdependent harmony in which everyone has his or her unique voice in a chorus that is at once one and many.”

This brings one back to Meyers’ earlier observation that self-governance and authenticity are naturally occurring feelings we can all relate to. It would appear the Zhongyong is similarly identifying this human experience. An equilibrium of one’s emotions is a sense of place and indeed a sense of limited control. This is that subjective moment of cheng or, now, of some dynamic authenticity. When emotions are focused and in equilibrium we are true to ourselves. Harmony (he 和), then, is that unfolding of our authentic narratives in multiply intertwined relations of existential interdependence, where each unique person in our web of relations is brought into qualitative focus. It is the advancing of the proper way in the world, the becoming of a consummate person in relation to others who are themselves consummating. Thus we have the valuing of unique

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487 Ames and Hall 2001, 44.
488 Ames and Hall 2001, 49
persons in relations, both so-called self and others. As I will argue in the next chapter, this achievement of harmony involves the critical revision of traditional norms to meet the particular needs and projects of individuated persons in one’s scope of moral concern.

What is novel about this sense of cheng is that while it values all unique persons within the field of relations, it values this enrichment of persons and relations at the interpersonal, the social, and the cosmic levels. We need to advance the way of human becomings because it brings order and value to the cosmos. The human is not cast into the world, but rather integral to the cosmos.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that far from devaluing unique persons, the ethics of vital relationality places great value on the uniqueness of persons as qualitative foci resolved in fields of relations. The opposition of relationality to individuality is a false one and a mistake that has impeded the advance of vital relationality in ethical discourse. In this chapter I have drawn from Walker (integrity as reliability), Meyers (autonomy competencies), and the Zhongyong (cheng) to put forth an ideal of uniqueness that is both grounded in vital relations and capable of critical reflection and, if necessary, confrontational action.

In the final chapter, I discuss the centrality of “family” as a political category for social justice and begin to outline what must be done for positive transformation of contemporary society. This extension of the ethics of vital relations to the politics of vital
relations involves introducing the role-relation of citizen and describing its connection to social groups, power relations, and cultural imperialism.
Chapter 2 established the vitally relational constitution of persons in care ethics and Confucian role ethics. In chapter 3, the vitally relational person was used to illustrate a nuanced but significant shift in the semantic content of certain key terms in the virtue ethical concept cluster (e.g., “human nature,” “moral agent,” “character,” and “virtue”). In short, the ethics of vital relationality was set apart as a unique ethical orientation focused on relations as well as persons, where relations are understood to be ontologically and ethically primary. In chapter 4, a similar shift of semantic content was demonstrated with the liberal moral concept cluster (e.g., “integrity,” “autonomy,” and “resolve”). In this final chapter, I follow through on the breakdown of the public/private divide first discussed in chapter 1 and effect a third shift of semantic content, this time for the democratic concept cluster (e.g., “citizen,” “justice,” and “civil society”). This chapter will demonstrate that the ethical development of a vitally relational person inherently involves the cultivation of a cultural political consciousness that attends to relational group identities.

There are two particular lines of critique brought against Confucian role ethics and care ethics that I will address here. The first is the distant others objection, also raised as the parochialism objection. What is it about these ethics of vital relations that draws our moral concern to those we have not and will never meet? Can these ethics account for distant others, or are they inherently familistic and parochial? I argue that the ethics of vital relationality necessarily involves the continual extension of moral concern and the practice of inclusion. However, as one extends one’s moral concern to more
distant others, the differences between oneself and the distant other are quickly augmented by group boundaries, which brings a second line of critique against the ethics of vital relationality.

The second line of critique is the *systemic transformation objection*. Does the ethics of vital relationality have the capacity to identify and then to transform systemic injustices or does its particularist orientation preclude such considerations? This is distinct from, but closely tied to, the question of distant others. While Confucian role ethicists have voiced concern over the need for procedural justice (see Ames 2011 on the issue of corruption and cronyism) and the need for distributive justice (see Rosemont 2015), I see the ethics of vital relationality as developed here pointing more directly to *social justice as recognition and representation*. In other words, rather than the legally-oriented liberal politics of fairness or the economically-oriented politics of redistribution, the ethics of vital relationality is most similar to the *culturally-oriented politics of difference* as developed by Iris Marion Young.489

These two issues can be addressed at two different levels. First, one can develop the ethics of vital relationality such that it extends to the polity, i.e., one can extend the *ethics* of vital relationality to include a *politics* of vital relationality. Second, one can extend even further to incorporate an international and global dimension to the ethics of vital relationality. I believe these two steps would have to take place sequentially and that the global extension would be largely analogous to the political extension. Therefore, I

489 Stephen Angle starts in this direction, but as I will argue later, I disagree with how he sees Young and Confucianism interacting. See Angle 2012, 112.
will focus my attention here on the politics of vital relationality and the extension of concern to distant others within the polity.

In bringing the ethics of vital relationality into alignment with Young’s politics of difference, the discussion of a politics of vital relationality will differ from the majority of the literature on politics and Confucianism or care ethics. Given the modeling of these ethics on the parent-child relation, most discussions of care-based and Confucian politics turn to the analogous state-citizen relation. While this is certainly an important area of political philosophy, it is not my concern here. I see much more value to be found in answering a question that has not much been adequately attended to in either body of literature: What does the family model for social order mean for the citizen-citizen web of relations? In other words, just as previous chapters demonstrated that our persons were inherently enmeshed in ethical relations, I will analyze here how our persons are also inherently enmeshed in political relations, where “political” refers to the intra- and inter-group relations within society and the privileges or lack thereof associated with these groups. The trust, sincerity, reliability, and resolve that characterized our ethical considerations earlier will manifest here as solidarity and the strengthening of fiduciary ties in a civil society.

Mature attention to a vital relation, however personal, is inherently political. The role-relation of parent-child involves not only the concrete particular persons involved and their mutual co-creation of each other, but also the embodied and personalized traditional and social norms—i.e., the creative adaptation of these norms to the present

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490 This, of course, raises a whole host of its own issues, such as the capacity for a state to respond to its citizens in their particularity, the grounds for state authority as compared to parental authority, the (im)possibility of forming emotionally deep state-citizen bonds, and so on.
situation—in a way that these persons, as a relation, are co-creating the category of Parent-Child. This facet of the ethics of vital relationality—that the political is inherently tied up in the production and enhancement of the personal—blurs the line between public and private. This is a different line of argument than many feminist care ethicists have taken in that I am not politicizing the previously (and presently) neglected role of carer in particular. I am arguing here that all roles are inherently sociopolitical, and when sociopolitical power structures work against rather than for those persons occupying these sociopolitical spaces, it is political as much as ethical action that is required. Here I will examine the inherently political citizen-citizen (rather than state-citizen) relations because, as the Confucian emphasis on strong familial ties underscores, social cohesion is more important to human flourishing than is state policy, which is not to say the latter is not important but rather that the former is primary for the positive transformation of society. This is reflected in the role ethicist’s observation that “a true and trusting relationship among members of a family is the fabric from which the norms of community, society, and ultimately polity draw their tensile strength.”

Henry Rosemont observes that “it is not merely that we are obliged, of necessity, to interact with others, we must care about them as well, and this caring, while it begins with the family, must nevertheless extend beyond it.” The obligation to extend our moral concern is grounded in the insight that our relations of interdependence extend

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491 I will later expand the scope of our political concern beyond relational roles to include non-role identities tied to groups, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and so on.

492 Ames 2011, 163. The passage Ames is analyzing when making this remark is the story of True Goody (Analects 13.18).

493 Rosemont 2004, 60.
radially; there are no absolutely discrete boundaries separating one person or group from another. The political dimensions of the ethics of vital relationality involve the metaphorical extension of familial relations to the larger community and polity and the transformation of the model of the family from a traditional image to one that is built on and fosters the growth and extension of these vital relations. In other words, there is simultaneously an introduction of the political into the personal—of the forum into the family—and of the personal into the political—the family into the forum. I will effect this transformation of the ethics of vital relationality by answering two questions: (1) What is the “family” that is being extended? And (2) how exactly are those highly charged, vital relations of trust and intimacy in the family being extended to distant relations and informing group relations? In the course of answering these two questions, the notion of social justice as recognition and accommodation of difference will be emphasized.

I begin with the relation of the public to the private in care ethics and Confucian role ethics in section 5.1. I then detail the politicized family in section 5.2. This model family is post-patriarchal and values inclusivity and mutual responsibility. In section 5.3 I argue for the extension of these familial relations into the political space as a means to address oppression. In this sense, the family is the model for the polity. In this extension of the family into the forum, the personal-political ambiguity is operating twice over. On the one hand there is micro-modeling; my personal relations require political consciousness. As I contribute to my childhood friend’s flourishing, I have to be aware of the power relations bearing on her group identities, such as woman, Asian American, lesbian, and so on. At this same level, my relationship to my friend forms a starting point for the development of relations with other women, Asian Americans, lesbians, and so on.
In other words, my interactions with others outside the intimate sphere is analogously modeled on those relations I had in the intimate sphere. There is also the macro-modeling. The values that govern the familial and intimate sphere—trust, mutual concern, attentiveness, mutual responsibility, co-creativity—analogously govern the sociopolitical sphere.

5.1 Overcoming the Public/Private Divide

For feminists and care ethicists, the public/private divide is an artificial construct we must work to reconceive or remove if we are to make positive progress in ethics and politics. In fact, Joan Tronto’s three moral boundaries are all iterations of what I am considering the distinction of family from forum. In this section I will discuss the relationship of public to private according to both Confucianism and care ethics.

