

**BRINGING THE SAGE BACK HOME:  
CONFUCIANISM AS EXEMPLAR-BASED ETHICS**

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*To my friends*

ANICKA MIHALIK

*and*

MIKE NEWKIRK

子反為吾  
欲子子使  
之父骨司  
乎母肉命  
妻肌復  
子膚生  
閭子  
里形  
知  
識

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## ABSTRACT

Exemplary persons are a dominant feature of early Confucian moral imagination and rhetoric. While this is widely acknowledged in the contemporary literature, scholars tend to downplay the genuine significance or normative originality of exemplary persons in Confucian ethics. Often it is said that such exemplary persons are exemplary only because they exemplify some external norm or conform to an independent standard. This is to offer a derivative conception of exemplary persons. In this dissertation I attempt to identify, characterize, and defend a non-derivative or native normative significance of exemplary persons, arguing that this is required if we are going to take Confucian philosophy seriously and on its own terms.

After defining the terms of the debate and surveying the various uses to which exemplary persons are put within Confucian ethics, I identify the main arguments against attributing native normativity to exemplary persons. These arguments all assume a foundational approach to normative justification—and it is for the sake of defending the native normativity of exemplary persons that I articulate and utilize a pragmatic approach to justification. Not only does the pragmatic approach allow us to make sense of the native normativity of exemplary persons, it is arguably the approach taken by the early Confucian philosophers. In the final section of the dissertation I offer a philosophical reconstruction of the Confucian sage—an exemplary person who is imperfect and distinguished not by engaging in extraordinary feats but by engaging in everyday pursuits in extraordinary ways. It is a view that decentralizes the significance of the Confucian sage, rendering sagehood socially composite and participatory. This view takes sagehood to be a communal process aimed at the ideal of democracy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	v

### PART I: EXEMPLARY PERSONS IN CONFUCIAN ETHICS

Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2. Exemplary Persons in Confucian Moral Culture.....	26
2.1: Creators of Moral Tradition.....	26
2.2: Learning.....	36
2.3: The Sociopolitical Force of Personal Example.....	45
2.4: Rhetorical Appeals to Exemplars in Remonstrance and Diplomacy.....	51
2.5: Keeping Your Word and Doing Your Utmost.....	54
2.6: Justification and Critique.....	60
2.7: Summary.....	64

### PART II: PRAGMATIC NORMATIVITY AND EXEMPLARY PERSONS

Chapter 3. The Normativity of Exemplary Persons After Plato.....	68
3.1: The Basic and Native Normativity of Confucian Exemplars.....	68
3.2: Critique of the Basic and Native Normativity of Exemplars.....	72
3.3: Explaining the Derivative Conception of Exemplars.....	80
Chapter 4. A Pragmatic Account of Normative Force and Justification.....	91
4.1: Introduction.....	91
4.2: The Pragmatic Normativity of Aristotle.....	93
4.3: The Pragmatic Normativity of John Dewey.....	108
4.4: Summary and Comparison with John Rawls's Approach to Justification.....	131
4.5: A Defense of Pragmatic Normativity.....	137
Chapter 5. The Native Normativity of Exemplary Persons in Confucian Ethics.....	154
5.1: The Non-Foundationalism of Confucian Ethics.....	154
5.2: The Pragmatic Account of Normative Force in Confucian Ethics.....	165
5.3: The Pragmatic Conception of Exemplary Persons in Confucian Ethics....	172

### PART III: THE CONFUCIAN SAGE

Chapter 6. The Community of the Sage.....	206
6.1: The Title of "Sage".....	207
6.2: The Predominant Descriptors of the Sage.....	213
6.3: The Wisdom (知 <i>Zhī</i> ) of the Sage.....	218
6.4: The Extensivity and Intensivity (仁 <i>Rén</i> ) of the Sage.....	244
6.5: The Integrity (潔 <i>Jié</i> ) of the Sage.....	261
6.6: Summary.....	271
Chapter 7. Democracy and the Invisible Sage.....	273

Chapter 8. Epilogue.....	298
Bibliography.....	302

PART I.  
EXEMPLARY PERSONS IN CONFUCIAN ETHICS



## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary scholars generally agree that exemplary persons play several vital roles in early Confucian ethics.<sup>1</sup> Exemplary persons are said to supply a non-coercive approach to the realization of social order,<sup>2</sup> to constitute much of the substance of Confucian moral education,<sup>3</sup> to be persons worth emulating as ‘aspirative objects,’<sup>4</sup> to be standards for the evaluation of conduct and ethical claims, to be referents used in effective remonstrance and diplomacy,<sup>5</sup> to be the creators of moral culture, and to be the ideals largely responsible for the cultivation of the two Confucian norms of 忠 *zhōng* and 信 *xìn* (‘doing one’s utmost’ and ‘keeping one’s word’). Given their wide range of normative roles we might say that a genuine understanding of exemplary persons is propaedeutic to an understanding of Confucian ethics.

The central thesis of this dissertation is that for the early Confucians “exemplary persons”<sup>6</sup> often performed these normative roles as “basic” norms with “native” normativity, and that this has several significant consequences for how one ought to understand the normative content and structure of exemplary persons. A basic norm is one that, in a particular context, justifies other norms but is not itself justified by another norm. Any norm that is treated as the final term of appeal within a specific normative

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<sup>1</sup> A person who is said to be exemplary is, at the very least, normative in some fashion.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Munro (1969) and Chad Hansen (1992)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Cua (1978) and Munro (ibid.)

<sup>5</sup> François Jullien (1991)

<sup>6</sup> The phrase “exemplary persons,” here, corresponds with only one of the three predominant meanings of 君子 *jūnzǐ* in the early Confucian literature. The three uses of *jūnzǐ* are (a) a descriptor of social class, which allows us to sometimes translate *jūnzǐ* as “gentleman,” or “nobleman” (this, incidentally, is the older sense of the term), (b) a normative title that describes someone as a particular type of exemplary person—below the sage (聖人 *shèngrén*) but above the petty person (小人 *xiǎorén*) in worth, and (c) a normative designation for any person who functions as an exemplary person, regardless of rank or relative worth (in this third sense, *jūnzǐ* is comparable to certain uses of 法 *fǎ*, 刑 *xíng*, 則 *zé*, 表 *biǎo*, and similar terms—which we will discuss in chapter five). “Exemplary persons” is used here in the third sense of *jūnzǐ*.

debate or deliberation is a basic norm. If, in offering a justification for one's conduct, one is able to convince another person of the appropriateness of that conduct with an appeal to, say, the consequences of that conduct, those consequences will function—within that specific conversation—as the final normative term of appeal and will be the basic norm of that conversation. Basic normativity is a question of the justifying relationship between norms whenever a justification is supplied to others or to oneself. Norms that play the role of a basic norm may also have native normativity. Native normativity concerns the origin of a norm's psychological and practical influence—its normative force and content. When a norm has native normativity, its normative force and content are not derived from an external norm.<sup>7</sup>

While a norm may be treated as basic in one conversation, the same norm—e.g., a set of consequences, an exemplary person, a virtue—may not have the same status in another conversation. It may, in fact, be taken to depend upon another norm for its justification. This is the difference between treating a norm as merely basic and treating them as basic *and* foundational. When a norm's place at the root of a justification is not assured by the nature of the norm itself or by its place in our moral theory, the norm can be said to be merely basic. To treat a norm as foundational, however, is to claim that the norm's place at the root of our justifications is no accident of circumstance; the norm is entitled to that role as the basic norm. If the foundational norm is not cited in a given

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<sup>7</sup> A great example of an exemplary person who is treated as a basic norm while not enjoying native normativity is Jesus in the “WWJD?” exercise in moral imagination. When someone asks ‘What would Jesus do?’ it is usually assumed that Jesus has normative force such that, by researching or imagining what Jesus did or would do in a situation similar to our own we can discover what we *should* do. As far as the occasion of this exercise is concerned not only is Jesus taken to be an exemplary person but he also enjoys basic normativity (since no other norm is necessarily involved in justifying the conclusion one reaches). Still, Jesus is not ordinarily given native normativity within Christian morality (a rare exception might be Emerson's position in “The Divinity School Address”); Jesus is usually regarded as an exemplary person because he *embodies* the will of God, or some other norm. In the end, what makes Jesus normative is usually not something unique to himself.

justification, it is assumed that for every legitimate justification we can always dig a little more and find that the norm that appears to be basic ultimately rests upon the foundational norm.

Two things happen to a norm whenever it is displaced from the root of a justification. First, in losing its status as the basic norm—its normative force must now be borrowed from whatever norm is now at, or closer to, the root. In addition, the norm loses its native normativity and instead derives its normative content from another norm. This happens, for instance, whenever we think of exemplary persons as *mere exemplars*—to be normative simply on account of what they exemplify. In this case, the normative force and content of exemplary persons are both derived from the norm these persons exemplify. They are displaced by the norm that is implied to be more basic, and they are incapable of native normativity—deriving their normative content from what they exemplify rather than having normative content unique to themselves. Yet when we treat exemplary persons as basic norms it is *possible* that they might also be more than what they exemplify.<sup>8</sup> We might go so far as to regard their normative force and content as being irreducible and non-fungible—“native” to themselves. When we conceive of exemplary persons as basic norms with native normativity, we can see their moral complexities and particularities as assets rather than detractions—and it is this conception of exemplary persons, as both basic norms *with* native normativity, that I will argue is at play in Confucian ethics.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> To refer to someone as an exemplary person can imply that they exemplify some external norm, but we may also refer to someone in that way simply to denote their normative status. I will maintain that the first sense of the word is not always at play—that a normative person is not always merely exemplifying some external norm.

<sup>9</sup> There is nothing in this ethically thin concept of the exemplary person that precludes Charles Manson, say, from being regarded by some not only as an exemplary person, but as a positive (good) exemplary person. The evaluation of persons, and our objections to some of those evaluations, is part of our ethically

If we can sustain the claim that the Confucians attribute basic and native normativity to exemplary persons, we will be entitled to describe Confucian ethics as an “exemplar-based ethics.” We must, however, be careful to specify exactly what we mean by this phrase. First of all, an exemplar-based ethics is not an alternative theory in competition with virtue ethics, deontological ethics, consequentialist ethics, or other possible types of ethical theories. This is chiefly because such ethical theories focus on a particular type of norm—such as motive, character trait, or consequence—and render all other norms derivative of this first type. These ethical theories are monomic and operate within the foundational paradigm of normativity. Were the Confucian ethics an exemplar-based theory in this sense, it would involve appealing to one or more exemplary persons—with fixed content and significance—as the foundation of all other normative claims. In the course of this dissertation I will argue that Confucian ethics operates within a very different paradigm of normativity. Not only do the Confucians not hunt for a foundational norm, they also present us with an alternative picture of what it is to practice moral philosophy. Adopting a pragmatic approach to normativity and moral philosophy, the Confucians do not expect moral philosophers to supply norms or justifications in a vacuum. While the moral philosopher may prove helpful in cultivating the skills of justification and critique, such things are ultimately only realized in everyday moral practice within specific moral situations.

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thick concept of the exemplary person. In this dissertation we will focus on the ethically thick concept of exemplary persons that we find in the Confucian literature—namely, the sage (聖人 *shèngrén*) and its related terms. We will turn to this in section three. Preceding that section we will focus on the ethically thin conception of exemplary persons. In other words, section one and two discuss conceptual claims we might make about exemplary persons; section three turns to the substantial claims made in the early Confucian literature about exemplary persons.

This distinction made above—viz., between merely basic norms and foundational norms—is instrumental in making sense of the possibility of treating exemplary persons as basic without, therefore, necessarily treating them as foundational. This is at least one dimension to what it means to speak of Confucian ethics as an exemplar-based ethics: exemplars will occasionally be treated as basic to a justification. But there is a second dimension to the claim—one best discussed in connection to Michael Slote’s distinction between what he calls agent-based virtue ethics and agent-focused virtue ethics. It seems fair to say every virtue ethical theory is at least agent-focused: they all mention aretaic or agent-specific traits in their assessment of moral situations, tending to favor a discussion of these traits to a discussion of actions and their consequences. What sets an agent-based approach to virtue ethics apart, according to Slote, is that it “treats the moral or ethical status of acts as entirely derivative from independent and fundamental aretaic (as opposed to deontic) ethical characterizations of motive, character traits, or individuals.”<sup>10</sup> Such a theory takes the aretaic qualities of agents to have what I have described as “native normativity”—that is, normative content that cannot be fully translated by other types of normative terms. Drawing upon Slote’s vocabulary, while maintaining that Confucian ethics is not a virtue ethics (or any other type of mononomic ethical theory), we can say that our discussion of exemplary-based ethics is similar to Slote’s use of the term “based.” Confucian ethics allows exemplars native normativity, which is to say that the ethical status of acts can derive their status from the normative content and force of an exemplary person. Confucian ethics parts company from Slote’s use of the term, however, when it comes to the finality of the relationship between normative claims and the normative content and force of exemplary persons: there should be no suggestion in

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<sup>10</sup> Crisp and Slote 1997, 239.

the claim ‘Confucian ethics is an exemplar-based ethics’ that exemplary persons are the only, or even the ultimate, source of value (that is, after all, mononomism), just as there should be no suggestion that exemplary persons cannot, occasionally, be justified by an appeal to other norms (that would make them not just basic, but foundational). To describe Confucian ethics as exemplar-based is simply to say that the Confucians occasionally treat exemplary persons as basic to a justification, and that exemplary persons are attributed unique, irreducible normative content.

Conceiving of exemplary persons as basic norms with native normativity in this fashion is, however, at odds with the derivative conception of exemplary persons that rose to prominence in the Western philosophical tradition after Plato—largely as a result of certain philosophical commitments. Among these commitments were a foundational approach to the justification of ethical claims; the pursuit of absolutely certain ethical knowledge; a commitment to moral agency (in contradistinction to the force of circumstance, whether social or physical); and an exclusively deductive approach to ethical reasoning. Commitments such as these naturally lead to an abstracted and derivative conception of exemplary persons where they become *mere* illustrations or exemplifications of external norms.

The thesis that the early Confucians treated exemplary persons as basic norms with native normativity also flies in the face of the contemporary scholarship. Many scholars understand exemplary persons to be derivative norms in Confucian ethics, parasitic upon some other norm for their force and content. This derivative conception of Confucian exemplary persons is present in the work of Donald Munro, Antonio Cua, William Theodore de Bary, Amy Olberding, and Stephen Angle. In *The Concept of Man*

in *Early China*, Munro speaks at length about the importance of emulating exemplary persons in Confucian ethics. Not only does he claim that the Confucians thought of emulation as a natural human response to exemplary persons, he says that they thought it was the very basis of “social control” or “social stability,” and a necessary precondition for self-cultivation.<sup>11</sup> Still, for Munro, exemplary persons amount to *nothing more* than exemplifications—they *embody* norms external to themselves and derive their normative force entirely from these norms. The normative foundation of Confucian ethics is, he says, to be found in the “Heavenly norms of [義] *yì*,” expressed in the rites (禮 *lǐ*). If a person is a “suitable model” for emulation this is because they “embody the *lǐ* in their own behavior” and so act ‘in accord with the Heavenly norms.’<sup>12</sup> Given the way Munro understands *lǐ* and *yì*, these norms cannot but be external to all exemplary persons. They must be transcendent of any person’s normative status, unaffected by the lives of those who might “embody” them.<sup>13</sup> His derivative conception of Confucian exemplary persons is also expressed in how he describes the research Confucius conducted into the exemplary persons of the past. He describes Confucius as surveying his tradition’s history with the aim of ‘discovering suitable moral exemplars.’ Munro assumes that the normative standards, used to justify the suitability of such persons, predate these persons; once these persons are identified, their normative significance and force will remain intact for all time to come. This is perhaps one of the dubious advantages of the derivative or restrictive conception of exemplary persons as mere exemplifications: once discovered, such persons will have eternal significance (though, of course, their

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<sup>11</sup> 1969, 110, 84, 147. We will discuss these roles in greater detail in the second chapter.

<sup>12</sup> 97; 100

<sup>13</sup> To speak of *yì* as “Heavenly norms” is suggestive enough, but when Munro speaks of kings, sages, *jūnzǐ*, and knights as “Confucian terms for sainthood” (115), can we doubt that he has a transcendent conception of Confucian norms?

significance is on eternal loan from a norm external to themselves). However, if we accept Munro's derivative conception of exemplary persons, their normative significance becomes suspect. Why do we need to appropriate an exemplary person when we might turn to the "Heavenly decreed norms"? Do exemplary persons offer us only a heuristic advantage—helping to developing our moral judgment, but never enjoying basic normativity?<sup>14</sup> Yet what sort of normative significance does this win the exemplary person?

In *Dimensions of Moral Creativity*, Antonio Cua describes the *jūnzǐ*<sup>15</sup> as "paradigmatic individuals"—a concept he borrows from Karl Jaspers, but augments with the work of George Berkeley, Max Weber, and Nicolas Hartmann. He uses three features to characterize paradigmatic individuals, and argues that the *jūnzǐ* possess all three.<sup>16</sup> First, paradigmatic individuals provide "an actuating significance to a moral practice."<sup>17</sup> Simply put, a paradigmatic individual inspires us. Second, paradigmatic individuals illuminate certain aspects of the human condition. This wins them their universal appeal and significance, but Cua acknowledges that the universal appeal is more often the product of tradition than the historical record of their lives. As Jaspers points out in his own discussion of Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, and Jesus, "All texts by which we know

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<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this is all Munro has in mind when he says, "The teacher who served as a model for the person seeking moral improvement was an 'outside aid,' and cultivation was impossible without him" (147).

<sup>15</sup> What he says of the *jūnzǐ* seems applicable to every other type of exemplary person in the *Analects*, with one exception: the sage (*shèngrén*). Cua thinks of the Confucian sage as "divinely inspired and innately wise," and as "a supreme abstract ideal of a perfect moral personality" (1978, 67). As such, the sage is "an imagined vision rather than a possible objective of the moral life" (ibid.). Cua clearly considers the sage and *jūnzǐ* not different in degree, but in kind. This, however, seems to fly in the face of the continuity between sages and average persons that we find discussed in the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*. For a sustained discussion on the supposed perfection of the sage, see chapter five.

<sup>16</sup> 66

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



them came into being after their death.”<sup>18</sup> This, Jaspers says, has allowed their stories “to be overlaid by legends and myths” and to become “mere possibilities.”<sup>19</sup> This level of abstraction and malleability constitutes a sort of productive vagueness that enables various traditions to contribute their own version of the paradigmatic individuals’ significance and to recreate them as archetypes of the human condition. Third, paradigmatic individuals can serve as moral standards for others, in both retrospective and prospective functions. Retrospectively, their example can serve as a model for the evaluation of conduct, while, prospectively, their example can become an aspirative object—an example to guide and inform our goals.

Since he attributes the third aspect of paradigmatic individuals to the *jūnzǐ* it would seem that Cua thinks it is possible that they might not only occasionally function as basic norms, but also possess native normativity. How else are we to understand his claims that “paradigmatic individuals generate their own criteria for evaluation,” or that “they [sc. paradigmatic individuals] are sources of principles and ideals”?<sup>20</sup> Yet a closer reading of Cua’s work reveals a very strong denial of any native normativity to exemplary persons. “A moral agent,” he says, “can look to other agents for guidance insofar as these agents share the same ideal norm and appear to have embodied it in some exemplary fashion in their lives and conduct. These exemplary agents may thus acquire a standard-guiding function *derivative* from the ideal norm.”<sup>21</sup> Even when one takes an exemplary person as a prime example of a moral ideal, they cannot amount to anything

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<sup>18</sup> 1957, 87

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> 40; 42

<sup>21</sup> 143; italics in the original. He also says that “there are, strictly speaking, no self-authenticating acts of any individual ... No self-authenticating act is ultimately possible, from the point of view of rational persuasion, without backing from an external source, whether divine revelation, established historical authority, or political and social sanctions” (41).

more than an illustration; and, “as mere illustrations,” Cua tells us, “citation of paradigmatic individuals remains an extrinsic feature of a moral ideal.”<sup>22</sup> A few pages later his position is made all the more obvious: a paradigmatic individual can function “as a derivative justificatory standard” and nothing more.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the only type of normativity Cua affords exemplary persons is derivative in nature. In the end, Cua holds exemplary persons to be simply the embodiments of pre-given principles and ideals: when used retrospectively, they *embody* moral principles and rules; when used prospectively, they *embody* moral ideals.<sup>24</sup> The *jūnzǐ* can be nothing but mere exemplifications.

A similar position is to be found in William Theodore de Bary’s *The Trouble with Confucianism*. In this series of lectures dedicated to the topic of exemplary persons within the long history of Confucian literature and institutions de Bary, despite the initial significance he attributes to the “paragons” of the sage-king and “the noble man” (*jūnzǐ*), expresses the view that these exemplary persons are derivative in their normativity.<sup>25</sup> He takes “Heaven” to be the source of a sage-king’s authority in pre-Confucian thought; and even with Confucius he claims it is the “Mandate of Heaven,” reconceived as a matter of “political and moral conscience,” that legitimates the noble man’s authority.<sup>26</sup> De Bary claims that it is the noble man’s “compelling voice of conscience and ideal standards represented by the imperative of Heaven which serves as the ultimate criterion and court

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<sup>22</sup> 143

<sup>23</sup> 145

<sup>24</sup> Preface

<sup>25</sup> 1991, 2 and 4

<sup>26</sup> With the sage-kings, “the *power* of the ruling house is subject to the intangible moral restraint which Heaven imposes as the unstated *condition* of the Zhou’s exercise of *sovereignty*” (4). Or, as de Bary puts it elsewhere, “his [sc. Confucius’s] critique of the rulers of his time appeals to the authority of high Heaven and invokes the ideal order of the sage-kings *praised for* [i.e., their normativity stems from] their reverence and obedience to Heaven” (15).

of judgment in assessing human affairs.”<sup>27</sup> The inclusion of such transcendent norms cannot but reduce exemplary persons to mere exemplifications.

In a recent article Amy Olberding argues that the *Analects* presents us with what she calls—following Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski (2004)—an exemplarist virtue ethics.<sup>28</sup>

“An exemplarist virtue ethics,” she explains,

begins with observation not theorizing ... exemplarism initiates an understanding of virtue with the suspicion that virtue is *like that*, where ‘that’ refers to some person of our acquaintance whom we believe to be virtuous ... we begin *without* fixed criteria or concepts, employing direct reference, *pointing to* what we mean as it features in our experience. ... Put simply, people may with some reasonable confidence identify virtuous exemplars in the absence of, and prior to, an account of virtue.<sup>29</sup>

While this sort of interpretation of Confucian ethics may at first appear sympathetic to the possibility of granting such persons native normativity in addition to their role as basic norms, Olberding is quick to rule out that possibility: “They [sc. exemplary persons] cannot define virtue,” she says.<sup>30</sup> In short, the normative content of the virtues is external to the normative content of exemplary persons who can do nothing but *exemplify* these virtues. Since Olberding understands Confucian ethics to be a variety of virtue ethics, exemplary persons must therefore always be derivative in normative content.

By precluding the native normativity of exemplary persons, however, her position faces two problems. The first concerns the novelty of her exemplarist virtue ethic reading of Confucianism. The use of *epagoge*<sup>31</sup> in the early Platonic dialogues, for example, presents us with an exemplarist ethics. Since Plato’s Socrates will rely upon familiar exemplars of courage or temperance in his search for a proper conception of these

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<sup>27</sup> 8-9

<sup>28</sup> 2008; cf. Olberding 2011.

<sup>29</sup> 626-7

<sup>30</sup> 627

<sup>31</sup> That is, inference from particulars (see Robinson 1953, 33-48).

virtues, his moral philosophy would also seem to qualify as exemplarist in nature.<sup>32</sup> Nor is exemplarist virtue ethics alien even to Kant.<sup>33</sup> It is thus difficult to see what we stand to gain from this interpretation of Confucian ethics that we might not also gain from the ethical theories of Plato or Kant.

The second problem concerns what Olberding means when she continues, despite her derivative conception of exemplary persons, to refer to them as the “origin,” “source,” “genesis,” or “ground” of Confucian ethical concepts. Since she claims that exemplary persons cannot define these concepts, the “originality” of exemplary persons seems to be merely pedagogical in nature. She seems to be saying that exemplars are the origin of our *understanding* of the virtues because these exemplars are the first illustration we have of these virtues. But if this is the limit of their significance it is difficult to see how exemplary persons might retain much, if any, original normative significance. True, the narratives and descriptions of exemplars might add to our understanding of the virtues, but since they cannot define these virtues their significance remains merely revelatory—restricted by the virtue-concepts that remain, in their content and force, unaffected by whomever we take to manifest them.

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<sup>32</sup> This would certainly be true if Gregory Vlastos were right that Socrates sometimes uses examples to *establish* a virtue’s definition (1985; see chapter three, footnote 26 for a discussion of the alternative interpretations). But as Robinson points out, Socrates uses examples not to generate definitions, but to reject them. Nevertheless, there is a way in which the Socratic utilization of examples indirectly generates knowledge. If exemplars, as normative *examples*, cannot define the virtues—i.e., cannot add content to the virtues—then what difference does it make if exemplars help you discard bad definitions as opposed to suggesting a good definition? One response is that these are but different paths to the exact same destination; and Olberding is praising exemplars for getting us to that destination, not the road that leads to it.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Kant’s discussion of the use of examples in the second part of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1997, 151-163); admittedly, his notion of “virtue” is a bit unique. For more on Kant’s account of the positive uses of examples in ethics, see Louden 2009, 1992a, and 1998.

Stephen Angle attributes a similarly derivative conception of exemplary persons to the philosophies of neo-Confucians, Wang Yangming and Zhuxi.<sup>34</sup> On Angle's account the neo-Confucian ideal of sagehood shares much in common with its classical cousin, such as the sage's purported ability to realize social integration or "harmony" (和 *hé*). The distinctively neo-Confucian contribution to the ideal of sagehood comes from the way in which harmony is cashed-out in terms of "coherence" (理 *lǐ*). Angle introduces this term with an appeal to our pervasive experiences of order. We "experience order, patterns, and intelligibility in our world", Angle writes; "we perceive (see, feel) similarities and differences, connections and disconnections" and amidst this intelligibility we also find value. It was, he says, in order to talk about the way in which our world makes sense to us that neo-Confucians spoke of *lǐ*. In short, *lǐ* names "the valued and intelligible way that things fit together"<sup>35</sup>—a coherence that is at once normative and descriptive.

He further claims that it is only when the sage acts in light of these natural patterns of coherence that she may be said to have gotten things right. As he puts it, "If our world is naturally patterned, then it makes sense to think that if we are able to fit in to, or respond to, our situation in just the right way—that is, the harmonious way—then the result can be perfect or complete ([誠] *chéng*). Without the idea of a natural pattern, it is hard to see how the sense of finality—of having-gotten-it-right—that *chéng* invokes could be justified."<sup>36</sup> The implication is that despite all the novelty of occurrent situations or all the moral imagination a sage may bring to the situation, there is a way in which a

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<sup>34</sup> 2009

<sup>35</sup> 67

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

sage gets it right only when she *responds* to these natural patterns.<sup>37</sup> Hence, the normative status of the sage is derived from the normative status attributed to natural patterns. It is, on this reading, impossible for Confucian exemplary persons to have native normativity since their normative force and content will always be derived from these natural patterns.

In addition to this *exegetical* objection—viz., that Confucian ethics treats exemplary persons always as derivative norms and never as basic norms with native normativity—the main thesis of this dissertation also faces several *philosophical* objections. There are the problems of evaluating or appreciating others, of baldly imitating exemplary persons, and of irrationality.

If we allow exemplary persons to have the status of a basic norm with native normativity, the task of properly appreciating others, and thus identifying and distinguishing between positive and negative exemplary persons, can become quite difficult.<sup>38</sup> This is especially true because the native normativity of exemplary persons, which makes them capable of being much more than mere exemplifications, precludes using standards like honesty or non-violence as a litmus test of persons worthy of being regarded as positive exemplary persons. In the early Confucian literature there are occasional passages that express the optimism that the proper appreciation of others, even without an independent standard, might easily be carried out. “Watch their actions, observe their motives, examine wherein they dwell content,” Confucius says, “won’t you

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<sup>37</sup> Is this part of our moral experience—this idea that there could be a “right” way of getting things?

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion on the challenge of distinguishing between positive and negative exemplary persons, see Hansen 1992, 68-69 and chapters five and six below. There is also great difficulty in evaluating ourselves. It is possible, for instance, to succumb to the words of sycophants; as the *Shangshu* tells us, “When the ministers ... are flatterers, the sovereign will consider himself a sage” (Legge 1971, 227). For a moving story of this sort of affair, see Plutarch’s “Life of Alexander.”

know what kind of person they are? Won't you know what kind of person they are?"

There is also, apparently, much to be gained by attending to a person's words. The last line of the *Analects* reads, "A person who does not understand words (不知言 *bù zhī yán*) has no way of knowing others."<sup>39</sup> In a passage that appears to offer a direct commentary on this idea, Mengzi claims to have "insight into words" (知言 *zhī yán*).<sup>40</sup> When asked what he means by the phrase, he responds

From biased words I can see wherein the speaker is blind; from immoderate words, wherein he is ensnared; from heretical words, wherein he has strayed from the proper path; from evasive words, wherein he is at his wits' end. What arises from the heartmind will affect how you govern yourself, and what affects the way you govern yourself will affect your affairs.<sup>41</sup>

Then there are the passages in the early literature that speak of the use of physiognomy.

In Zengzi's commentary to the *Daxue* we read,

When left alone, *xiǎorén* become corrupt without anything to stop them; it is only after they see a *jūnzǐ* that they try to conceal it, covering up their corruption and displaying their excellences. If, when others inspect these persons, they can see through to their true dispositions, what is the advantage (of the pretense)? ... This might be said to be a case of 'what is true within being displayed without.' As wealth adorns a house, so excellence (德 *dé*) adorns the person—when the heartmind harbors no shame and the body is relaxed.<sup>42</sup>

Mengzi expresses the same idea of reading a person's dispositions from their comportment, but specifically in terms of the eyes:

There is in man nothing more ingenuous than the pupils of his eyes. They cannot conceal his wickedness. When he is upright within his breast, a man's pupils are clear and bright; when he is not, they are clouded and murky. How can a man conceal his true character if you listen to his words and observe the pupils of his eyes?<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> 20.3

<sup>40</sup> 2A2

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Chapter 6; cf. Zhu Xi's commentary on *Analects* 1.15

<sup>43</sup> 4A15. It would be profitable to correlate this discussion with the contemporary empirical research into emotional "leakage" in facial expressions (see Argyle 2001, 26-30).

We may find it difficult to ignore our qualms about these physiognomic methods for discerning a person's true dispositions—methods, after all, that seem quite capable of simply confirming our prejudices about the person or persons we are appreciating, no matter how unjustified such prejudices might be. Yet the literature voices its own reservations and suggests that the task of appreciating others might be quite difficult after all.

Many of the difficulties are caused by the existence of “village worthies” (鄉原 *xiāngyuán*).<sup>44</sup> Confucius introduces the term, describing the village worthy as “excellence (*dé*) under false pretenses.”<sup>45</sup> When Mengzi is asked to clarify this expression he describes village worthies in the following terms:

Their words and deeds take no notice of each other, and yet they keep on saying, “The ancients! The ancients!—Why must they have walked along in such a solitary fashion? Being of this era, one must behave in a manner pleasing to this era. So long as one is adept (善 *shàn*), that is enough.” They try in this way to cringingly please their era. ... If you want to censure them, you cannot find anything; if you want to find fault with them, you cannot find anything either. They share with others the practices of the times and are in harmony with the era. They pursue such a policy and appear to be conscientious and faithful, and to show integrity in their conduct. They are liked by the multitude and are self-righteous. It is impossible to embark on the way of Yao or Shun with such persons. Hence the name “enemy of virtue.” Confucius said, “I detest what is specious. ... I detest flattery in case it should pass for what is right; I detest glibness in case it should pass for the truthful ... I detest those who pass for honest men in the village in case they should be mistaken for the virtuous.”<sup>46</sup>

The morality of village worthies is conventionalist. The sole interest of such persons is to court the approval of their contemporaries, mistaking reputation for genuine prominence.<sup>47</sup> It is the village worthy that seems to have prompted Confucius to claim that reputation and popularity, by themselves, are irrelevant when it comes to the real

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<sup>44</sup> The term suggests that the person is a “moral simpleton” or a “moral conventionalist.”

<sup>45</sup> 17.13

<sup>46</sup> 7B37

<sup>47</sup> 12.20



worth of a person.<sup>48</sup> Most importantly, it was a village worthy that taught Confucius to be suspicious when appreciating others.

Zaiwo was still sleeping during the daytime. The Master said, “You cannot carve rotten wood, and cannot trowel over a wall of manure. As for Zaiwo, what is the point in upbraiding him?” The Master added, “In my initial dealings with others I would listen to their words and trust they would act on them; now in my dealing with others I listen to their words and watch that they act on them. It is Zaiwo that has taught me this.”<sup>49</sup>

Zaiwo is a fellow whose words and deeds ‘take no notice of each other,’ and he is impervious to remonstrance. (It may be an open question, however, whether his sleeping habits accorded with the conventions of his times.)

Besides waiting to see if the actions of persons are as good as their words, one can also learn something from observing them within trying circumstances. As the Han Dynasty Confucian, Xu Gan, puts it: “If the road is not rough, then there is no way to test how good a horse is. Similarly, if a man’s responsibilities are not heavy, then there is no way to judge his 德 *dé*.”<sup>50</sup> Confucius seems to express the same idea in a rather cryptic

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<sup>48</sup> See 13.24, 15.28; cf. *Lunheng* 80. It is by ignoring popular acclaim, and investigating the person yourself, that a superior can avoid being duped by the reputation of such people. Given this approach to unmasking the village worthy, Confucius seems to attribute the elevation of such people to the existence of cliques.

<sup>49</sup> 5.10

<sup>50</sup> *Zhonglun* 3. Since I will make use of a very wide range of Han and pre-Han texts, now would be a good time to defend my inclusion of “unorthodox” materials. A critic might point out that there was a wide variety of Confucianisms (儒家 *rújiā*) during the Han dynasty, and that very few authors were self-described Confucians. Drawing upon either point the critic might then claim that to use Wang Chong, Yang Xiong, Liu Xiang, Dong Zhongshu, and Xu Gan indiscriminately and without qualification is an unjustified essentialism. Yet I believe this charge of indiscriminate essentialism works in my favor. There were no Confucians (儒士 *rúshì*) during the pre-Qin era, only Rú-ists (儒者 *rú zhě*). Thus the notion of Confucian orthodoxy is itself unorthodox—or at least anachronistic. When Sima Qian’s father used *rújiā* to select out a “Confucian” school, it was late in the game; and Zhu Xi’s canonization of the “Four Books” (*Analects*, *Mengzi*, and two chapters from the *Liji*—the *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*) is even longer in coming. Yet in the absence of a clear set of “orthodox” texts, what material will be relevant to a discussion on early (Han and pre-Han) Confucian ethics? I will answer this question by following two principles throughout the dissertation. Any text I draw upon to make original or substantive claims must be largely consistent with the *Analects*, or the material upon which Confucius and the authors of the *Analects* draw. This prevents me from using the *Zhuangzi* as a primary source, but naturally allows me to include the *Mengzi*, *Xunzi*, *Zuozhuan*, *Liji*, *Shangshu*, and *Shijing*. Yet, when it comes to using a text as commentary, I will draw upon any relevant text—regardless of “school” or historical period. If the use of the Chinese literature to clarify a

remark: “It is only when the cold sets in that we realize the pine and the cypress are the last to fade.”<sup>51</sup> One must be careful, however, in the interpretation of such circumstances. As Confucius says, “A fine steed is praised for its excellence (德 *dé*), not for its strength (力 *lì*).”<sup>52</sup>

To properly appreciate others often requires achieving a degree of intimacy with them. If we are to see through the fog created by popular reputation and cliques, we must come to know the person ourselves.<sup>53</sup> When Zigong hears others disparaging the worth of the Master, he says that only those who were his students knew his true worth. Confucius was like a domestic compound with a tall wall around its perimeter. Only by ‘entering through the gate’<sup>54</sup> could one truly glimpse the lavishness of the estate inside. Yet, paradoxically, intimacy with a person can simultaneously blind us to their true worth.

The *Daxue* commentary (大學曾註 *Daxue Zengzhu*) elaborates.

If there is something that enrages us, we will not grasp things correctly; if there is something that frightens us, we will not grasp things correctly; if there is something that delights us, we will not grasp things correctly; if there is something that worries us, we will not grasp things correctly. If the heartmind does not get free of these things, we look but do not see, we listen but do not hear, we eat but do not know the flavor.<sup>55</sup>

Our intimacy with others can also blind us in this fashion.

Persons are prejudiced about those whom they hold dear, they are prejudiced about those whom they loath, they are prejudiced about those whom they hold in awe, they are prejudiced about those whom they pity, they are prejudiced about those for whom they have apathy. This is the reason there are so few people in the world who can love someone and still know that person’s faults, or who can hate

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term, a distinction, or a discussion in one of the texts included under the second principle is objectionable, the whole commentarial tradition would be objectionable.

<sup>51</sup> 9.28; cf. *Mengzi* 7A24. One is reminded of something Mark Twain wrote: “I have found out that there ain’t no surer way to find out whether you like people or hate them than to travel with them.”

<sup>52</sup> 14.33; see above on the tension between natural ability and effort.

<sup>53</sup> *Mengzi* 6B6; 1B7; cf. *Analects* 19.20

<sup>54</sup> An expression that connotes becoming his student.

<sup>55</sup> Chapter 7; cf. *Mengzi* 7A27 for an elaboration on this theme

someone and still know that person's good points. Hence, the proverb has it, 'A man does not know the faults of his son, just as he does not know the potential size of his seedlings.'<sup>56</sup>

Given the various difficulties involved in the appreciation of persons it is no wonder that Confucius says that only the *jūnzǐ* are truly able to love and hate others—to adequately appreciate them and love their good aspects and hate their bad ones.<sup>57</sup> After all, to appreciate others one must be both sensitive to particulars and have a properly calibrated heartmind. Without sensitivity to particulars we may mistake chance for ability or nature for effort; but we might also miss the salient features of the circumstances of the other's actions that impact the value of their conduct. Without a properly calibrated heartmind, we will easily be blinded to the true worth or defects of another. But if we agree that we must cultivate ourselves before we can properly appreciate others, we must also agree that knowing the worth of others is a non-egalitarian form of knowing—that there are specialists in this area. Regardless of how we may initially feel about this, it seems to give rise to a particular kind of paradox. How are we to recognize the specialist when being a specialist requires certain traits that have moral value? Might you have to be a specialist before you can recognize another specialist? In that case, either you are or are not a specialist. If the former is the case, what use do you have for another specialist?<sup>58</sup> If the latter is the case, you cannot trust another person's appreciations since you cannot appreciate his or her ability to make such pronouncements. Add to this quandary the possibility of self-deception and we seem to be utterly lost.

The possibility of village worthies introduces a second puzzle, related to the first (viz., the challenge of distinguishing positive and negative exemplary persons when such

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<sup>56</sup> *Daxue Zengzhu*, chapter 8

<sup>57</sup> 4.3. This is why Confucius is asked, throughout the *Analects*, for his opinion of others.

<sup>58</sup> Xunzi appears to take this route, but without much success (see 5.12).

persons do not derive their normative force from a fixed moral standard external to themselves)—a puzzle that does not concern the appreciation of others so much as our proper relation to exemplary persons. As a conventionalist, village worthies are keen on appearing the part, on putting on a good appearance by conforming to the moral customs of their day.<sup>59</sup> Since they see no difference between moral substance and popular acclaim, they will not avoid baldly imitating an exemplary person (assuming the person is popular at the time). Yet Confucius is clear that moral ‘forms’ lack any merit if we do not invest ourselves in their performance, or if we do not personalize them;<sup>60</sup> and the same applies to the examples set by exemplary persons.<sup>61</sup> Not only does bald imitation lack the personal investment and judgment required to make one’s conduct meaningful and fruitful, the differences in the exemplary person’s situation and one’s own will render gross imitative conduct absurd, even harmful. “To be born into the present era, yet attempt to return to the ways of the past—a person like this will fall prey to disaster.”<sup>62</sup> But if imitation is not the proper way to relate to the pattern of an exemplary person, does this not render their pattern, at best, a heuristic for developing our own sense of what is optimally appropriate (義 *yì*)? Perhaps exemplary persons can be pedagogical devices of moral education, and nothing more. But in that case do they have anything but instrumental value? Is their normative content and force not necessarily derivative?

A third problem concerns the claim that the Confucian exemplary persons are basic norms, possessing native normativity. How does this conception of exemplary

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<sup>59</sup> 17.12

<sup>60</sup> 3.3, 3.12; cf. 3.4, 9.3.

<sup>61</sup> In the personalization of 禮 *lǐ* there are at least three ways one can go astray: one might use *lǐ* to assume a higher social rank than one has a right to (2.24, 3.1, 3.2, 3.6, 3.22, 7.36; cf. 3.8, 5.22), one might use *lǐ* to compete with others (3.7, 15.22; cf. 3.16), or one might use *lǐ* as an instrument for securing personal advantage (利 *lì*) (4.13, 9.3).

<sup>62</sup> *Zhongyong* 28; cf. Han Feizi’s story of the “watcher-of-stumps” (守株 *shǒuzhū*) (49.1).

persons not give rise to irrationalism or intuitionism? And how does the reliance on exemplary persons—as a basic resource for justification and critique—not simply reinforce cultural divisions?

A fourth challenge worth considering is whether, by relying upon exemplary persons rather than something like abstract principles, we might not sink into the mires of cultural relativism. After all, it seems that only those who already share a cultural heritage are likely to feel the normative force of a given person. Mengzi occasionally faces this sort of challenge. He encounters a mild form of it in conversation with Gongsun Qiu:

Gongsun Qiu asked, “If you, Master, were to hold the reins of government in Chi, could a repetition of the success of Guan Zhong and Yanzi be predicted?”

Mengzi said, “You certainly are a person of Qi—you know of Guan Zhong and Yanzi, but that’s all.”<sup>63</sup>

Again, when discussing rulership with Duke Wen of Teng, Mengzi cites Yao and Shun as his authorities. But when the Duke returns at a later date, Mengzi wonders if the Duke is unconvinced of what he said before—if, perhaps, these two exemplary persons carried no normative force for the Duke.<sup>64</sup> Yet the most forceful expression of relativism occurs when Mengzi counsels Duke Ting of Teng to follow the ritual of three-years mourning.

The elders and all the officials were opposed to this and said, “The ancestral rulers of the eldest branch of our house in Lu never observed this; neither did our own ancestral rulers. Now it comes to you, and you go against our accepted practice. This is perhaps ill-advised. Furthermore, the *Records* say, ‘In funeral and sacrifice, one follows the practice of one’s ancestors.’” They concluded, “We have authority for what *we* do.”

In our own times of globalism and cultural upheaval, it is hard to see how exemplary persons might find sufficiently broad acclaim to facilitate moral agreement. Citing people like Gandhi or Mandela as counterexamples to this claim might not work, especially if

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<sup>63</sup> 2A1

<sup>64</sup> 3A1

these exemplary persons are interpreted in a derivative way—with each culture censuring the originality, or particularity, of these exemplary persons by transforming them into the embodiment of that culture’s own normative scheme.<sup>65</sup> However, moral imperialism (in the form of forcing one’s morality upon another) is an unsatisfactory way of overcoming moral relativism.

In addition to these philosophical objections directed at allowing exemplary persons basic and native normativity, there are philosophical objections that seem unique to the *Confucian* endorsement of the basic and native normativity of exemplary persons. There is, for example, the problem of the “invisible sage”—that, to be genuine, a sage seems required to remain unrecognized as such. This is a problem unique to moral “situationism,” with its emphasis upon developing efficacious situations rather than the strength of character.<sup>66</sup> It is possible that the very traits that comprise the Confucian sage,

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<sup>65</sup> One finds a great example of this on the streets of Amsterdam. At Westermarck 6, Descartes’s summer residence in the year 1634, there is an engraved excerpt from his correspondence to Balzac, in which he apparently praises Holland, asking his reader, “In what other country may one enjoy such complete liberty?” What Descartes went on to say in the same letter, but does not appear on the engraving, was his explanation of this liberty—he says (paraphrasing, of course) ‘Everyone here is a merchant and doesn’t know philosophy from his own ass.’

<sup>66</sup> Anyone who interprets Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics must question the validity of describing Confucian ethics as situationistic. A supporter of a virtue ethics interpretation, Eric Hutton has recently argued (2006) that Doris’s situationism cannot apply to Confucian ethics. According to Hutton, “the Aristotelian notion of character [is] about as widespread in the East Asian philosophical tradition as in the Western philosophical tradition” (p. 37), and “an emphasis on robust character traits”—especially the *consistency* of character traits—“is a central feature of Confucian ethics” (ibid., p. 40). When he turns to the *Analects* to support his claims, Hutton discusses the trait of *rén* 仁 (which he translates as “benevolence”—a translation that might very well beg the question). Linguistically speaking, he says, this must surely be “a trait of people”: “Confucian texts often speak of the 仁人 [*rénrén*] ‘ren person’ or 仁者 [*rén zhě*] ‘one who is ren’” (ibid.). Furthermore, a careful reading of *Analects* 4.5 reveals an emphasis not merely upon the stability of this trait, but its consistency as well: “If the gentleman abandons *ren*, how can he merit the name [of ‘gentleman’]? The gentleman does not go against *ren* even for the amount of time required to finish a meal. Even in times of urgency or distress, he necessarily accords with it” (p. 41; Hutton’s translation). I do not think one can doubt these claims; they are, however, incapable of supporting Hutton’s initial claim about Confucian ethics. First of all, *rén* might be said to be a trait of persons—but what is it to be a “person”? As David Hall and Roger Ames have argued (1998), a person in Confucian thought is a focus in a field of relationships. Secondly, when it comes to the issue of the “gentleman” (*jūnzǐ*) in times of distress—what, we should ask, allows the *jūnzǐ* to maintain *rén*? Drawing upon the *Analects* it would seem that a good answer to this question is the company the *jūnzǐ* keep—their relations

if taken to their logical conclusion, could render the sage totally obscure or unknown. The early “Daoist” classics seem to reveal just this.<sup>67</sup> As the *Zhuangzi* declares, “Paragons are without a self, spirit-like persons are without accomplishments, sages are without a name” (至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名。Zhìrén wú jǐ, shénrén wú gōng, shèngrén wú míng).<sup>68</sup>

When Confucius goes about praising the distant sage-kings, he does so by noting their non-coercive (無為 *wúwéi*) approach to ruling. Thus we find Confucius saying, “How majestic they were—Yao and Shun reigned over the world but did not rule it”, and “If anyone could be said to have effected proper order while remaining nonassertive (*wúwéi*), surely it was Shun. What did he do? He simply assumed an air of deference and faced due south.”<sup>69</sup> Yet it is the sages’ quality of ruling non-assertively (*wúwéi*) that causes the Daoist texts to speak of them as unnoticed and unremembered.<sup>70</sup> Anyone who governs non-coercively will successfully attend to situations in their infancy; they will, as the *Laozi* puts it, accomplish great things because they never wait until the situation unfolds to the point where success would require a great accomplishment.<sup>71</sup> Neither heroes nor martyrs, the efficacy of the sages makes them invisible.<sup>72</sup> To borrow the style of the *Laozi* we might put the matter this way: ‘accomplished sages are invisible; visible sages are not accomplished.’<sup>73</sup> If this is right, then any exemplary person who is

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and relationships (cf. Xunzi on lì 立, “situation”). For more on the relational and participatory nature of *rén*, see chapter six.

<sup>67</sup> The *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi*. Since these texts do not mention “Daoism” (much like the early Confucian texts do not mention “Confucianism”), and because this title was first invented by Sima Qian’s father to describe a particular “political” theory, the term “Daoist” is of little significance.

<sup>68</sup> 1.1

<sup>69</sup> *Analects* 8.18, 15.5. When a ruler’s “thrown” faced due south it signified that the realm was at peace.

<sup>70</sup> This also seems applicable to the Confucian conception of sages.

<sup>71</sup> 63, cf. 64

<sup>72</sup> See *Laozi* 17, 70. See also the discussion of the invisibility of good generals in the *Sunzi*.

<sup>73</sup> “When *de* is cultivated and accumulated such that the particular is integrated utterly with the whole, the

recognized and appropriated would ipso facto be a deficient exemplar. Does this not question the wisdom of feeling emulously towards exemplary persons, or any practice that relies upon the normative force and content of such persons?

It is obvious by now that my thesis—namely, that exemplary persons were often used as basic norms within Confucian ethics and attributed native normativity—is controversial on both exegetical and philosophical grounds. Contemporary scholars are either critical of the thesis, or they implicitly preclude its tenability by interpreting Confucian ethics as resting, ultimately, upon a foundational norm. We have also discussed several philosophical difficulties that arise when we conceive of exemplary persons as basic norms with native normativity. In the chapters that follow I will attempt to defend the Confucian attribution of basic and native normativity to exemplary persons on both exegetical and philosophical fronts. I will defend the claim that the early Confucian literature endorses the basic and native normativity of exemplary persons; I will also defend this conception of exemplary persons from the philosophical objections.

In the second chapter I survey the various normative roles played by exemplary persons within Confucian ethics, using that discussion to generate a functional definition of exemplary persons. In the third chapter I begin to defend the exegetical claim that the early Confucian literature occasionally treated exemplary persons as basic norms with native normativity, and then turn to Plato's critique of that sort of position. Finding parallels between his argument in the *Euthyphro* and the arguments of John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, I identify a common commitment that is the root of their critique of

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distinction between *dao* and *de* collapses and *de* as an individuating notion is transformed into *de* as an integrating notion" (Hall and Ames 1987, 221; see also *Han Feizi* 20.1 and *Laozi* 38). In the latter we read, "Where one is *dé*, he is without *dé* [i.e., integrates rather than individuates]; the person of superior *dé* is not *dé*; and that is why he has *dé*; the person of inferior *de* does not lose [i.e., integrate] his *dé*; and that is why he has no *dé*; ... hence *de* arises after the *dào* is lost, *rén* arises after *dé* is lost."



allowing exemplary persons native normativity—namely, a paradigm of normativity that can be described as foundational. Chapter four draws upon the work of Aristotle and John Dewey to articulate an alternative approach to normativity that is pragmatic in character—an approach that makes the native normativity of persons a tenable hypothesis and functions as a response to the charge of irrationality and cultural relativism. In chapter five, by first showing that Confucian ethics operates according to the pragmatic rather than the foundational approach to normativity, I conclude the demonstration (begun in chapter three) that the native normativity of exemplary persons is not only present in the literature (an exegetical claim), but that by endorsing the pragmatic paradigm the Confucians were forced to attribute native normative to persons. This has implications for how exemplary persons are appropriated or emulated by others—a topic that concludes the fifth chapter. Another consequence of pragmatic normativity for the Confucians is the composite selfhood of the exemplary person—something I will discuss at length in chapters six and seven, especially as it connects to both the Confucian conception of sagehood and the practice of assessing persons. The notion of selfhood, understood in terms of a composite sense of self, correlates with the puzzle of the invisible sage, which is a puzzle I will turn to in the last chapter and discuss along with the non-liberal form of democracy that is reflected in the Confucian conception of exemplary persons.

## CHAPTER 2. EXEMPLARY PERSONS IN CONFUCIAN MORAL CULTURE

Exemplary persons are at the very heart of Confucian moral philosophy and practice—truly a dominant feature of Confucian moral experience.<sup>74</sup> They create moral traditions and exercise tremendous sociopolitical influence. They are often cited to facilitate moral education, to inform effective remonstrance and diplomacy, to develop and sustain relationships characterized by trust (信 *xìn*) and commitment (忠 *zhōng*), and to justify or critique conduct, aspirations, and normative claims.<sup>75</sup> By surveying these various normative functions one naturally gains a perspective on the Confucian experience of exemplary persons. This survey will enable us to articulate a functional definition of exemplary persons, and it will also prove instrumental in developing and testing the renewed understanding of exemplary persons that will be discussed throughout the dissertation.

### 2.1 *Creators of Moral Tradition*

There are two senses in which an exemplary person might create a moral tradition: one historical, the other performative.<sup>76</sup> It is a recurring claim in the early

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<sup>74</sup> I am using “exemplary persons” in both of the *normative* senses of 君子 *jūnzǐ* (see chapter one, footnote 6). I will use the term “moral” and “morality” in a very general sense throughout. Were we to restrict ourselves to a Kantian sense of the terms we would find no parallel in the classical Chinese canon—see, for instance, Kant’s distinction between “ethics” and “morals” (1993, 388). The two terms that suggest themselves as possible equivalents to the Kantian sense of morals are Mengzi’s binomial 仁義 *rényì*, and the phrase 人倫 *rénlún*—yet they are not “pure” in the Kantian sense, but tied to our “inclinations” and the consequences of conduct. For an insightful discussion of this issue see Rosemont 1976.

<sup>75</sup> The practice of citing an exemplary person is described as 稱 *chēng* in the *Mengzi* (see 3A1).

<sup>76</sup> We need not think of these two as mutually exclusive. The early Confucian literature has several ways of speaking about moral traditions. The *Analects* speaks of the rites (禮 *lǐ*), the six arts (六藝 *liùyì*), 文 *wén*, along with the 道 *dào*—such as the *dào* of one’s father or the *dào* of the former kings. To this Mengzi adds his 仁義 *rényì* (benevolence) and 人倫 *rénlún* (social roles) each of which we might translate as “morality,” while Xunzi offers the expressions 禮義 *lǐyì* (rites and duties) and 制禮義 *zhìlǐyì* (regulations, rites, and duties).

Confucian literature that the ancient sage-kings created (作 *zuò*) many of the moral traditions.<sup>77</sup> The *Liji* goes so far as to suggest that “sage” (聖 *shèng*) is simply another way of referring to “those who create” (作者 *zuò zhě*).<sup>78</sup> In perhaps the most sweeping expression of the inventiveness of the sages, Xunzi says,

The sages are the stewards (管 *guǎn*) of the way. The way of the realm is stewarded by the sages; the ways of the hundred kings harmonize with the sages. Hence the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Record of Rites*, and the *Book of Music* all revert back to the sages. The *Book of Songs* express their intentions (志 *zhì*), the *Book of Documents* express their affairs (事 *shì*), the *Record of Rites* express their conduct (行 *xíng*), and the *Book of Music* expresses their harmony (和 *hé*).<sup>79</sup>

Speaking specifically of the rites (禮 *lǐ*), Xunzi comments, “Of the sources of ritual principles, none is more important than the sage kings.”<sup>80</sup>

The moral creativity of the sage-ruler Shun is frequently mentioned. According to the *Shangshu* and the *Mengzi* it was Shun who first established the five cardinal human relationships (五倫 *wǔlún* or 人倫 *rénlún*), described by Mengzi as kindness (親 *qīn*) between father and son, appropriateness (義 *yì*) between ruler and minister, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of old over the young, and trust (信 *xìn*) between

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<sup>77</sup> The two sages most often cited in the *Analects*, *Mengzi*, and *Xunzi* are 舜 Shun and 堯 Yao. I will ignore the question of the historical validity of these claims about the sages and instead take them as nothing more than expressions of a Confucian genealogy of morals, or a Confucian self-understanding of its moral traditions.

<sup>78</sup> For more on the almost definitional connection between sagehood and creativity (*zuò*), see the *Xici* and *Shuogua* chapters in the *Zhouyi*, and the chapter on music (*Yueji*) in the *Liji*. This connection seems implied in *Analects* 7.1 (see Xing Bing’s [邢昺 932-1010 CE] sub-commentary in his *Lunyu Zhushu* 論語注疏, which clearly borrows a line from the *Liji*—作者之謂聖 *zuò zhě zhī wèi shèng*). For more on the nature of the sage’s creativity, see footnote 29 below.

<sup>79</sup> 8.14. “Truly the *Shu* contains the record of the affairs of effective government. The *Shi* sets the correct standards to which pronunciation should adhere” (*Analects* 1.8); cf. 7.18, 7.31, and *Xunzi* 8.4

<sup>80</sup> 5.10

friends.<sup>81</sup> Shun was also responsible for creating the regulations and rites of the era (制禮 *zhìlǐ*), said to reduce the material strife among the people.<sup>82</sup>

There are some passages in the early literature, however, that seem to deny the sages any role in creating the moral tradition. For instance, in the very same chapter in which the *Shangshu* claims Shun was the first to articulate the *wǔlún*, it also claims that this sage conformed to pre-existing rites governing the practices of mourning the dead and sacrificing to the ancestors. Perhaps the sages did not create *all* of the rites after all. This doubt is compounded by passages such as *Analects* 11.1, where Confucius says that “the first to come to observing ritual propriety and playing music were the simple folk; those who came later were the *jūnzǐ*. In putting ritual and music to use, I would follow those who came to them first.” If we take the *jūnzǐ* in this passage to be normative, the sages would no doubt be included among those who arrive late to the rites.<sup>83</sup> Mengzi provides us with this sort of ‘common folk genealogy’ for the rites of mourning:

Presumably there must have been cases in ancient times of people not burying their parents. When the parents died, they were thrown in the gullies. Then one day the sons passed the place and there lay the bodies, eaten by foxes and sucked by flies. A sweat broke out on their brows, and they could not bear to look. The sweating was not put on for others to see. It was an outward expression of their innermost heart. They went home for baskets and spades.<sup>84</sup>

If it is possible that nameless commoners of the distant past created the rites of mourning, what is to stop one from positing a similar claim about the whole of the Confucian moral tradition? While this does not necessarily endanger the claim that *exemplary persons*, if

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<sup>81</sup> *Shangshu* 1.2; *Mengzi* 3A4

<sup>82</sup> See *Xunzi* 6.10, 9.3, 19.1, and 23.3. By regulating the allocation of material goods, these standards establish social class divisions; and by regulating the seasonal uses of natural resources, they rendered sustainable the allocation of these resources (see 9.3, 9.14, 9.22). Social divisions are thought to restrict the range of one’s desires for material goods, while making our extraction of natural resources sustainable will secure us all the means of satisfying our basic needs.

<sup>83</sup> Yet see Edward Slingerland’s interpretation of this passage, which would make it irrelevant to our present question (2003, 111).

<sup>84</sup> 3A5

not sages, are the historical creators of the moral tradition (Mengzi, after all, treats these commoners as exemplary persons because of what they did), it at least suggests that, in the Confucian literature, there are competing genealogies of the moral traditions.<sup>85</sup>

Yet a promising way to reconcile these two lines of thought is to offer a more considered view of the sage's brand of creativity.<sup>86</sup> Thinking of creativity as complete originality—where one seeks to become significant to one's society by creating something absolutely novel—is explicitly denounced by the literature as an unworthy goal. As the *Zhongyong* puts it, “If someone takes as the way that which distances them from others, it should not be considered the proper way.”<sup>87</sup> And in the *Analects* we hear Confucius confess that thinking unaided for an entire day produced no results; he also claims that even the noblest aspirations cause nothing but trouble if one cannot mediate them by learning from the examples (則 *zé* or 法 *fǎ*) of others.<sup>88</sup> Genuine creativity is not complete originality but productive appropriation. One must renew the old as a means of realizing the new.<sup>89</sup> As Confucius expresses the idea, “Following the proper way I do not

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. “If they were right to bury them, then both filial children and consummate persons (仁人 *rénrén*) will also bury their kin; surely they must have the proper way (道 *dào*) of things!” This is one of Mengzi's arguments in his debate with the Mohist, Yizi. By offering this hypothetical scenario—much like his famous scenario of the infant about to fall into a well (2A6)—he offers us enough of the details to cause a response on our own part. We feel immediate sympathy for these distant people. Mengzi can then draw his conclusions out from our own heartminds (心 *xīn*); we will agree with him ‘that this is what filial children and consummate persons will do, and that it is the appropriate way of doing things.’

<sup>86</sup> And yet another way to reconcile the difference here is to refer to the composite or relational accomplishment of sagehood, which we will discuss in chapters six and seven. Briefly put, the absence of an identifiable individual responsible for the invention of a given moral tradition need not simply be the result of the pre-history of such an event, or the usually amorphous generation of social habits (after all, social habits seem to become recognized as units of social habituation only after they have been practiced for some time). In addition to these possibilities we find, in the Confucian conception of exemplary persons, that the conduct of a sage is understood to be the conduct of a community and tradition, and “agency” is taken to be an abstraction from culturally and socially constitutive human activity. This consideration, if admitted, erodes the significance of attributing the invention of a moral tradition to faceless commoners as opposed to a sage with a 名 *míng* (“name,” “title,” “fame,” or “reputation”).

<sup>87</sup> 13

<sup>88</sup> 15.31, 17.8

<sup>89</sup> 2.11

initiate (作 *zuò*), I trust and love the ancients—in these respects I am comparable to our venerable Old Peng.”<sup>90</sup> But this process is not one of subservient traditionalism.

Confucius is quite clear that students must not yield to their teachers simply because they are their teachers—and the same could be applied to how one should relate to one’s tradition.<sup>91</sup>

Confucius expounds on the nature of productive appropriation when he says that he ‘learns much, selects out what works and follows it.’<sup>92</sup> While Shun is said to have produced the five human roles and the *Shao* music, it is doubtful that he created them from whole cloth. Music and human relationships surely predate Shun’s contributions. As such, his creativity must have been a process of adaptation—an elaboration, an extension, a polish of what was already there. Mengzi captures this idea when he likens the moral government (*rénzhèng*) of the sages to a gnomonic tool. The sages created moral government like one might “invent” a compass, square, or plumb-line. All such gnomonic devices serve as a standard in specific practices, yet such practices often predate the creation of these gnomonic devices.<sup>93</sup> The practices of the five human relationships, along with governmental regulations, predate the contributions of the sages just as the practice of carpentry predates the square and plumb-line. Yet the refinement of these practices, realized by the introduction of these gnomonic devices, constitutes a novel contribution all the same.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> 7.1; by denying that he invents (作 *zuò*) Confucius is rejecting the title of sage.

<sup>91</sup> See 9.3

<sup>92</sup> 7.28

<sup>93</sup> While a gnomonic device can predate a practice to which it is then applied (when, for instance, we find a novel application of a gnomonic device to a practice other than the one that inspired the original creation of the device) it is very often the necessities of a specific practice that facilitate the creation and design of the gnomonic device.

<sup>94</sup> An illuminating parallel might be the creativity we find in contemporary music. There are certain limits imposed on the creativity of a musician today. There are the limits of traditional musical forms and what

The sage's creativity draws upon the pre-existing moral culture of his or her people, but also upon the wider conditions of the times.<sup>95</sup> Mengzi addresses this issue when discussing the topic of hegemony (or “kingship,” with the implication that there can be only one king in the known realm) with Duke Sun Chou.<sup>96</sup> Despite King Wen's *dé*—or influential personal example—it proved too difficult for him to achieve hegemony, and he died before he was able to unify the realm under his rule. This fact caused Duke Sun Chou to doubt the viability of the Duke Wen's example. Mengzi salvages King Wen's status by reminding the Duke of the larger forces at work in any given era. Take, for example, the sinister King Zhou. Here was a figure who ought to have quickly lost his realm, and yet he retained his rule for several years. According to Mengzi this was because of the fine governmental institutions Zhou inherited, the able ministers serving under him, and the sheer scope of his empire. King Wen, on the other hand, was at the very beginning of a new dynasty and with a limited realm of influence. This is why hegemony eluded King Wen and why King Zhou retained it for so long. The difference between them was not due to their individual capacities or the moral practices of their

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others will recognize as music. There are economic, religious, and recreational considerations that set limits to what a musician might do. There are the limits set by the physiology of human hearing and the “physiology” of musical instruments. These considerations no doubt pre-date contemporary musicians, limiting their creativity while simultaneously conditioning their musical inventiveness. In a similar way, the sage is limited in their creativity by the “physiology” of human society and sentiments, and of the established moral traditions. But we can note that these limiting factors, for the musician and the sage, are not immutable. They are, first of all, fluid and historical—shifting with the times. Secondly, moral and musical artists are capable of influencing the conditions that were initially constraining them through creatively engaging with them. Musicians, like sages, can blend traditions or take them in new directions. They can modify musical and moral instruments (as John Cage did with his “prepared” pianos).

<sup>95</sup> See, for instance, *Xunzi* 32.7: “‘Xunzi was not the equal of Confucius.’ This is not so. Xunzi was oppressed by a chaotic age (世 *shi*) and lived under the intimidating threat of stern punishments. On the one hand there were no worthy rulers, and on the other hand he faced the aggressions of Qin. Ritual and appropriateness were not practiced. The transforming effects of teaching were not brought to completion. The consummate person was disregarded and under constraint. The whole world (天下 *tianxia*) was lost in darkness ... It was a time when the wise had no opportunity to reflect, when the able had no opportunity to govern, and when the worthy had no opportunity to serve.”

<sup>96</sup> *Mengzi* 2A1; cf. *Analects* 14.19.

immediate community, but due to the greater dynastic conditions at play. “You may be clever, but it is better to make use of circumstances; you may have a hoe, but it is better to wait for the right season.”<sup>97</sup> In short, what sages achieve, what sages create, depends—in part—upon their times. For this reason it is perhaps best to think of the creativity of the sage in agrarian terms, as a kind of “cultivation” (養 *yǎng*).

Tradition and the material conditions of the times are not the only potential resources for productive appropriation. As the examples of Shun, Confucius, and Yan Hui (Confucius’s best student) all demonstrate, persons adept at productive appropriation will also borrow from their contemporaries. Mengzi describes Shun as someone who was “ready to fall into line with others, giving up his own ways for theirs, and glad to take from others that by which he could do good. From the time he was a farmer, a potter, and a fisherman to the time he became Emperor, there was nothing he did that he did not take from others.”<sup>98</sup> As for Confucius, he was able to find the ways of the ancient sage-rulers within the everyday practice of those around him, allowing him to learn from his contemporaries as if he were learning from these illustrious predecessors.<sup>99</sup> But Confucius not only appropriated the strong points of others; he was also able to learn from the weaknesses of others—using their faults as a mirror to detect his own.<sup>100</sup> Yan Hui, for his part, seems to have reproduced the excellence of Shun. When Confucius laments (though, no doubt, without much sincerity) that “Yan Hui is of no help to me:

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid: this is, according to Mengzi, a saying from the state of Qi.

<sup>98</sup> *Mengzi* 2A8

<sup>99</sup> 19.22. It is quite possible that his student, Yan Hui, was one of Confucius’s most important teachers. In their relationship the apex of 好學 *hàoxué* is realized, and we find a democratic form of education that does not require egalitarianism (something that contrasts with Jane Addams’s democratic ideal of education—see Addams 1964).

<sup>100</sup> As he expresses it, “In strolling in the company of just two other persons, I am bound to find a teacher. Identifying their strengths, I follow them, and identifying their weaknesses, I reform myself accordingly” (7.22).



there is nothing that I say that he doesn't like," he is describing a man who could listen to the Master's teachings and apply them to his own life in much the same way that Shun could appropriate from his peers.<sup>101</sup> Zengzi (曾子 505 - 436 BCE, son of one of Confucius's first students) completes the description of Yan Hui: "Able himself yet asking those who are not so, informed himself yet asking those who are less so, having much to offer himself yet seeming to have nothing, substantial himself yet seeming to be empty, transgressed against yet paying it no notice—in the old days I had a friend who proceeded in just such a way."<sup>102</sup>

In addition to creating moral traditions in an historical sense, normative persons can also create a moral tradition through their *performance* of significant (義 *yì*) actions.<sup>103</sup> While it is true that the rites have an abstract formalism that predates any

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<sup>101</sup> 11.4; cf. 2.9

<sup>102</sup> 8.5. Exactly how creative the sages are in authoring the moral tradition is debated in the early Confucian literature. Despite attributing authorship of at least some of the moral tradition to the sages, Mengzi and Xunzi, with their contrary views about the moral quality of the spontaneous human dispositions (人性 *rénxìng*), endorse competing views on the moral creativity of the sages. No doubt borrowing from certain themes in the *Analects* (see 6.30, 15.29, and especially 12.1), Mengzi claims that moral culture comes spontaneously to the sage. "Yao and Shun did it spontaneously (性之 *xìngzhī*); Tang and King Wu embodied it; the Five Rulers borrowed it. But if a man borrows a thing and keeps it long enough, how can one be sure that it will not become truly his?" (7A30). This, of course, correlates with Mengzi's commitment to the good quality of the spontaneously developing human dispositions, or *rénxìng*. As for Xunzi, having claimed both that the spontaneous human dispositions are "repugnant" (惡 *è*) and that the sages produced the rites and duties (禮儀 *lǐyì*), he entertains the following objection: "If our spontaneous dispositions are repugnant, does this mean that rites and duties was born out of what is repugnant?" His response is that the creation of the moral tradition did not stem from the spontaneous dispositions of the sages, but from their acquired dispositions, or what he calls their "artifice" (偽 *wèi*).

The ... rites and duties (*lǐyì*) are born from the artifice (*wèi*) of the sages. ... They produce (生 *shēng*) the rites and duties, and initiate (起 *qǐ*) the laws and statutes. ... Thus the sages transforms their spontaneous dispositions (*xìng*) and give rise to artifice; once their artifice develops, they produce the rites and duties; once the rites and duties are produced, they regulate the laws and statutes. This being so, it is the sages that produce the rites, duties, statutes, and laws. [23.7]

In any case, their role as historical creators of moral tradition suggests a possible line of research: one might use the various exemplary persons, especially changes in persons or descriptions, to construct a genealogy of Confucian morality (much as Adkins used the changing appreciation of Odysseus to chart the transition from warrior to civic virtue-paradigms in ancient Greece—see Adkins 1975).

<sup>103</sup> In making this claim I am, of course, drawing upon the work of David Hall and Roger Ames (see,

particular realization of the rites in action—a formalism that enables the communicative and coordinating or harmonizing aspects of ritual actions—this formalism must be balanced with a personal investment if the action is to be at all meaningful or appropriate.<sup>104</sup> In the *Analects* Confucius is clear that a failure to personalize a ritual form invalidates the action. Caring for the needs of one’s parents, laboring for the family, deferring to one’s elders—none of it counts as true filial piety or significant ritual action unless it is personalized.<sup>105</sup> Sacrificial rites and mourning rites are also hollow without personalization.<sup>106</sup> Even the use of ritual form in government is thought to prove ineffective in realizing social harmony unless the ruler invests himself in the process.<sup>107</sup>

To “personalize” a ritual form requires investing oneself—one’s embodiment and emotions—in the practice, as well as making use of one’s own sense of what would be optimally appropriate (義 *yì*) in every situation. Confucius speaks of the importance of displaying the proper countenance when enacting the rites, as well as honest deference, respect, and even grief. But in addition to the right dispositions and comportment, one must never rely solely upon the formalism of a ritual—one must be sure to tailor the form to the novelties of the situation and participants. One must also develop one’s own sense (*yì*) of things; at the very least, this requires foregoing predetermined plans or fastidiousness with the details of a ritual.<sup>108</sup> Beyond that, a sense of what is optimally

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especially, 1987).

<sup>104</sup> Hall and Ames 1987, 23. It is, in fact, the requirement of personalization that distinguishes the 禮 *lǐ* from rules and laws.

<sup>105</sup> 2.7, 2.8

<sup>106</sup> 3.12, 3.26

<sup>107</sup> 4.13

<sup>108</sup> After all, ‘it is not the way that broadens people, but people who broaden the way’ (15.29). See 4.10, 9.3, 15.37, and 3.18.

appropriate requires adaptability, reflection (思 *sī*), and a willingness to take a stand on one's own.<sup>109</sup>

If done appropriately (義 *yì*), even something as deceptively simple as the rite of cleaning can become as significant (義 *yì*) as a work of art. Near the close of the *Analects* we come across the phrase, “sprinkling and sweeping” (洒掃 *sǎsào*).<sup>110</sup> It refers to a method employed in cleaning the domestic compound—its rooms and pathways. The expression appears throughout the *Liji*, and occurs in several Han texts. We also find it in a story about the 16<sup>th</sup> century Japanese tea master, Sen Rikyû (1522-1591)—a story that well-illustrates the artistic possibilities of cleaning.

Rikyû was watching his son Shoan as he swept and watered the garden path. “Not clean enough,” said Rikyû, when Shoan had finished his task, and bade him try again. After a weary hour the son turned to Rikyû: “Father, there is nothing more to be done. The steps have been washed for the third time, the stone lanterns and the trees are well sprinkled with water, moss and lichens are shining with a fresh verdure; not a twig, not a leaf have I left on the ground.” “Young fool,” chided the tea-master, “that is not the way a garden path should be swept.” Saying this, Rikyû stepped in to the garden, shook a tree and scattered over the garden gold and crimson leaves, scraps of the brocade of autumn!<sup>111</sup>

One way to understand this story is by relating it to *Analects* 13.23: “The *jūnzǐ* seeks harmony (和 *hé*), not homogeneity (同 *tóng*).” The son possessed a rigid and dualistic approach to cleaning: he distinguished the garden into the two categories of what belonged and what did not, lumped all the leaves and twigs into the second category, and did his best to realize the homogeneity he mistook for cleanliness. What his father illustrates is a sense of what is optimally appropriate; responding to the setting and the season Rikyû preserved the flexibility of his categories and saw the harmony that could

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<sup>109</sup> 2.15; 15.36

<sup>110</sup> 19.12

<sup>111</sup> Okakura 1989, 84.

be achieved by the autumn leaves upon the stone path. If it takes a master to clean a garden path, how can we know which rites are mundane and which are momentous?<sup>112</sup> It is the skill of the performer, rather than the nature of the ritual alone, that is largely responsible for a ritual action's degree of significance.

This suggests that ritual ultimately thrives at the level of concrete actions—that they are *performative*. No doubt when one performs a ritual one draws an analogy with past ritual actions; but when ritual actions are significant they cannot but be the action of an exemplary person, cannot but occur within its specific context. In this way we might say that it is the *yì*-performance that creates any ritual action's significance; that the *lǐ*, in their abstract sense, are nothing more than a repository of past *yì*-actions.<sup>113</sup> When one genuinely performs a *lǐ* it is as if one invented the rite for the first time.