5.1.1 Public and Private in Confucianism

For Confucian role ethicists, the strict divide of public and private never arose. The public was always modeled on the private, the polity simply was the family writ large. Recall the Daxue discussed in chapter 2:

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494 Tronto identifies three boundaries that care ethics challenges. (1) The boundary between morality and politics. (2) The boundary between abstract principles and particular actions with concrete others. (3) The boundary between public and private life (Tronto 1993, 178).
Once they saw how things fit together most productively, their wisdom reached its heights; once their wisdom reached its heights, their thoughts were sincere (cheng 誠); once their thoughts were sincere, their heartminds knew what is proper; once their heartminds knew what is proper, their persons were cultivated; once their persons were cultivated, their families were set right; once their families were set right, their state was properly ordered; once their states were properly ordered, there was peace in the world.495

This notion of radiating circles of personal cultivation is mirrored by the semantics of jia 家, what Chenyang Li refers to as the “family-community-nation continuum.” The character jia has three correlated meanings in classical literature. First, it refers to a family dwelling together in a household. Second, it refers to a territory overseen by local officials as an economic unit of the state. This unit involved a state-appointed landlord and the laborers who worked the land.496 Finally, there is the nation itself, bangjia 邦家, meaning “nation-family” and connoting the correlation between familial and, as I shall argue below, political relations.497 What this “spectrum of jia” illustrates is that “family is the ultimate source and ground of political order, and in the absence of the flourishing family and the thriving community it enables, political order is a sham or worse. It is for this reason that any formal pretense to be a strong state independent of the thriving community is an empty abstraction.”498

495 Ames 2011, 93.
496 Li 2014, 114.
497 Li 2014, 115.
5.1.2 Public and Private in Care Ethics

Care ethicists, writing in a culture dominated by liberal philosophy and writing explicitly in response to the shortcomings of said position, take on the public/private divide directly. Grace Clement notes that while the so-called ideal types of care and justice—the juxtapositions in the early writings of Gilligan and Noddings—are too strictly distinguished and thus set up a false dichotomy, we should all the same resist the urge to assimilate care ethics into justice ethics, which are those ethics grounded in abstract rational principles as opposed to local concrete situations, universalizeability as opposed to particularity, and impartiality as opposed to partiality. She argues that doing so subordinates the traditionally feminine coded values associated with care to the traditionally masculine coded values of justice. Moreover, it requires us to understand care through the justice lens.\(^{499}\)

However, this is certainly not to say that we should keep the two ideal types distinct, for care as practiced today is often the unchosen work of women, especially women of color, in subordinated gender roles. Clement argues that “just as it is a mistake to ignore care’s social context, it is also a mistake to reduce the ethic of care to the distorted ways it is often practiced.”\(^{500}\) She claims later that “the ethic of care should not be relegated to personal relations, and the ethic of justice should not be relegated to

\(^{499}\) Clement 1998, 5.
\(^{500}\) Clement 1998, 6.
public relations and banned from private relations.\textsuperscript{501} In other words, the private ethics of care and the public ethics of justice are in fact interrelated.

Clement writes of the public/private divide in the justice/care debate:

\begin{quote}
The conventional boundaries of care and justice presuppose a public/private dichotomy, such that the public and private spheres are separate and distinct realms of activity. According to this dichotomy, the public realm tends to be characterized by self-interest, competition, and autonomy, while the private sphere tends to be characterized by altruism, interconnectedness, and dependence. As a result of their differences, each of these spheres is thought to give rise in liberal democracy to a distinctive kind of moral concern: in the public sphere, morality typically concerns abuses of power, and in the private sphere, morality typically concerns promoting individuals’ well-being. The ethic of justice, especially its negative duties of noninterference, is well-suited to handle the moral problems of the public sphere, while the ethic of care, with its active attention to individuals’ needs, is well-suited to handle the moral problems of the private sphere. However, if these characterizations of the public and private spheres are mistaken, then the conventional boundaries of care and justice lose much of their rationale.\textsuperscript{502}
\end{quote}

For Clement, we must move beyond the attempts to reduce one side to the other in the justice/care debate, for these two perspectives are “mutually interdependent.”\textsuperscript{503} Diemut Bubeck reflects a similar position when she writes that “the choice between care and

\textsuperscript{501} Clement 1998, 69.
\textsuperscript{502} Clement 1998, 71.
\textsuperscript{503} Clement 1998, 109.
justice is a false choice,“⁵⁰⁴ and Tronto echoes this observation of the “false dichotomy” of care and justice.⁵⁰⁵ What this means for the present project is that both family and forum must be transformed, and moreover the sort of justice we find needed at the sociopolitical level will be something more than legal fairness and equality (procedural justice) or economic welfare (distributive justice).

5.1.3 The Integration of Public and Private

So then how are the two realms related? Marian Barnes writes, “The relational ontology of care calls attention not only to the particular, personal needs of individuals, but also to the sociopolitical context in which those needs are produced and experienced, and to the processes by which difference and consequent exclusions are constructed.”⁵⁰⁶ She writes later, “care cannot be ‘contained’ within the moral boundary and private sphere of intimate family relationships. [A feminist ethic of care] recognizes that such relationships are constructed within social relations of power and inequality and defined within gendered constructions that have assumed an association between women, dependency and care.”⁵⁰⁷ For care ethicists, those values and relations in operation in the private sphere are influenced by the public sphere and operate analogously at the sociopolitical level, as I will further demonstrate later in this chapter.

⁵⁰⁵ Tronto 1993, 166.
⁵⁰⁶ Barnes 2012, 31.
⁵⁰⁷ Barnes 2012, 59.
I argued in the previous chapter that Confucian role ethics similarly runs from the ethical into the political in its use of role-relations. While one is of course relating to the person who is one’s parent or child as a unique particular, there is no escaping that the roles as vehicles for social norms are involved in the relation as well. It is this traditional or cultural continuity between generations that calls our attention to the need for ritual propriety (li 礼) to be personalized and re-authorized with each generation. When this need for reauthorization of the social grammar is seen in light of exemplary persons—those persons who reauthorize the culture and serve as models for others—the political becomes salient; just as two persons co-create each other in a role-relation, their particular relation co-creates the role-relational category within the sociopolitical context. In other words, reauthorization of a role-relation involves revising and changing that role-relation and thus effecting sociopolitical change. We can see then that in both care ethics and Confucian role ethics, there is a continuity between private and public, ethical and political, family and forum. I turn now to a closer examination of what this observation means for the model family.

5.2 The Model Family: The Flourishing Focal Person in an Intimate Field

What I will argue in the remainder of this chapter is that our relations and our conduct do not fall discretely into strict categories. I am not at one moment strictly political and at another strictly personal; my parent-child relations are neither solely concerned with the family sphere nor wholly within the purview of the forum. As such,
our guiding values in these spheres will involve a non-binary relation. In other words, just as my relation to my spouse is predominantly personal, there is nonetheless a political dimension, and just as my fight for a cause in the public sphere is ostensibly political, there is no denying a distinctly personal dimension to it. Understanding these two general spheres as correlatives will allow us here to better understand how the model family can model the polity. This will involve, eventually, the addition of group relations to our present use of role-relations for understanding the constitution of persons and the nature of social connection.

Nel Noddings writes that “instead of starting with an ideal state or republic, we will start with an ideal home and move outward—learning first what it means to be cared for, then to care for intimate others, and finally to care about those we cannot care for directly.” But if the family has been the model for the abuses of feudal society, the model for patriarchal oppression, and the primary site for reproducing unjust gender norms, how exactly should we construct this ideal home and ideal family? My goal here is to remove from our model family exclusionary and prejudiced practices, such as patriarchy and heterosexism, on the grounds that these practices undermine the flourishing of unique persons discussed in the previous chapter. The use of “family values” in conservative political rhetoric does not demonstrate that families are inherently patriarchal, sexist, racist, homophobic, or anything of the sort; this demonstrates rather the potency of families and familial relations in shaping society. Thus the first step here is to establish which “family” we are intending to use as the entry-point to social life and the strengthening of the polity.

Iris Marion Young discusses the difficulties in defining “family.” She writes that such a project must find a happy middle ground between overinclusion and underinclusion. In terms of defining “family,” she writes,

we wish to broaden the concept beyond that of heterosexual coupling through legal marriage, but not make it so broad that any and all relationships become familial. Mindful of these problems, in redefining family we should aim at a rough-and-ready characterization of attributes, some but not all of which should be present to call a relationship family. We need a concept of family that understands the “family resemblances” among families, that there are overlapping but not always shared attributes among them, and that perhaps families admit to degrees. ⁵⁰⁹

With these difficulties in mind, I now turn to the positive project of defining the model family.

5.2.1 The Model Confucian Family

Turning first to Confucian families, Sin Yee Chan cautions that “if family is the basic paradigm structuring political relationships, we have to pay more attention to whether the Confucians get the familial relationships right.” ⁵¹⁰ As one might expect, “Many features of the original Confucian vision of family life for generating role-bearing persons are of course no longer applicable to today’s post-postmodern, highly

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⁵⁰⁹ Young 1997, 106.
⁵¹⁰ Chan 2004, 115.
technological and interconnected multi-cultural world.” With that said, Henry Rosemont does see three general features of the Confucian family that do inform contemporary society. First, “the family is dynamic, not static…families must always be seen temporally and in flux while working for continuity, constancy, and growth.” As one might expect from a perspective where persons are sites of growth and change, families themselves are also constantly in a state of flux where the achievement of continuity within this change is prized. Second, the family is intergenerational. The family is “multigenerational, serving ethical, aesthetic and spiritual functions in addition to economic and social ones.” Thus we are speaking of more than a group of close friends of a similar age when we talk about families. There is continuity across generations that connect family members into a larger evolution of the culture itself. Finally, there is some sense of ancestor veneration, since acknowledging those who came before us contributes “to our sense of who we are, and is of religious significance.” This facet of the family involves ritual and tradition, which can be robust or fairly innocuous. The so-called rituals can be “created at any time: ‘instant tradition’ is probably better seen as an intergenerational bonding heuristic than as an oxymoron.”

Beyond this, Rosemont leaves the particular family’s organization fairly open provided “authentic democratic procedures” obtain in a way that provides all family

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511 Rosemont 2015, 122.
512 Rosemont 2015, 122.
513 Rosemont 2015, 122.
514 Rosemont 2015, 123.
515 Rosemont 2015, 123.
members a voice. In this way, parent-child relations need not be blood-relations (though how this does not conflict with ancestor veneration is not made clear). Adoption and other arrangements are possible. Spousal relations need not be heterosexual or even strictly monogamous, and those filling grandparental roles might not be the parents’ parents but could be instead an elderly neighbor or similarly situated elder. Ranjoo Seodu Herr similarly opens up our understanding of the Confucian family. The key to these relations, as Herr argues, is ren and the production of ren persons. What matters is that these familial relations—be they non-consanguineous or homosexual or otherwise non-traditional—are “based on the natural feeling of love and affection.”

Recall the discussion of ren as a process of human becoming rooted in xiao (chapter 2).

5.2.2 The Model Care Ethical Family

The reconstruction of the Confucian family is not too far off from the post-patriarchal model family developed in care ethics. Virginia Held proposes a post-patriarchal family as the model in care ethics, in response to feminist critics who argue that valuing care is nothing more than valorizing a slave morality and a program that works to keep women in subordinate positions under patriarchy. She writes that “the family is a social institution of the utmost importance. It is a small society, a set of

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516 Rosemont 2015, 124.
517 Rosemont 2015, 125.
518 Herr 2014, 88.
519 Analects 1.2.
relations.” She intends to extend a post-patriarchal model of the family—meaning “the relations between mothering persons and children without a patriarch, in societies free of the male dominance that has distorted these relations”—to the broader polity. However, what is needed before we can undertake that project there is a more substantive understanding of such a post-patriarchal family.

Turning again to Young, she defines the family as:

people who live together and/or share resources necessary to the means of life and comfort; who are committed to taking care of one another’s physical and emotional needs to the best of their ability; who conceive themselves in a relatively long-term, if not permanent, relationship; and who recognize themselves as a family.

In other words:

family are the ones who care for you when you are sick, and for whom you care when they are sick. Family members are mutually obliged to remember one another’s birthdays, the ones on whom we dump our troubles. Family entails commitment and obligation as well as comfort: family members make claims on one another that they do not make on others. I am obliged to consider the lives of my family members when deliberating about a career move, but I am not obliged to consider the lives of others.

522 Young 1997, 106.
Thus families “help provide a rooted sense of self and mutual, concrete caring.”\textsuperscript{523} What is essential to family life is not patriarchal legacy or the dogmatic reproduction of the previous generation’s values, but rather the constitutive connection of family members and the production of unique persons. And while Young does not mention intergenerational relations in her account, the focus in care ethics on the mother-child relationship provides such intergenerationality. Such a notion of family follows naturally from—and was effectively introduced in—chapter 2 above. What I will add now is the sense of place that accompanies this notion of family, namely the home.

Noddings writes that “there is a universal characteristic of ideal homes. In every ideal home is someone who does the work of attentive love; he or she responds to needs with a dependable ‘I am here.’”\textsuperscript{524} Attentive love, or the recognition of and work toward meeting another’s needs, characterizes a family. Noddings writes, “a home is not always a happy place and, indeed, it is sometimes a place of misery and fear, but, happy or unhappy, it is the new being’s initial dwelling place. If it is healthy, it is a place where the work of attentive love is done.”\textsuperscript{525} In other words, “the best homes everywhere maintain relations of care and trust, do something to control encounters, provide protection, promote growth, and shape their members in the direction of acceptability.”\textsuperscript{526} This echoes Sarah Ruddick’s earlier work on maternal ethics. Ruddick writes,

\textsuperscript{523} Young 1997, 106.
\textsuperscript{524} Noddings 2002, 4.
\textsuperscript{525} Noddings 2002, 122.
\textsuperscript{526} Noddings 2002, 123.
At the heart of a mother’s arrangements is a “home.” A home may consist of several families, of all the women and children of a community, of one mother in one room with several children, of a male and female parent and their children, of two or more men or women together, who may or may not be lovers. Whatever its particular structure, a home is the headquarters for a mother’s organizing and a child’s growing. Home is where children are supposed to return when their world turns heartless, where they center themselves in the world they are discovering.⁵²⁷

Focusing more on a phenomenological analysis of the home and the practice of homemaking, Young writes of how the home is the materialization of an unfolding narrative identity. For Young, a home, as opposed to a hotel room, “is personal in a visible, spatial sense.”⁵²⁸ This spatial personalization, or what Young calls the “process of the materialization of identity,” takes place on two levels: “(1) my belongings are arranged in space as an extension of my bodily habits and as support for my routines, and (2) many of the things in the home, as well as the space itself, carry sedimented personal meaning as retainers of personal narrative.”⁵²⁹ In this sense, “home as the materialization of identity does not fix identity, but anchors it in physical being that makes a continuity between past and present. Without such anchoring of ourselves in things, we are, literally, lost.”⁵³⁰

All of this is to say that when we talk about family in the ethics of vital relationality, our focus is on vital relations insofar as they contribute to the production of flourishing, unique persons. The family is the social space and the home is the physical

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⁵²⁸ Young 1997, 149.
⁵²⁹ Young 1997, 149.
⁵³⁰ Young 1997, 151.
space where vitally constitutive relations most impactfully generate unique persons. What makes children return home “when their world turns heartless” is that in the home with family they are valued as unique processes of growth and their vulnerabilities and needs are recognized and addressed. The ideal of Confucian harmony, where difference is emphasized in order to optimize value, and the tensile strength of caring and trusting relations are the foundations and the defining features of families. To the extent that a small group of persons meets these qualifications, we are looking at a family. Racist calls for purity, sexist and patriarchal relations to privilege one gender over another, heterosexist arguments rooted in exclusionary definitions of “love” all necessarily work against the establishment, maintenance, and growth of vital relations. With this understanding of the postpatriarchal model family in place, I now turn my attention to the political analogues of these familial relations.

5.3 The Family Model: The Flourishing Focal Citizen in a Civil Field

In this section I utilize the reconstituted vital family model to inform the present approach to the social and political landscape. The most crucial contribution is the use of vital relations as the undergirding infrastructure of social life that makes considerations of justice possible. I will accomplish this through a reconceptualization of the civil society and the social role of citizen from the perspective of the ethics of vital relationality. But first, I will loosely define the notion of oppression so as to better orient this section toward justice and a positive contribution to society.
5.3.1 Oppression and Group Relations

As we move to the sociopolitical level, we must be clear on what the issue is that we are wrestling with and how that issue impacts persons. Whereas the previous chapter addressed issues of subordination in role-relations, this chapter deals with oppression and group-relations.

While oppression is often equated with tyranny, there is a sense in which it manifests in liberal democracy. In the 1960s and 1970s, new left social movements shifted the meaning of “oppression” from direct tyranny to the subtle, systemic disadvantage of certain groups. Young identifies oppression as “the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society” and further notes that “oppression also refers to systemic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant.” This is structural oppression and poses a new sort of challenge to the achievement of a flourishing society. With tyrannical oppression, new laws or new rulers can solve the problem; the injustice is located exclusively with them. But with structural oppression “oppressions are systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions.” There is not necessarily an oppressor to restrain or remove, since the so-called oppressors are usually unaware of the systemic oppression and not causally reproducing it. With that said, there is always a correlated

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531 Young 1990, 41.
532 Young 1990, 41.
privileged group for each oppressed group. Before detailing particular forms of oppression, it is necessary to clarify what social groups are.

5.3.1.1 Social Groups and Relational Ontology

The purpose of this section is to clarify the meaning of “social group” and to tie this to the vital relationality developed at the interpersonal level earlier in this project. Within a liberal individualist framework, one might understand groups in two different ways. First, we might think of groups as aggregates. An aggregate is “any classification of person according to some attribute.” This mirrors the essentialist ontology identified in chapter 2. Group membership, according to an aggregate model, is a matter of identifying some essential characteristic of the group and then identifying that characteristic in individuals. The aggregate model of groups slips into a pernicious essentialism.

Moving away from the essentialist aggregate model, one might think of groups as associations. An association is “a formally organized institution, such as a club, corporation, political party, church, college, or union.” The problem here also correlates with the discussion of vital relations in chapter 2. Associations rely on a voluntary, contractual model of relations, but at the heart of the injustice of oppression is that many relations contributing to oppressive situations are not voluntary.

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533 Young 1990, 42.
534 Young 1990, 43.
535 Young 1990, 44.
Social groups are neither aggregates nor associations, since both are “methodologically individualist concepts.”\textsuperscript{536} These presuppose the ontological priority of the individual to the collectivity. A social group “is defined not primarily by a set of shared attributes, but by a sense of identity.”\textsuperscript{537} Moreover, it does not lend itself to the contract model of social relations, as do associations.\textsuperscript{538} But the problem with individualist approaches to collectivity goes beyond inconsistency with a relational ontology. Individualist approaches to collectivity make the identification and transformation of oppression more difficult, while simultaneously offering a skewed view of social life. Young writes:

This individualist conception of persons and their relations to one another tends to identify oppression with group identification. Oppression, on this view, is something that happens to people when they are classified in groups. Because others identify them as a group, they are excluded and despised. Eliminating oppression thus requires eliminating groups. People should be treated as individuals, not as members of groups, and allowed to form their lives freely without stereotypes or group norms.\textsuperscript{539}

As I argued in chapter 2, this sort of individualist abstraction does not adequately capture personhood a familial setting. What one can now see is that it hardly applies when discussing persons and groups in the public sphere either. Young argues “that group differentiation is both an inevitable and a desirable aspect of modern social processes,”

\textsuperscript{536} Young 1990, 43.
\textsuperscript{537} Young 1990, 44.
\textsuperscript{538} Young 1990, 44.
\textsuperscript{539} Young 1990, 46-47.
and therefore “social justice…requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression.” Thus we are looking for some other notion of social group to satisfy our approach to oppression in a relational ontology.

In defining social groups in a relational ontology, Young writes:

A social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience or way of life, which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group, or in a different way. Groups are an expression of social relations; a group exists only in relation to at least one other group. Group identification arises, that is, in the encounter and interaction between social collectivities that experience some differences in their way of life and forms of association, even if they also regard themselves as belonging to the same society.