## 2.2 Learning

Exemplary persons compose the primary subject matter of “learning” (學 *xué*). Learning is transactional or relational in nature. There is no learning if there is no teacher (師 *shī*); there is no teacher if there is no learner—as the *Shangshu* puts it, “teaching is half of learning.”<sup>114</sup> Originally, the process of “learning” referred to the student's growing awareness, and the teacher's transmission of his or her cultural legacy (文

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<sup>112</sup> Hence, Zixia is right to criticize Ziyou for thinking that housekeeping is just the tip of the branches; one can find housekeeping at the roots as well (*Analects* 19.12).

<sup>113</sup> Hall and Ames 1987, 97-8.

<sup>114</sup> *Shangshu* 3.12. In this passage Yue is counseling his king to learn from others. While Yue acknowledges that a king may learn much from his ministers, he recommends that a king pay attention (first of all) to the ancients. “In learning, there should be a humble mind and the maintenance of a constant earnestness. In such a case the learner's improvement will surely come. He who sincerely cherishes these things will find all truth accumulating in his person. Teaching is one half of learning” (Legge 1971, 98-99). Given that Yue began this comment by commending the ancients as teachers superior to the contemporary ministers, we might translate 教 *xiao* as “one's teacher” rather than “teaching”—reading the line as “one's teacher is half of learning.” Or we might take 教 *xiao* simply to mean something akin to ‘one's effort’ (which seems rather promising, given the context).

wén).<sup>115</sup> When Confucius speaks of learning from others it is not the acquisition of information or scholastic learning that he has in mind but the cultivation of his own person by cultivating his relationships.<sup>116</sup> In the *Analects* we find Confucius learning from the excellences and ineptitudes of his immediate companions: “In strolling in the company of just two other persons,” he says, “I am bound to find a teacher (*shī*). Identifying their strengths, I follow them, and identifying their weaknesses, I reform myself accordingly.”<sup>117</sup> But the *Analects* also expresses an awareness of the possibility that common people, in their everyday lives, might act as “custodians” of the ways of the former sages. When Gongsun Chao of Wei asked Zigong who it was that taught Confucius, Zigong replied,

The way of Kings Wen and Wu has not collapsed utterly—it lives in the people. Those of superior character have grasped the greater part, while those of lesser quality have grasped a bit of it.<sup>118</sup> Everyone has something of Wen and Wu’s way in them. Who then does the Master not learn from? Again, how could there be a single constant teacher for him?<sup>119</sup>

The Han dynasty Confucian, Xu Gan (徐幹 170-217 CE), might not be too far from the core of “learning” when he describes it as “according” (因 *yīn*) with exemplars—a practice, he says, that is not only demanded of those of superior character, but of sages as well.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Hall and Ames 1987, 45.

<sup>116</sup> As Confucius remarks, “I want to learn from others so that I can change myself. If having learned from others I still do not change myself, then of what use is it to have learned from them?” (*Zhonglun* 3).

<sup>117</sup> 7.22

<sup>118</sup> See *Mengzi* 2B4 for a comment on this passage.

<sup>119</sup> *Analects* 19.22

<sup>120</sup> *Zhonglun* 1. While the *Zhuangzi* treats 因 *yīn* (as in 因是 *yīnshì*) as a term of art—where one seeks to adaptively and efficaciously respond to the unique particularities of every novel person and context—this sense does not seem to greatly inform Xu Gan’s use of the verb. The inclusion of Xu Gan in our discussion is not arbitrary; his *Zhonglun* is quite relevant to our discussion of moral education and self-cultivation because it, like the *Xunzi*, emphasizes learning and the role of exemplary persons in moral education (see chapter one, footnote 50).

There are, of course, many different modes of encoding and transmitting an exemplary person's example, pattern, or *dào*: the written word, oral communication, even social institutions like ritual and music.<sup>121</sup> By the time of Confucius, the process of learning was largely codified as the six arts of ritual, music, archery, chariot driving, writing, and calculation. Yet, as Xu Gan comments, these six arts are not that far removed from the earlier conception of learning (that is, learning from exemplary persons).

The arts are the servants of the heartmind (心 *xīn*), the voice of consummate persons (仁 *rén*), and the image (象 *xiàng*) of appropriateness (義 *yì*). Thus ritual is used to perfect solemnity (敬 *jìng*), music to encourage concern, archery to balance one's aims, driving to bring harmony to one's heartmind, writing to link affairs, and calculation to bring order to confusion. If solemnity is perfected, then the people will not be remiss; if concern is encouraged, then the myriad living forms will be content; if one's aims are balanced, then resentment and blame will disappear; if one's heartmind is harmonious, then there will be concord between the separate virtues; if affairs are linked, then laws and prohibitions will be clear; if confusion is brought to order, then things will not be at odds.<sup>122</sup>

We might say that the six arts are the starting point of one's self-cultivation in the pattern of exemplary persons. This sort of practice cannot be reduced to the application of rules or principles; rather, it involves the development of one's own person as an artwork—a process that seeks harmony, not homogeneity. Even when learning began to be dominated by the study of books Xunzi could still insist that the true aim of this process was to become a sage, and that the classics were themselves just another way to encode and transmit the pattern of the sages.<sup>123</sup> In short, even book-learning could be understood as an exercise in learning from exemplary persons.

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<sup>121</sup> Such institutions, no doubt, facilitate the recognition of skill in an exemplar's bodily comportment.

<sup>122</sup> *Zhonglun* 7.

<sup>123</sup> A claim that Xu Gan, incidentally, concurs with when he describes the six classics as the transmitters of the sage's pattern (*Zhonglun* 1). The *Mengzi* also sees "learning" (學 *xué*) as an apt description of seeking to be a sage (compare *Analects* 7.33 with *Mengzi* 2A2).

If learning is, at least in part, a process of patterning oneself on another person, it becomes quite easy to understand the Confucian imperative to carefully select one's associates for they will be among one's teachers. The quality of one's friends should be a subject of great concern as one will stand to benefit from having friends who are true, make good on their word, and are broadly informed; but one will be harmed by having friends who are ingratiating, feign compliance, or who are glib talkers.<sup>124</sup> If one is given the opportunity one ought to associate with consummate persons and those who know the way.<sup>125</sup>

One's associates (friends, neighbors, and traveling companions) are a dominant aspect of what Xunzi refers to as our "situation" (立 *li*). The force of "situation," he says, is stronger than natural talent. We extend our capacities by standing on the shoulders of tradition, taking advantage of the wisdom of the ages.<sup>126</sup> But this increase in abilities is not a solitary power or individual accomplishment. As Xunzi illustrates, "Climbing to a height and waving your arms does not cause the arm's length to increase, but your wave can be seen farther away."<sup>127</sup> Just as a great nest is worthless if made on a twig, just as a small tree can still look down for leagues if it is at the top of a chasm—situation is profound. Situation is largely responsible for our excellence and social influence.<sup>128</sup> And one's associates—one's friends, neighbors, and traveling companions—constitute a tremendous portion of one's situation. They demonstrate the moral tradition, but it is also with one's associates that one first practices 'correlating one's conduct with others'<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> 16.4, 1.8; cf. 9.25

<sup>125</sup> 4.1, 1.14

<sup>126</sup> 1.1

<sup>127</sup> 1.2

<sup>128</sup> 1.4

<sup>129</sup> 6.30

beyond the confines of one's own family. According to Xunzi the *jūnzǐ* are no different from others at birth; but the *jūnzǐ* are those who selected their associates well.

When others demonstrate the moral tradition—whether they are one's associates, family, or distant sages brought home in a narrative—they very often do so by embodying the rites (禮 *lǐ*), thus becoming objects for somatic appropriation.<sup>130</sup> We see the attention paid to the concrete embodiment of the moral tradition in book ten of the *Analects*, which is a series of vignettes of Confucius depicting his comportment in various situations. The tradition is also keenly self-aware of the significance of one's body. We are told by Zengzi that

There are three things that *jūnzǐ* consider of utmost importance in making their way: by maintaining a dignified bearing (貌 *mào*), they keep violent and rancorous conduct at a distance; by maintaining a proper countenance (色 *sè*), they keep trust and confidence near at hand; by taking care in choice of language and mode of expression, they keep vulgarity and impropriety at a distance.<sup>131</sup>

Or, as Confucius reminds one of his students, “if you are not earnest (篤 *dǔ*) and respectful (敬 *jìng*) in your conduct (行 *xíng*) ... how can your conduct be proper?”<sup>132</sup> As Xu Gan comments, “It is by establishing models and exemplars that *jūnzǐ* are made. As for making models and exemplars, nothing is of greater importance than preserving an upright countenance (貌 *mào*) or taking care to maintain an awe-inspiring demeanor (偽 *wěi*).”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> The body, in fact, might be a more valuable concept for understanding Confucian moral culture than motive, intention, and character combined.

<sup>131</sup> 8.4

<sup>132</sup> 15.6

<sup>133</sup> He seems to treat these two, countenance and demeanor, as interchangeable. Xu Gan, for his part, understands countenance (貌 *mào*)—which he calls “the external side of one's tally” (*Zhonglun* 2)—to include one's conduct, speech, and gaze. He even appears to include costume within his understanding of countenance (*ibid.*). According to Xu Gan, respectfulness or solemnity (敬 *jìng*)—while an emotion—remains half of the core to proper countenance or demeanor; the other half is 禮 *lǐ*. This is why Xu Gan



When one takes another person as an object of somatic appropriation, however, one must be careful not to baldly imitate them. Just as a worthy teacher renovates the past to make it serviceable to the present, so good students must reflect (思 *sī*) when they appropriate their tradition.<sup>134</sup> The *Zhongyong* cautions us to this effect.

In the *Book of Songs* it says: “In hewing an axe handle, in hewing an axe handle—the pattern (則 *zé*) is not far away (不遠 *bù yuǎn*).” Yet when we grasp one handle to hew another, if we look away<sup>135</sup> from one to inspect the other, we can still regard them as quite distinct (遠 *yuǎn*). Thus the *jūnzǐ* use one person to mold others properly, but once their faults are improved upon, they stop.

The *jūnzǐ* do not seek to make people the same; likewise, when one takes another as one’s pattern (則 *zé*) the aim should not be to imitate them unintelligently; again, in the practice of cultivating oneself, a *jūnzǐ* seeks harmony not homogeneity.

One of the greatest benefits of intelligently or creatively imitating another person’s proper countenance and other somatic patterns is the way it influences one’s own emotional responses.<sup>136</sup> By embodying a proper somatic pattern one triggers an attitudinal shift. Xu Gan explains:

The countenance is the external side of one’s tally. The external side of one’s tally being rectified, therefore one’s emotional responses (情 *qíng*) and spontaneous tendencies (性 *xìng*) will be properly ordered. One’s emotional responses and spontaneous tendencies being in proper order, therefore consummateness (仁 *rén*) and appropriateness (義 *yì*) will be grasped. Consummateness and appropriateness being grasped, therefore genuine (誠 *chéng*) *dé* is manifest. When genuine *dé* is manifest, one can be a model and exemplar.<sup>137</sup>

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spends a good deal of time discussing the importance of solemnity, the risks of ignoring it, its connection with *lǐ*, and—at the end of the second chapter of the *Zhonglun*—says that it is because of the *jūnzǐ*’s sense of the rites and solemnity that his conduct, speech, and gaze are all proper models.

<sup>134</sup> 2.15, 2.11

<sup>135</sup> For this interpretation of 睨 *nì*, see *Mengzi* 3A5.

<sup>136</sup> The difference between bald imitation and intelligent imitation is whether, when we imitate an exemplar, we do so with genuine feeling and adequate reflection (思 *sī*). There is a conative and cognitive dimension to the process. For more on this topic see chapter five.

<sup>137</sup> *Zhonglun* 2

To understand how emotional responses and spontaneous dispositions might be transformed by taking up a proper countenance, we can turn to a passage in the *Xunzi* that touches on this very issue.

Smiles and a beaming face, sorrow and a downcast look—these are expression of the emotions of joy and sorrow which comes with auspicious or inauspicious occasions,<sup>138</sup> and they appear naturally in the countenance. Songs and laughter, weeping and lamentation—these too are expression of the emotions of joy and sorrow which come with auspicious and inauspicious occasions, and they appear naturally in the sound of the voice.

The partaking of grass-fed and grain-fed animals, rice and millet, wine and spirits, fish and meat, as well as of thick and thin gruel, beans and bean sprouts, water and water in which rice has been washed—these are expressions of the emotions of joy and sorrow which come with auspicious and inauspicious occasions, and are expressed naturally in one's food and drink. The wearing of ceremonial caps, embroidered robes, and patterned silks, or of fasting clothes and mourning clothes and sashes, straw sandals, and hempen robes—these are expressions of the emotions of joy or sorrow which come with auspicious or inauspicious occasions, and are expressed naturally in one's manner of dress. The use of spacious rooms and secluded halls, soft mats, couches and leantos, mats of twig and pillows of earth—these are expressions of the emotions of joy or sorrow which come with auspicious and inauspicious occasions, and are expressed naturally in one's choice of a dwelling.<sup>139</sup>

Diet, dwellings, clothing, and music—all dimensions of the rites with various, prescribed somatic patterns—can cultivate certain emotions. How different must one feel when, surrounded by friends and family, one eats a feast in celebration of a birth, as compared to when one eats a coarse diet alone in the woods after the death of a parent. How easy it is to be happy when those around us share our happiness; how quickly tears fall from our own eyes when we see them in another's. The somatic dimensions of the rites—the food, clothing, and countenance one can learn from others—express, but also inform, one's emotions.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Such as a birth or a death.

<sup>139</sup> 19. 25

<sup>140</sup> What is more, *li* enables us to experience these emotions together. Even the solitary son in mourning experiences, in his solitude, what other sons have experienced or will experience. *Li* makes us like-hearted

The patterns set by exemplary persons can also serve to develop one's sense of what is optimally appropriate (義 *yì*). First of all, they can cause one to be more sensitive to the details of a given situation. For example, in addition to those exemplary persons that live lives to be avoided (the *exempla horribilis*)<sup>141</sup> there are those who seem to go too far in pursuing excellence—moral “saints” who demonstrate the exceptions to moral rules. Xu Gan provides us with a list of such persons.

In the past Cangwu Bing took a wife, but because she was beautiful he gave her to his elder brother. It would have been better not to have deferred to him at all than to have been deferential in this manner. Wei Sheng arranged to meet his wife at the edge of the river. When the water suddenly rose he would not leave and so drowned. It would have been better not to have kept his word to her at all than to have done so in this manner. In the community of the Governor of She, a father stole a sheep and his son bore witness against him. It would have been better not to have been honest with his community at all than to have been honest in this manner.<sup>142</sup>

Each of these examples concerns one of the basic Confucian values: brotherly fidelity (第 *dì*), living up to one's word (信 *xìn*), and honesty (直 *zhí*). The trouble is that these people are far too principled and this made them blind to salient differences between situations. We might say that they did what was “right” rather than what was most appropriate. Perhaps they saw analogies between situations where no analogy should be established. For example, Cangwu Bing might have thought, “If I always give my older brother the best food, I should also give him the best wife.” What Cangwu Bing failed to realize was the significant differences between his relationship with his food and with his wife. As Xu Gan comments, “Thus while all of these ways are already difficult to walk, it is even

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and like-minded.

<sup>141</sup> Xu Gan refers to them as 戒 *jiè*, “warning examples.”

<sup>142</sup> *Zhonglun* 6; see the discussion of moral “perfection” and sagehood in chapter five.

more difficult to know when to put them to one side.<sup>143</sup> Because of this the *jūnzǐ* is watchful over himself and uses the past”—ostensibly, ‘the past’ includes these same cases of vicious perfectionism—“to reflect on himself.”<sup>144</sup> They do so in order to go beyond principles and develop situational sensitivity or moral insight.

Reference to exemplary persons can also serve to develop one’s sense of what is optimally appropriate in several other ways. They can be used to extend one’s moral wisdom, as when Mengzi counsels King Xuan of Chi to use his mode of relating to his family members to understand how he should relate to those outside of his own family—with the king serving, in this case, as his own exemplary person. “Treat the aged of your own family in a manner befitting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families; treat your own young in a manner befitting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families ... In other words, all you have to do is take this very heartmind here and apply it to what is over there.”<sup>145</sup> Reference to exemplary persons can also develop one’s moral creativity, allowing one to see novel ways of, say, satisfying one’s desires. When, for instance, King Xuan of Chi confesses his fault of loving money, Mengzi references ancient King Liu who shared this fondness.

The *Odes* say, “He stocked and stored; he placed provisions in bags and sacks. He brought harmony and so glory to his state. On full display were bows and arrows, spears, halberds and axes. Only then did the march begin.” It was only when those who stayed at home had full granaries and those who went forth to war had full sacks that the march could begin. You may be fond of money, but what is it to you so long as you share this fondness with the people?<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> An alternate translation could be, “Hence with all these paths, treading them is already difficult; blundering them [makes their] advantages inconstant.”

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> 1A7

<sup>146</sup> 1B5; cf. 1B3

Finally, exemplary persons can develop one's sense of what is optimally appropriate by establishing proper limits and beacons, forming normative standards by which to evaluate and guide conduct.<sup>147</sup>

### 2.3 *The Sociopolitical Force of Personal Example*

The term 德 *dé* is used in several different ways in the *Analects*. At times it denotes authority, excellence, even kindness and can be attributed to such disparate objects as horses, houses, and commoners. But when *dé* is attributed to rulers or ministers it denotes a form of social influence that contrasts (domestically) with the influence of commands and punishments, and (internationally) with the influence of martial conquest.<sup>148</sup> Domestically and internationally it picks out the influence of an exemplary person's example that is substituted for executive and legislative might.<sup>149</sup>

The potency of someone's personal example is correlated with that person's social standing. Personal example may very well be a powerful social force, but that force presupposes the person has a social position of "superiority" (上 *shàng*); otherwise, one's personal example may be ignored. The *Analects* discusses two ways such social standing and concomitant influence might be achieved.<sup>150</sup> One is the *de facto* social standing and influence enjoyed by those born into the ruling family.<sup>151</sup> This kind of *sociopolitical* superiority affords one's personal example an automatic potency, though not always to

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<sup>147</sup> See section 2.6 below.

<sup>148</sup> 2.3, 12.19; 14.5, 14.16, 16.1; cf. *Mengzi* 2A3

<sup>149</sup> 12.17-19

<sup>150</sup> There are, no doubt, other ways to acquire it, but the *Analects* appears to purposively leave them out. Of the two mentioned in the text, the first is a fact of the dynastic system of government of the time, while the latter is the Confucian attempt to improve and augment that system.

<sup>151</sup> *De facto* social influence might also be attributed to parents, clan elders, and the like (cf. 2.21).

good results since it is simply the product of one's birth.<sup>152</sup> This is perhaps the reason the Confucians say what they can to encourage rulers to use their influence to secure good results.<sup>153</sup> The second way to achieve superiority is through a process referred to as “accumulating *dé*” (崇德 *suidé*), which essentially involves establishing one's social and political influence on the bases of personal merit.<sup>154</sup> It is the form of *moral* superiority enjoyed by the *jūnzǐ*, (and anyone who achieves it is less likely to use his or her social influence inappropriately).

Persons with *dé* often influence others to “imitate” (法 *fǎ* or 如 *rú*) their example.<sup>155</sup> Confucius expresses the idea when he claims, “If their superiors cherished the observance of ritual propriety (*lǐ*), none among the common people would dare be disrespectful; if their superiors cherished appropriate conduct (*yì*), none among the common people would dare be disobedient; if their superiors cherished making good on their word, none among the common people would dare be duplicitous.”<sup>156</sup> The

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<sup>152</sup> One is reminded of Thomas Carlyle's statement, “The Thibet [sic] priests have methods of their own of discovering what Man is Greatest, fit to be supreme over them. Bad methods: but are they so much worse than our methods—, of understanding him to be always the eldest born of a certain genealogy?” (1901, 6).

<sup>153</sup> This is perhaps why Confucius, in *Analects* 2.3, appends the expression, ‘keep the people in line with ritual propriety’; this renders explicit the moral requirements of effective rulership. It is worth noting that while the social superiority of King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty secured his personal example a great deal of normative force, that force in the literature is taken to be *proscriptive*. So, for instance, to tell people that they are behaving like Zhou is to seriously admonish them.

<sup>154</sup> See *Analects* 12.10, 12.21. Implicitly, one might also secure normative force for one's personal example by becoming a petty person (小人 *xiǎorén*); yet this is not the sort of normative force one usually desires.

<sup>155</sup> 法 *fǎ*, as a verb, describes this activity in the commentary to the *Daxue* (as it does in the *Laozi*); 如 *rú* is Mengzi's verb for the activity (see *Mengzi* 4B28, for example). One might be wary of the term “imitation,” fearing that it connotes a rather unintelligent attempt to reproduce an exemplary person's outward conduct alone, and to do so without regard to circumstance. One way to respond is to distinguish between imitation and emulation, reserving the latter for a much more dynamic and informed appropriation of a person's example. Since I will tend to use “emulation” in its original sense—as an emotional response to an exemplary person's example (see Aristotle's treatment of *zelōs* in his *Rhetoric*)—I will instead (and with a nod to John Dewey) distinguish between intelligent and unintelligent imitation, discussing this distinction in chapter five.

<sup>156</sup> 13.4. There are similar passages in the *Mengzi*, one of which reads “When the ruler is consummate (仁 *rén*) no one will fail to be consummate; when the ruler seeks optimal appropriateness (義 *yì*), no one will fail to seek optimal appropriateness; when the ruler is rectified (正 *zhèng*), no one will not be rectified. The

implication is that if persons with *dé* merit their social position and influence, they stand a good chance of cultivating others simply by cultivating themselves. One can, as Xu Gan puts it, “uproot wrongdoing by acting appropriately.”<sup>157</sup>

The influence of a person’s example operates by causing others to feel both emulation and shame, and by stimulating reciprocal behavior. If we define emulation as an emotional response to the excellence of other that causes us to desire to develop a similar excellence in ourselves, then Confucius can be said to take emulation as something he wishes to cultivate in others as well as himself.<sup>158</sup> “Upon seeing the excellence of others, think to be equal to them,”<sup>159</sup> he implores. Yet if we are susceptible to feeling emulation, we are bound to feel shame. After all, we are unlikely to feel emulously towards anyone we already equal; hence, the emotion of emulation entails the awareness that we are not already what we wish to be—that, as we presently are, we are painfully different from the person whom we aspire to approximate (如 *rú*). This painful sensation is shame.<sup>160</sup>

While the sting and moral motivation occasioned by a momentary sensation of shame may be endured without lasting effect, the efficacy of a general sensitivity to shame (or what we can call “a sense of shame”) may be more reliable.<sup>161</sup> Ultimately, it is

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solitary rectification of the ruler is enough to set the whole state in order” (4A20).

<sup>157</sup> This notion is expressed throughout the Confucian literature, and is the central tenant of the *Daxue*.

<sup>158</sup> 7.5

<sup>159</sup> 4.17 cf. 16.11

<sup>160</sup> “The *jūnzǐ* are ashamed that their actions are not like those of Yao or Shun” (*Zhonglun* 5). Here is an example from Plutarch to illustrate these two emotions. He tells us that when Caesar read the history of Alexander the Great, he wept. When Caesar, a mere governor of Spain at the time, was asked by his friends why he was weeping, he replied, “Do you think I have not just cause to weep, when I consider that Alexander at my age had conquered so many nations, and I have all this time done nothing that is memorable” (2001, II: 206). It is very likely that Alexander’s example caused Caesar to feel both emulation and shame. Caesar no doubt found much to admire in the personal example of Alexander the Great—not least of all his greatness as an historical figure. And yet this admiration, which engenders his emulation—or his desire to be similar to Alexander—also causes him to feel shame.

<sup>161</sup> See Harris 2013.

this *sense* of shame, and not merely a *sensation* of shame, that another's personal example is thought to generate. This much seems obvious from Confucius's counsel to govern by means of a personal example informed by ritual propriety. "Lead the people with your personal example, regulate the people with ritual propriety—they will have a sense of shame and, moreover, will order themselves."<sup>162</sup>

In addition to how the emotion of emulation and the sense of shame may dispose us towards imitating another person's example, there is an additional psychological principle, discussed in the literature, which partly explains the influence of another's example. This principle—the reciprocation principle, or so we might call it—claims that others tend to treat us in a manner similar to how we treat them. "He who loves others is always loved by them; he who respects others is always respected by them"—with the same tendency applying to those who hate others, cheat others, benefit others, and so on.<sup>163</sup> The ways in which a normative person relates to others will, therefore, tend to stimulate a similar response on their part.

The early Confucians are convinced that nothing exercises as much influence on the common people as the personal example of their social superiors; that a personal example is more influential than commands, penal laws, or the threat of violence; and that it is a more reliable source of influence than martial prowess.<sup>164</sup> In fact, the Confucians think that the influence of personal example can render external sanctions of

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<sup>162</sup> *Analects* 2.3. While one might translate 耻 *chǐ* simply as "a *sensation* of shame," the emotion by itself would be incapable of explaining how this approach to rulership could generate lasting effects, or how it could allow the people to 'order themselves.' But translate 耻 *chǐ* as "a *sense* of shame," and one simultaneously names a lasting disposition of the people, and explains how social order might stem from the people themselves rather than from external sanctions.

<sup>163</sup> *Mengzi* 4B28. The principle of reciprocation is also expressed in *Analects* 2.20. This principle touches upon a tendency that has exceptions. Should another person fail to reciprocate your behavior, initially the proper response is to examine yourself for any faults (see, for example, *Mengzi* 4A4).

<sup>164</sup> For more on the necessary connection between personal example and social influence, see *Mengzi* 4A12, 7B9, and *Daxue Zengzhu* 9.4.



the state, such as punishment, unnecessary: set a good example and your commands become superfluous; even if someone tries to bribe one of your subjects they will not act contrary to your example. Set a bad example, on the other hand, and even prohibitory commands are said to be incapable of stopping the common people from following it.<sup>165</sup> Confucius's own commitment to the efficacy of a superior person's example leads him to invariably counsel rulers to achieve effective governing (政 *zhèng*) by means of 'being proper in one's own person' (正其身 *zhèng qí shēn*), and to denounce any attempt to govern by laws alone.<sup>166</sup>

The policy of meritocratic employment of ministers, championed in the literature, is a natural extension of the sociopolitical force attributed to the personal example of superiors. It involves 'elevating the worthy' (expressed as either 舉善 *jǔ shàn* or 舉直 *jǔ zhí* in the *Analects*) by granting station and salary to persons based on merit. In a world where wealth was gained largely through a process of official commission, and one's clothing, utensils, and diet invariably reflected one's social and political status, the ruler had tremendous control over the substance of social elevation and demotion. By promoting only those who 'accumulated *dé*' a ruler was said to win the allegiance of his subjects, but to also make them "eager" (勸 *quàn*) in moral matters.<sup>167</sup> Because meritocracy justifies reaching out to various groups in the state it can foster a greater degree of loyalty among one's subjects. Furthermore, since the worthy persons will certainly have won the support and appreciation of their families and neighbors, by elevating these people the ruler is able to love what the people love; just as by passing

<sup>165</sup> 12.17-18; see *Mengzi* 1A1 for an illustration. This suggests that much of the force of person example stems from social position, rather than moral merit.

<sup>166</sup> 12.17, 12.19, 13.1, 13.2, 13.13, 2.3; cf. 15.5, 2.1, 20.1, 14.5, 4.25, 4.26, 8.18, and 9.14.

<sup>167</sup> *Analects* 2.19, 2.20

over those whom the people have reason to dislike, the ruler is able to hate those whom the people hate. And this, according to Zengzi's commentary on the *Daxue*, is how meritocracy earns the allegiance of the people: "When a ruler loves whom the people love, and hates whom the people hate—this can be called 'being the parent of the people.'"<sup>168</sup> When meritocracy is combined with a desire on the part of the ruler to teach those who lack ability (教不能 *jiào bù néng*) it enables the ruler to stimulate or encourage (勸 *quàn*) the people. Of course, this possibility involves something from both parties: the ruler must engage in meritocracy and moral education, but the people must also be receptive to moral instruction. This joint program of meritocracy and instruction will make the people receptive to moral instruction, be it in the form of remonstrance or encouragement, because they will know that inability does not disbar them from instruction and that ability is rewarded. The people will thus be motivated to listen to such instruction. Presumably in this situation the motive on the part of the people is not simply a matter of emulation or even a sense of shame—but quite likely self-interest. If the common people think they can gain wealth by accumulating *dé* they will naturally prize *dé*. However, while they may at first grant *dé* only an instrumental value, they may eventually come to esteem *dé* for having an inherent value. And even if the program of elevating the worthy utilizes a person's concern for wealth and his or her self-interest, since the accumulation of *dé* cannot occur without developing an increasingly inclusive regard for social interests, it enables people to pursue their personal interests in such a fashion so as to also serve the interests of the community—redefining the scope of personal interest and allowing self-interest to operate in a non-selfish fashion.

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<sup>168</sup> *Daxue Zengzhu* 10.3, 10.17; cf. 10.14-16 (see chapter 11).

## 2.4 Rhetorical Appeals to Exemplars in Remonstrance and Diplomacy

Exemplary persons also inform the Confucian approach to efficacious discourse, especially the practices of remonstrance and diplomatic persuasion. On several occasions in the early Confucian literature it is said that a minister's relationship with his ruler, or a son's relationship with his parents, can only be qualified as filial (孝 *xiào*) if the minister or son remonstrates (諫 *jiàn*) with their social superiors whenever the latter happens to go astray.<sup>169</sup> Remonstrance is understood to be a service to one's superiors since it cultivates and preserves their *dào*, helping a ruler maintain his position and a parent to avoid offending the neighbors; and, indeed, the sole purpose and justification of remonstrance is correcting the conduct of one's social superiors.<sup>170</sup> To be effective, however, remonstrance must remain distinct from ridicule (訕 *shàn*), or exposing (陳 *chén*) one's social superiors to the offense of directly naming their faults.<sup>171</sup> It must not be carried to the point of rebellion (逆 *nì*), nor can the one remonstrating even risk the *appearance* of rebelliousness if this practice is to play a role in sustaining and developing the relationship between parent and child, ruler and minister.<sup>172</sup> One must be careful to remonstrate only after one has earned the other person's trust.<sup>173</sup> One must also be careful to temper one's criticisms. Certainly one's comportment—one's countenance, breath, and

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<sup>169</sup> *Xiaojing* 15, *Jiyi* 12, and *Fangii* 17 in the *Liji*; see also *Analects* 4.18 (cf. 3.7).

<sup>170</sup> *Xiaojing* 15, *Neize* 15 in the *Liji*; *Analects* 18.5, 3.21

<sup>171</sup> The *Liji*'s *Shaoyi* 21 and *Biaoji* 40. The *Xiaojing* expresses error or faults in terms of inappropriate (不義 *bùyì*) conduct, while the *Neize* chapter of the *Liji* speaks of error as having gone too far (過 *guò*).

<sup>172</sup> *Jiyi* 13. The Confucian literature also cautions one from remonstrating with a ruler in order to curry favor (諂 *chǎn*). It might seem strange that by criticizing someone you might endear yourself to them—but when effective, remonstrance serves a real need and deserves thanks. Yet it is a mistake to offer remonstrance for the sake of that gratitude, just as it is a mistake to fail to remonstrate with a superior simply because one does not want to risk one's salary (*Shaoyi* 21, *Biaoji* 38).

<sup>173</sup> 19.10

voice—can go a long way in defusing the offense of one’s criticisms, but the semantics of one’s remarks must also be guarded. Confucius recommends that sons remonstrate with their parents in a subtle (幾 *jī*) fashion; and in the *Liji* we are told that a minister should not remonstrate in a direct or open manner with his ruler.<sup>174</sup> Each of these texts enjoins the deployment of disguised or indirect remonstrance (幾諫 *jījiàn* or 微諫 *wēijiàn*).<sup>175</sup> In his analysis of indirect communication Francois Jullien argues for the superior effect of disguised remonstrance.<sup>176</sup> Like the wind (風 *fēng*) indirect remonstrance has ‘a far-reaching and discreet influence,’ it ‘cannot be pinned down, fixed or circumscribed,’ and ‘is visible only in the way that it rouses and provokes a reaction by insinuating itself.’<sup>177</sup> By avoiding a frontal insult, indirect remonstrance prevents a confrontation—it allows the criticism to be communicated with minimal risk to the remonstrator and minimal shame to the remonstrated.

Poetic utterances and allusions to passages in the *Book of Songs* (詩經 *Shijing*) were commonly employed to effect indirect remonstrance.<sup>178</sup> As Confucius remarks in the *Analects*, studying the *Songs* provides one with the ability to serve both father and ruler—ostensibly by providing one with a litany of images with which to communicate

<sup>174</sup> *Liji* Neize 15; *Analects* 4.18; *Liji* Quli II.113

<sup>175</sup> *Analects* 4.18; *Liji* Fangji 18. In a somewhat allusive passage of the *Kongzi Jiayu*, we hear Confucius say, “In remonstrating with his ruler, a dedicated minister has five different methods. The first is to use circuitous speech in one’s remonstrance. The second is to feign stupidity in one’s remonstrance. The third is to be self-deprecating in one’s remonstrance. The fourth is to use direct speech in one’s remonstrance. The fifth is to be satirical in one’s remonstrance. Only when I need to measure a lord to serve him do I employ the satirical mode of remonstrance” (辯政 *Bianzheng*, 2). One may note that only one of these five methods is a direct mode of remonstrance; the other four disguise the remonstrance in one way or another.

<sup>176</sup> Jullien 1995

<sup>177</sup> Jullien is borrowing from the 毛詩序 *Maoshi xu* and the trope of the wind in political and politicized poetry. See also 1995, 64-66

<sup>178</sup> Jullien 1995, 55-73. See the *Guoyu Zhouyu*, the *Maoshi xu*, and Watson 1962, 203.

indirectly.<sup>179</sup> Of the various strategies one might employ to construct an apt poetic utterance Jullien names the method of “borrowing.” One might, for instance, borrow the image of a rat to criticize a ruler under the guise of a metaphor.<sup>180</sup> But one might also “borrow” the narratives of the exemplary persons of the past—of either a positive or negative variety of exemplary persons—to effect a disguised critique.<sup>181</sup>

Allusions to exemplary persons may be put to a similar purpose in diplomatic discourse. The rise of the various warring states during the Eastern Zhou dynasty naturally gave rise to diplomatic engagements, several of which are depicted in the *Zuozhuan*. In these conversations the interlocutors communicate largely through appeals to quotations from what eventually became known as the *Shijing* (*Book of Songs*); taking turns each diplomat would perform a particular song, selecting it for its images and allusions, with many of these songs involving the depiction of an exemplary person.

Jullien suggests that the efficacy of this approach to negotiations is the result of distance and poetic image.<sup>182</sup> Since the canonical formula merely hints at each party’s position, while keeping their desires or requests as well as their commitments vague, those involved are able to avoid outright conflict while preserving their ability to change their minds without seeming either weak or inconsistent. In this regard, Jullien argues, indirect diplomacy—or diplomacy through poetic quotation—is superior to diplomacy through argumentation since the latter involves fully and directly disclosing one’s position, making it much more difficult to alter one’s demands. Yet there is another way in which indirect diplomacy is superior to direct, argumentative diplomacy, and that is

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<sup>179</sup> 17.9; cf. *Maoshi xu*.

<sup>180</sup> Jullien 1995, 58

<sup>181</sup> See *Analects* 6.3 and 7.15 for examples.

<sup>182</sup> Jullien 1995, 75-92.

the power of the poetic image. Jullien speaks of the “hallowed authority” and ‘conventional allure’ these poems possessed for these people. But we can also mention the protreptic force of a poetic image: argue, and you must rely upon your counterparts’ love of logic and rationality; convey an image, however, and in your attempts to persuade them you can rely upon their sensitivity to the pains and joys of a much wider range of human experience.<sup>183</sup>

## 2.5 *Keeping Your Word and Doing Your Utmost*

“Doing one’s utmost” (忠 *zhōng*) and “living up to one’s word” (信 *xìn*) are relational virtues, or normative social realizations, which are minimal requirements for sustaining one’s viability as a person and accumulating *dé*. In the *Analects*, *xìn* is most often discussed in the context of friendship—as the proper qualifier of friendships. It is not a virtue or trait of character but a social realization. In a *xìn* relationship, *xìn* (信) concerns the words (言 *yán*) of a person (人 *rén*)—specifically, whether one follows through in performing (行 *xìng*) that which one said (言 *yán*) one would perform.<sup>184</sup> Follow-through is our contribution to a *xìn* relationship; trust is the contribution others make to the same relationship.<sup>185</sup> It is true that without follow-through no one will trust you; but it is equally true that without trust one often cannot hope to follow-through. For example, the viability of a ruler and the state depends upon having the trust (*xìn*) of the

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<sup>183</sup> Jullien says “the art [of this form of diplomacy] is less to persuade the other through reasoning than to shake his resolve” (1995, 78). If we can think of persuasion occurring without recourse to reasoning or argumentation, however, we might say that this is a false dualism—that shaking their resolve is one mode of persuasion, just as a poetic image may be another. There are more ways to persuade than to simply argue.