The language here mirrors that of chapter 2 where I argued that persons co-create each other in vital relations of trust and concern. One’s own person is an expression of one’s various role-relations focused in the particularities of the present situation, and while one might recognize commonalities across these relations the space for growth and thus the grounds for value are in the differences. I contend here that Young’s relational ontology of social groups is analogous to the relational ontology of persons developed in chapter 2.

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540 Young 1990, 47.
541 Young 1990, 43.
In addition to being articulated with similar language, social groups are also constitutive of persons in much the same way vital relations are interpersonally constitutive. Young writes,

Social groups are not entities that exist apart from individuals, but neither are they merely arbitrary classifications of individuals according to attributes which are external to or accidental to their identities. Admitting the reality of social groups does not commit one to reifying collectivities, as some might argue. Group meanings partially constitute people’s identities in terms of the cultural forms, social situation, and history that group members know as theirs, because these meanings have been either forced upon them or forged by them or both. Groups are real not as substances, but as forms of social relations.542

Clarifying this constitutive nature of social groups, Young writes—in a manner reminiscent of chapter 2 of this dissertation—that “the self is a product of social processes, not their origin.”543 She writes, “our identities are defined in relation to how others identify us, and they do so in terms of groups which are always already associated with specific attributes, stereotypes, and norms.”544 Moreover, just as our role-relations provide a multiplicity of “selves” to be focally integrated into our everyday conduct, group relations operate according to a similar intersectional ontology. I am at once my parents’ child, my wife’s partner, and my brothers’ sibling, though at any given time one of these roles will be foregrounded. Similarly, I am at once American, white, and male, though at any given time one of these roles may be foregrounded. Young writes, “This

542 Young 1990, 44.
543 Young 1990, 45.
544 Young 1990, 46.
view of group differentiation as multiple, cross-cutting, fluid, and shifting implies another
critique of the model of the autonomous, unified self.” As with interpersonally
constitutive relations, these group relations can either obstruct or enhance the
achievement of human flourishing. In understanding how these relations obstruct
personal development and social flourishing, I turn now to the nature of oppression at the
sociopolitical level.

5.3.1.2 Young’s Five Faces of Oppression

In her analysis of oppression and the ways in which group relations inhibit
personal and social flourishing, Young identifies five faces of oppression. The presence
of any one is enough to qualify a given group as oppressed, but often multiple faces in
various forms overlap in structuring a particular group’s place in society. The first three
faces address the social division of labor while the final two are more explicitly about
cultural imperialism.

*Exploitation* is oppression that “occurs through a steady process of the transfer of
the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another.” One example is gender
exploitation. Women are not simply excluded from certain privileged activities, but the
“freedom, power, status, and self-realization of men is possible precisely because women

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545 Young 1990, 48. It is important to note that Young is not as optimistic about the integration of one’s
various group identities. However, what matters to the present argument is the multiplicity of these
constitutive group relations.

546 Young 1990, 49.
work for them.” In this way, “gender exploitation has two aspects, transfer of the fruits of material labor to men and transfer of nurturing and sexual energies to men.” Young concludes, however, that bringing justice to this dynamic involves more than redistribution of wealth; it also “requires reorganization of institutions and practices of decisionmaking, alteration of the division of labor, and similar measure of institutional, structural, and cultural change.”

A second face of oppression is marginalization. Marginalized persons are those “people the system of labor cannot or will not use.” Where marginalization is taking place, “a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination.” In this sense, marginalization is extremely dangerous. Beyond just distributive injustice, there are two further categories of injustice: (1) “the provision of welfare itself produces new injustice by depriving those dependent on it of rights and freedoms that others have,” and (2) “even when material deprivation is somewhat mitigated by the welfare state, marginalization is unjust because it blocks the opportunity to exercise capacities in socially defined and recognized ways.” Young concludes that—much like the justice issues surrounding exploitation—“while marginalization definitely entails serious issues of distributive justice, it also involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and

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547 Young 1990, 50.  
548 Young 1990, 50.  
549 Young 1990, 53.  
550 Young 1990, 53.  
551 Young 1990, 53.  
552 Young 1990, 54.
institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction.”

The third face of oppression related to the social division of labor is powerlessness. Those who are powerless “lack the authority, status and sense of self that professionals tend to have.” This is otherwise termed “respectability,” and Young identifies three aspects of respectability that privilege professionals. First, “acquiring and practicing a profession has an expansive, progressive character” in that one acquires an expertise and then advances in that career path. Second, “many professionals…have considerable day-to-day work autonomy,” even if they do not have a robust sense of control over the workplace. In other words, where and when they take breaks, who they chat with, what they wear, and so on, is up to them. And finally, “the privileges of the professional extend beyond the workplace to a whole way of life” that Young terms “respectability.”

Fourth, one finds oppression as cultural imperialism, which will be the primary focus for the latter sections of this chapter. “Cultural imperialism” picks out “how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other.” It is the universalization and normalization of the dominant group’s experience and

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553 Young 1990, 55.
554 Young 1990, 57.
555 Young 1990, 57.
556 Young 1990, 57.
557 Young 1990, 57.
558 Young 1990, 58.
culture. The injustice of cultural imperialism is “that the oppressed group’s own experience and interpretation of social life finds little expression that touches the dominant culture, while the same culture imposes on the oppressed group its experience and interpretation of social life.”

Finally, there is oppression as violence. Young observes that “many groups suffer the oppression of systematic violence” in that “members of some groups live with the knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or property, which have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person.” That these are more than just moral or legal issues, but social justice issues is “the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable.” In other words, that systematic violence is a social practice makes it an issues of social justice. These violent acts are directed at group members as group members. The result is a deprivation of freedom and dignity, and a situation that “needlessly expends their energy.” The reform of those institutions that support and perpetuate this oppressive violence “may require the redistribution of resources or positions, but in large part can come only through a change in cultural images, stereotypes, and the mundane reproduction of relations of dominance and aversion in the gestures of everyday life.”

559 Young 1990, 59.
560 Young 1990, 60.
561 Young 1990, 61.
562 Young 1990, 61-62.
564 Young 1990, 62.
565 Young 1990, 63.
With the exception of cultural imperialism, anyone can experience a version of these faces of oppression, but they are only properly understood as oppression at the group level. For example, as a white, American male I may experience violence, a sense of powerlessness, exploitation of my labor, or even some sort of marginalization. At no point would I be able to claim I was oppressed, however, since the particular group identities I have selected are not systematically subjected to these situations. The relation between social groups and the five types of oppression, then, is that the oppression exists in the relationship between groups within a community or polity. One suffers oppression as a unique person by virtue of one’s group memberships.

In all of these faces of oppression, Young has emphasized the cultural forces that perpetuate and reproduce these power dynamics between groups. While I do not think that all forms of oppression reduce to cultural imperialism, I will take that is my focus for the remainder of the chapter. The reasons for this is two-fold. First, this area of social justice is not as well addressed in the dominant justice literature where issues of procedural fairness or distributive parity are highlighted. Adding this cultural dimension should enrich those discussions. Second, the cultural dimension of oppression and social justice is the area of sociopolitical concern toward which care ethics and Confucian role ethics are already oriented. For instance, Young herself argues that resisting cultural imperialism involves reconceiving subjectivity, where “rather than seeking a wholeness of the self, we who are the subjects of this plural and complex society should affirm the otherness within ourselves, acknowledging that as subjects we

566 I do not mean here to say procedural fairness and distributive parity are unimportant. To the contrary, they are central to the continuation of a flourishing society. With that said, they are beyond the scope of the present work, and I leave them for a later project. I repeat this point, with more detail, in the epilogue.
are heterogeneous and multiple in our affiliations and desires.” The vitally relational model, especially once extended to the sociopolitical as I am doing here, is well-equipped to take on Young’s project.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will work to understand the polity in terms of the family dynamics developed so far in this dissertation. This will involve working with a particular notion of civil society to better highlight the social fabric that is our distant interdependence at group levels. With this sociopolitical, rather than interpersonal, interdependence in hand, the priorities for social justice will shift from material redistribution to cultural accommodations of difference that entail recognition, de-stigmatization, and participatory parity. Finally, I will introduce the role of citizen to the ethics of vital relationality to better underscore the ambiguity between our ethical and political conduct.

5.3.2 Care Politics

When considering what “politics” means, Selma Sevenhuijsen writes, “Politics…is concerned with the shaping of collective responsibility and productive use of the tension between difference and equality.” Importantly, the political is about power relations, in particular the power relations affecting groups. For instance, disparities along racial lines between blacks and whites in the United States, or along ethnic lines between Han Chinese and Uighers in the People’s Republic, would fall under

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567 Young 1990, 124.
the category of “politics.” Sevenhuijsen argues that care ethics can be political in both a broad and a narrow sense. Broadly, the feminist ethic of care is political “because it wants to break with the patterns of domination that have surrounded caring activities and moral feelings for too long and to establish new modes of being ‘truly moral’, both for women and for men.” Feminist care ethics is “narrowly” political in that it wants to transform systems of instrumental and bureaucratic rationality, which aim at banishing the unexpected and the uncontrollable—the symbolically feminine—and argue instead for new forms of creative power—a power to act together in concert, to borrow Arendt’s terminology—and thus for renewed forms of political agency, political judgment and social justice.

To lay out care politics fully, I will first indicate the social space in which it takes place (i.e., civil society). I will then identify the values at work in this space (e.g., interdependence, solidarity, and difference). Finally I will develop the role of caring citizen for comparison to Confucian role politics in the next section.

5.3.2.1 The Caring Civil Society

One might recognize three distinct yet overlapping sets of activities in a polity—legal, economic, and cultural. As mentioned above, the ethics of vital relationality as developed here points most immediately to cultural activities as the site of social change.

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and the possible realization of justice. The metaphorical arena for these cultural activities is the forum (as opposed to the courts or the market), and the group that participates is the civil society. I will argue here that the forum operates analogously to the family, where social groups stand in interdependent and co-creative relation to one another.

This notion of the caring civil society serves as a pragmatic and always contingent horizon of concern. Virginia Held articulates the civil society in terms of the network of social connection presumed in any discourse on rights. When we talk about rights in society we are presuming a background network of care. In other words, civil society is built on what Held calls the presumption of care. She argues that political rights are both causally and normatively premised on caring relations, and that “a relation of social connection, or a caring relation, is normatively prior and has priority over an acknowledgement of rights.” Held writes that “civil society is often now taken to include attitudes, practices, and relations characterizing the ways members of a society interact in other than formal legal-political ways.”

Joan Tronto makes a similar point regarding the presumption of care in our political communities. She writes that one change in our political discourse when we adopt a care perspective is that “we connect our notion of ‘interests’ with the broader cultural concern with ‘needs.’” The pursuit of self-interest is both a right and a project that is checked by the rights of others. Much like the earlier realization that so-called

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571 See, e.g., Baier 1995.
572 Held 2006, 125.
573 Held 2006, 125.
574 Held 2006, 127.
575 Tronto 1993, 164.
agency arises from responsiveness to others (chapter 2), we find here that political rights are couched in an unacknowledged human condition. This change in our conception of the human condition is tied up in our newly perceived interdependence (rather than independence or dependence) and the starting position of moral engagement (rather than detachment).

In response to this perspectival shift, rational choice and social contract theorists often write that such a sense of connection does not apply to strangers but only to intimates and at most community members. But Held contends that “it has been apparent to many of us that the political individuals of rational choice and contractualist theory are not really strangers: They already have sufficient connectedness to be part of the same society or group or nation.” Held points to sectarian violence and civil war in recent decades to underscore the empirical fact that “before hypothetical citizens can agree on the hypothetical terms of their self-government, they must agree on whom they seek agreement with…In other words, they must see those others as belonging to the group of ‘us,’ as ‘we’ seek agreement on our rights; all involved are thus actual or potential fellow citizens, not strangers.” At both the familial and the civic levels “there is a presumption of social relations holding the individual persons together. And in forming and maintaining these relations, empathetic feeling and a sense that what happens to the others in the group matters play important roles.”

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576 Tronto 1993, 162.
577 Tronto 1993, 164.
578 Held 2006, 128.
579 Held 2006, 129.
580 Held 2006, 131.
citizen later. For now, the point is to foreground the presumed social connection at the political level and to notice the correlations with social connection at the familial level.

The delineation of a civil society attends to a middle-ground between family and liberal government (i.e., caring and procedural justice as fairness). The civil society is one composed of citizens empathically identifying with one another and carrying out community projects. Such a communal fellow-feeling involves “such virtues as a willingness to listen attentively to others and to engage in respectful discussion of persons’ needs and interests,” which are extensions of the deep feelings found in intimate family relations. Just as with the family,

what are most important are often the mutual relationships developed or maintained, not the outcomes for the separate individuals as assessed on a utilitarian calculation and not the strict following of deontological rules as might be the case in a legal context. The members of a civic association often think as much about maintaining the association and the connectedness it involves as about the individual gains or losses to them resulting from their membership.

It is about a sense of belonging. Held writes that “it is through fostering social trust and sentiments of solidarity, factors hardly visible in the liberal, rational choice, contractual firmament, that actual states can probably best maintain themselves.”

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581 Held 2006, 131.
582 Held 2006, 131.
583 Held 2006, 131.
584 Held 2006, 131.
Thus where trust was foundational to the family earlier, one finds solidarity doing the work at the socio-political level. Held writes:

Gradually, we can hope, feelings of solidarity will be extended to all persons everywhere, sufficiently to see their rights respected and their needs addressed. But it may be the value of care as much as the value of [procedural] justice that can help this happen. Unless the presumption of care is met, people seem not to be concerned enough about others to care whether their rights are respected or even recognized. The history of disregard for and of domination and exploitation of those not strong enough to threaten the self-interest of rational contractors indicates how unpromising it may be to hope for respect for human rights to encompass the globe without building the caring relations such respect seems to presume.\(^{585}\)

In other words, while a justice and rights discourse may be effective at explaining why certain actions are required or prohibited, without the care perspective and the incorporation of the care perspective into our political discourse, the motivation to heed such prescriptions is missing. Held’s point is that while a caring network is a precondition for raising moral and political questions, having a moral and political life, it is not necessarily the case that care as a value adequately addresses those questions that arise.\(^{586}\) So what values, then, does this caring civil society call for?

\(^{585}\) Held 2006, 132.

\(^{586}\) Held 2006, 136.
5.3.2.2 Caring Social Justice

The primary value at work in the political space is justice, but what exactly one means by justice is what is at stake in this debate. Procedural justice is firmly grounded in formal equality and negative liberties. This is the justice of the libertarian end of the liberal spectrum. Distributive justice is concerned with social justice, but preoccupied with the materialist foundations of justice to the exclusion of a key dimension of human experience. The first three faces of oppression discussed above could be addressed almost completely from a distributive justice perspective. It is to a third sense of justice that I turn here.

Sevenhuijsen writes of justice:

Justice cannot be formulated as a standard set of norms and rules, be they procedural or substantive. Justice cannot be separated, any more than care, from the way in which we give shape to our social and political participation. Justice is a process in which content and form are interwoven in specific ways, or a common commitment to structure our collective lives in accordance with situational considerations on just rules and public provisions. Justice should be based on values such as reconciliation, reciprocity, diversity and responsibility, and on the willingness and ability of citizens to accept responsibility for each other's well-being (Flax 1993; Frazer and Lacey 1993:206).\(^{587}\)

Many of the values Sevenhuijsen identifies here reflect the values indicative of a flourishing family. After conflict or confrontation, reconciliation and relational repair are

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\(^{587}\) Sevenhuijsen 1998, 149.
key. Moreover, the considerable work put into vital relations requires reciprocity. And finally, focusing on responsibilities to others with regard to their well-being is the hallmark of the perspectival shift the ethics of vital relationality has attempted to herald.

Similarly, Marian Barnes writes that justice from a care perspective is not just about material distribution. For those with marginalized or stigmatized identities, she writes, “While material inequalities are certainly a significant dimension of their experiences, a redistributive response would be insufficient to address the impact of disrespect and mis-recognition that affect their lives and may undermine their sense of self.”588 She goes on to argue that “in conceptual and philosophical terms the care versus justice debate is usually couched in terms of competing principles. If we include the principle of recognition as well as redistribution within our understanding of the concept of justice, then, I argue, the apparent lack of consistency is much less evident.”589 And when we recognize that participation in the political process is important as well, we might follow Nancy Fraser (2009) in arguing that “justice requires not only redistribution and recognition, but also participatory parity in the process of decision making.”590

The achievement of such parity and recognition when social injustice is structural in nature (see “Young’s Five Faces of Oppression” above) is a matter of strengthening social bonds at the group level through the cultivation of solidarity. Sevenhuijsen writes:

The feminist ethics of care points to forms of solidarity in which there is room for difference, and in which we find out what people in particular situations need in

588 Barnes 2012, 26.
589 Barnes 2012, 27.
590 Barnes 2012, 26.
order for them to live with dignity. People must be able to count on solidarity, because vulnerability and dependency, as we know, are a part of human existence; we need each other’s disinterested support at expected and unexpected moments.\footnote{Sevenhuijsen 1998, 150.}

She continues:

The notion of solidarity gives a political meaning to care and to mutual commitment. Solidarity without care leads to an impoverished sense of morality and collective responsibility, because it can only recognize others if they are exactly “like us” or needy, pathetic, pitiful and worthy of “our” commiseration because of their comparative deprivation in relation to ‘ourselves’. Solidarity thus depends on an “us-and-them” distinction, which is exactly what forms an obstacle to thinking about care in a “human” way. On the other hand, care without collective solidarity strengthens the privatization and moralization of care. We need caring solidarity not because the “needy” are dependent on the solidarity of the “strong”, or because the “strong” need to defend themselves against the looming threat of society’s corruption by the “needy”…but because everyone in different ways and to different degrees needs care at some point in their lives.\footnote{Sevenhuijsen 1998, 151.}

I will add to Sevenhuijsen’s analysis of solidarity here that “neediness” attaches to both persons and groups. The social groups identified by Young above can themselves be “needy” in that they are oppressed, dominated, and otherwise disadvantaged due to the (cultural, for the present purposes) structure of society. And so I would argue that solidarity does double work in the politics of vital relationality. On the one hand,
solidarity serves the intra-group function of generating, maintaining, and evolving a recognizable group identity. What does it mean to be Black, Hispanic, Woman, and so on in the contemporary United States? These are questions that will be answered largely in intra-group, consciousness-raising sorts of discussions. Solidarity in the sense of including the various individuated voices to produce a group narrative is essential to expressing group needs in a civil society.

On the other hand, solidarity does work between groups as well. Those groups in need and in need because they are oppressed. While this does not make another group “the oppressors,” it does make some group privileged. With privilege is power, and it is this power that must be leveraged for change. Noddings observes as much when she writes that that a political reason for attending to the needs of others is that “expressed needs are the forerunners of rights…[and] the conversion of wants to rights requires not only persistence but the use of power. Since it is some form of power that is sought in a claim to rights, rights-seekers are at the mercy of those who already hold power.”

Solidarity across group lines strengthens civil society by both remedying the injustice of a particular groups situation and deepening the group ties that form the social fabric of the polity. In what follows, I will detail some values that are representative of the caring solidarity concept cluster.

One related concept is attentiveness. Tronto observes that the care perspective in the political realm directs us “to a politics in which there is, at the center, a public discussion of needs, and an honest appraisal of the intersection of needs and interests.”

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593 Noddings 2010, 192.
594 Tronto 1993, 168.
For Tronto, “the absence of attentiveness to the plight of some group in the society (or the world) becomes a public issue, worthy of public debate” in a caring civil society.\textsuperscript{595} Marian Barnes writes of attentiveness that it “can be understood as an openness to understanding the circumstances and needs of others, and a preparedness to take action on this basis.”\textsuperscript{596} She continues, “Attentiveness to the circumstances of others involves recognition of issues of vulnerability and power and the necessity of giving voice to the perspectives and experiences of those who are often marginalized or stigmatized.”\textsuperscript{597} Solidarity requires attentiveness just as care and trust do. If I am morally engaged within the family, then I am cultivating a trusting environment by being \textit{attentive} to the unintentionally expressed needs of others. At the sociopolitical level, attentiveness is analogously required for the cultivation of solidarity in social groups and civil society.