<sup>184</sup> 1.7, 5.10

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 17.6, 20.1; cf. 6.19

common people, just as the social viability of each person depends upon the trust of others.<sup>186</sup>

*Zhōng*, on the other hand, is discussed in the *Analects* as a quality proper to how one relates to one's social superiors: 'doing one's utmost' entails instructing and remonstrating with one's social superiors, but it also involves putting the plans (謀 *móu*) of one's social superiors into practice.<sup>187</sup> Again, like *xìn*, *zhōng* is a social realization and not an individual trait of character. Remonstrance (諫 *jiàn*), for example, is successful only when the one remonstrated with is open to critique (an attitude Confucius refers to as 文 *wén*).<sup>188</sup> We might add that instruction presupposes the student has a 'love of learning,' just as putting the plans of our superiors into action presupposes that our superiors have reasonable plans.

While *xìn* and *zhōng* are often qualities of good relationships, a fastidious or unimaginative pursuit of these norms can produce inappropriate behavior. *Xìn*, for example, is not always the most appropriate value in a given situation.<sup>189</sup> There is the case of Wei Sheng that we discussed above. This man told his wife that he would meet her at the edge of the river. He went there at the arranged time but when the water unexpectedly rose he refused to break his word and, remaining where he stood, drowned. Xu Gan says that "It would have been better not to have kept his word to her at all than to have done so in this manner." And Confucius remarks, a fondness of *xìn* can put one in danger if it is not balanced by an equal fondness for learning as well as the moral insight

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<sup>186</sup> Much as the function of a cart depends upon its linchpin (2.22, cf. 15.18, 6.29, and *Mengzi* 4A12).

<sup>187</sup> See 1.4, 2.20, 3.19, and 14.7

<sup>188</sup> 5.15 and 12.23. See Xu Gan's discussion of Duke Wu of Wei, Shun, Great Yu, and the counterfactual examples of King Li and Wu Qi.

<sup>189</sup> At *Analects* 1.13 we learn that *xìn* and *yì* are conceptually distinct.

(*yì*) that is the proper object of learning.<sup>190</sup> The possibility of fastidiousness seems to be part of the reason Confucius often mentions *yì*, or moral insight, in connection with *xìn* and *zhōng*—they, like every other norm, must be kept in the service of realizing what is optimally appropriate.<sup>191</sup> Yet, when they are imaginatively pursued, *xìn* and *zhōng* are claimed, on one occasion at least, to constitute the accumulation of *dé*.<sup>192</sup>

As social realizations, *xìn* and *zhōng* entail specific contributions from others. But there is another way other persons can contribute to their cultivation, and that is as exemplars of *xìn* and *zhōng*. In the *Analects* we find Confucius correlating the cultivation of *zhōng* and *xìn* with the practice of ‘not befriending those who are not as good as yourself.’<sup>193</sup> Friends who are as good or better than ourselves are necessarily exemplary persons for us; and, as exemplary persons, good friends help us cultivate both *zhōng* and *xìn*. Our desire to be as good as they are can give us the courage to practice *zhōng* and *xìn*, even when remonstrating with a ruler or keeping one’s word is quite difficult. Furthermore, good friends teach us—by practicing *xìn* and *zhōng* with us, and by demonstrating the practice of *xìn* and *zhōng* in their personal examples—how we might more successfully practice *zhōng* and *xìn* with others. We learn new ways to remonstrate, to instruct, and to put plans into action; we develop more reasonable expectations of ourselves and others.

There is also a way in which one’s self, as a projected and exemplary person, can support the cultivation of *zhōng* and *xìn*. Both *zhōng* and *xìn* involve the temporal and

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<sup>190</sup> 17.8. See Xu Gan’s example of Zong Lu.

<sup>191</sup> 12.10, 5.19, 5.26

<sup>192</sup> 12.10. Their mutual contribution to the accumulation of *dé* explains, at least in part, why these two are often paired in the literature.

<sup>193</sup> 1.8, 9.25. The fact that the second portion of 1.8 stands apart as 9.25 suggests that the two parts of 1.8 are not necessarily connected, while the various claims of the second half of 1.8 can be understood as, internally, quite intimately connected.



social projection of a possible self. The moral significance of living up to one's word and doing one's utmost lies in the temporal disparity between what is promised or assigned, and what will or will not come to be. When he mentions *zhōng* and *xìn* Zengzi explicitly touches upon this temporal aspect:

Daily I examine myself on three counts: On behalf of the plans of others, have I failed to do my utmost? In my encounters with friends, have I failed to live up to my word? Have I failed to practice what I have learned?<sup>194</sup>

Ideally, promises become deeds, and assignments or plans become action.<sup>195</sup> Yet, before they do, one gives one's word or takes an assignment upon oneself. One *begins* by projecting a possible self—a person that does not yet exist, but a person that is exemplary for us all the same because that imagined person lives up to her or his word, or because she or he does their utmost.

*Xìn* and *zhōng* also involve a socially projected self. In the same passage in which Confucius correlates *zhōng* and *xìn* with 'not befriending anyone who is not as good as ourselves,' he also correlates them with 'not hesitating to mend one's ways.' It seems inevitable that one will make mistakes in one's attempts at *xìn* and *zhōng*: one may have unreasonable expectations of oneself, or fail to successfully adapt one's methods in an attempt to remonstrate with a superior. Success in cultivating *xìn* and *zhōng* will, no doubt, require overcoming mistakes. Minimally, this requires the ability to see, and a willingness to admit, one's mistakes. This entails following the example of Yan Hui in 'not shifting our anger'—that is, not blaming others for our own faults.<sup>196</sup> But it also

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<sup>194</sup> 1.4

<sup>195</sup> Assuming, of course, that the promises and assignments are appropriate.

<sup>196</sup> *Analects* 6.3. On the theme of 'shifting one's anger' (遷怒 *qiānnù*), there is an illuminating passage from Xiu Liang's *Lienu Zhuan*:

involves following the example of Shun in practicing a form of self-incrimination (自訟 *zìsòng*) or self-blame.

The villainy of Shun's father, stepmother, and stepbrother is legendary. As Mengzi recounts it, they attempted to kill Shun on several occasions:

Shun's parents sent him to repair the barn. They removed the ladder and the Blind Man [sc. his father] set fire to the barn. [When that didn't work] they sent Shun to dredge the well, set out after him and blocked up the well over him. Xiang [sc. his step-brother] said, "The credit for plotting against the life of Shun goes to me. The cattle and sheep go to you, father and mother, and the granaries as well. But the spears go to me, and the lute and the *ti* bow as well. His two wives should also be made to look after my quarters."<sup>197</sup>

During each attempt upon his life Shun's acumen enabled him to avoid being killed. He leapt from the burning barn and used a pair of straw-hats like a pair of wings to break his fall; and he escaped from the collapsing well by means of a hidden passageway he dug in anticipation of his family's actions. But what sets Shun apart is the way he dealt with the villainy of his family. Rather than seek revenge, or distance from his family, he instead blamed himself for what we would consider to be the faults of his family. It is said that when he went to work in the fields Shun would cry aloud and say he was to blame for

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In the countryside of Chu there was a disputant woman who was married into an illustrious clan. Duke Jian had sent presents, inviting a minister to Chu; and as he came into a narrow lane there was this married woman driving a chariot. They collided, his wheel hub was struck and his chariot's axle broke. The minister was enraged and was about to lay his hands on the woman and whip her, when this married woman said, 'I have heard that the *jūnzǐ* does not transfer his anger and does not make two mistakes at once. Now as you were in the middle of this narrow lane, I stopped at the other end. Your slave didn't allow me to draw out even a little way—that is how your chariot was ruined. And yet you wanted to lay your hands on me—how is this not transferring your anger?! Without hesitating you were angry with me instead of your slave—how is this not committing two mistakes at once?! [6.5]

To transfer one's anger is, according to this passage, to blame the wrong person—to blame someone else when you should really blame yourself or your own. It is interesting that this passage reads 貳 *èr* as 二 *èr*—so that it is not 'repeating the same mistake,' as the *Analects* is often translated, but 'committing two mistakes at once.' If you are angry with the wrong person you are committing two mistakes: being angry with someone you should not be, and not being angry with someone that you ought to be. On this reading, then, 貳過 *èr guò* is simply a gloss on 遷怒 *qiānnù* and not a separate consequence of *qiānnù*.

<sup>197</sup> Mengzi 5A2

these events; he would claim that—in his relationships with his father, stepmother, and stepbrother—there was something he was not doing, that there was something he could be doing differently which could improve these relationships.<sup>198</sup> Clearly, this sort of self-incrimination is not about assigning fault based on an individual's choices or actions. It does not operate within the causal paradigm of personal responsibility. Rather, this sort of self-incrimination involves a *social projection* of oneself—a self that takes responsibility for the entirety of a faulty relationship.<sup>199</sup> This self is also, like its temporal cousin, exemplary: it is a person one could be, a person who seeks to cultivate relationships rather than locate fault and minimize his or her responsibility. Incidentally, this projected self can also function as an exemplary person for the other persons involved in the faulty relationship. Protrectically, blaming oneself for the faulty relationship, rather than blaming the other persons involved, avoids forcing them to defend themselves; it affords these persons the opportunity to voluntarily admit their contribution to the situation and provides them with a projected self—your projected self—to inspire them to take on a greater field of responsibility.

## 2.6 *Justification and Critique*

The Confucians often use normative persons to justify or critique normative claims (言 *yán*), to evaluate conduct (行 *xíng*), and to inform or reform a person's

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<sup>198</sup> *Shangshu* 1.3; cf. *Analects* 20.1.

<sup>199</sup> This notion of selfhood—as composite—will factor into our characterization of exemplary persons (see chapters six and seven).

aspirations.<sup>200</sup> There is a passage in the *Mengzi*<sup>201</sup> that illustrates all three uses of exemplary persons. Summoned by the King of Qi, Mengzi feigns illness so as to avoid complying with the summons. When circumstances conspire to finally force him to go to court Jingzi accuses him of failing to show proper respect to the king: “Within the family, the relationship between father and son is the most important, while outside, it is that between ruler and subject. The former relationship must prioritize kindness, while the latter must prioritize respect. ... When summoned by one’s ruler, one should not wait for the horses to be yoked to one’s carriage [but should set off immediately].” Mengzi responds by developing a more considered view of the proper relationship between a king and a king’s teacher. While acknowledging the social influence of rank, age, and personal example Mengzi insists that in different contexts each can take precedence. At court rank is the most important form of social influence; in the village it is age; but “for giving help to the world and ruling over the people” it is the power of personal example (德 *dé*). When a king treats his teacher—the one wealthy in *dé*—as just another subject and summons them to court, the king is extending the value of his rank beyond its proper context. If a king wishes to speak with a teacher of *dé* he must go see the teacher himself. Such a teacher should never be summoned but must rather be treated as a peer in wealth (even if the teacher’s “wealth” is moral rather than material). To support his position Mengzi cites the authority of Zengzi, who said,

The wealth of Qin and Chu cannot be rivaled. They may have their wealth, but I have my consummateness; they may have their exalted rank, but I have my integrity. In what way do I suffer in the comparison?

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<sup>200</sup> For a discussion of the sage’s “aspirative” function, see Cua 1978.

<sup>201</sup> 2B2

Presumably, Jingzi shares Mengzi's positive estimation of Zengzi—and so the normative weight of this person, associated with this particular quote, lends support to Mengzi's *conduct* on this occasion. Yet Mengzi also uses the normative status of Zengzi to support the validity of the cited *claim* (言 *yán*):<sup>202</sup> “If it were not right, Zengzi would not have said it.” Mengzi also uses Zengzi, and the other exemplary persons he cites a moment later (viz., the teachers Yi Yin and Guan Zhong), to inform his own *aspirations*—using them to make important distinctions in addition to establishing a regulative ideal in his role as a teacher of kings.

When they are appropriated to serve as the basis for a critique or justification exemplary persons can be used in either a prototypical or probabilistic capacity. We can illustrate the difference with reference to a couple of passages in the *Mengzi*. King Xuan, fearful that the rulers of the neighboring states are preparing to attack his own state, approaches Mengzi and asks him how this disaster might be averted. Here is Mengzi's reply:

I have heard of one who gained ascendancy over the realm from the modest beginning of seventy *li* square. Such a one was Tang. I have never heard of anyone ruling over a thousand *li*<sup>203</sup> being afraid of others. The *Book of History* says, “Tang began his punitive expeditions with Ge.” With this he gained the trust of the realm, and when he marched on the east, the western barbarians complained, and when he marched on the south, the northern barbarians complained. They all said, “Why does he not come to us first?” The people longed for his coming as they longed for a rainbow in a time of severe drought. Those who were going to market did not stop; those who were ploughing went on ploughing. He punished the rulers and comforted the people, like a fall of timely rain, and the people greatly rejoiced. The *Book of History* says, “We await our ruler. When he comes we will be revived.” Now when you went to punish Yen, who practiced tyranny over its people, the people thought you were going to rescue them from water and fire, and they came to meet your army, bringing baskets of rice and bottles of drink. How can it be right for you to kill the old and bind the young, destroy the ancestral temples and appropriate the valuable

<sup>202</sup> Which is an indirect way to justify his own conduct.

<sup>203</sup> “Ruling over a thousand *li*” is an indirect way of speaking about the ruler of the Empire (see 6B8).

vessels? Even before this, the whole realm was afraid of the power of your state. Now you double your territory without practicing consummate government (仁政 *rénzhèng*). This is to provoke the armies of the whole realm. If you hasten to order the release of the captives, old and young, leave the valuable vessels where they are, and take your army out after setting up a ruler in consultation with the men of Yen, it is still not too late to halt the armies of the realm.<sup>204</sup>

Mengzi's position is that the size of one's territory is no measure of security; even his mention of 'ruling over a thousand *li*' is really his way of talking about ruling by means of consummate government (*rénzhèng*). When a ruler employs the right policies—and puts the people first—he will not only have the support of his own people, but the people of his neighboring states will want him as their ruler. And there is no greater security, Mengzi is arguing, than that. To make his case he has appealed to historical exemplary persons. One of them is named directly, while countless go unnamed—they are the rulers of the past who have ruled by means of *rénzhèng*. Mengzi relies upon the example of the unnamed exemplary persons to conclude that *rénzhèng* is the most reliable resource for a sovereign's security; and he relies upon Tang's example to conclude that the initial size of one's state has very little to do with one's security or possible influence. In both cases he is using these exemplary persons to establish a set of parallels, which are probabilities linking conduct to consequences.<sup>205</sup> One concerns the correlation between the size of one's state and one's possibilities, another concerns the security and influence

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<sup>204</sup> 1B11

<sup>205</sup> One of the parallels, here, is between Tang's situation and his outcome, and the King's situation and his potential outcome—the claim is that a *parallel relationship* between situations and consequences applies to both persons. Using normative persons to establish practical patterns is, in the Confucian tradition, a species of wisdom (知 *zhī*). Hall and Ames describe *zhī*, in *Thinking Through Confucius*, as “realizing” or “forecasting” (Hall and Ames 1987). But *zhī* is unlike mere prediction, they say, in two ways. ‘First, *zhī* involves bringing into focus a selected, possible future event along with the conditioning features of the past and present that form the context out of which this events may emerge. Secondly, *zhī* entails projecting a possible future in such a fashion, and with such persuasive authority, as to invite sympathy and participation’ (55). When normative persons are used to construct probabilities, or deployed in rhetorical speech, they would seem to satisfy each of these criteria.

engendered by *rénzhèng*, and yet another concerns the risk of abandoning *rénzhèng*. And it is upon the strength of these probabilities that Mengzi advises King Xuan to adopt *rénzhèng* if he wishes to avoid being attacked by his neighboring states.

We can find an example of the prototypical utilization of exemplary persons in another passage in the *Mengzi* where the eponymous character objects to the state of Lu's proposal to attack the state of Qi.<sup>206</sup> He argues that even if the campaign were a military success it would be a moral failure since to engage in this sort of offensive warfare is to be motivated simply by the acquisition of more land, and seeking territory at the cost of human lives is to bring disaster upon the people. Yet, as Mengzi makes plain, "one who brings disaster upon the people would not have been tolerated in the days of Yao and Shun." In this passage much of the normative force of Mengzi's case against the proposed campaign rests upon the status of Yao and Shun—that what Yao and Shun would not tolerate in their day we should not tolerate in our own, that we should adopt a parallel relationship to offensive warfare. In his utilization of Yao and Shun Mengzi is not using them to establish a probability but a norm; he does not draw upon them to establish a link between conduct and consequences, but appeals to the normative weight assigned to these persons (whose identity is essential to the argument) to make a definitive claim.<sup>207</sup> These two features—using an exemplar to establish a norm, and appealing to the normative force of a particular person—set the prototypical use of exemplary persons apart from their probabilistic use. But there is one other distinguishing

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<sup>206</sup> 6B8

<sup>207</sup> With probabilistic exemplary persons the important feature is that the practical pattern—the connection between conduct and consequences—has occurred before, *not* the identity of those who have instantiated that pattern.

characteristic that bears mentioning: the prototypical use of exemplary persons, alone, can be positive and negative; probabilities are neither—at best they encourage or warn.<sup>208</sup>

## 2.7 Summary

Having surveyed the various uses and practical functions attributed to exemplary persons within Confucian moral culture we are now in a position to discuss the most basic features of exemplary persons. First of all, it would seem that no one may be an exemplary person without enjoying some variety of normative force for another person—even if the two persons involved (*viz.*, exemplar and exemplate<sup>209</sup>) are really just one person at different times. Surprisingly, perhaps, this normative force need not always be positive: the literature is comfortable talking about *exempla horribilis*—persons who stand as normative warnings, villains, and what we might call “expirative” objects.<sup>210</sup> The normative force we are speaking of can also take on many different forms. Exemplary persons may affect our emotions—as when a positive exemplar stimulates shame or emulation, or when *exempla horribilis* cause us to feel disgust or even alarm that we might be similar to them. They obviously influence our speech, and the names we use in our attempts to persuade others. The normative force of exemplary persons can also be seen in conduct, institutions, and ideals.

While using exemplary persons to establish a “probability” (discussed in section 2.6 above) requires that we at least *believe* them to be historical, this is the only use of

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<sup>208</sup> See *Shiji* 80, *Shangshu* 4.13, and *Zhongyong* 13. Xu Gan speaks about the psychological influence of those who do wrong and get away with it (*Zhonglun* 11), and the idea of warnings: ‘by calling Qi Bao a bandit, for instance, one makes them into warnings and so prevent others from feeling safe to follow their example. There is a pattern-based bit of analogical reasoning involved here. One must “enumerate the miseries of impropriety” (ibid.).’

<sup>209</sup> That is, the one for whom the exemplary person has normative force.

<sup>210</sup> See below for an explanation of this term.



exemplary persons that necessarily requires historical veracity.<sup>211</sup> What we have found in the use of exemplary persons in the practices of justification, critique, imitation, and learning is that we can just as easily appeal to mythological, fictional, even hypothetical exemplary persons as we can to those that might be historical. Still, while it is not always the case, there are times when a justification by appeal to exemplary persons, and not just probabilities, can depend upon historical questions about what these persons can be said to have really done.<sup>212</sup>

Looking over the various uses to which exemplary persons are put within Confucian moral culture we can distil at least three normative functions common to every one of these uses: exemplary persons serve as aspirative and “expirative” objects, as tools for direct or indirect persuasion, and as vicarious and anticipatory experience. The first function occurs whenever someone thinks they should or should not be like person P in respect to property *z*. The normativity of person P is used to inform one’s aspirations, conduct, and the like. Those whom we aspire to be like are genuine aspirative objects while those whom we wish to avoid (and are thus negatively normative) become (playing on the Latin root of “aspire”) “expirative” objects. In each case property *z* is a generalized feature that has bearing upon the person emulating the person P.<sup>213</sup> A distinguishing feature of this function is that while the act of justifying is often a response to doubt or dispute concerning normative *claims*, emulation or intelligent imitation of an exemplary person is a response to possibilities of *actions* and *affections*. However, just as the

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<sup>211</sup> This answers one of the questions posed by Sor-Hoon Tan (2005, 415). She asks whether the narratives of exemplary persons must be historically accurate if they are to be useful. The answer is that it depends entirely upon the use made of such narratives.

<sup>212</sup> See *Mozi* 16 and Yi-Pao Mei’s discussion of the Mohist “historical argument” (1934, 61-68).

<sup>213</sup> The content, significance, and normativity of such properties will need to be discussed at some length (see chapter five)

normativity of claims and actions can impact the normativity of each other, so emulation and justification are often relevant to each other. The aspirative or expirative function of exemplary persons can also be characterized by a certain philosophical psychology we might describe as the conative aspect of intelligent imitation. We have already discussed the relevance of the affections of shame and emulation when it comes to exemplary persons. To these we might add a third affection, though a defective one: envy. When comparing envy and emulation in the *Rhetoric* Aristotle describes these two affections as two very different responses to persons whom we take to be potential objects of aspiration. With emulation, the normative weight of the other motivates us to become more like that person. Envy, on the other hand, appreciates the normative weight of the exemplary person, yet instead of seeking to become more like that person envy motivates us to tear the other person down—a process that may involve a physical or social attack, but may also be accomplished simply through a process of rationalizing away the significance of the other. Only bad people, Aristotle says, experience envy.

In each of the normative uses we have discussed exemplary persons function as tools for persuasion. When the normativity of action  $x$  is in doubt or disputed you can argue that “person P did action  $x$ .” To be effective, even though the normativity of  $x$  is certainly up in the air, the normativity of P (whether positive or negative) must be assumed by both parties of the dispute or doubt; only then can the normativity of P be used to support a given normative assessment of action  $x$ —either positive as a justification, or negative as a critique.

In their third function exemplary persons are warnings or encouragements, and in either case they are a source of experience. The reasoning here is that “When persons P

did action  $x$ , consequence  $y$  followed.” Here,  $P$  is merely an indexical; their normative status is irrelevant to the argument. All you want from them is historical legitimacy. What is in question is the value of  $x$ , or the likelihood of  $y$ . By connecting  $x$  and  $y$ , you can calculate the likelihood of  $y$ , or support a normative assessment of  $x$ . Often the end (consequence  $y$ ) is assumed to be valuable, and the person  $P$  simply illustrates technical prowess or industrial excellence (“skill”) or ineptitude that is used by others to inform their own practical intelligence.

We will return to the aspirative and experiential functions of exemplary persons in the fifth chapter. In the next two chapters we will concern ourselves primarily with the second of our three functions: viz., exemplary persons used as resources for justifying or critiquing normative claims. I will argue that the Confucian tradition is willing to allow exemplary persons an original role in such justifications and critiques given that these persons are afforded basic and native normativity. After offering an initial defense of this exegetical claim at the start of the next chapter I will then turn to the philosophical objection to this sort of position, focusing primarily upon Plato’s *Euthyphro* and comments from Kant and Mill on the subject. Identifying the nature of this objection is the first step to finding a way to defend the alternative position—a task incumbent upon anyone willing to take Confucian ethics seriously.

PART II.  
PRAGMATIC NORMATIVITY AND EXEMPLARY PERSONS

## CHAPTER 3. THE NORMATIVITY OF EXEMPLARY PERSONS AFTER PLATO

### 3.1 *The Basic and Native Normativity of Confucian Exemplars*

Exemplary persons were often understood by the Confucians to function within the normative practices, discussed in the previous chapter, as basic norms with native normativity. To support this claim one must first prove two, related claims. First, that there are occasions in the literature when the appeal to an exemplary person concludes a debate without any actual or anticipated objection meeting that appeal. If an interlocutor does not raise an objection, this implies that—for the participants of this debate, at the least—the normativity of the cited exemplary person or persons is accepted as basic. Citing such cases shows that exemplary persons are at least *capable* of playing the role of a basic norm. Yet psychological considerations, situational factors, a deficient interlocutor, even literary concerns might explain the lack of an objection equally well. Proving that exemplary persons do, in fact, occasionally play the role of a basic norm requires supporting a second claim: that they are able to have native, or non-derivative, normativity. Since exemplary persons are (given their specificity or particularity) ill-adapted to be foundational norms, and are never treated as such by the Confucians, one way to establish the native normativity of exemplary persons is simply to show that the Confucians do not approach normativity within a foundational paradigm.<sup>214</sup> If this is the case, we can conclude that exemplary persons *need not* be derivative in their normativity—that their normative content and force can belong to their particularities and complexities, rather than a general norm they might be thought to embody or exemplify.

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<sup>214</sup> In chapter five we will defend the claim that the Confucians do not employ a foundational paradigm of normativity.

Concerning the first claim there are numerous occasions when, in a particular discussion, the authority or normative force of a person—as an exemplar—appears to function as a basic norm; that is, they are offered as the last word of the discussion and remain unchallenged by the opponent.<sup>215</sup> When Confucius uses Bo Yi and Shu Qi to criticize the conduct of the Lord of Wei, for instance, no one attempts to question the status of these two figures.<sup>216</sup> But there are occasions when an exemplary person's status *is* brought into question, and the possibility of doubting any particular person's role as a basic norm is quite significant since it means that exemplary persons cannot enjoy an absolute, inviolate, or foundational normative status within Confucian ethics.<sup>217</sup> Rather, exemplary persons seem quite capable of borrowing their normativity from some other person or value. In the *Analects*, for example, the normative status of Yao and Shun can play a basic role in one argument, possessing an unchallenged authority.<sup>218</sup> And yet, in other passages, the normativity of Yao and Shun seems to be derived from other values. In these latter passages, which form a series of panegyric utterances, Confucius draws our attention to certain aspects or general features of their conduct and uses these details to warrant the normative status as these sages.

How majestic they were—Yao and Shun reigned over the world but did not rule it.<sup>219</sup>

How great indeed was Yao as ruler! How majestic! Only 天 *tiān* is truly great, and only Yao took it as his model. How expansive was he—the people could not find the words adequate to praise him. How majestic was he in his accomplishments, and how brilliant was he in his cultural achievements.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>215</sup> In the first book of the *Analects* alone there are at least five passages that clearly argue for normative claims based solely upon the normativity of a person, such as Confucius or Zengzi.

<sup>216</sup> See also *Analects* 6.30, and *Mengzi* 1B3 and 1B10

<sup>217</sup> See *Mengzi* 2A1 and 3A1 for specific doubts, and *Xunzi* 5.7 for a brief discussion of two common causes of such doubt.

<sup>218</sup> 6.30, 12.22, 14.42

<sup>219</sup> 8.18

<sup>220</sup> 8.19

If anyone could be said to have effected proper order while remaining nonassertive (無為 *wúwéi*), surely it was Shun. What did he do? He simply assumed an air of deference and faced due south.<sup>221</sup>

These passages derive the normative status of these sages from the normativity of *tiān*, non-coercive governing, and good results.<sup>222</sup>

The challenge is to acknowledge the occasional derivation of a person's normativity and yet resist concluding that these other norms are somehow more fundamental values, or that the normativity of sages must *always* be derived from these other values. A proper understanding of a sage's normative status requires that we always place it within the context of the discussion in which the sage is mentioned. A good illustration of the efficacy of this interpretive principle—that normativity is often limited to the discussion in which it factors—concerns the normativity of Confucius himself. Throughout most of the *Analects* the normativity of Confucius is taken for granted and used to supply the normative force of many claims. Book ten, for instance, would be a useless catalogue of anecdotes about Confucius unless the reader already attributed some sort of normative status to the man. During the initial stage of the text, and for many of its readers in the history of China, such an attribution might be assumed. But there is evidence—especially in the nineteenth book of the *Analects*—of some doubt about the true worth of Confucius. On these occasions a defense is offered. In the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* (two texts that vied with other schools and reached a much wider, and potentially much less sympathetic, audience than the earlier *Analects*) defending the sagehood of

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<sup>221</sup> 15.5

<sup>222</sup> On the normative status of *tiān* in relation to the sage, see Hall and Ames 1987, 206-7; 215.

Confucius became a real issue.<sup>223</sup> The most reasonable explanation of this shift seems to be that whether a person's normative status was assumed or derived within a specific discussion depended upon the participants in that discussion. In one conversation, the value of non-coercive government might be supported with reference to the example of Shun under the assumption that the participants all assume Shun's normative status; in another conversation, when the status of Shun is put into doubt, one might rely upon the assumption, presumably shared by the participants, that non-coercive governing is appropriate. What a person may cite in order to support his or her claims depends upon the common sentiments of the interlocutors. This is part of what I will be calling a "pragmatic" approach to justification or normativity—an approach that, when applied to exemplary persons, acknowledges that such persons may be basic norms with native normativity.<sup>224</sup> They may, in other words, be the final norm in a particular debate, even if—unlike foundational norms—they do not play this sort of normative role in *every* debate in which they figure.

There is yet another way to support our general hypothesis and that is by proving the second claim mentioned above: that Confucian ethics does not operate in terms of a foundational paradigm of normativity. This supporting argument must wait, however, until we have developed an account of foundational normativity, its place in the common philosophical objections to treating persons as basic norms with native normativity, and the alternative paradigm of normativity that I am calling "pragmatic normativity." These points will be the focus of the next two chapters.

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<sup>223</sup> See *Mengzi* 2A2, 5B10, and *Xunzi* 21.5

<sup>224</sup> I will use "basis," "basic," and "basicity" when referring to norms used in a pragmatic justification of normative claims, and "foundation" or "ground" for norms that are used in a foundational justification of normative claims. See chapter one for the difference between basic norms and foundational norms, and chapter four for the difference between foundational and pragmatic approaches to normativity.



### 3.2 Critique of the Basic and Native Normativity of Exemplars

Yet even our first claim—viz., that exemplary persons can occasionally function as basic norms—is bound to come under attack. We encounter this objection in Plato's *Euthyphro* and the ethical writings of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. In the history of Western philosophy it was Plato's *Euthyphro* that first conceived of exemplary persons as *mere exemplifications*. In the moral culture preceding this work, going all the way back to the Homeric poems, persons were used as basic norms without philosophical incident. Euthyphro's initial defense in this dialogue represents this antecedent tradition; for a moment it is, in a fashion, a confrontation between Plato and his predecessors. In attacking this long-standing Hellenic tradition Plato sought to champion a re-conceptualization of the normative force attributed to persons, one where such persons could only have derivative normative content—to be nothing more than illustrations or manifestations of other moral norms. While Plato's conception of exemplary persons as *mere exemplifications* did not immediately eclipse the prior conception, in time it has come to overshadow it completely.<sup>225</sup> Today it continues to be a predominant conception of exemplary persons in Western philosophy and has, in turn, corrupted our understanding of exemplary persons in Confucian ethics.

Plato's dialogue begins with a chance meeting between Socrates and Euthyphro outside the court of the Archon. After hearing of Socrates's own troubles, we learn why Euthyphro is in the neighborhood. He intends to prosecute his father for the murder of a slave—"for which I am thought mad," he says. But before Socrates has the opportunity to transform this dialogue into his usual hunt for a universal account (*eidos*)—in this case,

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<sup>225</sup> We find the attribution of basic normativity to persons in the work of Plato's contemporaries—especially in the work of the Attic *rhetors*; it is disputed whether Plato depicts Socrates, in other dialogues, as engaging in this practice (see footnote 26).

of piety (*to hoision*)—Euthyphro offers a justification for his proposed course of conduct. He tells Socrates that he is acting under a specific principle (*nomos*), namely, that when an injustice is committed it does not matter if the person who suffered the injustice was a stranger or a relative, just as it does not matter if the perpetrator of the unjust deed was your own father.<sup>226</sup> Euthyphro supports this principle, in turn, with an appeal to the gods Zeus and Kronos:

I can cite powerful evidence that the *nomos* is so. I have already said to others that such actions are right ... These people themselves believe that Zeus is the most excellent and just of the gods [*theon ariston kai dikaiotaton*], yet they agree that he bound his father because he unjustly swallowed his sons, and that he [sc. Kronos] in turn castrated his father for similar reasons. But they are angry with me because I am prosecuting my father for his wrongdoing. They contradict themselves in what they say about the gods and about me.<sup>227</sup>

There is something to Euthyphro's initial defense that is too often overlooked: he is treating Zeus and Kronos as exemplary persons, and justifying his conduct with an appeal to their conduct. This is easily missed if we focus upon Euthyphro's eventual inability to provide Socrates with a universal account of piety or upon the unsavoriness of his intended course of conduct, and conclude that it is not worth listening to anyone with such philosophical or ethical defects.<sup>228</sup> Or, rather than see Euthyphro's justification as an

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<sup>226</sup> *Nomos* is a term that might also be translated as "law" or "convention." At this point in the history of Greek thought a *nomos* would be one of the unwritten laws of the *polis* and thought to govern both political morality and personal morality—with no clean division seen between these two (see Jaeger 1939, 326).

<sup>227</sup> 5d-6a, translated by G.M.A. Grube with modifications; cf. Hesiod's *Theogony* 154 ff, 459.

<sup>228</sup> When reading this dialogue it is hard to imagine that Plato ever intended his readers to take Euthyphro seriously: he is arrogant, woolly-headed, and intent on prosecuting his father on a charge of murder. No doubt Plato's contemporary readers would have taken Euthyphro's conduct towards his own father as sufficient grounds for dismissing anything the character might say, but Plato makes Euthyphro all the more outrageous when the details of the case are disclosed. Euthyphro's father killed a slave, and only out of neglect; the slave died of starvation and exposure to the elements. We also learn that the victim of his father's neglect was guilty of killing another slave in a drunken rage. That the victim was a slave might be enough for Plato's contemporaries to excuse the father of any moral responsibility in the victim's death, but add to that the slave's intemperance and recent homicide and even we can understand the father's apathy towards the victim of his negligence. Another indicator that Plato did not mean for his readers to take Euthyphro seriously is the plain inconsistency the character evinces when it comes to the application of his

appeal to exemplary persons we might mistake it for a contrary justification—one rooted in a divine command ethical theory.<sup>229</sup> But, in fact, Euthyphro’s appeal to Zeus and Kronos is an appeal to two *paradeigmata* (‘parallel cases,’ ‘precedence’)—to two cases that he claims parallel his own in a normatively significant fashion.<sup>230</sup> The parallel is analogical in structure. He is not simply claiming that he is like Zeus or Kronos, but that

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principle. First of all, Euthyphro seems upset at his father because it was his own slave that died of neglect. If this is true, then Euthyphro is clearly not following his principle of impartiality. Secondly, Euthyphro kept company with a slave who was a drunkard and capable of murder—and yet he did not seek to prosecute or correct the man.

<sup>229</sup> See Frankena 1974, 20; Geach 1969, 165-166; Helm 1981, 2; Rachels 1998, 50-51; Swinebrune 1974, 120; Young 1977, 154. Cohen (1971) describes it as an “authoritarian ethical normative theory.” He remains much closer to the text by speaking about the ‘love’ and ‘approval’ of the gods, rather than their commands; but he still ignores Euthyphro’s appeal to the personal example of the gods. Euthyphro’s appeal to the love of the gods comes only after Socrates begins the search for a general account of piety. Before that point Euthyphro can be said to practice a very different sort of normative theory. He commends Zeus by saying that he is “the most excellent and just of the gods.” Which of these aspects—the character traits of excellence and justice, or the status of divinity—is supplying the normativity of his example? It is not clear how we should answer this question when this initial defense is concerned, but as the dialogue precedes Euthyphro comes to rely upon the assumption that divinity makes a difference, in fact all the difference, in the normative weight attributed to Zeus or to other gods. How else could we explain the *Euthyphro* dilemma (“Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved *by the gods*?”), or Euthyphro’s consternation at the possibility of moral disagreement amongst the gods? But even if the normativity of the gods stems from their divinity (and this appearing only later in the dialogue) that does not necessitate the involvement of a divine *command* theory—regardless of whether we are dealing with the early or late normative theories in the dialogue. The gods might come by their normative authority because they are divine, or Zeus might come by his normative authority because he is just and noble—yet it does not matter which because a divine command theory requires that one appeal, in the end, to the *commands* of the divine, and not to their personal *conduct*. Yet Euthyphro’s early position is to appeal to the personal example of the gods, while his later position is to appeal to what the gods love—in neither case is he appealing to the commands of the gods.

<sup>230</sup> *Paradeigma* is the singular form. While Euthyphro does not include the term in his justification it is clear at his lack of surprise, when Socrates uses it a moment later, that it is compatible with what Euthyphro is saying. Citing a person in normative discourse was, according to the rhetorical theories of Aristotle and Anaximenes, a perfect example of a *paradeigma*. It is also the term used by later Attic writers for discussing the use of persons in the protreptical speeches in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

The Liddell-Scott-Jones derives *paradeigma* from the verb, *paradeiknumi*: ‘to compare,’ ‘to exhibit side by side,’ ‘to make comparisons’ (*para*, alongside; *deiknumai*, to show). This would suggest that the noun *paradeigma* stands for a substantive correlate within a comparison—i.e., one of the two things being compared (that which the Mohists refers to as 所效 *suǒxiào*). Since a *deigma* (the Mohist 法 *fǎ*) is a ‘sample,’ ‘pattern,’ ‘case,’ ‘instance,’ or ‘example,’ (see, for example, Isocrates’s *On Antidosis*, 54) we might translate *paradeigma* as “comparative case” or “parallel case.” However, a slightly different etymology seems plausible (see Kornhardt 1936): one might argue that *peira* (‘trial,’ ‘attempt,’ ‘experiment’) was the original source of *paradeigma*’s prefix. Following this second etymology, we could translate *paradeigma* as ‘preceding case’ or simply ‘precedence,’ with perhaps both the temporal and normative sense of the word. Rather than resolve the etymological question (what can etymology, by itself, give us anyway?) I would suggest that we appreciate how each possible sense—precedence and parallel—plays a crucial role in the utilization of persons within normative discourse. We will return to this theme in chapter five.

he will be *relating* to his own father in much the same way that Zeus and Kronos *related* to their own fathers.<sup>231</sup> In addition to the analogical parallel between these relationships Euthyphro's argument uses Zeus and Kronos as exemplars. He is not attempting to establish probable consequences of his conduct; rather, he is treating the two gods as basic norms, assuming that these gods related to their fathers appropriately without further argument. These two aspects combined—the appropriateness of the conduct of Zeus and Kronos, and the parallel between their conduct and Euthyphro's own—form the substance of his argument.