Another concept in this cluster is \textit{achieved equality}. Tronto writes that the conception of the human condition in care ethics (interdependent, “needy” in addition to “interested,” and morally engaged rather than detached) means that “rather than assuming the fiction that all citizens are equal, a care perspective would have us recognize the achievement of equality as a political goal.”\textsuperscript{598} She argues that making equality the goal rather than the fictive starting point makes questions of equal resources and power more salient and more urgent.\textsuperscript{599} Again, Young’s politics of difference takes precisely this observation as its starting point.

\textsuperscript{595} Tronto 1993, 168.
\textsuperscript{596} Barnes 2012, 102.
\textsuperscript{597} Barnes 2012, 102.
\textsuperscript{598} Tronto 1993, 164.
\textsuperscript{599} Tronto 1993, 165.
Finally, solidarity foregrounds our *interdependence* and thus our *mutual responsibility for social flourishing*, rather than either negative or positive conceptions of individual liberty. Noddings writes that care politics lands us between these two notions of liberty since—contra negative liberty—we do and should be involved in others’ lives even if they are not harming someone else, and—contra positive liberty—we are not justified in prescribing a substantive ideal person or citizen. Our achievement of freedom entails listening to others and helping them meet their particular personal and group needs.\(^1\)

This brings the discussion to what exactly a care politics means by “citizen.” After providing an image of the caring citizen, I will turn to Confucian role politics.

5.3.2.3 Caring Citizens

Tronto observes that with the strict public/private divide of dominant liberal theory, the proper role of citizen is defined in terms of a work ethic, which is to say that citizens are valued in so far as they contribute productively to the economic production of the public sphere. This inherently hides the work that goes into caring and producing citizens.\(^1\) In place of this vision of the citizen, she argues that “care as a practice can inform the practices of democratic citizenship. If through the practices of giving and receiving care we were to become adept at caring, I suggest that not only would we have become more caring and more moral people, but we would also have become better

\(^1\) Noddings 2010, 203.

\(^1\) Tronto 1993, 166.
citizens in a democracy."\(^{602}\) Diemut Bubeck makes a similar point in arguing that we replace *homo economicus* with *persona carans* in our socio-political theorizing.\(^{603}\) Bubeck argues that care theory “provides a much more wide-ranging and overarching new approach to social and political theory and philosophy in general.”\(^{604}\)

“Citizen” then, is both a role to add to the role-relations discussed throughout this dissertation and a concept within the cluster that will shift semantic content when vital relations are foregrounded. Sevenhuijsen writes that alternative moral vocabularies have left us confused in the political realm when we attend to care. The issue is that “we have become used to conceiving of citizenship issues in the terminology of enforceable authority, rights and duties, the language which seems pre-eminently designed for the expression of our manifestation in the public sphere.”\(^{605}\) This language contributes to an ideal of citizenship that “demands that citizens free themselves from dependencies and loyalties in their political judgment in order to arrive at free and autonomous choices.”\(^{606}\)

As opposed to this individualist conception of citizenship, Sevenhuijsen argues for a feminist-caring interpretation of neo-republican *active citizenship*, where

the public sphere is seen as a meeting ground where people shape identities through action and interaction, through the exchange of narratives and opinion, through deliberation and debate, and where, in so doing, they can continually revise and transcend their images of “self” and “other.” Here identity depends

\(^{602}\) Tronto 1993, 167.
\(^{603}\) Bubeck 1995, 12.
\(^{604}\) Bubeck 1995, 12.
\(^{606}\) Sevenhuijsen 1998, 5.
more on what you do than on what you are. Rather than being fixed, it remains open to change. The public sphere then enables people to act in the sense of “starting something anew.”

In short, the forum takes on the function of the family. It is an environment in which persons and groups are co-created, meanings evolve, and the possibilities for a flourishing future are found.

To develop this novel sense of “citizen,” Sevenhuijsen turns to the feminist ethics of care. She sees value in the ethics of care because “the ethics of care is based on a dual commitment: on the one hand it assumes that people recognize and treat others as different and take into account other people’s individual view of the world and of their place within it (Tronto 1993:12ff.) while, on the other hand, needs and narratives are not taken as absolute but are interpreted and judged in specific contexts of action (Code 1991, 1995).” These dual commitments give rise to a set of values that will “enrich” the notion of citizenship to equip citizens for pluralism and diversity and will “de-romanticize” care so as to better incorporate the historically derided so-called feminine values into our political lives.

When the social fabric is woven with concern, trust, attentiveness, and at least recognition, the relationship of the citizen to the state becomes a secondary relation. Of primary import is the citizen-citizen relation across group boundaries. Listening to women’s stories regarding the importance of Planned Parenthood as a male citizen or

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609 Sevenhuijsen 1998, 16.
recognizing the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement as a white citizen strengthens the intergroup solidarity of civil society as well as the intragroup solidarity of more local group identities, such as a workplace, school, neighborhood, and so on. The strengthening of these solidarities almost certainly should result in policy changes, economic redistribution in many cases, and perhaps legal action at times. These all involve the state in ways I am not addressing here. It is the cultural dimension of politics that I would like to attend to here, the politics of who expresses what about whom and why that matters.

The care politics developed here see all familial environments to be couched within a polity, understood most directly as civil society. This civil society is constructed most immediately in terms of not individuals but social groups. Social groups themselves impose certain power dynamics on each other, producing the oppressed and the privileged. The relations, however, are not a zero-sum game and this power relation can be leveraged to the mutual benefit of all involved, much like the leveraging of vital relations within families to the benefit of all persons involved. I argued here that the extension of a care perspective and the caring family model to the socio-political level of the civil society foregrounded certain values and a particular conception of the role of “citizen” that serve to ground a sense of social justice that operates on the social fabric of society, namely cultural meanings. I turn now to Confucian role politics and a similar sequence of analyses.
5.3.3 Confucian Role Politics

With its related focus on familial and communal relations, Confucianism has also been criticized for failing to account for distant others and for a certain blindness to systemic issues. However, many contemporary Confucian scholars have focused on the concerns of justice in revitalizing the Confucian tradition. Ames writes, “while a community modeled on family relations might sound liberating, at the same time without the balance accorded by an appropriate regimen of institutionalized regulative ideals, such dependence on intimate relations can also be a disintegrative source of nepotism, cronyism, parochialism, and corruption.”

He writes later, “While the familiar appeal to universals might suffer from the ambiguity of practical applications, the Confucian attempt to extend consideration to all involved is handicapped by the need for more abstract regulative ideals such as courage and justice that provide direction for what is a legitimate claim for consideration and inclusion.” And Stephen Angle observes that Confucian insights have historically “been limited by their particularism,” and that Confucian ethics and politics has therefore “sometimes been blind to the systemic effects of large-scale social and economic arrangements.”

It is important to keep these criticisms in perspective. The approach here is cross-cultural anachronism, and many of the concerns for justice above did not arise in the society these classical texts were written. The parochialism and systemic transformation objections only occur once a polity is large enough and integrated enough for one’s

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610 Ames 2011, 263.
611 Ames 2011, 268.
612 Angle 2012, 112.
actions to matter to distant others and for cultural diversity to be significant enough to allow for systemic issues to arise. But “these enduring texts first emerged in a different world far away and long ago when people lived and died within a relatively small compass,” and “that small radius put family and community in an uncontested position as the central forum in which human beings lived out their lives.”613 One should not be surprised, therefore, that questions of systemic injustice are not readily answered in classical Confucian texts. The purpose of this section is to develop a Confucian response to these contemporary issues and therefore demonstrate the value of Confucian role ethics to today’s world.

I will begin with an articulation of Confucian civil society as developed out of the established extension of family to community. I see civil society as a broader group than community with distinct features necessary for a contemporary Confucian role politics. I will then turn to the issues of social justice discussed above and develop the Confucian notion of harmony as a resource for addressing cultural imperialism and for cultivating solidarity across difference. Finally, I will bring this political extension of Confucian role ethics back to the focal person in terms of the role of citizen, which itself entails various intersecting and potentially conflicting group affiliations.

5.3.3.1 Confucian Civil Society

Confucianism discusses the fiduciary community and the “nation-family.” I would like to broaden this from its classical roots to be something akin to civil society.

613 Ames 2011, 261.
There must be multiculturalism and a greater degree of difference than were present in Confucius’ day. This will alter the course of Confucian political philosophy and bring it into dialogue with the politics of difference as developed by Iris Marion Young.

The Confucian polity has always been understood according to family metaphor. Sin Yee Chan identifies two ways in which the family can model the political in Confucianism. First, there is the historical application of family dynamics to how the ruler related to his subjects, and vice versa. In this traditional interpretation, the ruler was a parent-figure, and the subjects were his “children.”614 As I stated above, this is not what we are pursuing here. We are asking after how citizens relate to fellow citizens. The second interpretation, the extension interpretation, claims “the state is the family writ large in the sense that people relate to each other as if they were family members.”615 She argues later that “the state is the family writ large in the sense that everybody is related by concern or benevolence and the principles of universality and impartiality as embodied in the idea of extension.”616 This is closer to what I am pursuing here, with the one caveat that, again, the state is not of direct concern just yet. Instead, we want to uncover how the polity, or civil society, comes together as an extension beyond communities.

Historically, the state and civil society did not have a strict boundary for classical Confucians.617 This perhaps accounts for why the analysis of classical texts for political insights so often steers one toward how to hold political office or rule a kingdom. Never

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614 Chan 2004, 98.
616 Chan 2004, 106.
617 Rosemont 2008, 49.
is the discussion one of how one has political obligations to one’s fellow citizens, but this observation is not to say that such political relations cannot be developed within the Confucian perspective.

As with the family group, the civil society is characterized in its ideal form according to harmony, which is the enriched appreciation of difference through communication. The civil society is inclusive, built on mutual trust and co-creative responsibility. Sor-hoon Tan writes of community that a Deweyan and Confucian “ideal community is neither intolerant of differences within nor hostile to strangers without. It deemphasizes group boundaries without sacrificing intragroup bonds; it accommodates diversity without surrendering integrity.” While we speak often of the family metaphor for social order in Confucianism, it is worth repeating that the structure of that metaphor is one of focus and field where boundaries are better seen as horizons of vagueness with the greatest resolution in the center. As such, exclusionary boundaries conflict with this view of family and society, since “an exclusionary community, whether a family or some other social group, distorts rather than actualizes the Confucian ideal of community.” For Confucians, social groups all the way out to the polity and the world, “insofar as they are distinguished from one another, are related in a continuous, interactive process.” As with persons in chapter 2 and 3, though, that there is an ontological extension does not mean there is not ethical (and in this case political) work to be done to optimize value. These relations can stagnate and whither or intensify, depending on our attention to them.

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619 Tan 2004, 72.
620 Tan 2004, 72.
And when they intensify, they can develop in either a contentious or a harmonious fashion.

Focusing on the normative dimensions of these relations, Tan writes that “the stronger the relations within a group, the greater its capacity for such growth [i.e., the modification of group identity through changing membership]. Strength depends not on homogeneity of thought or behavior but on effectiveness of communication.”

Each of these groups may constitute a center, but not the only center. Other groups are centers, foci of energy in their own right. Each center acknowledges the existence of other centers by acting upon them and being acted upon by them. Smaller social groups are nested within larger social groups. For the larger group to flourish, it is not enough that each constitutive smaller group is doing well by itself. Their being part of a larger group implies an organic relation, so that their interaction will affect the well-being of the larger group. A small group flourishes only if it interacts well with, and thereby contributes to the well-being of, other groups with which it forms a larger group. A group approaches the ideal of community only if it interacts flexibly and fully with other groups to constitute a larger community; a community is not yet ideal as long as some members of the human species are excluded.

She writes “The art of community—achieving harmony through communicative processes—incorporates diversity, resistance, tension and focus without ultimate closure, and it promotes growth with its accompanying freedom. This process of bringing about

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621 Tan 2004, 74.
622 Tan 2004, 74.
and sustaining community does not oppress individuals."\textsuperscript{623} What I would add here is that we should also speak of a Confucian civil society. The ideal may be community, but community in a homogenous society is more easily achieved than any sense of a contemporary American community might be today. In other words, while community is a laudable ideal and still an ideal for the ethics and politics of vital relationality, it is a long-term ideal. An intermediary ideal would be a civil society, since the practical outcomes of emphasizing \textit{community} rather than \textit{civil society} today is more likely to be solidified group boundaries and essentialized group differences, rather than the breakdown of boundaries and the appreciation of differences. With that said, civil society, as a transitional extended group identity, shares many features of community as developed by Confucian political philosophers.

Much like the care ethicists above who argued for the expansion of interest groups to include responsiveness to group needs, Tu Weiming writes that the Confucian ideal society “is not an adversary system consisting of pressure groups but a fiduciary community based on mutual trust.”\textsuperscript{624} He later writes, “A fiduciary community so evolved [from the five basic human relations] is a society of mutual trust instead of a mere aggregate of individuals. In such a society, the goal of the people is not only to live in peace but also to aid each other in moral exhortation as they cultivate their own personal characters.”\textsuperscript{625} In other words, Tan and Tu offer a vision of the polity in which

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{623} Tan 2004, 79.
\item \textsuperscript{624} Tu 1989, 48.
\item \textsuperscript{625} Tu 1989, 56.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
persons have not only role-identities but also group affiliations, and just as role-relations represent a web of trust and mutual concern, so too must the group affiliations represent a web of solidarity.

The ideal pursued in the Confucian framework is not solidarity but harmony, though I will argue that harmony entails solidarity. Li writes that there are two components to the integrating process of harmony: First, there is transformation of parties previously antagonistic to harmony to parties that are components of harmony. Second, there is accommodation of parties that could become antagonistic to harmony so as to preserve them as components of harmony. Harmony is achieved in the creative tension between these two, for one with out the other is either surrender or imposition. At the level of civil society, these parties are social groups, and the achievement and maintenance of harmony is understood in terms of the personal and communal growth of those social groups. How this notion of growth and harmony contributes to a vision of Confucian social justice is the topic of the next section.

5.3.3.2 Confucian Social Justice

Stephen Angle sees Young’s work on oppression and the politics of difference to have something to contribute in conversation with Confucius. However, Angle’s project is one of virtue politics. For example, in bringing Confucianism and Young’s analysis of

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626 Rosemont, in describing the role-bearing person in a political context, writes that the specification of one’s roles and relations has been made clear, one will “have been fully described as fundamentally a co-member of several overlapping communities” (Rosemont 2008, 47).

627 Li 2014, 126.
oppression into dialogue, Angle argues that oppression poses three major problems for Confucianism. First, it can make it “more difficult for an individual to develop character traits that are widely recognized as virtuous.”\textsuperscript{628} Second, it can encourage “character traits that either contribute to a better life under the oppressive circumstances or offer one the possibility of resistance to oppression, but which are in one way or another problematic.”\textsuperscript{629} And third, the privileged in an oppressive society are at risk of developing “the ordinary vices of domination.”\textsuperscript{630} As with chapter 3, I would like here to shift our focus from character traits and individuals to the relations that sustain and enrich personal lives.

While Rosemont is primarily focused on economically-oriented social justice, i.e., the redistribution of wealth, he does acknowledge the cultural dimensions of social justice.\textsuperscript{631} In setting up his account of Confucian justice as redistribution, Rosemont writes that classical Confucianism has much to say about the foundations of rights and democracy, not so much in terms of civil liberties for discrete individuals, but in light of the fact that “our most basic rights stem from membership in a community, with each member assuming a measure of responsibility for the welfare of all other members,” a fact Confucians take to the heart of their ethics and politics.\textsuperscript{632} Assuming responsibility for the welfare of distant others is a matter of recognition and responsiveness to need. Many of these needs attach not to individuals, first and foremost, but to social groups.

\textsuperscript{628} Angle 2012, 125.
\textsuperscript{629} Angle 2012, 125. These are what Lisa Tessman calls “burdened virtues.” See Tessman 2005.
\textsuperscript{630} Angle 2012, 125. This phrase is borrowed from Tessman 2005.
\textsuperscript{631} See Rosemont 2015, 16 and 69, for example.
\textsuperscript{632} Rosemont 2004, 59.
Thus Confucian harmony must be concerned not just with personal differences, such as those found within a family environment, but with group differences and the privilege or oppression that manifests in those group relations in a civil society.

So how do the family values articulated thus far inform these group dynamics in a civil society? Rosemont writes that “we model our behavior with [non-kin relationships] on our earlier behavior at home: my relations with my grandmother give me an initial basis for dealing respectfully with all elderly women, and my relationships with my children enable me to more easily interact with, and develop an affection for other children.” In this sense, the family model is a matter of extension of our personal emotional ties analogously to distant others. I am motivated to address the oppression of women because I am attached to multiple women directly in my life. My concern for them can be extended to others in that group. But there is another way in which a Confucian sense of justice is extended according to a family metaphor.

The family dynamics among persons analogously applies to group dynamics. Groups are understood to be of value in themselves, while always identified in relation to others. Group identities are co-created between and among other groups, and the optimization of value in those group identifications requires an inclusive relation with those other groups. I flourish as a person when my siblings flourish. Analogously, men flourish as a group when women flourish; heterosexuals flourish when same-sex couples flourish; whites flourish when non-whites flourish; and so on. Relations of domination or oppression are as antithetical to flourishing at the group level as they are at the interpersonal level (see chapter 4), and those living in privileged group positions are wise

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633 Rosemont 2015, 163.
to recognize the distinction between privilege in a circumscribed social world and harmony in a flourishing civil society.

While addressing these group relational dynamics ultimately entails legal and economic considerations, I narrow my focus here to cultural issues. Communication across the groups is the key, and recognition of the other with all his or her differences has always been at the heart of Confucian particularism, whether this manifested historically or not. Thus just as trust was key to family and then community relations, solidarity within groups and solidarity among groups are the keys to the fiduciary community or Confucian civil society. Seeing the role our group differences play in shaping each other and also providing the creative tension for growth is an insight Confucianism provides today to many issues of social justice. I close this section with an account of the role-relation of citizen-citizen.

5.3.3.3 Confucian Citizens

I would like now to introduce a new role-relation to Confucian role ethics, a role that will make it a Confucian role politics. That role-relation is the citizen-citizen relation, and just as role-relations such as the parent-child relation are always qualified by context (e.g., Elle’s-mother-Rachel and Rachel’s-daughter-Elle), so too are citizen-citizen role-relations qualified. However, the context is one of social group rather than personal connection. So Rachel, who is Elle’s-mother, is also a white-citizen, a female-citizen, a heterosexual-citizen, a middle-class-citizen, and so on, and her relations to other citizens will be contextualized by the relations that obtain between the groups descriptively and
any transformations of those relations that are necessary to realize a harmonious civil society. For example, Rachel the white citizen’s relation to Jim the black citizen, her coworker, may involve acknowledgement of the significance of the Black Lives Matter movement, a sensitivity to any stereotypes she may unwittingly have adopted growing up white, and importantly a reception of Jim in all his particularity. The Confucian role-relational person does not see the role first and the person only later; the role-relation merely informs the interpersonal connection. Here too such a prioritization of the other person requires seeing the person first and allowing the social group affiliations to inform the relationship.

Admittedly, this role-relation is not present in classical or even much contemporary Confucian philosophy. Rosemont writes that while “groups are to be evaluated by the criterion of enabling personal growth,” he does not believe

Confucians would necessarily see voluntary associations as a challenge to their views of the ideal society. If such an association provided a means for interactively furthering one’s humanity in ways that other groups did not, and helped us help others in furthering their humanity, I believe they would strongly endorse such an association.635

634 Rosemont 2008, 49.
635 Rosemont 2008, 49 and 50. I wish to reinforce here the fact that social groups go beyond voluntary associations. I am not voluntarily a member of the male social group, just as I am not a voluntary member of my family. Many of our group identities are unchosen, which is why oppression is an issue in the first place. But despite this difference from Rosemont, I believe his point about group affiliations stands and readily incorporates such unchosen group affiliations.
Rosemont writes that “with voluntary associations and civil society playing no role in Confucian thought, issues surrounding citizenship cannot arise; there is no term in classical Chinese that has anywhere near the range of meanings for the English *citizen*, nor its Latin root, *civis*.636 But as the reader is aware, the notion of citizen in development here is hardly the traditional sense of citizen in Western philosophy.