Socrates, of course, responds to Euthyphro's defense with incredulity. While he does not object to Euthyphro's analogy, and does not voice any reservations (as yet) concerning the use of persons as exemplars with basic normativity, Socrates finds it hard to accept that the gods ever acted in the manner Euthyphro describes.<sup>232</sup> Socrates rejects the precedence of Euthyphro's *paradeigmata*, and this is enough to prevent the gods from functioning as norms basic to Euthyphro's justification of his conduct.<sup>233</sup> This objection robs Euthyphro of his argument not by rejecting the validity of this type of argument, but by rejecting the truth of one of his premises. In other words, Socrates's initial objection does not endanger the general practice of arguing by exemplar (*paradeigma*), it only undermines the soundness of Euthyphro's specific argument.

Shortly after raising his initial objection to Euthyphro's defense, however, Socrates subtly transforms the concept of the *paradeigma*. It is this re-conception that

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<sup>231</sup> To claim that he was similar to Zeus or Kronos would be vague and as capable of being a mere simile as a strict analogy. For a discussion on the difference between simile and analogy, see Mill 1904, 393-397 and chapter five below.

<sup>232</sup> 6a. Even if somehow forced to admit the gods acted in this fashion Socrates would not accept this conduct as being appropriate.

<sup>233</sup> On the relevance of precedence and parallelism see chapter five.

robs exemplary persons of the possibility of being a basic norm, problematizing the tradition that guides and justifies conduct by means of exemplary persons alone. If accepted, this re-conceptualization would require us to think of the normative content of exemplary persons as non-native or derivative.

Socrates: "Bear in mind then that I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form (*eidos*) itself that makes all pious actions pious, for you agreed that all impious actions are impious and all pious actions pious through one form, or don't you remember?"

Euthyphro: "I do."

Socrates: "Tell me then what this form itself is, so that I may look upon it, and using it as a model (*paradeigma*), say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not."<sup>234</sup>

Socrates affords *paradeigmata* the same basic role in matters of evaluation and justification as they have for Homer and for Euthyphro. The difference, however, is that the Socratic *paradeigmata* cannot be persons; they can only be general accounts (*eide*). He has exchanged "person-*paradeigmata*" for "*eidos-paradeigmata*."<sup>235</sup>

This re-conceptualization of *paradeigmata* is an expression of a particular epistemology.<sup>236</sup> As Richard Robinson comments on this passage,

That our knowledge of X is prior to our knowledge of its cases is implied ... in the *Euthyphro* (6E), where Socrates says that when Euthyphro has told him what X is he is going to use it as a paradigm or pattern to determine which things are X and which not. In fact, the impression vaguely given by the early dialogues as a whole is that Socrates thinks that there is no truth whatever about X that can be known before we know what X is.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> *Euthyphro*, 6d-e

<sup>235</sup> This is, in short, a shift in the original Hellenic notion of *paradeigmata* away from the notion of exemplary persons. For a similar trend attributed to the sophist Protagoras, see Plato's *Protagoras* 326c-d and Jaeger 1939, 310.

<sup>236</sup> But this epistemology rests, in turn, upon Plato's desire for certainty in ethical matters. We will return to this shortly when we discuss the connection between this epistemology and "foundational normativity."

<sup>237</sup> Robinson 1953, 51.

When this epistemology is applied to the conception of *paradeigmata* it is clear why Plato thought that particular *paradeigmata*—such as persons and their actions—must be displaced by universal *paradeigmata*. Zeus may indeed be an exemplar of piety, but only if he somehow corresponds with (and thus exemplifies) the *eidos-paradeigma* of piety; otherwise, how could we know if his conduct were a true example of pious action?<sup>238</sup> Examples (e.g., particular persons) cannot be used to support, let alone supply, a definition of a virtue.<sup>239</sup> At best, examples can be used to disprove a definition.<sup>240</sup>

If the concept of a pious person depends upon the general concept of piety, the value of particular examples of piety will be made to depend upon the value assigned to

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<sup>238</sup> The issue of correspondence is actually one of the greatest weaknesses of Platonic *paradeigmata*. Until “correspondence” can be determined without relying upon a person’s judgment and experience they cannot do what the character Socrates, in the *Euthyphro*, wishes them to do: to identify for us what actions and persons are pious.

<sup>239</sup> Peter Geach (1966) suggests that the principle of *Euthyphro* 6E—which we might call the Primacy of Definition (PD) principle—leads to a second principle: if we cannot recognize a case of X without first having a definition or account of X, then we cannot use cases of X to establish a definition of X. Let us call this second principle the Insufficiency of Cases for Definitions (ICD). These two principles, taken together, constitute what Geach famously referred to as the “Socratic fallacy” (though it is true that the Socratic “fallacy” is not a fallacy in the technical sense of the term—viz., a beguiling argument—since these principles do not constitute an argument, let alone a beguiling one).

Attributing this kind of restriction upon the relevance of examples to Plato’s Socrates creates a challenge to the interpretation of the Socratic use of cases (see Robinson 1953, 33-48). On several occasions Socrates appeals to exemplars of courage or temperance in his discussion of such virtues. This has led Gregory Vlastos to contradict Geach’s conclusion and claim that Socrates sometimes uses examples to *establish* a virtue’s definition. In his argument to support his position Vlastos does us the service of pointing out that Geach has strayed too far from the original texts. He reminds us no early Platonic dialogue actually expresses the PD principle (Vlastos 1985, 23n54). Furthermore, Socrates’s claim at *Euthyphro* 6E is not logically equivalent to the PD principle. The latter says that if you *do not* know X you *cannot* recognize cases of X, while this passage in the *Euthyphro* says that if you *do* know X you *can* recognize cases of X. The PD principle is much stronger since it speaks of the necessary and sufficient condition for knowing that a case is genuine, while the *Euthyphro* passage simply mentions a sufficient condition for knowing without claiming that it is also a necessary condition. Hence, someone who speaks as Socrates has in this passage need not be committed to the PD principle. Still, the claim in the *Euthyphro* strongly *suggests* something like the PD principle, especially when we associate it with what is said in the later Platonic dialogues. But Vlastos goes too far himself when he claims that examples of X are used by Socrates to build an account of X. He cites several instances in the elenctic dialogues where a search for a definition is apparently undertaken by means of examples—with *Laches* 190e-193c as his prime defense. Yet when we look at *Laches* 190e-193c we find that this passage presents us with an entirely negative utilization of examples—one where examples do not support or supply a definition but are used simply to dismiss a proffered definition.

<sup>240</sup> As Richard Robinson puts it: “epagoge [or, argumentation from particulars or examples] is a means to the destruction rather than the establishment of definitions” (1953, 48).

the universal *paradeigma* of piety. Hence, the epistemological priority of the universal translates into the normative dependency of exemplary persons. This is how Plato's reconfiguration of *paradeigmata*—from particular to universal—generates a *normatively* derivative, and not just a *conceptually* derivative, understanding of normative persons. In Plato's case, exemplary persons derive their normative content and force from universal *paradeigmata*. The normativity of persons can no longer stand on its own, nor enjoy the role of being the last term of appeal in normative discourse.<sup>241</sup>

But can there be anything wrong with Plato's normatively derivative conception of exemplary persons, or 'person-*paradeigmata*'? After all, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill (to cite two exemplary moral philosophers) draw similar conclusions.<sup>242</sup> Kant voices this point of view as early as his first *Critique* (interestingly enough, when he is discussing Plato).

As we are well aware, if anyone is held up as a pattern of virtue, the true original with which we compare the alleged pattern and by which alone we judge of its value is to be found only in our minds. This original is the idea of virtue, in respect of which the possible objects of experience may serve as examples [*Beispiele*] (proofs that what the concept of reason commands is in a certain degree practicable), but not as prototype [*Urbild*]. ... For it is only by means of this idea that any judgment as to moral worth or its opposite is possible.<sup>243</sup>

He makes a similar claim in his *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Here, like Socrates in the *Euthyphro*, Kant is attempting to subject appeals to divine persons to rational critique. "Worse service", he says,

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<sup>241</sup> An exemplary person does not become normatively derivative—i.e., a mere exemplification—the moment one *can* provide a further explanation of their normativity. The derivative conception posits that the normativity of an exemplary person must *always* be grounded on some other norm. The force of this distinction will become clearer after we have discussed the differences between the foundational and pragmatic approaches to the "normative question" below.

<sup>242</sup> For more on the place of exemplary persons in Kant's ethics see Louden 1992a, 1998, and 2009. For a similarly derivative depiction of exemplary persons in late Hellenic thought see Viner 2002; cf. Sedley 1999, and Long 1996, 100-101 and 150-151.

<sup>243</sup> 1929, A315/B372.

cannot be rendered morality than that an attempt be made to derive it from examples. For every example of morality presented to me must itself first be judged according to principles of morality in order to see whether it is fit to serve as an original example, i.e., model. But in no way can it authoritatively furnish the concept of morality. Even the Holy One of the gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is recognized as such. ... examples can never justify us in setting aside their true original, which lies in reason, and letting ourselves be guided by them.<sup>244</sup>

John Stuart Mill utters a parallel conviction when defending utilitarianism against the allegation that this ethical theory “renders men cold and unsympathizing; that it chills their moral feelings toward individuals; that it makes them regard only the dry and hard consideration of the consequences of actions, not taking into their moral estimate the qualities from which those actions emanate.”<sup>245</sup> Part of his response to this objection is to distinguish between right and wrong actions, on the one hand, and good and bad agents on the other. He reminds us that a right action does not necessarily proceed from a good character, just as a wrong action can sometimes emanate from a good character. This is why we are entitled to distinguish between the quality of actions and the quality of agents. But Mill goes beyond this distinction to claim that an evaluation of actions cannot, and never has, rested solely upon the evaluation of the agents performing them:

If the assertion [sc. that utilitarians do not take into their moral estimation of actions the qualities of the agent performing them] means that they do not allow their judgment respecting the rightness or wrongness of an action to be *influenced* by their opinion of the qualities of the person who does it, this is a complaint not against utilitarianism, but against any standard of morality at all; for certainly no known ethical standard decides an action to be good or bad because it is done by a good or bad man.<sup>246</sup>

If he is not claiming that the evaluation of agents can have nothing to do with the evaluation actions, Mill is at least ruling out the possibility that the former might

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<sup>244</sup> 1993, 408-409. See also Kant 1963, 109-114.

<sup>245</sup> Mill 1998, 66.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.; emphasis added.



determine the latter.<sup>247</sup> In either case, his position entails a wholesale rejection of the basic normativity of persons upon which Euthyphro relies in his initial defense.<sup>248</sup>

The objection—voiced by Plato, Kant, and Mill—is that the normative force and content of persons is and ought to be derived from the normative force and content of something like the moral law (Kant), the proper “account” (Plato’s Socrates), or the principle of utility (Mill). Insofar as Kantian and Utilitarian ethics are among the dominant ethical theories in contemporary academic philosophy we can expect this objection to continue to exercise considerable influence upon our appreciation of the possible uses of exemplary persons within discourse and practice.

### *3.3 Explaining the Derivative Conception of Exemplars*

In what remains of this chapter I would like to offer a general explanation for the normatively derivative view of exemplary persons. We have already seen, in the case of Plato, how it can be produced from a particular theory of knowledge. But there are several other possible explanations. A philosopher’s conception of analogical reasoning can, for instance, influence their conception of exemplary persons in this regard.<sup>249</sup> Yet the most powerful explanation for thinking of exemplary persons as “mere

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<sup>247</sup> The difference between these two interpretations of the passage comes down to how strictly we are to read Mill’s mention of “influence.” The first reading seems improbably, especially since Mill will at times make use of a person’s example to aid our estimation of actions. See, for instance, his appeal to the exemplar, Socrates:

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides. [1998, 57]

It is apparent, however, that Socrates does not function as a basic norm in this passage (nor is there any guarantee that he is attributed native normativity).

<sup>248</sup> And without basic normativity such persons cannot have native normativity.

<sup>249</sup> This hypothesis will be defended in chapter five.

exemplifications” is the prevalence of a particular approach to justification. This approach answers what Christine Korsgaard labels “the normative question”—a question that concerns the justifiability of ethical claims—with an appeal to a subset of moral or non-moral beliefs that form the foundation for all other moral beliefs. We might describe this approach as “foundational normativity.”<sup>250</sup>

In *A Theory of Justice* John Rawls distinguishes between two forms of foundational normativity.<sup>251</sup> The first, which he labels “Cartesian,” appeals to a subset of moral beliefs that are thought to have self-evident normativity and uses these beliefs as axioms to then justify—through a process of deduction—all other legitimate moral beliefs. The second sort of foundational normativity that Rawls describes is reductive “naturalism.” This approach to justification appeals to a certain set of non-moral, empirical beliefs—beliefs that are often about human nature. While these beliefs may not be self-evident or necessary they are at least empirically grounded and are used as the foundation for all legitimate moral beliefs. While reductionistic naturalism is the form of foundational normativity most often attributed to Aristotle—an attribution, however, that I will challenge in the next chapter—it is the “Cartesian” variety of foundational normativity that we encounter in the writings of Plato, Kant, and Mill, with each author seeking to justify moral norms by means of a subset of moral beliefs treated as an ultimate “foundation” or “ground.”<sup>252</sup> The Platonic *eidos-paradeigmata* of the *Euthyphro*

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<sup>250</sup> William James would refer to it as seeking “closet-solutions” in ethics; Dewey, as the “metaphysical method” in moral philosophy.

<sup>251</sup> 1971, 577-587

<sup>252</sup> William James claims (1956a) that Kant, Mill, and Aristotle—among others—are foundational normativists, or what he calls “closet-philosophers.” In the end, since what I am interested in is our contemporary interpretations of Confucian ethics and exemplary persons, I am primarily interested in how moral philosophy is predominantly understood by contemporary scholars (how, for example, they interpret Kant, Mill, and Aristotle) and not whether these interpretations are ultimately fair to these historical philosophers. I would argue that foundational normativity is not a fair assessment of Aristotle’s position;

are given a foundational role in Plato's ethics. Kant attributes a similar role to "the moral law" or "the supreme principle of morality," which he describes as "the seat and origin" of moral concepts.<sup>253</sup> For Mill, the "foundation" of morality is the "*first* principle of ethics," which he describes as the "*common ground* of obligation," "the criterion of right and wrong," and "the origin and ground of moral obligation."<sup>254</sup> While these moral philosophers conceive of the foundation of morality in different ways, there are a few common elements to how they characterize the foundations of their moral theories. There are the two features characterized by Rawls (*self-evident* moral beliefs used to *deduce* all other moral beliefs), along with a third: these foundational claims are fixed or un-revisable.

A foundational justification must satisfy the highest standard of truth. Any such justification must supply absolute certainty of the validity of the foundational norm; anything short of this is not a genuine justification. Kant speaks of the foundational principle as a necessary truth, and this is associated with his insistence that the normative foundation be determined without any reference to contingent affairs.<sup>255</sup> Mill, for his part, conceives of the foundational norm as something that, once achieved, will overcome confusion, uncertainty, and discordance in the realm of moral values, and instead establish unanimity; a foundational principle, he claims, will remove uncertainty and provide consistency.<sup>256</sup> Plato, as we have seen, expects much the same from his *eidōs-paradeigmata*.<sup>257</sup>

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but I think that Kant, Plato, and Mill are genuine candidates (with Mill, perhaps, as the least likely candidate of the three).

<sup>253</sup> 1993, 392, 411

<sup>254</sup> 1998, 49-51

<sup>255</sup> 1993, 389

<sup>256</sup> 1998, 49, 51

<sup>257</sup> *Euthyphro*, 6e

The specter of the moral skeptic seems largely responsible for elevating the requirement for an adequate justification to the level of absolutely certainty.<sup>258</sup> This is because moral skeptics do not doubt this or that norm, but all norms; they are, as Kant describes them, “those who ridicule all morality as being a mere phantom of human imagination.”<sup>259</sup> The skeptic is thus anyone and no one. It seems that anyone, at anytime, might become a moral skeptic; but the prejudices of the skeptic along with the skeptic’s dispositions and cultural background are all left in the dark and have nothing, apparently, to do with the skeptic’s skepticism. This sort of skepticism does not arise because one’s values conflict tragically within a given situation. The assumption employed by the foundationalist is that normative questions do not arise only within specific contexts or as a question asked by specific persons, but are rather ever-present. The global, abstract, and speculative doubt of the moral skeptic makes it impossible to resolve that doubt short of anything absolutely “universal” and “necessary” (to borrow terms from Kant). One cannot use a skeptic’s commitment to another moral norm to convince her of the legitimacy of the norm she doubts, but must rather convince her of all moral norms simultaneously; one, in fact, cannot use any of the skeptic’s beliefs or emotions to justify moral norms, but must convince a faceless skeptic without any personality or moral culture. Finally, since the doubt is not limited to a specific situation, nor limited to practical need, the resolution must be rather general and cannot use the practical need of the doubter to force a resolution. There really is no practical urgency to the doubt, no real need for a resolution; the skeptic is idle in their doubts and can remain doubtful for an indefinite period of time.

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<sup>258</sup> Much as Descartes uses his method of radical doubt to force a form of skepticism upon himself and his reader.

<sup>259</sup> 1993, 407

Clearly the only way to meet the doubts of the moral skeptic is to establish a proof without relying upon any contingent considerations. Because the skeptic is faceless, proving the validity of moral norms cannot rely upon the skeptic's emotions or sentiments, their upbringing or moral experience, their culture or times. This is what Kant has in mind when he speaks of the foundational norm needing to be both "universal" and "absolutely necessary": it must be morally obligatory for all moral agents ("universal"), and possess a normative necessity that does not stem from any contingent interests of the agents ("absolutely necessary"). Because the Categorical Imperative is thought to bind every rational agent *qua* rational agent, it does not depend upon contingent aspects of the person who might ask the normative question. Yet barring complete "universality" the justification ought to come as close as possible to possessing this quality. For instance, Mill's defense of his own ethical theory, by resting on a common trait of the human animal, cannot achieve the level of absolute necessity and universality Kant would require of an ethical theory; yet even Mill links the defensibility of his ethical theory to the degree of universality he is able to achieve by grounding it upon human nature.

In his attempt to supply an indubitable moral justification of his foundational norm, Kant restricts himself to what can be known *a priori*; and in his second *Critique* he provides a deduction—or formal justification—of the Categorical Imperative, grounding the moral law upon the practical postulate of freedom. Yet Kant also claims in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that the moral law neither allows for, nor needs, a formal justification. Its authority, he says, is firmly established in ordinary moral consciousness as a 'fact of reason'—as the starry heavens objectively appear *above us*, so does the

moral law objectively appears *within us*.<sup>260</sup> Furthermore, a deduction of the moral law is not possible because it is not an object of possible experience, nor the ground of the existence of objects—“one cannot reason it out from antecedent data of reason ... although it would be analytic if freedom of the will were presupposed.”<sup>261</sup> Instead, the moral law “forces itself upon us of itself as a synthetic a priori proposition that is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical”—it is “given, as it were, as a fact of pure reason of which we are a priori conscious and which is apodictically certain.”<sup>262</sup> This seems to make Kant a little unsettled, for he precludes his comment with the claim that “the thing is strange enough, and has nothing like it in all the rest of our practical cognition.”<sup>263</sup> While Mill’s consequentialism prevents him from restricting himself to the *a priori*, and he explicitly denies the possibility of providing a “direct proof” of the principle of utility, he relies upon human nature to supply his indirect proof of his foundational norm.<sup>264</sup> Still, Mill seems to share Kant’s final position that the moral foundation ought to be self-evident.<sup>265</sup> It seems that Kant and Mill both arrive at the conclusion that the best way—perhaps the only way—of supplying an indubitable normative foundation is to show that it is, in fact, self-evident. After all, what is self-evident is indubitable not because it is proved with absolute certainty but because it does not stand in need of a proof.

Whether one discovers an absolutely certain justification for moral norms or explains their certainty without a formal justification there are several implications of

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<sup>260</sup> 1997, 47 and 161

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 31 and 47

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 31 and 46-50

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 31

<sup>264</sup> 1998, 81-82.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

thinking that one might supply either outcome without appealing to the doubter's moral psychology, culture, society, or any other contingent characteristic. The first is that one must be willing to think of normativity not as a psychological or social force, but as a force that can influence the skeptic on rational grounds alone (assuming, of course, that the force of reason is distinct from everything contingent—that logic and rhetoric, moral philosophy and the moral life, are independent affairs). We must be willing to think of normativity as something akin to an independent property of reality. Lastly, we must also embrace a form of moral intellectualism since we must be committed to the possibility that a person might have moral knowledge (such as the proposition, 'all legitimate moral norms are justified') regardless of their moral practice, character, or upbringing. This implies that moral knowledge can be captured in things like definitions or principles, and that there is a clear division between the substance of moral norms and the details of their applications—or whatever might involve moral judgment.

A primary assumption of anyone searching for a foundational norm is that there exists a single standard for every other possible moral norm. This presupposes that one might identify a common essence to all moral norms, and use it to translate every other type of norm into this fundamental norm-type. We might call this supposition the “mononomic hypothesis.” We observe it in Mill's writing when he justifies the value of certain character traits and moral obligations by appeal to the fundamental norm of utility; just as we find Kant rendering the value of happiness and character traits dependent upon the supreme moral value of duty.<sup>266</sup> In fact, many of the moral theories discussed in contemporary academic philosophy—consequentialism, Kantian deontology,

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<sup>266</sup> Mill describes what he is after as “some one fundamental principle or law at the root of all morality” (1998, 51).

and virtue ethics, for instance—share the approach of taking either teleological, deontic, or aretaic norms as foundational and thus the justification of norms under the other two categories. Mononomism, or commitment to a single foundational norm-type, thinks substantive moral conflict—such as the conflict between duties or between consequences and duties—is impossible. At most, conflict may arise due to our own ignorance, or perhaps to our conflicting natures; *substantive* conflict, on the other hand, is impossible. A foundational norm, with the reduction of all other types of norms to the foundational norm-type, promises a clear prioritization of all possible moral claims—or what William James calls ‘a final casuistic scale.’<sup>267</sup> It is as an implication of their mononomism that moral theories endorsing a foundational approach to normativity are necessarily incompatible with each other. Each theory presents us with a competing foundation of all moral norms—operating under the assumption that there can only be one possible foundational norm or norm-type within a moral theory. This is not simply how contemporary scholars tend to understand the moral theories of Kant and Mill, but each of these philosopher’s expresses as much in their own words.<sup>268</sup>

The foundational approach to justification appeal to the self-evident moral beliefs and uses them to deduce all other legitimate moral beliefs. Yet if foundational norms must be justified without reference to anything contingent and enjoy a transcendent normative force, it follows that a normative foundation will not only be self-evident and axiomatic: it will also be fixed, beyond revision, even timeless. A transcendent foundation to our various moral norms cannot but be eternal in nature—whether they are

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<sup>267</sup> While William James and John Dewey seem to view mononomism much like anti-theorists view moral theory, it is rather untenable to suggest that someone like Kant sought to replace practical judgment with a casuistic scale (see Louden 1992b). Mononomism need not imply a deliberative determinacy, such as the anti-theorists fear, but it does require a normative or justificatory determinacy.

<sup>268</sup> For Kant, see 1993, 392 and 398; 1996, 206-7; and 1997, 28. For Mill, see 1998, 51.



Plato's *Eide*, Kant's a priori propositions, or Mill's notion of human nature free of plasticity. It follows that a normative foundation, when discovered, would be valid for all time. This is the way both Kant and Mill speak, and it betrays a particular self-conception of these moral philosophers: that a philosopher might, at one point in time, discover the justification of every possibly legitimate moral norm.<sup>269</sup> But a norm that supplies a foundational justification will also be fixed. Assuming a distinction between the justification of moral norms and their application by means of moral judgment, any alteration within a moral system supplied with a normative foundation will occur at the level of application; revisions at the foundational level will remain unnecessary, even unimaginable. These three characteristics—(1) absolute certainty of a foundational norm that possesses both (2) timeless normative force and (3) fixed normative content—entail that the details of circumstances will remain insignificant to the normative content of the foundational norm. If a standard is to be absolute, it must also be fixed in content and timeless in force; if fixed and timeless, it cannot depend upon, or change with, circumstances. Hence, if the standard is absolutely certain, it must be abstract. Details may affect the way we apply the foundational to our lives, but details cannot (even partly) supply the content of the foundational norm. The ultimate norm must be context-free, abstract—otherwise the foundational norm could not be applied in various contexts. This is why Plato, Kant, and Mill require definitions or principles at the foot of their moral systems; it is also the reason foundational normativity is attributed to abstract properties—things like duty, piety, or utility. In short, seeking a foundational norm of which we may be absolutely certain compels us to ground moral theory in a foundational norm that possess timeless normative force, as well as fixed, abstract normative content.

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 49; 1993, 389

Given these three characteristics of the “Cartesian” foundational approach to justification (viz., *self-evident* moral beliefs that are *axiomatic* and *fixed*) it would seem to do a good job of explaining the derivative conception of exemplary persons. First, every philosopher we have discussed who thinks of exemplary persons as mere exemplifications also endorses foundational normativity—something that cannot be said for a particular conception of analogical reasoning or a Platonic prioritization of definitions over cases.<sup>270</sup> Second, foundational normativity is absent from the work of David Hall and Roger Ames, and they are also the only recent scholars of Confucianism to attribute basic and native normativity to that tradition’s interpretation of exemplary persons. Third, foundational normativity entails the alternative explanations of the derivative conception of exemplary persons (viz., one’s conception of analogical reasoning, and giving priority to definitions above cases) just as these alternative explanations presuppose foundational normativity. But foundational normativity does not simply correlate strongly with the normatively derivative conception of exemplary persons; its several characteristics *entail* the derivative conception. While it is the normative relevance of their particularities that comprise the significance of exemplary persons with basic and native normativity, foundational normativity (characterized by its quest for an absolutely certain foundational norm with timeless force, and fixed and abstract content) precludes the normative significance of particularities.

If we have any hope of championing a conception of exemplary persons that takes them to have basic and native normativity, we must first offer an alternative to

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<sup>270</sup> See chapter five for a discussion of analogical reasoning and its relevance to the normative significance of exemplary persons.

foundational normativity; we must show how it is possible to justify norms without a moral foundation. It is to this task that I turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4. A PRAGMATIC ACCOUNT OF NORMATIVE FORCE AND JUSTIFICATION

### 4.1 *Introduction*

In this chapter I will draw upon the writings of Aristotle and Dewey to characterize and defend an alternative paradigm of justification and normative force—a paradigm I will refer to as “pragmatic normativity.” A pragmatic approach to normativity assumes that normative force lives only in thought and action; it is experienced as an *event* in moral practice and not a timeless trait of ethical propositions or moral laws.<sup>271</sup> Seeing justification as a practice that occurs in everyday normative discourse, pragmatic normativists will seek to justify an ethical claim, to either themselves or others, *only* when that claim is actually doubted—that is, only when the normativity of the ethical claim is doubted by a particular person and in such a way that that doubt causes hesitation.<sup>272</sup> Treating that actual doubt as their true target pragmatic normativists consider a justification to be successful when that doubt is overcome and the normative force of the ethical claim is either reinstated or instated for the first time. They assume that justification can legitimately draw—at least in part—upon the doubting person’s pre-reflective and pre-rational moral habits and, further, that no justification is in fact possible without an appeal to such habits. Pragmatic normativists conduct themselves in this fashion because they think that, without the relevant habits, ethical knowledge is

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<sup>271</sup> “Force” in the expression “normative force” is used much as J. L. Austin (1962) used the term in his expressions “locutionary force,” “illocutionary force,” and “perlocutionary force.”

<sup>272</sup> Hence, the doubt cannot merely be speculative or idle, but must affect practice—this is “doubt” in the best pragmatic sense of the term (see Peirce 1955a, 9-12).

practically irrelevant and ethical argumentation is unpersuasive and unable to justify anything.

The pragmatic paradigm of normativity is relevant to our investigation because it offers us an alternative approach to the foundational paradigm—one that allows us to account for the practice of justification without requiring an appeal to foundational norms. This, in turn, affords exemplary persons the possibility of native normativity (a possibility we will pursue in the next chapter). By defending the pragmatic approach against its most serious and prolific objections and thus showing it to be viable alternative we can temper the critique of exemplary persons that stems from a foundational approach to normativity. But before I respond to the various objections to the pragmatic approach I will develop an account of pragmatic normativity. Both Aristotle and Dewey add something unique to the equation while also sharing the basic commitments of pragmatic normativity mentioned above.<sup>273</sup> Aristotle's pragmatic normativity contrasts sharply with the moral intellectualism of his teacher and reveals the antiquity of this paradigm within the European philosophical traditions. His unique contribution concerns the role upbringing plays in the cultivation of the noble sentiments, such as a sense of shame and emulation, and their role in any ethical justification. John Dewey's approach to normativity builds upon the pragmatism of Aristotle. Among his unique contributions to our account of pragmatic normativity are the way he connects moral theory to practice in terms of his denotative method, his enlarged conception of habit and culture and their role in normativity, and his genealogical account of the basic species of norms that

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<sup>273</sup> Additional resources for developing a pragmatic account of normativity include Gadamer 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Locke 1953; Hume 2000; and Baier 1991.

renders them non-reducible to each other.<sup>274</sup> After summarizing the common features and unique contributions of these two philosophers, in an attempt to add to the clarity of the concept of pragmatic normativity and to defend its originality, I will explain why John Rawls's approach to normativity by means of "reflective equilibrium" does not qualify as a pragmatic approach.

#### 4.2 *The Pragmatic Normativity of Aristotle*

There is a tendency in contemporary scholarship to read Aristotle's ethics as if it were committed to the goals of some modern moral philosophers. This sort of interpretation assumes that Aristotle is attempting to offer a validation of his ethical views and moral tradition by drawing upon claims external to those ethical views and moral tradition; that his justification appeals to reasons which can convince any rational agent *qua* rational agent (rendering the justification "absolutely necessary" or "unconditional" in Kant's vocabulary); and that Aristotle attempts this sort of justification in order to silence the moral skeptic.<sup>275</sup> Were any of these descriptions true Aristotle would necessarily be working within a foundationalist paradigm of normativity.

A foundationalist interpretation of Aristotle's ethics invariably takes the Function Argument of *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7 as his attempt to provide an external validation of his ethical views. In this passage, having dispatched the Platonic conception of a universal good, Aristotle seeks to elucidate the *human* good. Aristotle claims that a

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<sup>274</sup> Despite sharing a pragmatic approach to justification Dewey's account of normative content differs from Aristotle's—and these differences will prove significant when we attempt to explicate and defend the native normativity of exemplary persons in the following chapter.

<sup>275</sup> See Irwin 1988, 348-9.

thing's goods can be 'sketched' or outlined<sup>276</sup> with reference to its *ergon*: that is, a thing's characteristic function or activity.<sup>277</sup> He thereby explicitly links a thing's *ergon* to its good. Since Aristotle is not trying to define good in general, but the good for humans, he seeks to identify the characteristic activity of humans. After a brief account of the various *erga* of particular crafts and human organs, Aristotle claims that the characteristic activity of humans is "activity of the soul in accordance with reason [*logos*], or not apart from reason."<sup>278</sup> Aristotle then concludes that a good human will perform this characteristic activity well or with excellence.<sup>279</sup>

Several scholars present us with a foundational interpretation of Aristotle's ethics with each of them interpreting the Function Argument as Aristotle's metaphysical postulate that there is a function common to the biological species of human beings.<sup>280</sup> They think that Aristotle uses this function to define the highest human good. In short, Aristotle is moving from a description of human nature to a description of the human good.<sup>281</sup> Of course, to *derive* one's ethical claims from an extra-ethical claim is to necessarily engage in a form of normative foundationalism.<sup>282</sup> But it is not because it is a foundational approach that these scholars often have a problem with Aristotle's ethics, nor do they reject the Function Argument because it commits the so-called naturalistic fallacy in its attempt to derive Ought from Is. Their objection to the Function Argument concerns the viability of Aristotle's claim that humans even have a function. For these scholars, Aristotle's claims about the human function—understood to be a metaphysical

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<sup>276</sup> 1098a22

<sup>277</sup> 1097b27

<sup>278</sup> 1098a8. It is important to note that "activity," here, includes both action and contemplation.

<sup>279</sup> 1098a17

<sup>280</sup> Williams 1985; Irwin 1980, 1988; MacIntyre 1984; Korsgaard 1996.

<sup>281</sup> Irwin 1988, 23, 355 and 1980, 50-51; MacIntyre 1984, 51-2, 148; Korsgaard 1996, 50.

<sup>282</sup> See chapter three.

claim about the biological species—cannot be defended today, and it is this that renders his ethical claims undefended and suspect.

There are good reasons, however, for thinking that Aristotle did not intend the Function Argument to supply an external justification of his ethical views. If viable, these reasons cast serious doubt upon any interpretation of Aristotle's ethics that sees it as foundational.<sup>283</sup> First of all, if Aristotle thought that the Function Argument could supply the justification of his ethical views we would anticipate finding that argument throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, used in various ways to defend his account of the particular character excellences. Yet it is only used to develop his definition of the highest good, *eudaimonia*. And while the argument mentions "excellence" (*arete*), it is likely that Aristotle is speaking "formally" rather than "materially"—that he is talking about "excellence" as a placeholder for whatever it may turn out to be after further inquiry, rather than about the specific character excellences that he goes on to define.<sup>284</sup> His defense of the various character excellences seems, rather, to be the work of his *ta endoxa* method—an appeal to reputable opinions—and not an appeal to the human *ergon*.

Secondly, even if Aristotle intended for the Function Argument to defend his account of the various character virtues, the argument as it stands is simply incapable of performing that role—and the principle of charity would thus require us to question any interpretation that understood Aristotle to be using the Function Argument in this fashion. The conclusions one might infer from the Function Argument are quite weak, and

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<sup>283</sup> There is no apparent consensus on this question in the scholarship. There are plenty of scholars who do not interpret Aristotle's Function Argument as a foundationalist justification of his ethical system (see Hursthouse 1999, Gomez-Lobo 1989, Lawrence 2001, and Vasiliou 1996).

<sup>284</sup> See Broadie and Rowe 2002, 277 and Lawrence 2001, 448.



Aristotle says as much.<sup>285</sup> After all, what sorts of ethical claims can you derive from the claim that the human function is ‘activity according to reason (*logos*)’? If the human function were instead activity according to “proper reason” (*orthos logos*, or *phronesis*), it would be a very different matter. But the human function, as stipulated by Aristotle, allows for so many different and normatively mixed activities; as Bernard Suits humorously puts it, Aristotle “would see that man makes love, buys and sells, plots revenge, collects bits of string, listens to Mozart (or soft Lydian airs), washes his socks, travels to Ionia (or, as it may be, Toronto), worships God, exploits his neighbor, practices virtue, lies, cheats, murders, and does metaphysics.”<sup>286</sup> Were the Function Argument intended to supply us with a list of only appropriate conduct, Suits’s list would indeed be the refutation he took it to be. But, as Alfonso Gomez-Lobo rightly points out, this is no refutation of Aristotle’s claim about the human function since it misunderstands the point of Aristotle’s argument.<sup>287</sup> The criterion used to create this list “is that all of the items included are performed according to reason or at least not without reason”,<sup>288</sup> it is because Aristotle conceives of the human *ergon* in very general terms that any activity, however perverse or morally mistaken, may be included under that heading so long as it involves reason (in the sense of *logos*, not *orthos logos*). In short, the human *ergon* is—by itself—incapable of guiding appropriate conduct, nor was this apparently Aristotle’s intent.<sup>289</sup> Thus, we cannot take the human *ergon* to be Aristotle’s defense of the virtues; he is sketching the good life, not the good character.

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<sup>285</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.1.

<sup>286</sup> 1974, 39.

<sup>287</sup> 1989

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 183

<sup>289</sup> Even when we consider performing the *ergon* well, the conception of action according to proper reason is insufficient to supply or justify virtuous action (cf. Irwin 1980, 50). As Aristotle puts it: “there is a standard which determines the mean states which we say are intermediate between excess and defect, being

Finally, if Aristotle thought that the Function Argument could justify his various ethical claims, why does he demand more than just reason from the student of ethics? Were reason sufficient, students would not need to have the sort of upbringing Aristotle stipulates before they could understand and profit from his lectures on ethics. That he makes such a claim goes a long way in not only undermining any foundationalist interpretation of Aristotle's ethics but in also supporting an interpretation of his ethics in terms of the pragmatic paradigm of normativity.<sup>290</sup>

Aristotle does not—and perhaps cannot—attempt to supply an external justification of his moral culture, instead he relies upon a certain kinship between the dispositions of his students (those who listen to his lessons and arguments on ethical matters) and virtue itself. He says, “any one who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just ... must have been brought up in good habits” so that they already “love what is noble and hate what is base.”<sup>291</sup> These good habits of loving the noble and hating the base are what we might call “noble affective *habitus*.”<sup>292</sup>

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in accordance with right reason (*orthos logos* [note the normative qualifier]). But such a statement, though true, is by no means illuminating ... if a man had only this knowledge he would be none the wiser ... Hence it is necessary with regard to the states of the soul also not only that this true statement should be made, but also that it should be determined what right reason is and what is the standard that fixes it” (1138b23-34).

<sup>290</sup> In attributing a pragmatic bent to Aristotle I am limiting myself to his ethics. Whether Aristotle is or is not pragmatic when it comes to metaphysics, for instance, is not my focus. I am simply arguing that he does not use metaphysical claims to justify his ethical ones.

<sup>291</sup> 1095b4-6 and 10.9; cf. 2.3

<sup>292</sup> Irwin distinguishes between *ethos* and *hexis* calling the former habits and the latter *habitus*. “Habits,” he says, are merely patterns of action and affection; unlike “*habitus*,” they do not include desires, affections, and decision. While the same behavior denotes the same habit, it need not denote the same *habitus*. If two people behave in the same way, but for different reasons, they have different *habitus*. I find Irwin’s distinction untenable, however. Not every *hexis* involves our affections or decision; the *hexis* of knowledge is a good example of a *habitus* that need not involve either. While our affective *habitus* may certainly condition our desires, the desires need not constitute part of the affective *habitus* themselves. Furthermore, since our habits involve patterns of affections, I cannot see how we can distinguish between affective *habitus* and affective habits. My own hypothesis is that Aristotle’s use of *ethos* and *hexis* is not as technical as Irwin assumes. Similar to the English “state” and “condition,” or “condition” and “disposition,” they can have the same reference while enjoying different senses. To refer to a disposition as an *ethos* emphasizes the disposition’s contribution to our character (*êthos*), and perhaps the disposition’s creation by means of

“*Habitus*”<sup>293</sup> is a very old translation of *hexis*. A *hexis* is a firm or fixed disposition that distinguishes it from the shallow “dispositions” (*diathesis*), such as a mood that is easily created or removed. *Hexeis* are not given by nature, but are the products of habituation; they are cultivated (either by others or ourselves). *Hexeis* are also unique dispositions in that they are “active” rather than “passive” dispositions—a distinction which relies upon the divide between the voluntary and the involuntary, or between what is ‘up to us’ (*eph hemin*), and what is not ‘up to us.’<sup>294</sup> Aristotle’s notion of responsibility, or up-to-us-ness, does not involve a free will but proximal or significant causation in association with a deliberative decision. If we can say that an agent’s decision was an irreplaceable cause of something, regardless of how that decision might have been fully determined by antecedent conditions, that ‘something’ can still be said to have been ‘up to’ that agent. Thus, a *hexis* is a disposition that enables us to initiate certain kinds of events, and are thus “active” dispositions. Both health and knowledge are examples of a *hexis* as Aristotle defines the term.

“Affection” is a possible translation of *pathos*.<sup>295</sup> *Pathos*, “like the verb *paschein* [to suffer, to undergo], of which it is a derivative form, has an earliest sense of what is experienced or undergone by way of misfortune or harm—what is, as we say, *suffered*—but comes subsequently, as with ‘suffer,’ to have a general sense of what is experienced, a mode of a subject’s being acted upon.”<sup>296</sup> *Pathos*, in short, is an undergoing, a “passivity” on our part; in its primordial sense, *pathos* designates the phenomenon of

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habituation. By calling a disposition a *hexis*, Aristotle highlights the stability and active quality of that disposition. This hypothesis is supported by the way Aristotle uses the terms synonymously when talking about our dispositions towards danger, drinking, and other objects relevant to the character virtues (2.1; cf. 1.4 and 10.9).

<sup>293</sup> The plural and singular forms of the term are the same.

<sup>294</sup> Cf. 1109b30 ff.; 1113b19-23

<sup>295</sup> Common alternative translations of *pathos* are “feeling” and “emotion.”

<sup>296</sup> Kosman 1980, 104

*feeling* an emotion. In Aristotle's account of the various *pathe* in the *Rhetoric* we find him attributing four common characteristics to each of them. Every *pathos* is (1) attended by the sensation of pain or pleasure, (2) caused, in part, by a 'state of mind,' (3) intentional in the sense that it involves a particular judgment *about* something—usually a someone, and—finally—a *pathos* is (4) triggered by some particular event or object. These four can be illustrated by Aristotle's account of fear. Fear, he says, is the feeling of pain (this is '1'), on account of a perceived immanent harm (4), felt towards the object of doom (3), and is easily aroused in those who are in the state of mind of being uncertain of their own future safety (2).<sup>297</sup> The four characteristics are also present in his account of anger, which he describes as the feeling of pain (1), on account of a perceived slight (4), felt towards the person who committed the slight (3), and is easily aroused in those who are in the state of agitation, or expecting an outcome which is thwarted by an action—an action which comes to be seen as a slight (2).<sup>298</sup>

We can see that the sensations of pleasure and pain “accompany” the affections (*pathe*) in some fashion; but in what sense of “accompaniment”? In the essay “Aristotle and the Emotions,” Stephen Leighton imagines three possibilities. In the first two possibilities sensation and affection remain distinct concepts but “accompany” each other in either a contingent or necessary fashion—that is, either you cannot experience one without the other, or you can. The third possibility is that sensation and affection not only accompany each other as part of a single phenomenon, but that they accompany each other conceptually with sensation partly defining affection.<sup>299</sup> Leighton shows the first possibility to be untenable because sensations seem to be necessary for affections: they

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<sup>297</sup> 1382a21-1383a12

<sup>298</sup> 1378a31-1380a4

<sup>299</sup> 1982, 155

are mentioned in Aristotle's description of every emotion (except, perhaps, enmity). But sensations are not merely part of the description of an affection (and so only a necessary association of distinct concepts), Leighton argues. They are part of the very definition of an affection.<sup>300</sup> In other words, the affection of fear *is* the sensation of pain, the affection of anger *is* the feeling of pain, and so on with the other affections. Since the affections are defined in terms of the sensation of pleasure or pain, they can be distinguished from all other psychological phenomena that are not defined by pleasure or pain. This is why "affection" cannot refer to thoughts, beliefs, or perceptions since these—while they may be contingently associated with sensations of pleasure or pain—are not necessarily associated with them. But the accompaniment of such sensations is not all there is to Aristotle's concept of affection. Affections are sensations of pleasure or pain *on account of a judgment*. The *pathos* of anger, for example, is not simply pain; it is pain caused by a perceived slight—that is, the judgment that a specific person has done something that we take to be an undeserved action that comes between us and achieving our desired ends. This makes *pathe* conative and cognitive at the same time.<sup>301</sup>

An "affective *habitus*" is an active disposition that concerns our experience of the affections. There are several different ways we can experience the affections. There is the passive condition of feeling anger or fear, or the primary sense of *pathos*. But Aristotle suggests that we can also have an active disposition concerned with these affections—a disposition that we may not be able to influence willy-nilly but one that is still a product of habituation rather than nature, and has more to do with the agent's own contribution to

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 156

<sup>301</sup> The combination of sensation and judgment helps Aristotle set *pathe* apart from bodily sensations of pleasure and pain, as well as desires (*orexis*): bodily desires do not involve judgment, and none of the desires (whether rational wish, temper, appetite) include both sensations and judgment.

experience (the latter making it active rather than passive). An affective *habitus*, or emotional disposition, is not the *feeling* of an affection but is a *habitus* (*hexis*) to feel an emotion in certain circumstances, for certain reasons, towards certain persons, in association with certain ends, and to a certain degree of intensity.<sup>302</sup> A good example of an affective *habitus* is the sense of shame. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes shame as an affection. When we feel it, he says, we experience the pain of being-out-of-sorts or disturbed at the prospect of social disgrace (*adoxia*).<sup>303</sup> Essentially, the affection of shame is sensitivity to the values and opinions of others. While *feeling* shame is of dubious value Aristotle also uses “shame” (*aischune* and *aidos*) to refer to a *habitus*—a *disposition* (*hexis*) with regard to the affection of shame.<sup>304</sup> The *habitus* of shame is characterized by the tendency to experience shame only under appropriate conditions, rendering it a praiseworthy disposition. First of all, the kind of *habitus* of shame that Aristotle finds praiseworthy is one that falls between shamelessness and bashfulness. If

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<sup>302</sup> Cf. 1106b21-24. Only with a clear distinction between “emotion” as emotional disposition, and “emotion” as felt emotion can we make sense of Aristotle’s seemingly contradictory claims that, on the one hand, the “emotions” are part of virtue (1106b17, 1105b26, 1104b14, 1106b17, 1106b25, and 1107a9), capable of praise and blame (1109b30-32), and so must be voluntary (*ibid.*), and, on the other hand, that the “emotions” are not capable of blame or praise (1105b29-1106a1), and so cannot be part of virtue, and are not voluntary (cf. 1109b30 ff.).

<sup>303</sup> 2.6; cf. Cooper 1996

<sup>304</sup> He is explicit about the distinction between these two—the *emotion* and *sense* of shame—on at least one occasion (*Eudemian Ethics* 2.2). While the authenticity of this rather unique passage has been questioned (see Rowe 1971 and Woods 1992), there are several other passages where his mention of “shame” can only refer to a capacity, state, or what we are calling a “sense” of shame. When, for instance, he discusses civic courage in the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* he attributes it to shame (*Eudemian Ethics* 3.1 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.8; cf. *Magna Moralia* 1.19). In this case, it makes much more sense to suppose that the courageous conduct of those with civic courage is due not to a *feeling* of shame (since this suggests failure on their part) so much as an *aversion* to shame. It is a disposition, not an emotion, which is at work; and it is this disposition that entitles a person to claim the character trait of civic courage (see *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.9 and 2.7). Yet another reason to accept this distinction appears when we contrast Aristotle’s comments on shame in book two and four of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (2.7 and 4.9). In the former book he speaks of it as a praiseworthy trait, while in the latter book he says that it is “not ... characteristic of a good man.”<sup>304</sup> Like Alexander of Aphrodisias we would be wise to resolve this contradiction by utilizing the distinction between the experience of shame and a certain capacity towards shame. Aristotle seems to have the emotion of shame in mind in the fourth book: since the emotion of shame is most often a consequence of shameful conduct, it is not something we would wish to find in mature individuals. It would be praiseworthy, rather, to avoid any reason to feel shame—and it is the sense of shame that contributes this very thing, making it worthy of praise.

one is shameless when one disregards everyone's opinion, and bashful if one regards just anyone's opinion, one will have the praiseworthy *habitus* of shame when one has the proper caliber of social concern and only feels shame when the opinions of good people suggests that we should feel it.<sup>305</sup> Secondly, the praiseworthy *habitus* of shame has us feel shame either *because* others think that we have acted viciously,<sup>306</sup> or *because* they think we lack a particular virtue—or other such 'honorable things'—possessed by our peers.<sup>307</sup>

As *hexeis*, the affective *habitus* can be cultivated. By changing our state of mind, and thus our judgment of a situation, very different objects can trigger pleasure or pain. For instance, cowardly persons who have the affective *habitus* of feeling fear in situations of danger may—if they can cultivate a different frame of mind—decrease the fear they experience in those situations. The process of cultivating or modifying affective *habitus* is habituation (*ethismos*). At one point Aristotle characterizes habituation simply as the process of repeating an activity.

By doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of the appetites and feelings of anger: some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, *habitus* arise out of like activities.<sup>308</sup>

While repetition of virtuous conduct may sometimes be enough to establish a preference for such conduct, it seems as likely to produce boredom or increased frustration as it is to

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<sup>305</sup> *Rhetoric* 2.6

<sup>306</sup> The phrase is *kakon erga*, and translates as “acting badly.” It can denote acting clumsily, making a mistake, even being slow to comprehend something; but it can also denote acting viciously, and this is what interests us here.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.9. For other examples of affective *habitus*, see 2.1. Someone who loves what is truly noble or honorable (*kalon*) will naturally seek the virtues; hence, the virtues are to be included in the set of honorable (*kalon*) things.

<sup>308</sup> 2.1

produce love for acting virtuously; and while all of these dispositions—viz., boredom, frustration, and love—are technically affective *habitus*, they are not all *noble*. No doubt repetition would become more effective if it were combined with praise or sanction for the nobility or baseness of a person's conduct; this would condition the person to associate the pain of shame with base conduct and the pleasure of honor with noble conduct.<sup>309</sup> In addition to habituation through repetition Aristotle alludes to two other methods for cultivating noble affective *habitus*. One method is to work at getting others to overcome the fear of the pain associated with noble actions. This method seem to be, at least in part, the reasoning behind the ancient Hellenic customs (common to Athens and Sparta, on Plutarch's account) of plunging children into a cold river and dressing them in very little clothing, or the Spartan practice of making beds from reeds and traveling at night without a lamp. By familiarizing persons with the miserable conditions associated with military affairs, when courage demands what is painful it is hoped that these persons would not find their love of courage outweighed by their dread of pain. The other method of habituation involves preventing others from finding pleasure in, or a desire for, base actions. One does this, according to Aristotle, by means of a program of social exclusion. When outlining early childhood education in the *Politics* Aristotle recommends that the young be kept away from slaves as much as possible, as well as from intemperate persons. He also disapproves of children observing artworks or religious rites that depict shameful conduct. With "our relationships with people and with things," Aristotle

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<sup>309</sup> To be truly successful, of course, this approach must seek to praise only those noble actions that stem from noble character traits, and to sanction only those base actions that stem from base character traits. This requires assessing and responding to the agent's choice, knowledge, and desire. While we might initially think that just about anyone would have a taste for noble action if, that is, we understand "taste" simply as "having experienced;" but, for Aristotle, to have "tasted" these actions is restricted to only a few persons because a true taste requires socioeconomic liberty from seeking to satisfy one's basic needs to be able to seek to do something simply *because* it is noble.



comments, “everything that comes first we like more. That is why everything that is vulgar must be made alien to young people.”<sup>310</sup> In short, one seeks to avoid the corruption of a child’s sentiments by keeping certain affairs out of sight.<sup>311</sup>

The study of ethics is beneficial, according to Aristotle, only when that study influences our conduct. We study ethics, Aristotle says, not simply to know the good, but to *become* good.<sup>312</sup> Of course, Socratic intellectualism (as Aristotle characterizes it)<sup>313</sup> would have us believe that there is no difference between *knowing* justice and *being* just: Socrates “thought all excellences to be kinds of knowledge, so that to know justice and to be just came simultaneously.”<sup>314</sup> This conception of ethical knowledge might be adequate if the study of ethics were a theoretical branch of philosophy where to know is to be. For example, to know astronomy is to be an astronomer—knowing is the substance of doing, here. But with the study of ethics, “any one who knows what justice is is not forthwith just, and similarly in the case of the rest” of the virtues.<sup>315</sup> Ethical knowledge can influence our conduct only if we already have the requisite noble affective *habitus* because the latter alone supply the drive to consistently act in a noble fashion. “To feel delight and pain rightly or wrongly has no small effect on our actions”<sup>316</sup>: it is because of pleasure that we do base actions, and because of pain that we abstain from noble actions;

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<sup>310</sup> *Politics* 1336b24 ff. As the ancient Greek proverb has it, “If one lives with a lame man, one eventually walks with a limp.”

<sup>311</sup> We might infer that this method of habituation has an implicit, inverted practice: one might cultivate the affective *habitus* of children through positive influence by providing them with good persons to imitate (see Sherman 1989; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 6).

<sup>312</sup> 1094b28 ff.; cf. *Eudemian Ethics* 1.5. While Aristotle claims that the end of ethics is not knowledge but action, this should obviously not be taken as a statement rejecting the value of ethical knowledge. He is simply saying that ethical knowledge is different from theoretical knowledge in that it is worthwhile only if it leads to action. But for those whose passions are regulated by reason, “knowledge about such matters [sc. ethics] will be of great benefit” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.3).

<sup>313</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13, *Magna Moralia* 1.1, *Eudemian Ethics* 1.5

<sup>314</sup> *Eudemian Ethics* 1.5

<sup>315</sup> *Magna Moralia* 1.1

<sup>316</sup> 2.3

likewise, if we delight in noble actions and are pained by base actions, we will act appropriately. A person's affective *habitus* provides stability and predictability to a person's conduct because these affective *habitus* motivate that conduct. If we lack the noble affective *habitus* all the knowledge in the world cannot motivate us to do the right thing.<sup>317</sup>

Ethical arguments also prove ineffective without the noble affective *habitus*.

Aristotle says that those whose upbringing did not habituate them to noble joy and hatred are simply incapable of benefiting from ethical arguments.

If arguments were in themselves enough to make men good, they would justly, as Theognis says, have won very great rewards, and such rewards should have been provided; but as things are, while they seem to have power to encourage and stimulate the generous-minded among the young, and to make a character which is gently born, and a true lover of what is noble, ready to be possessed by excellence, they are not able to encourage the many to nobility and goodness. For these do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear; and do not abstain from bad acts because of their baseness but through fear of punishment ... What argument would remold such people?

Those who have benefited from a proper upbringing will have noble affective *habitus*.

They will be the ones who are generous-minded, gently born, and true lovers of what is noble. Their noble affective *habitus* will provide them with the desire to perform noble actions—arguments need only clarify ethical affairs to be able to encourage and stimulate their cultivation of virtue. Those who lack the noble affective *habitus*—those who have no sense of shame and no love of what is noble—will not only have dispositions that run counter to the cultivation of virtue, but arguments can have no power to encourage and

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<sup>317</sup> Unless, of course, that knowledge is used to establish the relevant *habitus*; but even then, the knowledge is merely an instrument and not sufficient by itself.

stimulate them. Only the fear of punishment—a rather ubiquitous affective *habitus*—can keep such persons in line.

The first principles of ethics—the reasons<sup>318</sup> to do what is noble, and avoid doing what is base—are thus, according to Aristotle, supplied by habituation and not through argumentation. In general, first principles can sometimes be acquired through induction and perception, they can also be acquired through habituation;<sup>319</sup> but when it comes to the first principles of ethics, Aristotle thinks that habituation is the way we acquire them. As he puts it, “the man of good upbringing has or can easily get first principles.”<sup>320</sup> Once acquired, Aristotle claims that the first principles of ethics remove the need for justification: if the first principles are “satisfactorily ascertained, there will be no need also to know the reason why it is so.”<sup>321</sup> The only way this makes sense is if we think that the first principles of ethics, acquired through habituation, are more than cognitive affairs. If they involved merely a cognitive awareness of ethical distinctions and the salient features of a given situation, someone might know the first principles while doubting their veridicality. But if possessing the first principles also involves a conative aspect—namely, the noble affective *habitus*—then no justification of the first principles needs to be offered since our affective *habitus* will preclude our doubting them.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Where “reason” is taken in the vague sense of referring to either *the psychological cause* of one’s conduct (regardless of whether or not it is rational), or *the justifying explanation* of one’s conduct. For Aristotle, the “reason” to perform noble actions is a matter of proper *habitus*, not rational justification (see footnote 48, below).

<sup>319</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.4

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>322</sup> By saying that first principles come by way of habituation Aristotle is not ruling out the possibility for the rational justification or critique of ethical claims in general, or suggesting that all ethical argumentation can be replaced by habituation; he is simply precluding the necessity for a justification at the level of first principles and claiming that ethical argumentation need not go ‘all the way down.’ It seems entirely possible that these first principles might be subjected to a rational critique if one encountered a very different moral culture. And once the critique began, one could then profitably pursue possible justifications. Aristotle does not, however, entertain such possibilities. The justifications and critiques we

Aristotle's response to those who would doubt otherwise uncontested aspects of the moral culture—such as whether one must honor the gods or care for one's parents—is to say that such persons are not in need of an argument but punishment.<sup>323</sup> If they had the noble affective *habitus*, such doubts would not arise; since they have arisen, this is proof enough that they lack the *habitus*. For persons such as these, one can only use their fear of punishment to overcome their doubts. Aristotle does not think that argumentation could resolve these doubts because the effectiveness of any argument presupposes a certain *habitus* on the part of the recipient of the argument. Even a sound deduction can only influence a person who has an affective *habitus* that favors deductive proofs. If arguments must presuppose affective *habitus*, how might we expect them to supply the very things they require to be effective in the first place? Applied to the field of ethics, we may legitimately wonder how an argument in favor of an ethical claim might supply the noble affective *habitus* it must presuppose before it can prove effective.

In summation, Aristotle's approach to normativity is characterized by his claims that ethical knowledge and argumentation are effective only on the basis of noble affective *habitus*, which are acquired during a pre-rational process of habituation. He does not provide an external or foundational justification of his moral culture. Not only is the Function Argument not a foundational justification, Aristotle dismisses such a project altogether, recommending we beat moral skeptics rather than argue with them. Justification, for Aristotle, only occurs within the bounds of our moral culture and cultivation.<sup>324</sup>

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find in Aristotle *Ethics* occur exclusively within his moral culture and thus presuppose its first principles.

<sup>323</sup> *Topics* 1.11

<sup>324</sup> Incidentally, this explains Aristotle's employment of the method of *ta endoxa*—appealing to the 'opinions of note' in the course of his lectures on ethics.

#### 4.3 *The Pragmatic Normativity of John Dewey*

John Dewey's understanding of justification and normative force is best approached in terms of his account of inquiry. In the first chapter of *Experience and Nature* he outlines what he call the "denotative" or empirical method of philosophical inquiry. According to this method inquiry is seen to only ever begin in response to a problem within "primary experience." Dewey describes primary experience as the "gross, macroscopic, crude subject-matter ... what is experienced as the result of a minimum of incidental reflection,"<sup>325</sup> and he lists "stars, rocks, tree, creeping things" as possible objects of primary experience.<sup>326</sup> As a response to problems within primary experience inquiry comes into the picture; inquiry is a secondary experience, "the refined, derived objects of reflection" or "what is experienced in consequence of continued and regulated reflective inquiry."<sup>327</sup> Treated as *secondary*, inquiry remains practical both in origin and in aim. It arises because of practical need, and it is tasked with satisfying that need. In this way Dewey rehabilitates the practical significance of philosophical inquiry.

To employ the empirical method is to see each inquiry within the light of the relevant primary experience. To have a sense of what this entails we must first grasp the meaning of Dewey's deceptively simple word, "experience." Experience, he says, is both what we do and what we suffer, how we act and are acted upon. Furthermore, it is both the objects of experience as well as the interaction of human organism and these objects:

Experience is *of* as well as *in* nature. It is not experience which is experienced, but nature—stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on. Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience; they are *what is*

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<sup>325</sup> 1987, 6

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 6

experienced. Linked in certain other ways with another natural object—the human organism—they are *how* things are experienced as well.<sup>328</sup>

In other words, Dewey understands experience, in its ‘primary integrity,’ to involve “no division between ... subject and object, but [experience] contains them both in an unanalyzed totality.”<sup>329</sup> As for inquiry, while it is part of experience, it remains a secondary form of experience; it is always defined with reference to the primary objects of experience—to practical problems and enacted solutions.<sup>330</sup>

To take primary experience as one’s starting point involves several commitments. First of all, it requires thinking of theories and the other products of inquiry as “secondary” objects of experience. Implicitly this requires avoiding the ‘philosophical fallacy’ of confusing the products of inquiry with the subject-matter that sets inquiry going. And this, in turn, requires that we take the “integrated unity” of experience—the unity of subject and object, human organism and environment—as the proper “starting point for philosophic thought.”<sup>331</sup> Secondly, starting with primary experience involves embracing a form of naïve realism. In primary experience the traits possessed by the subject-matter of experience are “found,” “given.” Beginning with primary experience rather than radical skepticism—which, after all, is a product of philosophical speculation (or secondary experience)—such “givenness” is sufficient for supposing that such traits are real.<sup>332</sup> Finally, by placing primary experience before inquiry, one takes experience to

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 10-11

<sup>330</sup> To see the originality of this philosophical definition of experience we need only consider how it flies in the face of the definition found in classical Empiricism—a conception which separates subject and object, renders the connection of subjective consciousness with external objects suspect, and problematizes inference (see Dewey 1987, 3-49).

<sup>331</sup> Dewey 1987, 11

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 5

supply the very problems which stimulate inquiry and as furnishing the data upon which inquiry can reflect and construct its solutions to those problems.<sup>333</sup>

According to the empirical method, inquiry—as secondary experience—has a very specific role to perform. Inquiry arises when we encounter a “problem” within primary experience. That is, when, for any number of reasons, “opposed responses are provoked which cannot be taken simultaneously in overt action.”<sup>334</sup> The situation produces a problem by calling for what is a practical incompatibility. One rather important implication of this conception of inquiry is that all instances of inquiry will always have a particular purpose: every bit of reflective knowledge produced by inquiry will have a specific task.<sup>335</sup> In other words, “reflection itself is always specific in origin and aim; it always has something special to cope with.”<sup>336</sup> Without problematic situations in primary experience, inquiry would have no impetus, nor would it have any conclusion.<sup>337</sup>

Even inquiry that begins with as little as a question mark (as is the case with idle thought, idle curiosity, Cartesian radical doubt, and much of contemporary academic philosophy) still has a specific origin and aim. It is true that this sort of inquiry will be “abstract” in the sense of being removed from the exigencies of everyday life. But this does not mean that it is removed from primary experience, or has no specific problem it sets itself to solving. As Dewey insists on several occasions even the most abstract forms

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 6, 7; cf. 33

<sup>334</sup> Dewey 1954, 7

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>337</sup> This aspect of inquiry is a theme we encounter in the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce (see 1955a and 1955b). Defining “belief” as a condition or habit of mind that guides our desires and actions, and “doubt” as “an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves” and that involves the interruption of the practical efficacy of its correlated belief, Peirce goes on to assert that doubt both initiates inquiry, and sets its proper limit or terminus (1955a 9-11). In fact, Peirce claims that “the settlement of opinion”—or the resolution of doubt—“is the sole end of inquiry” (1955a, 11).

of philosophical inquiry are still forms of practice—they still have an environment, or primary experience. It may be in the library or at the annual conference, rather than the workshop or the street, but it has its practical setting all the same. We can assume that philosophical inquiry, no matter how abstract, is still responding to academic problems if not everyday problems; and these specific problems contribute to the origins and aims of even the most abstract kind of inquiry. Hence, thought isolated from the everyday is still practiced within its own sphere of concern—a sphere able to provide its own sorts of problems. And while these may be academic problems, inquiry remains specific in *origin* and *aim*. The major difference between abstract or speculative inquiry, on the one hand, and empirical inquiry, on the other, is that the speculative variety does not respond to *everyday* problems and does not bring its theory back down to *everyday* primary experience. As such, it is quite possible that its problems are pseudo-problems (or what Dewey calls “puzzles” rather than “problems”<sup>338</sup>), its solutions lacking both empirical value and validity.<sup>339</sup> From the perspective of everyday practice, such inquiry can appear rather pointless; and when its problems are merely puzzles, and its solutions unapplied and unfalsifiable, this sort of philosophic inquiry is also a disservice to the potential relevance of philosophical inquiry.

Whether everyday or speculative, inquiry remains a search for a “solution” to the original problems encountered in primary experience. According to Dewey, inquiry offers a “solution” when it can denote a plan of action to resolve the opposed responses, triggered in the problematic situation. This is why Dewey calls the empirical method the

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<sup>338</sup> 1987, 9

<sup>339</sup> 1922, 19. This is because they are not applied to everyday practice, or so do not teach us about primary experience, and will have no validity (being unfalsifiable).



“*denotative* method”<sup>340</sup>: “when used to describe a path by which some goal in primary experience is designated or denoted” the solutions offered by the empirical method “solve perplexities to which that crude material [of primary experience] gives rise but which it cannot resolve of itself.”<sup>341</sup> In this way, solutions “become means of control, of enlarged use and enjoyment of ordinary things.”<sup>342</sup> As Dewey elaborates: “To be intelligent in action and in suffering<sup>343</sup> (enjoyment too) yields satisfaction even when conditions cannot be controlled. But when there is possibility of control, knowledge is the sole agency of its realization.”<sup>344</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce’s own account of the resolution of inquiry is rather instructive. “Absolutely indubitable” propositions are, he points out, *pragmatically indistinguishable* from propositions that are “perfectly free from all actual doubt.”<sup>345</sup> Hence, he claims, the satisfaction of doubt (understood pragmatically) need not involve absolute certainty. We continue an inquiry only so long as we are plagued by doubt; inquiry aims at, and terminates with, a psychological state grounded in practice. Since the cause of “doubt”—or hesitancy in action—is very likely a “practical problem,” such as Dewey discusses, the resolution of Peircean doubt is not all that different from offering a Deweyan solution. While overcoming doubts or solving problems may require a sound deduction for some persons and in certain circumstances, there is nothing intrinsic to inquiry itself that requires this degree of argumentative finesse in resolving doubts or solving problems.

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<sup>340</sup> 1987, 8

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 9

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> “Suffering” in the sense of *pascherion*—“undergoing.”

<sup>344</sup> 1987, 22

<sup>345</sup> 1955a, 11

The final defining aspect of the empirical method, as Dewey describes it, is taking primary experience to be the proper “terminal point” of inquiry. This means bringing our inquiries back to the primary objects of experience for application and experimentation.<sup>346</sup> One can do this by either enacting one’s solutions or by using one’s conclusions to predict results. In either case, one has the ability to test the conclusions of inquiry by means of experimentation.

There are several reasons for preferring this empirical method of inquiry to the non-empirical way of doing philosophy. First of all, following the empirical method helps us to avoid wasting our time and energy on artificial problems. Secondly, by taking an experimental attitude to its theories or solutions the empirical method secures their practical validity and empirical value. Following the empirical method of inquiry requires taking the conclusions of one’s philosophic inquiry to be hypotheses to be tested. A solution predicts a certain form of success, and one tries the solution out—and tests its practical validity. Unlike speculative inquiry, empirical inquiry has something to test itself against: inquiry began in response to a problem in primary experience, and inquiry succeeds in finding a solution only if the specific problem can be solved. As testable hypotheses, we might say that the conclusions of empirical inquiry have the strength of being falsifiable. This is also how the results of empirical inquiry can acquire “empirical value” and “contribute to the common experience of man,” rather than being nothing more than relics in a “metaphysical museum.”<sup>347</sup> The results have empirical value because they are testable hypotheses; they can succeed or fail to resolve the problematic situation. Either outcome, however, is significant or has empirical value. Success

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<sup>346</sup> Dewey 1987, 6, 33

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 19

provides us with resources for facing similar problems in the future, while failure promises to school us in practical matters all the same. Finally, philosophy pursued according to the empirical method prevents the type of “intellectualism” that elevates the results of inquiry to the status of ultimate reality and confuses the objects of philosophy with the objects of primary experience.<sup>348</sup>

When employed in moral philosophy the empirical method promises to radically transform the way we understand normative force and justification. First of all, on Dewey’s account the primordial experience of moral life is characterized by the integrated unity of the human organism and its physical and social environment, of character and conduct, and habit and custom. Secondly, by starting with experience rather than theory, we are implicitly embracing a naïve form of moral realism.<sup>349</sup> Finally, the empirical method, applied to moral philosophy, requires that we root the origin and aim of moral inquiry and its products in problematic situations: without these problematic or “moral” situations, moral inquiry would not begin in earnest; but once we encounter a moral situation, its solution is the sole purpose of that occurrence of moral inquiry.<sup>350</sup>

On Dewey’s account of primary experience, habits are a significant feature of the integration of human organisms with their social and physical environments. “Habits,” as Dewey defines the term, are adaptations *with* environing forces. They are not simply adaptations of the organism *to* its environment, but modifications *of* the environment to

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 19-20

<sup>349</sup> See below and Dewey 1985, 5.

<sup>350</sup> No doubt finding a solution to one situation may generate principles or guidelines, but it is Dewey’s point that the significance of these bits of moral theory, or secondary experience, is derived entirely from their application to a specific situation—whether that situation is the one presently faced, or a situation faced at a later date. Principles, guidelines, and other elements of moral theory may be applied to more than one situation, but each time they are applied the difference in the situation to which they are applied can transform their significance. In the end, Dewey is not rejecting moral philosophy or moral theory—he is simply reminding us that theory is practice (see Dewey 1891).

better suit the organism: they require the cooperation of both the organism and its environment. There are several parallels between Dewey's notion of habit and Aristotle's notion of *ethos* and *hexis*, and it seems likely that Dewey was drawing upon Aristotle's ethics when developing his own position; yet the inclusion of 'environment' within Dewey's notion of habit signals a major difference between his conception and Aristotle's own—the significance of which we will discuss shortly.

Much like the *hexeis* that result from our upbringing, Deweyan habits are not always deliberately formed but can “develop accidentally, without set intention.”<sup>351</sup> They are established through a process of habituation—they are “that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired.”<sup>352</sup> Habituation occurs by means of the establishment of an organic mechanism: “all habit involves mechanization. Habit is impossible without setting up a mechanism of action, physiologically engrained, which operates ‘spontaneously,’ [without the need for reflection] automatically, whenever the cue is given.”<sup>353</sup> Dewey mentions at least one way to establish an organic mechanism, and that is through behavioral repetition, which engrains the necessary “predisposition to ways or modes of response.”<sup>354</sup> As Dewey puts it, habits

are active demands for certain ways of acting. Every habit creates an unconscious expectation. It forms a certain outlook. ... Habit is energy organized in certain channels. When interfered with, it swells as resentment and as an avenging force. ... it will be obeyed.<sup>355</sup>

Dewey agrees with Aristotle that the repetition of behavior is neither necessary nor essential to habit; as he explains, the tendency to repeat acts is merely “incidental” to

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<sup>351</sup> 1922, 26

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 31

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 65

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 70-71

many habits.<sup>356</sup> First of all, a habit may express itself in action only once. Secondly, a habit is a predisposition to respond to certain stimuli; but the continuity we attribute to these responses need not be cashed out in terms of overt behavior. Having the habit of kindness, for example, predisposes us to act kindly; but there are very many different types of overt behavior that might qualify as kind, and different situations, no doubt, call for different types of overt behavior. Sometimes it is kind to speak, sometimes to remain silent; sometimes it is kind to tell the truth, sometimes to lie. Habits often involve behavioral patterns but they are also much more than patterns of behavior.

In addition to their propensity to cause certain kinds of behavior, habits—according to Dewey and Aristotle—are affective dispositions.<sup>357</sup> Dewey, however, allows habits a much wider scope than does Aristotle: habits, according to Dewey, also constitute our desires, our skills or working capacities; furthermore, the influence of habit upon thought and sensation is much more pervasive and explicit in Dewey’s account of the concept than in Aristotle’s account.<sup>358</sup> Without the relevant habit or mechanism thoughts or ideas cannot be carried into action, Dewey claims;<sup>359</sup> in addition, the very formation of our ideas, not to mention whether they hold our attention, is largely determined by our habits.<sup>360</sup> When Dewey goes so far as to refer to the virtues with his term, habit, it is apparent that there is a significant terminological divergence between his position and Aristotle’s. While Aristotle speaks of virtues as *involving* states (*hexeis*),<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Dewey 1922, 40; cf. Sherman 1989.

<sup>357</sup> See Dewey 1922, 26

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., especially 31. Aristotle’s *ethos* or *hexeis* are primarily affective dispositions; and while these dispositions necessarily include a cognitive tendency (given the place of judgment within our affections), Aristotle is clear that our affective dispositions *condition* tendencies of action and belief (but to say they “condition” them is not to say they “constitute” them).

<sup>359</sup> Dewey 1922, 26, 30, 31, 33, 63

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 26, 30

<sup>361</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.0

he is clear that states are not all there is to the virtues. But, given the scope of Dewey's term—its cognitive and conative depth, missing in Aristotle's *hexeis*—this terminological discrepancy may not amount to a substantial discrepancy.

There are other ways in which Dewey's account of habit exceeds Aristotle's account. Dewey, for instance, allows habits to influence each other. Every habit implies a specific environment—habits are, after all, integrations of organism and environment. And, as environments overlap, we can suppose that habits do not exist in isolated compartments, but are affecting and affected by other habits in their operation.<sup>362</sup> “Character” is the word Dewey uses to describe the interpenetration or continuity of a person's habits—character, as the continuous and mutual modifications of habit, accounts for the unity we find in a person's conduct.<sup>363</sup> Dewey's account of the social origins of habit in custom is also more developed than anything we find in Aristotle's account. There is some indication that Aristotle understood the communal origins our habits might have. This, at least, is obvious from his interest, at the close of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in the prospect of implementing a Lacedaemonian form of public upbringing or habituation. Dewey, however, is quite explicit about the communal roots of habit. He is willing to admit that custom, or “widespread uniformities of habit,” can take their origin from the individuals that compose the community—that such uniformities might occur because individuals face the same situation and react in like fashion.”<sup>364</sup> Yet Dewey also attributes the origin of custom to custom itself and takes that origin to be the more significant of the two possible origins: “to a larger extent customs persist because

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<sup>362</sup> Dewey 1922, 37

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 55

individuals form their personal habits under conditions set by prior customs.”<sup>365</sup> His account of the social origins of habit takes on greater depth when Dewey supplies material explanations of the development and adaptation of custom. The development of custom, he says, follows environmental demands. “The problem of origin and development of the various ... customs, in existence at any particular time in any particular place is not solved by reference to psychic causes, elements, forces. It is to be solved by reference to facts of action, demand for food, for houses, for a mate, for some one to talk to and to listen to one talk, for control of others ... to physics, chemistry and physiology rather than psychology.”<sup>366</sup> Dewey uses these environmental forces not only to explain the development of customs, but takes them to be the proper rubric for the assessment of custom. Customs, he says, are “reasonable” if they are “adapted to social needs and uses”—if they provide us with the means for “effective mastery of the conditions” we face in our immediate situation.<sup>367</sup> Dewey’s notion of “reasonableness,” which he defines in terms of situational efficacy, provides a critical apparatus for the assessment of an individual’s habits and of a community’s custom that is lacking, to a great degree, in Aristotle.