As I have begun developing the citizen-citizen relationship here, I believe it is a natural extension of the role-relational ontology at work in Confucian role ethics. Moreover, I believe that the introduction of this role-relation and the notion of social groups to Confucian role ethics goes a good distance toward creating a Confucian role politics that is capable of addressing many social justice issues, particularly those involving cultural oppression arising through various cultural practices that ascribe meaning and status in disproportionately harmful ways. The Confucian *junzi*, as I argued in chapter 4, must continue their self-cultivation through to a political level. *Junzi* operate on a political level in their capacities as Confucian citizens with a multiplicity of group identities they must bring into resolution, both in their persons and in civil society.

5.4 Conclusion

I have here argued that the vital relationality that transformed our ethical perspective in chapters 3 and 4 offers a complementary revolution for our political consciousness. Just as our interpersonal relations co-create our ethical identities, so too do political power relations. If human flourishing is collaboratively achieved and

moreover I achieve a unique flourishing by helping my friend to flourish, then the political privileges and disadvantages attending my friend’s particular position are of direct relevance to my ethical considerations. And given the radial nature of these ethical relations, one finds no strict delineation between the “purely” ethical and the “purely” political. These two so-called realms and in fact intertwined dimensions of the same activities, though one may be more prominent than the other in a given situation.

Importantly, we co-create those power relations insofar as role-relations and group identities are always in process and emerging. How these roles and group identities change must be judged against the present generation, while an appreciation of the past and considerations of the future are balanced. The field we focus in our political consummation is not the family as it was for ethics, but rather the community and civil society. Our attention is no longer to particular unique persons and their relations, but entire groups as representatives of other groups. A white ally at a Black Lives Matter rally is an important expression of political value and solidarity, as is a male driver with a Planned Parenthood sticker on his window, or an upper-class salaryman’s show of solidarity with the wage workers at his company. Crossing these social boundaries is important for the cultivation of mutual trust and concern that is the foundation for a flourishing society, and the insight we get from the Confucian Daxue is that these fields of ethico-political concern telescope such that the neglect of political power relations leaves the ethical cultivation of familial and local community relations somehow diminished, and vice versa.
6.1 Summary

In chapter 1 I situated the Confucian-Care project—what can be seen now as the vital relationality project—within the larger ethical discourse as a feminist comparative challenge to both dominant moral theories and virtue ethics. I also provided a survey of the current literature on the subject as well as an analysis of the discourse. Through the course of this analysis, I made clear that dismissals of the project have rested on fundamental misunderstandings of feminist comparative aims and methodologies, the definition of care ethics, and the evolving nature of the Confucian tradition. When these misunderstandings are clarified, the current arguments for dismissal are seen to be groundless. I also briefly surveyed those works that further the Confucian-Care project. While these works will resurface throughout the course of the remaining chapters, it was worth noting that all but two ignore the need to compare care ethics and Confucian role ethics in terms of their notions of relationally constituted persons.

Chapters 2 and 3 provided a thorough comparative analysis of care ethics and Confucian role ethics with the aims of not only better grounding Chenyang Li’s initial project but also more clearly distinguishing these ethical orientations as unique voices in contemporary ethics. As such, these chapters served to articulate a thick conception of the ethics of vital relationality. Chapter 2 corrected an omission from many of the positive contributions to the Confucian-Care project and provided a detailed analysis of relational persons according to care ethics and Confucian role ethics. In this chapter, I distinguished
the vitally relational persons of Confucian role ethics and care ethics from other intersubjective conceptions of persons. On the one hand, there were the power relations of Michel Foucault’s work on the subject. I argued these are causally constitutive relations. On the other hand, there was the intersubjective existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir. While Beauvoir went further in breaking down the distinction between self and other, intersubjectivity remained at an ontological level and the richness of our lived connection with others was absent. As such, these relations are best seen as internally constitutive relations. Confucian role ethics and care ethics both begin with family relations of trust and mutual concern and the focal nature of these relations, and it is these deeply emotional and co-constitutive relations that I termed vital relations and used to center the remaining chapters on ethics and politics.

Chapter 3 examined the locus of ethical values in care ethics and Confucian role ethics, and distinguished this from the locus found in the virtue ethical concept clusters of teleological and sentimentalist virtue ethics. Those virtue ethical traditions, exemplified by Aristotle, MacIntyre, Hume, and Slote, may approach a relational ontology similar to those of Confucian role ethics and care ethics, but they remain committed to an individualist discourse by locating value in and focusing ethical considerations on characters and their traits. The contribution to ethical reasoning made by the ethics of vital relationality is to focus our ethical reflection on the relations themselves and foreground values of trust, care, responsibility, and empathy.

Chapters 4 and 5 critically engaged care ethics and Confucian role ethics in order to create an ethical orientation for a post-patriarchal future. The motivation for these chapters was the recognition that any ethics of vital relationality offered in today’s
society will have to be cognizant of the present reality of patriarchal oppression and the dangers of not actively working against its perpetuation. Chapter 4 addressed ethical issues that are perceived to arise from the emphasis on intimate and trusting vital relations. For example, if vital relations are often, at least initially, unchosen relations, then what does one do when one finds oneself in a constitutive relation that is either exploitative or destructive of one’s own person? These are the self-sacrifice concerns that I identified as the plague of commitments objection, the no exit objection, and the truncated freedom objection. I argued that feminist work on integrity as reliability and autonomy competences as well as Confucian work on cheng as resolve and resolution respond well to these objections and offer a vision of a unique person-in-relation. This chapter charted the shift in semantic content for the dominant moral theory concept clusters with their focus on integrity as wholeness, autonomy as sovereignty, negative freedom, will, and agency.

Chapter 5 argued that despite the ethical focus on concrete, particular relations, care ethics and Confucian role ethics offer compelling insights into social and political philosophy. Taking Iris Marion Young’s analysis of oppression as a starting point, I identified the internal capabilities of care politics and Confucian role politics for challenging systemic power relations. I argued that, contrary to the prevailing opinion that both Confucianism and care ethics require a gestalt shift away from the political perspective of rights-based justice theories, they in fact serve to ground many of the claims of social justice, especially when social justice is taken to include cultural issues beyond the scope of traditional economic issues. The ethics of vital relationality is not a radical alternative to justice theories, but rather a more capacious account of moral life
grounding socio-political action in a family metaphor for social order. Here I focused on developing a political concept cluster around social justice, including solidarity, civil society, citizen-citizen role-relations, recognition, difference, and social groups.

Before closing, I will point toward several areas for future work. Some of these involve digging deeper into issues raised in the preceding chapters. Others are extensions to topics explicitly set aside earlier or simply beyond the scope of the present work.

6.2 Future Directions

I would like to end here with possible future directions for the ethics of vital relationality. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but rather the beginning of the next step. As with vital relations themselves, the growth of this perspective will involve increasing both the depth and the breadth of what has been presented. First, in terms of depth, the exploitation of carers is not exclusively an issue of women’s roles within families. Paid care workers from nurses to nannies need our attention. We can extend this insight into care work to include other related professions that might fall outside “care work.” I am thinking here of social workers and public educators. This would involve bringing the politics of vital relationality into dialogue with redistributive social justice arguments and attending to the contemporary situations in both the United States and China, and ultimately beyond.

Second, while I attended to gender bias and patriarchal conceptions of the family and values here, the furthering of feminist goals was not the explicit goal. The application of the vital relations model to particular public policies, from child custody to workplace
discrimination has already been undertaken and will hopefully be strengthened by the arguments presented here. In this sense, the culturally-oriented social justice concerns raised in chapter 5 will have to be augmented with legal analyses and questions of procedural justice as fairness. In terms of the Chinese side of this comparison, the Confucian role politics preliminarily developed in chapter 5 will have to be brought into dialogue with questions of the rule of law in China and other Confucian cultures.

Third, more pointedly, the attention to a comparative feminist perspective here has opened the door for a feminist transformation of Confucianism and Confucian cultures. This transformation no longer requires a liberal model, and it is my hope that some of what has been argued here will be productive for the internal development of a postpatriarchal Confucianism. In other words, the work here, especially the work of chapters 4 and 5, hopefully lays the foundation for uniquely Confucian social and political activism.

In terms of adding breadth to the vital relationality project, first there is the further development of the politics of vital relationality. I mean here both the work on public policy initiatives as well as the critique of systemic issues, such as unchecked capitalism, that perpetuate the oppression and exploitation of persons and communities, and tear at the social fabric in the United States.

Second, the extension of the politics of vital relationality to international relations. Just as we can extend our notion of relational interdependence to the individual-group and group-group level, we can adopt this model for state-state relations. The economic interdependence of the world alone justifies adopting such a perspective where the myth of discrete entities is cast aside, but perhaps just as poignant is our vulnerability, as a
species, to environmental issues such as global warming, which leads to a third direction for future development of the vital relations model.

Finally, the ethics of vital relationality, in attending to constitutive relations and the focal nature of persons and groups is well-positioned to develop a robust environmental consciousness. Just as our interpersonal and socio-political existence is one of interdependence, so is our biological existence. An approach to environmental ethics and policy initiatives could well emerge from the vital relationality perspective.

Civil war, sectarian violence, racism, sexism, exploitative capitalism, and a growingly powerful decentered global terrorism leave much to be desired in our present world. If my argument here has been persuasive, there is a path that is hopeful. In recognizing our mutual vulnerability and interdependence and following through on this recognition through mutual growth and solidarity, we can effect a hopeful future where voices are heard, needs met, and the creative force of vital relationality permeates our media.
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