The social and material origins he attributes to custom—even moral culture—is the chief cause for Dewey’s ethical pluralism and its implicit “polynomism.” In his essay “Three Independent Factors in Morals,” Dewey puts forward the hypothesis that there is more conflict and justifiable uncertainty in the formation of our moral judgments than is usually admitted to.<sup>368</sup> Moral philosophers, in particular, seem bent upon ignoring this

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 55

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 63, 72

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 198

fact. Dewey suggests that the conflict and uncertainty is the result of the “three independent factors in moral action”<sup>369</sup>—where we are to understand ‘independent factors’ as forces in the formation of judgment or demands for action that *can* be at cross purposes because they are not reducible to the same category of value. Were all demands of action reducible to a “single principle” or foundational norm—a theoretical possibility we have referred to as “mononomism” (a defining characteristic of foundational normativity)—conflict could not exist within the moral demands for action. Conflict, according to mononomism, could only be of the psychological, not the normative, variety; the conflict in any moral situation would simply be between doing what is right and doing what is selfish, what is good and what is evil, and so on. With mononomism, there can be no moral indeterminacy to our moral judgments. Yet, if Dewey is right that there are at least three independent factors in the moral life, then conflict can be internal to moral judgment.

The three factors Dewey has in mind are the teleological, aretaic, and deontic considerations of any given situation. He defends their independence by arguing that each of them has a different genealogical origin and mode of operation. Genealogically speaking these value types originate from very different material conditions: teleological norms are rooted in personal or group interests, impulses, appetites, or desires; deontic norms are born of communal life and the social expectations we have of each other; and aretaic norms are rooted in public opinion of people and their dispositions. Having different origins, each type of norm is quite capable of running at cross-purposes to each other in their modes of operation. A desire need have nothing to do with social expectations or approval, and may well be momentary and not a disposition of character.

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 199



I may, for instance, have a once-off desire to eat a buffalo burger without any regard for social opinion. A duty can run counter to our desires and may meet with public disapproval. A clear example would be the Kantian duty to never tell a lie, even to an axe murderer who asks about the present location of our friend. Finally, public approval is often given without reflection on the likely consequences, or whether the person given the public approval acted from a sense of duty. A ‘subway hero’ who risks her life to rescue someone who has fallen onto the subway tracks may cost the city lots of money, and she may have acted from a desire to be famous. Despite all this, we will still praise her.

Dewey goes beyond the social origin of habits to attribute a social *reality* to them as well. This is yet another way in which Deweyan habits differ from Aristotle’s conception of *ethos* and *hexis*. Aristotle, in his own account of our habits is at times disposed to think of them as the possessions of individuals in isolation. According to Aristotle, the virtues of character necessarily involve specific *hexeis*. Yet we are capable of possessing these virtues even when we are asleep or in a coma. Yet Dewey is quite clear that what distinguishes a habit from a physiological function, such as walking or breathing, is their social environment. *Habits are always shared*.<sup>370</sup> By saying this Dewey is not simply claiming that habits often have a social object—that, for example, a habit of kindness is often *directed towards* others. This much is true of several character virtues on Aristotle’s account; liberality, friendliness, and magnificence—for example—are partly defined by their proper social objects. Dewey, however, is saying something more. He is claiming that the social environment partially composes the habits; that it is

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 19; cf. 17

impossible to have these habits while asleep (unless, of course, they are somehow active in our dreams).<sup>371</sup>

This particular divergence on the matter of a habit's social reality is connected to a deep incompatibility between Aristotle and Dewey that concerns the dependency of habits upon their context in general. At stake, here, is a difference in one's account of the origin and, thus, endurance of tendencies or habits. Do tendencies stem from the person's character (where "character" is partly defined by the ability to overcome situational forces) and thus have individual-specific endurance? Or might tendencies stem from situational forces, and thus have very little individual-specific endurance?<sup>372</sup>

On this matter, Dewey falls somewhere between Aristotle's position (a position Dewey would describe as "individualistic"), and a position John Doris refers to as "situationism." Situationism, according to Doris,<sup>373</sup> denies the "consistency" but not the "stability" of character traits. We may act compassionately across a range of situations when these situations share important similarities, allowing the trait of compassion a measure of *stability*. But if situations become too dissimilar (especially if these situations make compassionate actions more difficult), it is less likely that we will continue to act compassionately. Hence, we cannot be said to be *consistently* compassionate. If we accept the truth of these two claims (and in his work Doris solicits psychological research to support their validity), traits like compassion would seem to be more aptly attributed to situations than individuals. We might think of situationism as a deflationary account of character, where any mention of character or virtues of character is understood as an

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<sup>371</sup> It is curious that Aristotle comes close to sincerely entertaining this possibility.

<sup>372</sup> The significance of this difference between Dewey and Aristotle will only become clear in the next chapter when we discuss the native normativity of exemplary persons in Confucian ethics.

<sup>373</sup> 2002

abstraction; as such, situationism can function as a corrective on our fascination with agency and character by claiming that praiseworthy events, even praiseworthy tendencies, are more the result of situations than agents.

Aristotle's position on the ontology of tendencies places him somewhere along the opposite side of the spectrum. His position shows an inclination towards thinking of habits as owned exclusively by the agent, or capable of being divorced from situational forces. In addition to mentioning the ways in which *hexeis* may be possessed even in sleep—which implies that a person possesses them regardless of the situation—he is also committed to the “fixity” of tendencies or dispositions. As we mentioned earlier, the difference between a *hexis* and a *diathesis* is that the former constitutes a condition with greater endurance or fixity. Aristotle relies upon the relative permanence of dispositions to distinguish virtue from luck, and to explain how the possession of virtue contributes a kind of stability to the quality of one's life on the whole. Aristotle is, in short, committed to the idea that character enables us to overcome situational forces—he is committed, in other words, to the consistency of traits or individual-specific endurance.<sup>374</sup>

Dewey's own account of habit as “conduct” places him somewhere between situationism and Aristotle's account of character and habit. While there are several reasons to attribute habits to an individual person, he says, this should not lead us to suppose that habits are private possessions, which can somehow subsist within the person. Habits, like physiological functions, are traits of persons-in-context. They are as true of the person as they are of the context; but they are never true of either in isolation. This is what Dewey has in mind when he refers to habits as “conduct”—a term which

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<sup>374</sup> The individualism of habits, however, implies the separation of character from activity, and motives from deeds.

designates this person-in-context conception of habit.<sup>375</sup> For Dewey, habits are inclusive of their environment; this is why he says, on one occasion, that a change of habit necessarily requires an initial change in one's environment. If we understand "character" to involve an ability to oppose situational forces, then Dewey's account can be said to be a deflationist account of character—but in a way quite different from situationism. The unity of conduct that supplies Deweyan "character" is not a product of being impervious to the exigencies of circumstance, but the continuity of habits through their modifications, which is made possible by the interpenetration (mutual influence) of habits.<sup>376</sup>

In addition to habit, a second consequence of starting moral philosophy with primary experience, or the integrated unity of our primary experience of the moral life, is a particular form of moral realism. If we begin with the unity of subject and object, or with the unity of the human organism and its environment, then primary experience will not neatly separate into the objective and subjective, the cold universe of fact and the warm embrace of value, and we will not need to somehow justify the reality of value in the world beyond our own subjective states. "If experience actually presents esthetic and moral traits, then these traits may also be supposed to reach down into nature, and to testify to something that belongs to nature as truly as does the mechanical structure attributed to it in physical science."<sup>377</sup> And who can deny that moral traits are part of their primary experience? Thus, a form of non-cognitive moral realism is a consequence of beginning moral philosophy with primary experience. This form of moral realism informs Dewey's account of "normative force," or the influence of ethical traits or claims.

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<sup>375</sup> 1922, 11

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 5

Normative force is part of our primary experience—we feel it in the disapproving glance of a friend, by the lure of our highest ideals, from our unmet needs, even by the force of habit itself.<sup>378</sup>

A third consequence of Dewey's approach is a particular re-conceptualization of moral inquiry and its results (such as moral theory, principles, and normative terms)—which, in turn, changes how we understand moral justification. The empirical method, when applied to moral philosophy, thinks of moral inquiry as originating from problematic experience. Given that normative force arises from these pre-rational or pre-reflective sources, it stands to reason that—unless there is cause for doubt—the normative force we experience will continue uninterrupted. Doubt and moral inquiry are localized events, and occur only in response to specific problems. If this is true, we can no longer think that just any request for justification is sufficient to begin moral inquiry; such requests will be genuine, or worth our attention, only when they arise out of a problematic experience. A non-empirical approach to moral philosophy, on the other hand, takes inquiry and its results to exist independent of moral culture and the other aspects of primary experience. It does not seek to limit the occurrence of moral inquiry to the advent of problematic situations; it sees no reason not to entertain *any* request for justification. As a result, the “problems” it considers are often “blocks to inquiry, blind alleys; they are puzzles rather than problems”<sup>379</sup>—they are “artificial problems.”<sup>380</sup> This is because there is no specific, instigating problem that calls for an equally specific solution. One's conclusions have no aim; they are not seen as solutions to a specific problem. There is, thus, no way to test one's conclusions. Only the non-empirical method

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 19, 71; 1891, 199

<sup>379</sup> 1925, 9

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 19

could think of the “puzzle” of general skepticism, and search for a foundational norm (something fixed, final, and singular).<sup>381</sup>

The empirical method sees the origin of moral inquiry to lie in problematic experience. Dewey refers to the relevant problematic experiences as “moral situations.” They are characterized by a conflict of “goods”—or values—and an uncertainty of what is appropriate.<sup>382</sup> The conflict he has in mind is an inevitable result of polynomism. When there are several types of goods, “one has to manage forces with no common denominator”;<sup>383</sup> and we may find that in a given situation “what is good from the viewpoint of desire is bad from the viewpoint of social requirements; what is bad from a personal point of view may be warmly recommended by public opinion. Each conflict is real and sharp and we must find the means of reconciling opposing facts.”<sup>384</sup>

Reconciliation of such forces is not always straightforward. Sometime we can even face a situation that has only tragic solutions. And, in addition to conflict, we can experience uncertainty in moral situations, caused by either the indeterminacy of the future or the novelty of situations. As Dewey puts it, all action is “an invasion of the future.” As such, there is always a degree of uncertainty in our choices. The degree of uncertainty is also affected by the significance of the possible outcomes; the *mere* possibility of drastic consequences may be a cause for inquiry as much as the *great* possibility of less drastic consequences.<sup>385</sup> Uncertainty can also be caused by the novelty of situations. As Dewey argues, no two situations are exactly the same.

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<sup>381</sup> See Dewey 1920, 162

<sup>382</sup> 1966, 198, cf. 1922, 12. “Goods,” here, is not used to exclusively refer to teleological values, but picks out any type of value.

<sup>383</sup> 1966, 199

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 204

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

We cannot seek or attain health, wealth, learning, justice or kindness in general. Action is always specific, concrete, individualized, unique ... To say that a man seeks health or justice is only to say that he seeks to live healthily or justly ... How to live healthily or justly is a matter which differs with every person.<sup>386</sup>

Or, as he expresses it elsewhere, “there is no such thing as conduct in general; conduct is what and where and when and how to the last inch.”<sup>387</sup> As a result, there is always a necessary gap between the abstract terms of the best moral principles and the particularity of each situation. We cannot expect there to be “a unique and ideally correct solution for every difficulty into which a person will be thrown” that might somehow predate the occurrence of the situation;<sup>388</sup> “no past decision nor old principle can ever be wholly relied upon to justify a course of action.”<sup>389</sup> Hitting upon a solution requires that we attend to the unique situation, that we “discover” the solution.<sup>390</sup> The dependence of appropriateness upon each unique situation necessarily produces uncertainty. Initially, in any situation, “one is ignorant of the end and of good consequences, of the right and just approach, of the direction of virtuous conduct”—and must search for them.<sup>391</sup>

Properly understood, moral inquiry is always only a situation-specific attempt at a solution; it is the practice of intelligence in action. When faced with a problematic situation, intelligence involves ‘observing the detailed makeup of the situation, analyzing it into its diverse factors, clarifying what is obscure, and tracing the consequences of the possible courses of conduct.’<sup>392</sup> No doubt, moral inquiry—so understood—is more likely to be successful when someone conducts it with “wide sympathy, keen sensitiveness,

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<sup>386</sup> 1966, 166-167

<sup>387</sup> 1891, 191

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 204

<sup>389</sup> 1920, 174-5

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 169

<sup>391</sup> 1966, 199

<sup>392</sup> 1920, 164

persistence in the face of the disagreeable, [and a] balance of interests.”<sup>393</sup> But the implication is that moral inquiry is always answerable to its initiating problem or “moral situation”—that applying its conclusions to the problematic situation is the aim of every moral inquiry, its proper terminal point. Moral inquiry, moral knowledge, moral theory “always has a particular purpose ... every reflective knowledge, in other words, has a specific task”,<sup>394</sup> “reflection itself is always specific in origin and aim; it always has something special to cope with.”<sup>395</sup> Hence, moral inquiry and theory are tied to particular situations. The alternative, non-empirical approach to moral philosophy does not take primary experience to be its origin and terminal point, with the result that no verification is made of moral theory, the primary objects of experience are not enlarged in their meaning or significance through the production of moral theory, and moral theory becomes abstract—living in an isolated realm.<sup>396</sup>

Since justification is itself a particular form of moral inquiry, or an inquiry aimed at a particular kind of result, it too will always be situation-specific and require the same practice of intelligence. The pragmatic picture of normative justification is quite similar, in this regard, to the account of truth offered by William James in his lectures on pragmatism.<sup>397</sup> James says that

the truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 164

<sup>394</sup> 1954, 8

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>396</sup> See 1922, 63. Lacking application, thoughts are not tested.

<sup>397</sup> 1907

<sup>398</sup> 1907, 133



Likewise, pragmatic normativists will say that normativity or normative force is a happening, and not a static property of ethical claims. It is always realized within a specific context. At the very least this is because justification is called for only when we experience a particular kind of problematic situation. In a way, problems that are solved by a justification are meta-problems. A justification is not required for every “solution” to a problematic situation, but only when a solution to problematic situations, an analytical tool for analyzing problematic situations,<sup>399</sup> or notion of the good lacks sufficient normative force. Then, but only then, is a justification called for. The aim of inquiry, in this case, is to re-establish the normative force of the solution, analytic tool, or good—or to seek out an alternative. In either case, the problematic situation—the lack of normative force—is restricted to a particular situation and to those persons experiencing that situation. As such, any justification—as a solution—must address that given situation and those persons. If the aim is to re-establish the normative force of a proposed course of action, one is not necessarily concerned with what others—outside of that situation—will think but only with what those within the situation, doubting the validity of the proposal, will think. Understood in this way, justification often has a very limited scope. Not only is justification something that must be called for, it is also something that can be delivered when it succeeds in convincing just one person—if that one person was the person who doubted the normativity of the proposal, analytic tool, or good in question. Clearly, a justification need not be foundational for it to be effective in this way.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> E.g., principles, normative terms (such as character, duty, character), and the like, or “goods” (ideals or norms).

<sup>400</sup> Dewey does not support a foundational approach to justification, in any case. The polynormism implied in his account of moral experience rules out mononormism; and the absence of mononormism precludes foundational justifications.

Finally, when the empirical method is applied to moral philosophy, the very products of moral inquiry—theories, principles, normative terms—are understood in a new light. First of all, as objects of secondary or reflective experience they are no longer confused with aspects native to primary experience. Despite the fact that many of the dominant moral theories today insist on only one basic type of norm—be it aretaic, deontic, or teleological—it is irresponsible to think that moral life is that simple. Furthermore, the abstract situations sometimes considered by moral philosophers—the prisoner’s dilemma, the trolley problem, and other such examples of what Julia Annas calls “trolleyology”—will be seen as forced dilemmas that may do very little to develop our own abilities to meet challenging situations dynamically and intelligently.<sup>401</sup> To confuse the products of moral inquiry (such as principles, norms, theories, and the like) with the nature and content of primary experience is to commit what Dewey famously refers to as “the philosophical fallacy.” Unfortunately “the professional philosopher,” he remarks, “is only too prone to think of all experiences as if they were of the type he is specially engaged in, and hence unconsciously or intentionally to project *its* traits into experience to which they are alien.”<sup>402</sup> And what is true of the philosopher in general seems all too true of the moral philosopher.

Once the results of moral inquiry are seen to belong to secondary experience (inquiry) rather than primary experience we realize that they derive their significance entirely from the individual situations to which they are applied. The cultivation of generalities, of principles and analogies, is certainly a mark of practical wisdom or intelligence. But such theoretical objects are nothing more than tools of moral insight,

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<sup>401</sup> See footnote 76 above.

<sup>402</sup> 1954, 2

with value only insofar as they promote “individualized response in the individual situation.”<sup>403</sup> Normative categories, for instance, are important for the solutions they *suggest*. When we categorize primary experience into general goods and ills—“health, wealth, industry, temperance, amiability, courtesy, learning, esthetic capacity, initiative, courage, patience, enterprise, thoroughness and a multitude of other generalized ends ... acknowledged as goods”—“the *value* of this systematization,” Dewey says, “is intellectual or analytic. Classifications [of ills and goods] *suggests* possible traits to be on the look-out for in studying a particular case; they suggest methods of action to be tried in removing the inferred causes of ill.”<sup>404</sup> But they never occur in primary experience (health, after all, is never something one might pursue in itself; one can only ever aim to live healthily, something which varies by situation and person). A similar assessment can be made concerning the value of principles. Principles, Dewey claims, are “empirical generalizations from the ways in which previous judgments of conduct have practically worked out.”<sup>405</sup> In a way, they are our inheritance of past experimentation in conduct. Yet Dewey suggests that they are merely “methods of understanding”<sup>406</sup>—that “principles, criteria, laws are intellectual instruments for analyzing individual or unique situations.”<sup>407</sup> It is the novelty of situations, rather than their homogeneity, which makes principles useful in the first place.<sup>408</sup> That very same novelty, however, makes principles insufficient for determining appropriate conduct, and thus incapable of supplying normative foundations.<sup>409</sup> Instead of seeing principles as ready-made solutions to moral

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<sup>403</sup> 1920, 169

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 169

<sup>405</sup> 1922, 222

<sup>406</sup> 1920, 161

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 162-3; cf. 1922, 3.

<sup>408</sup> 1922, 225

<sup>409</sup> This is the point where those practicing the empirical method would distance themselves from the

situations, we ought to view them and their ilk as “hypotheses with which to experiment.”<sup>410</sup> If they have any value, it is their ability to direct our attention to resemblances and differences in novel situations, and thus economize the necessary effort in reaching moral insight.<sup>411</sup>

#### 4.4 *Summary and Comparison with John Rawls’s Approach to Justification*

When we compare the accounts of Aristotle and Dewey on questions of normative force and justification we find that neither philosopher attempts to provide a foundational justification. Instead, Dewey and Aristotle are both willing to root normative force within the pre-rational force of habituation. Dewey is willing to seriously entertain doubts about even basic values (goods)—something Aristotle is not willing to do. But when Dewey considers them, his assumption is that the normative force of goods is continually operative, except by rare exception. In this way Dewey is in concert with Aristotle in denying the legitimacy of radical moral skepticism. Aristotle denies the radical skeptic by claiming that any doubts one might have about the first principles of ethics betrays a poor upbringing or a lack of culture, and that the radical skeptic—were she to surface—is better dealt with by punishment than argumentation. Dewey denies the possibility of radical skepticism by claiming that normative force is, by default, active; that doubt, when it arises, is a localized affair and the product of a problematic situation, not speculative doubt. Dewey—in contrast with Aristotle—does not preclude the

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methods of Plato, Kant, and Mill.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 221. Such experimentation begins with moral situations, where conflict of values may prompt us to experiment with—to adopt or adapt—a given principle. Certainly when our experimentation prompts us to challenge some of the most common principles—to wonder, for instance, whether theft or murder is really all that wrong—such experimentation can certainly be dangerous if it is mismanaged. Perhaps that sort of experimentation is best contained within works of literature (see Ricoeur 1992, 140-168 and James 1956a, 210).

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 225-6

reasonableness of doubting any one moral solution, analytical tool, or good; he simply denies the possibility of doubting them all at once. But take phronetic questions—such as the validity of a Deweyan “solution” or an “analytical tool,” or an Aristotelian *prohairesis*—and both philosophers would agree that they are open to doubt and justification; the difference is that when values themselves come to be doubted Dewey allows us to legitimately pursue a justification while Aristotle does not. Yet the most significant difference between these two philosophers concerns their respective positions on the connection between a habit and its social and natural environment—a difference we will return to in the next chapter.

For the sake of further clarifying the nature of pragmatic normativity I will end this chapter by contrasting this paradigm with another approach to normativity that is likely to be more familiar to my reader while, at the same time, quite similar to the pragmatic paradigm: viz., John Rawls’s method of reflective equilibrium. Like the pragmatic normativist, Rawls thinks that there must be cause before one pursues a justification—that justification is a response to an actual conflict. The sort of conflict that sets it off is incoherence among our ‘moral beliefs’ (what he also refers to as considered judgments on moral matters). Rawls distinguishes between three classes of considered judgments. First, there are our judgments about a particular case or instance. “When A water-boarded B, A was torturing B” is an example of this kind of considered judgment. Then there are the judgments that take the form of rules or principles that govern our particular judgments. “Torture is wrong,” or “causing physical harm to others, without their consent, counts as torture,” are possible examples of this kind of judgment. Finally,

there are those theoretical judgments that bear upon our principles or rules. “Never treat another person as a mere means but always as an end-in-themselves,” for example.

As one encounters an increasing number of instances and forms increasingly particular judgments, and as one encounters a wider set of principles in the claims of others, conflict among these judgments is inevitable. We may encounter two judgments, one that asserts that water-boarding is not torture, another that asserts that it is. When we consider the question whether torture is always wrong we may find ourselves perplexed by situations in which the torture of one individual may save many lives, or when the person tortured is considered evil. Conflict may also arise among judgments of different orders. We may hold to the principle that torture is wrong, and yet also hold to the principle that harming another person in self-defense is excusable. One then encounters a proposed scenario in which the torture of one “terrorist” saves the lives of many innocent civilians. Is this not a case of self-defense? Is torture, then, always wrong? Or one may endorse the principle that criminals may be denied personhood, in certain respects, because of their behavior. Can one not apply the same principle to “terrorists”?

Whenever such conflicts emerge doubt naturally attends one or more of our moral beliefs. According to Rawls the justification of our moral beliefs hang together: the justification of one belief rests upon its coherence with the whole set of our moral beliefs.<sup>412</sup> His is a coherence theory of justification. It is a view of justification that also embraces the notion that justification is always achieved *in medias res*: the search for a justification presupposes a set of moral beliefs, and justification is realized by

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<sup>412</sup> 1971, 21

establishing coherence among these beliefs; moral beliefs, in other words, are always already at play before justification gets underway.<sup>413</sup>

“Reflective equilibrium” is the method Rawls proposes for re-establishing coherence among our moral beliefs. It involves modifying our various moral beliefs until coherence can be achieved. This method embraces what we might call normative parity—no single category of considered judgments (viz., particular judgments, principles, and theoretical judgments) takes priority. Rather, all moral beliefs enter into reflective consideration with equal normative weight. Furthermore, Rawls shares the pragmatic normativist’s rejection of foundations. He claims that no belief is foundational; any considered judgment, no matter how abstract, is open to at least the possibility of revision or rejection—“for even the judgments we take provisionally as fixed points are liable to revision ... This equilibrium is not necessarily stable.”<sup>414</sup>

There are clearly several similarities between Rawls’s approach to justification and the approach we have developed from the work of Aristotle and Dewey: every approach rejects foundational norms; every approach sees justification as something that occurs in response to a conflict; every approach takes justification to occur among held moral beliefs. Despite this, Rawls’s approach is significantly different from that which Aristotle and Dewey propose. First of all, while Rawls does insist that a justification is called for only after an “actual” conflict occurs, he considers conflicts that are “likely to arise in ordinary life” as “actual” conflicts—something that allows inquiry to distance itself from specific or concrete doubts.<sup>415</sup> This speculative attitude towards “actual”

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<sup>413</sup> Adapting the Latin to our purposes here we might refer to this aspect of pragmatic normativity as *in medias normas*—“in the middle of values.”

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 20; see 1993, 45

<sup>415</sup> 1951, 182.

conflict and doubt is evidenced in the way Rawls lists several discrete and particular instances of conflict—the conflict that arises between the moral beliefs of two persons, or within the moral beliefs of an individual, for example—and then uses these *concrete* cases to warrant *general* doubt and justification.<sup>416</sup> It appears that he is haunted by the radical moral skeptic; justifying a set of moral beliefs to those who actually doubt them, in that particular moment, is not his true aim. Concerned with general rather than actual doubts, doubt and justification become radical—speculative. Seeking what is universally or objectively right, Rawls cannot limit himself to a person’s moral culture. This leads him to distinguish reason from conviction. As he puts it, when discussing his method: “It should be noted that we are concerned here only with the existence of a reasonable method [a procedure for determining the objectivity of our moral beliefs], and not with the problem of how to make it psychologically effective in the settling of disputes.”<sup>417</sup> For Rawls, it is quite possible that one might justify a set of moral beliefs (by showing them to be objective) while failing to convince anyone of their validity. The psychological question is separated from the objective question, and we are faced with two radically different conceptions of justification. Thus, a major difference between pragmatic normativity and the method of reflective equilibrium is whether justification is an everyday practice limited by psychological conviction and doubt, or a speculative enterprise limited only by the moral skeptic and consistency. Both may be practiced, but we must not confuse the requirements of the latter for the requirements of the former.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> See 2001, 30. Rawls’s inquiry is not speculative because it entertains situations that are likely to arise, but because—by focusing upon general doubt—he does not limit his inquiry to actual “situations” (regardless of whether they *are* occurring or simply *likely* to occur); and it is this that prevents his inquiry from remaining rooted in a particular question and so capable of drawing upon the moral culture of the one doubting.

<sup>417</sup> 1951, 177

<sup>418</sup> Christine Korsgaard, one of Rawls’s students, seems to follow him down this path in *The Sources of*



A second divergence concerns the moral beliefs with which the search for reflective equilibrium begins. Unlike habits, Rawlsian ‘considered judgments’ are always post-reflective beliefs. Rawls describes them as those judgments that are arrived at under favorable conditions—conditions that basically render one’s judgment impartial. A considered judgment appears to simply be a judgment that lacks any personal contribution; it is a restrictive, negative concept, constituted by the one judging being deprived of information<sup>419</sup> or simply ignoring information about him- or her-self. Considered judgments are those “judgments in which our moral capacities are most likely to be displayed without distortion,”<sup>420</sup> where judgments that are “made with hesitation, or in which we have little confidence ... those given when we are upset or frightened, or when we stand to gain one way or another can be left aside” as distorted.<sup>421</sup> In fact, the thought experiment of the veil of ignorance, discussed in *A Theory of Justice*, is a way of simulating these ideal conditions. The veil of ignorance, where one is “deprived of this sort of information [sc. about one’s ethnicity, wealth, and the like]”, is Rawls’s way of rendering those ideal conditions for impartial judgment.

The negative conception of considered judgments excludes emotions, desires, or sentiments from the person’s considerations in the formation of their judgments. Even when Rawls says “the person making the judgment is presumed, then, to have the ability, the opportunity, and the *desire* to reach a correct decision” he quickly adds, “or at least

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*Normativity*, and yet she confuses the pragmatic and Rawlsian forms of justification. She speaks at times as if an answer to “the normative question” need be nothing more than what will convince the person doubting the normative force of the claim in question (pragmatic form), while at other times she assumes that something more objective than mere conviction is necessary (Rawlsian form). Gerald Cohen exploits this confusion to his advantage in his scathing critique of her book.

<sup>419</sup> 1971, 19

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 47

<sup>421</sup> Ibid. Of course, these conditions do not necessarily render our judgments distorted.

not the desire not to,”<sup>422</sup> making it appear that the absence of particular desires is sufficient for correct, considered judgment. Unlike habits, considered judgments are also essentially unconnected to personal creativity, emotional dispositions, and character. The closest to moral tradition they come is when they stem from public, democratic debate. It is clear that Rawls is not interested in the normative force of pre-reflective normative culture captured in Deweyan and Aristotelian “habit.”

Another difference—and a consequence of his speculative conception of justification—is his rather limited view of how justification can be practiced or realized. According to Rawls one justifies a set of moral beliefs by showing how they fit with each other in reflective equilibrium. This, however, is built off a model of reflection rather than dialogue, and assumes that coherence is the only way to justify. Pragmatic normativity, however, knows no limits to the methods of justification since justification is a matter of concrete doubt and conviction, not speculative doubt and objectivity.

#### 4.5 *A Defense of Pragmatic Normativity*

To some pragmatic normativity will seem untenable. To begin with, by allowing moral standards to originate from custom, pragmatic normativity appears to deny “all rationality and principle to morality,” giving morality over to the “blind, arbitrary forces in life.”<sup>423</sup> Developing this charge of irrationalism a bit further we can point to two apparently blind forces that play significant roles in the pragmatist’s account of normativity—viz., subjective preference and culture. Subjective preference seems to have an inordinate influence on norms justified pragmatically. This is because pragmatic

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<sup>422</sup> 1971, 48 (emphasis added).

<sup>423</sup> As Dewey expresses the objection. (see 1922, 71-2).

normativity—with its focus on habit, belief, conflict, uncertainty, and doubt—defines normative force and a successful justification in terms of conviction (or similar subjective states), rendering the various methods used for reaching a state of conviction, no matter how irrational, pragmatically indistinguishable from a rational argument in defense of that norm.<sup>424</sup> A pragmatic normativist thus seems guilty of conflating logical reasons for believing a proposition with the psychological readiness for believing it. As W.D. Ross explains at the start of “The Basis of Objective Judgments in Ethics,”<sup>425</sup> we can speak about the “basis” of a judgment in at least two senses: the *psychological cause* of holding the judgment, and the *logical ground* for holding the judgment. Ross goes on to claim that these two notions of “basis” are exclusive: “to say that a judgment is due to *causes* is to imply that it is not based on *reasons*, and so far as this is the case we have no ground for believing it to be true; it will be a mere accident if it is true.”<sup>426</sup> By relying upon subjective states for normative force and the success of a normative justification, the pragmatic normativists seems to think that the force or justification of norms will boil down to nothing more than a subjective preference; in that case, they will be unable to account for the opposition between moral claims and self-interest. Yet this opposition between Want and Ought is taken by some moral philosophers (usually the deontologically oriented) to be the defining characteristic of morality. As Kant expresses the notion in the preface to the *Grounding*, “Everyone must admit that if a law is to be morally valid, i.e., is to be valid as a ground of obligation, then it must carry with it absolute necessity. ... the ground of obligation here must therefore be sought not in the

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<sup>424</sup> Cf. Peirce 1955b.

<sup>425</sup> 1927

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 113 (emphases added).

nature of man nor in the circumstances of the world in which man is placed.”<sup>427</sup>

Elaborating on this idea, Philippa Foot comments that “common opinion agrees with Kant in insisting that a moral man must accept a rule of duty whatever his interests or desires.” She continues:

When we say that a man should do something and intend a moral judgment we do not have to back up what we say by considerations about his interests or his desires; if no such connexion can be found the ‘should’ need not be withdrawn. It follows that the agent cannot rebut an assertion about what, morally speaking, he should do by showing that the action is not ancillary to his interests or desires.”<sup>428</sup>

Finally, the reliance upon subjective states in normative justifications puts pragmatic normativity in danger of endorsing moral subjectivism. If normative force and justification hinge upon subjective states, how can the pragmatic normativists account for the critique of morality? How can a pragmatic normativist denounce rationalization? What is to stop persons from holding their moral beliefs or habits by whimsy alone, or simply seeking to avoid the problematic situations that give rise to doubt and inquiry?

The blind force of custom is also a concern for pragmatic normativity since it roots ethical justification in the customs, or shared habits, of the moral culture. This reliance upon moral culture threatens the paradigm with both cultural dogmatism and cultural relativism. What is to stop a community from aggressively holding to their beliefs and, like the insular individual mentioned above, seeking to avoid any confrontation to their moral beliefs or habits? And what is a pragmatic normativist to do when a dispute arises *between* two different moral cultures? How can any proposed

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<sup>427</sup> 1993, 389

<sup>428</sup> 1992, 314-315. Incidentally, while Ross and Korsgaard endorse this position it is not where Foot stands on the matter.

solution have normative force for both parties of the dispute if they each come from different moral cultures?

Yet another reason some may object to pragmatic normativity concerns the paradigm's naturalism.<sup>429</sup> It would appear that pragmatic normativity is committed to a special form of deriving Ought from Is. Yet explaining normative force by an appeal to a person's moral culture seems rather absurd to some moral philosophers. As Dewey expresses the objection: "What authority have standards and ideas which have originated in this way? *What claim have they upon us?*"<sup>430</sup> We cannot appeal to our moral culture to justify why our moral culture *should* possess normative force without begging the question; and yet being unable to supply some such justification is a lethal shortcoming, according to some.<sup>431</sup>

The basic assumption behind both of these objections—viz., irrationalism and naturalism—is that one can account for normative force and provide an ethical justification without appealing, in any way, to the contingences we might lump for the sake of convenience under the term "ethos": our habits, conduct, character, plastic human nature, sentiments, moral culture and customs.<sup>432</sup> This assumption is characteristic of foundational normativity as this other approach to normativity wishes to distinguish moral standards from ethos, and to derive normative force and justification from something independent of all ethos. Without the assumption that moral standards might have grounds outside of ethos, foundational normativists could never hope to discover a certain, final, or fixed norm to place at the foundation of their moral systems.

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<sup>429</sup> An objection that is often leveled against Hume's moral philosophy.

<sup>430</sup> Dewey 1922, 72.

<sup>431</sup> See, for example, Korsgaard 1996.

<sup>432</sup> I am borrowing this use of the term from Gadamer 1999a, 1999b, and 1999c. It, however, fits quite well with the positions of Aristotle and Dewey.

To see the implausibility of this assumption we can turn to Kant's metaphysics of morals, which is arguably the most promising (cleanest) form of foundational normativity and also the most explicit about the importance of the distinction between moral standards and ethos. If any moral philosopher can derive normativity without an appeal to ethos, Kant is the man to do it.<sup>433</sup> Yet, despite a concerted effort on his part, Kant is guilty of smuggling ethos into his "justification"<sup>434</sup> of the moral law, undermining its claim to purity. Kant's approach to justifying the moral law is to appeal to the self-certification of reason. If we are rational, the moral law will be "apodictically certain" and we will not *need* a justification of the moral law. Like a matter of faith, either you are lucky enough to be rational and can thus go without a justification, or you are an irrational skeptic, unconvinced—and Kant has no way to convince you. The success of this indirect justification ultimately rests, however, upon certain pre-conditions or ethos. Whether we are rational is certainly not a question settled by simply being human; it depends upon our upbringing, our education and habituation.<sup>435</sup> Whether we actually *use* our rational faculties is also contingent upon our ethos—by what our communities reward and punish, praise and blame, and by what exemplars we have and imitate, and so on.

In addition to his problematic approach to justification, Kant's attempt to supply normative force (or moral motivation) without any appeal to a person's ethos is also rather implausible. The separation of Ought from Want—or duty from inclination—is fundamental to Kant's project. It serves as an initial justification for developing a metaphysics of morals, and it informs his understanding of moral worth. Convinced that a

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<sup>433</sup> It is important to point out that the issue here is the *justification* of norms free from ethos, regardless of whether the norms themselves are free from content borrowed from ethos.

<sup>434</sup> Justification is in scare-quotes here because Kant can be interpreted as offering a justification of the moral law by means of his argument that a justification of the moral law is not necessary.

<sup>435</sup> See MacIntyre 1999

good will, or a will with moral worth, must be free of external influences, Kant claims that moral motivation requires a will determined by reason alone. His account of the subjective side of such a will is the ‘intellectual feeling’ he calls “respect” (*Achtung*). Directed solely at the form of our will and not its likely results or one’s inclinations, respect compels us to act in accordance with duty *for the sake of duty*. Of course, for this to be a viable account of moral motivation or normative force, respect must be distinct from our inclinations and Kant insists that it is: “even though respect is a feeling, it is not one received through any outside influence but is, rather one that is self-produced by means of a rational concept.”<sup>436</sup> Presumably, since the only object to which respect may be directed is the moral law, it is the moral law that is the rational concept responsible for generating respect. Yet, even if we accept Kant’s picture of the psychological impact of this concept upon the form our will takes, it is rather implausible that this impact occurs without presupposing certain moral culture and habits (*ethos*). Are we to believe that rational beings, *regardless of their character and their moral culture*, will feel compelled to subordinate their will to the moral law simply because it is the moral law? Yet this is what Kant presumes when he insists that a good will is a will determined by reason alone.

In addition to being implausible—as the example of Kant’s moral philosophy has shown—the separation of ethics from *ethos* leads to several problematic consequences. One such consequence is cultural dogmatism (a problem that is, incidentally, attributed to pragmatic normativity). As Dewey explains, “the chief practical effect of refusing to recognize the connection of custom with moral standards is to deify some special custom,” pretending it is not custom, treating it, instead “as eternal, immutable, outside of

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<sup>436</sup> 1993, 401n; cf. Loudon 1992b, 41 ff.

criticism and revision.<sup>437</sup> Yet this form of cultural dogmatism undermines moral insight or intelligence since, instead of meeting the novel situation in a flexible mindset, one is already committed to certain foundational principles. It also prevents us from developing the abilities to negotiate and understand the moral culture of others. Such inflexibility seems doomed to produce more problematic situations than solutions.<sup>438</sup> This cultural dogmatism can, in turn, lead to cultural imperialism as we force our moral culture onto others while denying that we are doing so. Such imperialism can occur between the geographical spectrum of cultures, but it may just as easily occur between classes and generations. It would also appear that thinking in terms of normative foundationalism gives one greater cause to embrace moral relativism. Before Plato and Kant—or any moral philosopher who embraced foundationalism, thus baptizing aspects of their moral culture as eternal moral truths—disputes between moral cultures could be seen in a more natural light. They could be conflicts, tensions, reflections, debates—but with a way forward. No doubt the way forward requires patience, discussion, and all the virtues of philosophy when it is practiced according to the empirical method. But once we radicalize such disputes, treating them as two competing moral foundations, diversity becomes relativism. It is arguable that Plato, Kant, and other normative foundationalists are not so much responding to relativism as creating it.

A final problematic consequence of dividing ethics from ethos that is worth noting is the argumentative cost of such moral metaphysics. Is it any wonder that the moment one attempts to ground norms without any appeal to ethos one starts to speak

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<sup>437</sup> 1987, 33.

<sup>438</sup> Perhaps it is only a matter of time before a radical break ensues; as Dewey says, “an ethical doctrine with less ‘foundations’ under it is likely to go farther and last longer” (1896, 188).



about self-generating intellectual feelings like respect, or Platonic Ideas? Ironically, the separation of ethics from ethos seems to require more, not less, justification.

The charge of naturalism forces the question of whether norms derived from moral culture can have normative force—especially after we realize the origin of these norms. This question is predicated, however, upon the possibility of radical moral skepticism—that is, the possibility of standing outside the influence of all moral culture—since this is the only way one might ask why any moral culture *should* influence us at all, as if it were possible that moral culture could not.<sup>439</sup> Yet the moral skeptic poses as much danger to the foundationalist as to the pragmatist; it is impossible to respond to the radical moral skeptic even with a foundational norm. When asked why a norm should have normative force if it stems from culture, “in one sense the question is unanswerable,” Dewey says.

In the same sense, however, the question is unanswerable whatever origin and sanction is ascribed to moral obligations and loyalties. Why attend to metaphysical and transcendental ideal realities even if we concede they are the authors of moral standards? Why do this act if I feel like doing something else? Any moral question may reduce itself to this question if we so choose.<sup>440</sup>

We can, after all, doubt the normative force of a transcendental norm if we can doubt the normative force of a custom-based norm. And argumentation, divorced of all ethos, will prove incapable of justifying any norm to a radical moral skeptic. There is a passage in the *Zhuangzi*, very similar to the Pyrrhonian discussion of the Criterion, that illustrates this point beautifully.

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<sup>439</sup> This radical moral skepticism should not be confused with the measured critique of one’s ethos. The American civil rights movement, for example, criticized many aspects of its society’s ethos—yet, in so doing, it was not engaged in a form of radical moral skepticism. The criticism of some aspects of the ethos were justified by appeals to other aspects of a common ethos. Even when such criticisms were based on transcendent norms (such as an appeal to natural law theory), the objections worked only when they came from within a common ethos. Hence, Martin Luther King jr’s appeal to natural law theory in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” could persuade others simply because it was part of a common, Christian ethos.

<sup>440</sup> 1922, 75

Say we had argued and you had refuted my position without my being able to do the same—is your position necessarily right (是 *shì*); is my position necessarily wrong (非 *fēi*)? If I had refuted your position without your being able to do the same—is my position necessarily right; is your position necessarily wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Are both of us right or are both of us wrong? If you and I cannot agree on an answer, other people are bound to be even more in the dark. Whom shall we get to decide the matter (正之 *zhèng zhī*)? Shall we get someone who already agrees with you to decide? But if he already agrees with you, how can he decide fairly? Shall we get someone who already agrees with me? But if he already agrees with me, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who already disagrees with both of us? But if he already disagrees with both of us, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who already agrees with both of us? But if he already agrees with both of us, how can he decide? Obviously, then, neither you nor I nor anyone else can decide for each other. Shall we wait for still another person? But waiting for one shifting voice [to pass judgment on] another is the same as waiting for none of them.<sup>441</sup>

The sophistry of this argument stems from ignoring the common fact that disputes occur between people with more to them than simply where they stand on the matter. There is a context, there are possible resources for developing one's point further, and there are common grounds upon which to develop agreement.<sup>442</sup> The passage can only problematize the utility of argumentation *if* we endorse a rather artificial conception of the practice—since only then is there no common ground upon which to build agreement. And yet that is the conception of argumentation we must embrace if we attempt to justify a norm to a radical moral skeptic. Such skeptics are anyone and no one; they live without a known moral culture. That is the only way they can doubt morality *in toto*. But, at the same time, it is the reason argumentation has no traction for them since any argument that attempts to justify a norm to a moral skeptic must do so independent of all ethos.

<sup>441</sup> Watson 1968, 48 (translation modified).

<sup>442</sup> As we can see in the 'river Hao' passage of the *Zhuangzi* (17.7) To be clear, given the context in which the cited passage occurs, the author(s) are not committed to this sophistic depiction of argumentation (辯 *biàn*); they are simply using this artificial account of argumentation in their attempt to show that argumentation itself cannot 正 *zhèng* ("rectify") things—that by means of argumentation one cannot get to the 是 *shì* and 非 *fēi* ("right" and "wrong") of things.

Fortunately, the pragmatist does not need to find a way to respond to the moral skeptic because such skepticism is not part of moral life or our everyday, primary experience. For instance, we never have cause in our everyday practice to doubt *all* aspects of our moral culture. Even if the moral culture of our social class is rendered problematic in one situation, the moral culture of our generation, religion, profession, and so on, need not be implicated or problematized in that situation. Since moral culture is an unnatural kind, it is rather unlikely that a situation could ever concern it in its entirety. Hence, the origin of moral skepticism must be found in the academic practice of moral inquiry, and not everyday practice. Besides, it is difficult to sustain doubts that are caused by a problem in primary experience: in addition to the felt aversion we often have to doubt, the force of circumstance and the urgency of action compels us to find some way to overcome our hesitations. The duration and scope of the moral skeptic's doubts—were such a person to exist, and yet remain subject to the human condition—would suggest that what the skeptic doubts is trivial (at least in the skeptic's estimation). Yet the only way moral doubt might become trivial is if one either restricted oneself to considering only abstract moral situations, or abstracted oneself from moral situations. There is no way one might sustain radical moral skepticism in the everyday. The radical moral skeptic is thus a hypothetical doubter, postulated because of an academic problem; moral skeptics and the problematic situations that give rise to them are so fictional and abstracted from moral life that moral practice will never deal with either. Even if the idle doubt of the moral skeptic were entertained, it should not be mistaken for a possibility of moral life, nor used to radicalize the requirements for satisfying our practical moral doubts.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105b12 ff.

In the debate between the viability of the pragmatic and foundational paradigms of normativity anyone who claims that norms derived from moral culture will lack normative force, and uses that claim to object to the pragmatic paradigm, begs the question. It is, after all, a claim only someone employing the foundational paradigm could assert since it is only once one assumes that normative force and justification can exist beyond the limits of moral culture that one can then question the normative force and justification that stems from moral culture. The pragmatist, on the other hand, finds the separation of normative force and justification from moral culture untenable. As Dewey puts it:

Reason, moral principles, cannot in any case be shoved behind these affairs, for reason and morality grow out of them ... They are there as part of them. ... In short, the choice is not between a moral authority outside custom and one within it. It is between adopting more or less intelligent and significant customs.<sup>444</sup>

The pragmatist does not consider naturalism a cause for doubt. It is possible to be skeptical about this or that aspect of moral culture (to doubt on a local scale and because of a problematic situation); it is impossible to “genuinely” doubt (that is, to doubt on the level of primary experience and action) moral culture *in toto*.

Let us turn to the charge that pragmatic normativity would have moral inquiry succumb to the blind, or irrational forces of subjective preference and culture. One of the problems that stems from letting subjective preference supply normative force and justifications is that it is apparently bound to conflate psychological readiness with logical reasons. Not only are we told that these two are distinct, but, according to Ross, if psychological causes are used to explain the force of a justification, logical reasons could have had no part in the success of that justification—these two are *exclusive* sources of

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<sup>444</sup> 1922, 75

normative force and the success of justifications. This, however, appears to involve a false dilemma. First of all, the force of reasons and logical argumentation stems from their connection to our habits—what William James refers to as our “willing natures.”<sup>445</sup> Whether we happen to go for a particular conclusion (e.g., justified norm) or are persuaded by a particular argument (e.g., justification) ultimately depends upon our practical and logical dispositions—each of which depend, in turn, upon our past education and habituation. As James puts it, we cannot simply will ourselves, independent of psychological conditions or our willing natures, to believe something; at the beginning of an inquiry or argument, all conclusions are not “live options” for us. We are already inclined this way or that—inclined towards certain outcomes just as we are inclined towards different modes of persuasion. Some of us are duly influenced by sound arguments, while others are easily won over by fallacious arguments. Thus, we cannot claim that logic is distinct from rhetoric; logic is yet another type of persuasive speech.<sup>446</sup> Does this mean that there is no distinction between psychological tendencies and rational grounds? Of course not. Logical arguments are persuasive, for some of us, in part because they assure us of the truth of their conclusions; and that is something that cannot be said of all conclusions reached by other means of persuasion. Still, we cannot conclude, as Ross wishes us to, that psychological causes *exclude* rational grounds.

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<sup>445</sup> 1956b

<sup>446</sup> In addition to following Aristotle’s suggestion that rhetoric be seen as a natural part of “ethics” (or political science), we find that the inclusion of logic within rhetoric suggests a much more inclusive notion of moral philosophy. For accounts of how this would transform the function of moral philosophers, see James 1956a, 208-210. One significant result of this alternative conception of ethics is that the claim that there is no moral philosophy in the *Analects* becomes even more dubious that it already obviously was. Before we could reassure ourselves that there was moral philosophy in the *Analects* by citing the few passages that present a more or less complete argument. Using Aristotle’s notion of an enthymeme (abbreviated argument), we might include even more passages within the group of passages that could be said to illustrate moral philosophy. But with this expansive notion of moral philosophy—as something akin to persuasive normative discourse—all of the passages in the *Analects* can be taken to illustrate moral philosophy.

It was also said that pragmatic normativity's appeal to subjective preference, in its account of normative force of morality, made it impossible to distinguish between obligations and self-interest or Ought and Want—a tension taken by some to be definitive of morality. We can respond by first pointing out that this sort of opposition between Want and Ought is quite possible within a pragmatic framework; Dewey himself alludes to this sort of conflict in “Three Independent Factors in Morals.” What this particular objection fails to realize is that subjective preferences—beliefs, convictions, certainty, habits—are not restricted to momentary interests, wants, or desires. Our subjective preferences are conditioned. We cannot simply will ourselves to believe or prefer one thing or another in any given moment. We have willing natures or habits that have a history, and this is one way a subjective preference can run counter to our momentary wants. We may, in other words, find that what we want in a given moment runs counter to an obligation, but an obligation for which we have a subjective preference. For example, we may have the habit of truthfulness, and thus a subjective preference for truth-telling; in a given moment we may find that we simultaneously do not want to tell the truth and have an inclination to do so. There are also consequences to our subjective preferences. Our preferences, as habits, condition certain activities and are, therefore, capable of producing problematic situations that challenge the viability of these habits and thus limit our wants. Consequence may reveal the value of an obligation—to which we have a subjective preference—and yet the obligation may still run counter to what we want to do. We may find ourselves in a situation where we do not want to keep a particular promise, and yet also know the dire results that will follow if we renege.

Incidentally, this second aspect of subjective preference—its consequences—affords the pragmatist a way to respond to the question, ‘How can we critique subjective preferences from within a pragmatic framework?’ Even if conviction or confidence constitutes normative force and successful justification, as aspects of habit they are not private possessions of the individual; they have practical consequences, and are thus checked by our environment (both social and physical). We have cause to question our convictions when they result in shame or failure.

Even though the tension between Ought and Want can occur within the pragmatic framework, we need not consider it definitive of “morality.” After all, if we understand Want to be more than a momentary affair—to be, instead, synonymous with subjective preferences, or what Kant refers to as “inclinations”—then taking the opposition between Want and Ought as the defining characteristic of morality implies that morality must oppose human nature. Yet, as Dewey says, it is a poor moral philosophy—a transcendent moral philosophy—that always pits individuals against their moral values. Such moral philosophies either commit suicide (undermining the normative force of their solutions to problematic situations) or involve human nature in an unending civil war.<sup>447</sup> But they also drive “morals inwards from the public open out-of-doors air and light of day into the obscurities and privacies of an inner life.”<sup>448</sup> Dewey provides an alternative characterization of morality as any situation in which our values conflict; morality, in other words, is a quality of situations, not of consequences, character traits, motives, principles, rules, or ideals. His might be said to be a functional, rather than a substantive, characterization of morality.

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<sup>447</sup> 1922, 4

<sup>448</sup> We can see the truth of this in Kant’s own account of the hidden quality of true moral worth.

Let us now turn to the second permutation of the first objection—viz., that pragmatic normativity permits the irrational, blind force of culture to supply normative force and underwrite normative justifications. The objection that the naturalism of the pragmatic approach leads to cultural dogmatism “rests upon a false separation. It argues in effect that either ideal standards antecede customs and confer their moral quality upon them, or that in being subsequent to custom and evolved from them, they are mere accidental by-products.”<sup>449</sup> There is another alternative: we might take ideal standards and previous customs to be different stages of a single process. To illustrate this idea, Dewey uses the case of language. “Language grew out of unintelligent babblings, instinctive motions called gesture, and the pressure of circumstance.”<sup>450</sup> This, however, does not confine its present practice to ‘perpetuating the forces which produced it;’ rather, we may use language to “to modify and redirect” these very forces.<sup>451</sup> Likewise, moral culture as custom, or shared habits, may have a sordid birth and a long history of material forces directing its transformations; but custom can also alter its social and material environments, and thus redirect these material forces towards desired forms of moral culture. We may, however, wonder how intelligent this process of redirecting these material forces can be, especially since any new alterations of our environment and moral culture will stem from our moral culture. Cultural dogmatism, or the stagnation of custom, does not, however, go unchallenged. When he considered cultural dogmatism, Peirce was hopeful that an awareness of cultural diversity would prompt us to doubt those customs of ours that diverged from the customs of others. No doubt we can expect conflicts among different moral cultures to offer some means of critique, in addition to

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 73-4

<sup>450</sup> 1922, 74

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.



this doubt stirred by diversity, just as problematic situations allow us to critique subjective preferences. Since moral cultures include generations and classes, interaction among diverse moral cultures, and conflict among them, seems inevitable.

Yet what can pragmatic normativity do when conflict and disputes arise between cultures that lack a common set of customs? Does the pragmatist's commitment to the cultural grounds of normative force not preclude any resolution in such cases when the parties of the dispute have no common ground upon which to justify a possible resolution? While it may be possible to slowly cultivate a fusion of cultural horizons—something we can see in Isocrates's attempt at solidifying a Pan-Hellenic identity through his orations, and Plutarch's attempt to cultivate a Greco-Roman moral culture by comparing the exemplary persons of these two cultures—we need not suppose that the absence of a common moral culture precludes the justification of a common resolution. Justification is a matter of reinstating, or instating for the first time, the normative force of a plan of action, a good, or a tool for analyzing moral situations. This is something that comes down to persuasion. And since it is possible to persuade persons of the same conclusion, but in very different ways, it is quite possible that persons from two, very different moral cultures may be persuaded of the normative force of a common item, but by drawing upon very different moral assumptions. Kantian arguments, for example, might be used to convince some that they should not lie to others and do so by drawing upon Enlightenment conceptions of reason and personhood, while Shantideva's arguments might be used to achieve the same effect, but by drawing upon distinctively Buddhist assumptions.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> See Shantideva's *Bodhicaryavatara*, 8.97-103; cf. Siderits 2007, 78-84.

In the next chapter I will apply the claim that Confucian ethics operates in terms a pragmatic paradigm of normativity. I will use this conclusion to complete my defense of the exegetical claim that exemplary persons are occasionally attributed basic normativity in early Confucian ethics, and that they possess native normativity. Attributing this sort of normativity to exemplary persons drastically affects how one thinks of them—and it is this re-conceptualization, along with the practice of thinking through exemplars, that concludes chapter five.

## CHAPTER 5. THE NATIVE NORMATIVITY OF EXEMPLARY PERSONS IN CONFUCIAN ETHICS

Can we say that the early Confucians take a pragmatic stance with regard to the justification of normative claims and the significance of exemplary persons? Does Confucian ethics operate under a pragmatic paradigm of normativity such as we have outlined in the previous chapter? And if we can substantiate the claim that Confucian moral philosophy employs a pragmatic approach to normativity, how might such an approach influence the Confucian conception of exemplary persons? In this chapter I will argue that the early Confucian literature not only expresses a pragmatic account of normative force and justification similar to what we find in the moral philosophy of Aristotle and John Dewey, but that the literature also supports an account of the normative significance of persons that comes much closer to Dewey's position than to Aristotle's. Once I have defended these claims I will explain how this pragmatic approach to normativity requires a specific conception of 'exemplification,' arguing that native normativity is an unavoidable dimension to the Confucian conception of exemplary persons.

### *5.1 The Non-Foundationalism of Confucian Ethics*

We can begin our argument for the pragmatic normativity of Confucian ethics by first supporting the claim that the early Confucians do not appeal to foundational norms. While this will go some way towards proving that Confucian ethics supports a pragmatic account of normative force, and thus open a way to account for the native normativity of exemplary persons, it is insufficient evidence to carry our argument all the way to these

conclusions; as we have already seen in the case of John Rawls's approach to justification through reflective equilibrium, a non-foundationalist account of normative force does not necessarily entail a pragmatic approach.

As we noted in chapter three, normative foundationalism relies upon a mononomic hypothesis that all moral challenges might be met with sufficient ingenuity by applying a ranked system of values (that is, a fixed set of values, ranked, and reducible to a common value-type). There is sufficient evidence, however, that such a hypothesis is not entertained by the early Confucians, (though there is some speculation that the Mohists endorsed this sort of approach to normative justification).<sup>453</sup> At the very least we can reference the various passages in the early Confucian literature that discuss the

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<sup>453</sup> Graham 1989, 33-45. Mozi suggests three standards (三表 *san biao*) for testing the validity of a proposition: rooting the proposition (本之 *ben zhi*), sourcing the proposition (原之 *yuan zhi*), and using the proposition (用之 *yong zhi*). Yet Mohists "source" only those proposition that concern questions of existence, says Graham; that is why this standard appears only in the debates over fate and ghosts. The other two standards are, however, used in every one of the core chapters (37-8). When push comes to shove, however, Graham claims that the Mohist will always privilege the "use" standard—that the Mohist, in other words, employs a foundational form of normativity: "the third ... test, outweighs any ancient authority which can be cited on the other side. For the Mohists, it provides a principle by which to judge all traditional morality. ... The utilitarian principle is presented as nothing less than the final criterion of whether action is moral or immoral. ... The utilitarian principle is seen as 'transcendent' as defined by Hall and Ames, detached from all custom, which loses its authority when seen to vary from one society to another" (39-40). The following are Graham's reasons for holding this claim. First, the Mohists would "distinguish the sage kings from the tyrants by whether their policies proved beneficial or harmful in practice"—something that seems to occur whenever there are conflicting claims to sagehood (see the Purist criticism of the 'kings, dukes, and great men of old' [8/1, 18/1, 31/1]—cf. Mei 1929, 30, 101, 182 and Watson 1963, 18 and 117, where each translator puts 今 *jīn* in for 古 *gǔ*). Second, the Mohist would "adopt a new course for its practical effects and then search history for confirmation that the sage kings did the same." Third, the Mohists would "put [their] own thoughts in the mouths of those [they] identify as sages, knowing that since the thought is right the sage would have shared it." But Graham's best defense of his hypothesis is the following: in "Thrift in Funerals," the Mohist acknowledges that both proponents and critics of the three-year mourning practice will cite the way (道 *dao*) of Yao, Shun, Yu Tang, Wen and Wu. In response to this impasse, the author of this chapter suggests that we "observe what happens if you try it out" and goes on to show that the three-year mourning ritual will 'interrupt work, injure health, impoverish the people, and weaken the state's defenses.' Based on this line of reasoning Graham concludes that "the utilitarian principle is presented as nothing less than the final criterion of whether action is moral or immoral" (40). Yet, employing our distinction between basic and foundational norms, we might question the necessity of Graham's conclusion. What we have here is the application of the third test when to persist in using the first would be to beg the question: if the question arises as to whose position accords with the way of the true sage, you cannot use the example of a sage to justify your position. Given the circumstances of this argument it does not compel us to conclude that the utility test is foundational.

inappropriateness (不義 *bu yi*) of remaining principled in one's conduct. As we mentioned in the second chapter, a fastidious or unimaginative conception of *xin*, *zhong*, *xiao*, and the other such norms can in fact produce inappropriate behavior.<sup>454</sup> To realize what is optimally appropriate (義 *yi*) requires that one remain responsive to the particulars of the situation as one seeks to articulate and realize these basic norms—it requires that one be morally creative.

According to the *Analects* moral creativity involves 'discovering implications' (知來者 *zhi lai zhe* "knowing what follows"), 'tailoring' (損益 *sunyi*) moral customs, and 'weighing' (權 *quan*) the situation. Yan Hui was Confucius's best student; as such, he was also the Master's teacher. The first passage in the *Analects* to mention Yan Hui depicts this student indirectly instructing Confucius on the true nature of intelligence.

Confucius remarked, "I can speak with Yan Hui all day long without him once raising an objection, as if he were stupid (愚 *yu*). Yet when I see how he conducts himself when away, he exemplifies (發 *fā*) what I have said. This Yan Hui—he is certainly not stupid!"

The lesson, of course, is that the measure of one's intelligence is not whether one is able to raise objections, but whether one can put one's studies into "practice" (習 *xi* or 行 *xing*). Success in this matter is said to require timing (時 *shi*),<sup>455</sup> reflection (思 *si*),<sup>456</sup> and—given the literature's association of this ability with the person of Yan Hui—it is probable that Confucius would also say that applying one's studies requires 'discovering their implications.'<sup>457</sup> This last activity is mentioned in Confucius's praise for Zigong in

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<sup>454</sup> In addition to Wei Sheng, who allowed himself to be unnecessarily drowned for the sake of *xin*, there are several other examples in the literature of situations in which the pursuit of these norms—foolishly or abstractly understood—produced inappropriate behavior (for a list of such examples, see *Zhonglun* 6).

<sup>455</sup> *Analects* 1.1

<sup>456</sup> 2.15, see Hall and Ames 1987, 46-50.

<sup>457</sup> Cf. *Analects* 1.15, 2.9, 5.9

*Analects* 1.15. Here we witness Zigong ‘discovering the implications’ of a line borrowed from the *Book of Songs*, finding a novel and appropriate application of a text that forms part of his moral culture. This sort of creative adaptation of one’s moral culture is a mark of a genuine teacher, in Confucius’s estimation; it is also how Confucius describes himself.<sup>458</sup> Yet, out of the three exemplars of the practice of discovering implication—viz., Zigong, Confucius, and Yan Hui—it is Yan Hui who outshines the other two.<sup>459</sup> His skill at discovery implications explains his ability to practice what he learns, but it also enables him to fit the past to the present—to use his education as an asset in realizing what is appropriate. Just as one must not yield even to one’s teacher in matters of appropriateness, so too one must adapt and extend the moral culture one is taught.<sup>460</sup>

In addition to adapting particular aspects of the moral culture to novel situations, institutions and communities are often required to ‘tailor’ the moral culture for the sake of realizing what is appropriate. On one occasion Confucius alludes to the historical transmission of *li* from one dynasty to the next. In each case, he says, a dynasty adopted the moral culture of the preceding dynasty, adding and subtracting, ostensibly in order to adapt custom to novel social conditions.<sup>461</sup> The people (眾 *zhong*) are also said to tailor moral culture. It is on account of the people (or perhaps we should say ‘common usage’) that hemp caps replaced silk caps in Confucius’s own day, and for the same reason that ministers began kowtowing after ascending to their ruler’s throne, rather than kowtowing before ascending the steps.<sup>462</sup> But not every tailoring of moral culture is necessarily appropriate. For instance, Confucius says that kowtowing on the same level with the ruler

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<sup>458</sup> 2.11, 7.1

<sup>459</sup> 5.9

<sup>460</sup> 15.36

<sup>461</sup> 2.23 (glossing 損益 *sunyi* as 增減 *zengjian*).

<sup>462</sup> 9.3

is taking liberties (泰 *tai*), and puts the minister-ruler relationship at risk. Success in tailoring moral custom is no doubt measured much like the success of *li* in general:

In making use of *li*, it is social harmony (和 *he*) that is the most important thing. It was the realization of social harmony that made the way of the sage-kings elegant in everything trivial and important. With impermissible conduct—say you knew how to realize harmony with such conduct; even still, because it is not punctuated with *li*, it remains impermissible.

While the value of *li* is not reducible to its consequences, social harmony remains perhaps a viable litmus test for any adaptation or alteration of one's moral culture.

Another aspect of moral creativity is referred to in the literature as the process of weighing (權 *quan*). Originally a term for the balance scale, it was also used to refer to the activity of weighing objects or—as it is used in the last book of the *Analects*—a ruler's office of establishing units of weight and investigating the corresponding accuracy of the reference-weights used in the marketplace.<sup>463</sup> Then there is the metaphorical extension of the term to include the practice of weighing up a situation. The *Liji*, for example, makes explicit reference to the term in this last sense when describing the appropriate adaptation of the mourning rites (喪禮 *sangli*) to special circumstances.

“Women who are bald do not use the coiffure; hunchbacks do not unbare their arms; the lame do not leap; and the old and ill do not give up the use of liquor and flesh. All these are cases regulated by ‘responsiveness to circumstance’ or ‘weighing up the situation’ (權 *quan*).”<sup>464</sup>

Yet is the Confucian insistence upon moral creativity all that radical? Insofar as the Confucian notion of moral creativity involves the intelligent application of one's

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<sup>463</sup> 20.1; cf. *Liji Yueling* 15 and *Shenxi* 1

<sup>464</sup> *Liji Sangfusizhi* 8. Another classic discussion of this notion is to be found in *Mengzi* 4A17; we will discuss this passage momentarily. See also *Analects* 9.30, discussed below.

moral norms, even Kant could see its relevance. As he puts it in the preface to the *Grounding*, even the moral laws require “a power of judgment sharpened by experience ... in order to distinguish in what cases they are applicable.”<sup>465</sup> What makes the Confucian demand for moral creativity distinctive is the addition of irreducible moral conflict and moral indeterminism, requiring much more creativity from the practice of *yi* than merely ‘judgment sharpened with experience.’

The early Confucians recognize the possibility of an irreducible conflict of values—a conflict Dewey describes as a “moral situation.” A frequently cited example of a moral situation within the early Confucian canon is *Mengzi* 4A17.<sup>466</sup>

Chun Yu Kun asked, “When members of the opposite sex exchange gifts there is no touching of hands—that is the custom (禮 *li*)?” Mengzi replied, “That is the custom.” “If your sister-in-law were drowning, would you save her with your hand?”<sup>467</sup> “To not save one’s sister-in-law is savagery. Members of the opposite

<sup>465</sup> 1993, 389; admittedly Kant would insist on preserving his distinction between the content of morality and moral culture.

<sup>466</sup> A series of moral “situations” can be found in the *Analects* associated with taking on an official position. On the one hand, one needs to take up an official position near home to be able to provide for one’s parents and clan (*Analects* 2.7, 6.4; cf. 4.19 and 18.2—after all, 穀 *gu* is the word for salary and grain: one was paid in food), yet, on the other hand, a commitment to ‘doing things properly’ 直道 *zhidao* (18.2) or doing what is appropriate 義 *yi* (19.1, etc.), makes it very likely that one will be dismissed from office (18.2, 8.13; 5.21, 15.7) and denied a salary. Then there is the question of whether one can risk taking an official position in ‘a state where the way does not prevail’ (辟無道 *bi wu dao*) or under a ruler ‘lacking in excellence’ (不善 *bu shan*). Doing so not only puts one’s habits and reputation at risk, but it is also quite possible that one may offend the ruler and suffer mutilation or execution on account of it (see 17.7, 18.7 and 5.2, 14.3). But to refuse every official position offered by a corrupt ruler is perhaps symptomatic of having unrealistic expectations of others, and renders one useless as it involves passing up an opportunity to improve the state (17.5, 17.7, 18.7). The tension here is perhaps best illustrated with reference to Zilu’s position on the matter. On two occasions he is adamant that one should not take an official position from a morally deficient ruler, yet on another occasion (assuming, of course, that states with morally deficient rulers are co-extensive with states in which the way does not prevail) he is resolved that the potential of improving conditions in a state justifies doing just that. While we could attempt to resolve this contradiction (and one way to do so is to pay attention to the role- and relationship-specific protreptics of his utterances on these occasions: the person whom he is talking to—his role vis-à-vis this person, and the particular nature of his relationship with him—very likely making all the difference in determining which position he took), it is worthwhile to dwell upon the significance of the presence of this contradiction in the text. The compliers of the *Analects* do not appear to attempt a final solution to these tensions so much as to attempt to lay out the various, competing commitments that are involved.

<sup>467</sup> Chan Yu Kun is assuming that saving her life is to give her a gift.



sex not touching—that is custom. He who saves his drowning sister-in-law is responding to the situation (權 *quan*).”

Allowing that the *li* applies to both cases (i.e., that saving a life is analogous to giving a gift), Mengzi is prepared to admit that following the *li*—at least as they are conventionally understood and articulated with reference to formal patterns of behavior—is not always the most appropriate thing to do. As the *Gongyong Zhuan* explains, “What is it to *quan*? To *quan* is to oppose the constant (經 *jing*) so that good might follow.”<sup>468</sup> Yet if *yi* entails ‘weighing’ (*quan*), and can thus supercede moral culture, *yi* must occasionally involve more than simply creatively *adapting* that culture to novel situations. What Mengzi is expressing is not simply the necessity of *yi*, but the “primacy” of *yi*. The primacy of *yi* is also endorsed in the *Analects*. To begin with, the *junzi* is described as someone who gives first priority to appropriate conduct (*yi*),<sup>469</sup> and who, when taking office, maintains no absolute prescriptions (適也 *di ye*) or proscriptions (莫也 *mo ye*), but gives his loyalty first to what is appropriate (*yi*).<sup>470</sup> The primacy of *yi* also informs Confucius’s self-description as someone without moral absolutes, and with no patience for moral fastidiousness or inflexibility.<sup>471</sup>

Lest we take such claims about the primacy of *yi* as evidence of a foundational norm, we must realize that *yi*, in itself, is an empty norm—much like Dewey’s ‘moral

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<sup>468</sup> 權者何？權者反於經，然後有善者。 *Quan zhe he? Quan zhe fan yu jing, ranhou you shan zhe* (2.11.3). Mention is made here of the correlative pair of irregularity and regularity, or contingencies and constancies—*quan* and *jing*. *Yi* might not be radically opposed to *li*, even in this passage from the *Mengzi*. The ‘constancy’ one rejects in saving one’s sister-in-law may simply be the calcified or conventionalist aspect of *li* (which, incidentally, is the nourishment of village worthies), but not ritual conduct that is creatively appropriated and personalized. In other words, in responding to the situation, one might still be realizing *li* (see chapter two).

<sup>469</sup> *Analects* 17.23

<sup>470</sup> 4.10

<sup>471</sup> 我 ... 無可無不可 *wo ... wu ke wu buke* (18.8); cf. 1.8, 14.32, 15.36, 15.37

insight' or 'intelligence.'<sup>472</sup> The emptiness of *yi* stems from the Confucian commitment to moral contextualism and indeterminacy. Moral contextualism is a major theme of *Analects* 9.30. "Confucius said, 'You can study together with a person and still not share the same path (道 *dao*); you can share the same path and still not take your stand (立 *li*) with him; you can take a stand with a person and still not share the same response to a situation (*quan*).' " Commentators Wang Bi (王弼 226-249 CE) and Zhang Ping (張憑 Jin Dynasty) take the final clause as a statement on the fluctuation or emergent novelty of circumstance—that it is *quan* that allows one to adapt to the changing environment—with the implication that what is appropriate depends upon context.<sup>473</sup> This suggests that *yi* is empty of normative content outside of a given context. Things become even more interesting when the *Analects* apparently claims that in similar situations contrary modes of action can be deemed appropriate. "Viscount Wei left him, Viscount Ji was made his slave, Bi Gan remonstrated and was put to death. Confucius said 'Even at the close of the Shang dynasty there were three consummate persons to be found in it.' "<sup>474</sup> Each of these persons responded differently to the villainy of emperor Zhou, and yet they are all exemplary for what they did. This potential contradiction can be resolved by attending to who each person was. Viscount Wei was the older son of the previous emperor; thus, his flight can be seen to be appropriate insofar as it allowed him to continue the dynastic line

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<sup>472</sup> There are at least two other ways of arguing against any interpretation that takes Confucian ethics to be foundational. The first is to undermine each attempt that takes *tian*, or something similar, to be a metaphysical foundational of moral value. For this line of argument, see the work of Hall and Ames (especially 1987 and 1998). A second argument is to show that even the most promising candidate of a foundational moral system—the ethics of the Mohists—fails to deliver the goods. This line of argument would begin with A.C. Graham's claim in *Disputers of the Tao* that Mozi takes utility (用 *yong*) as his transcendent norm and then turn to the *Mozi* and cite several passages where the sages or 'experience' (cf. Mozi's 'source [原 *yuan*] test') are used as basic norms to justify the value of utility.

<sup>473</sup> 論語義疏 *lunyu yishu*.

<sup>474</sup> *Analects* 18.1

and provide sacrificial offerings to its ancestors. Viscount Ji and Bi Gan were both uncles to Zhou, and both attempted to correct their nephew through remonstrance. In the end, Viscount Ji protected his potential of exercising a positive political influence in the future by feigning madness, thus securing his enslavement in lieu of his execution. But Bi Gan, having no such potential, felt at liberty to follow the course of remonstrance to its conclusion. Thus the particulars of a person—his or her roles, relationships, and reputation—are morally salient aspects of the context, and must be accounted for as one attempts to realize what is optimally appropriate.<sup>475</sup> A passage from the apocryphal *Kongzi Jiayu*, compiled by Wang Su (王肅 195-256 CE), drives this point home.

In the state of Lu there was a man who lived in a house by himself; his neighbor was a widow who also lived alone in another house. One night a violent storm arrived and the widow's house was destroyed. In haste she sought shelter from the man, but this man from Lu shut his door and would not let her come inside. She took herself to the window and said, "Sir, how could you be so unfeeling (不仁 *bu ren*) as to not let me inside?" The man of Lu replied, "I have heard that men and women who are not at least sixty years old do not share a common residence. At present you are younger than sixty; I am also younger than sixty. This is the reason that I dare not admit you into my home." She replied, "Sir, why can't you be like Liuxia Hui in this matter? With his own body-warmth he sustained a woman who did not reach the gates in time, and still his countrymen did not call him reckless." The man of Lu replied, "Were I Liuxia Hui, then it might be permissible (可 *ke*); but as I am not Liuxia Hui, it is impermissible (不可 *bu ke*). It would be using that which is impermissible for me to emulate what is permissible for Liuxia Hui." Confucius heard about this. "Excellent!" he said. "Of those who desire to emulate (學 *xue*) Liuxia Hui, not yet has one of them resembled the man. Aspiring to come up to the level of excellent persons while not simply imitating (襲 *xi*) their deeds—this can be called wisdom indeed!"<sup>476</sup>

<sup>475</sup> A similar point may be taken from *Analects* 15.7 if we can assume that both Shiyu and Qu Bo are exemplars of comparable merit. It would then follow that their divergent behavior in the "same" situation also supports our attribution of moral contextualism to Confucian ethics.

<sup>476</sup> 10.16. Given the lack of parallel passages in the literature, it is likely that this passage was written by Wang Su (Kramers 1950, 1-196, 366). Wang Su's distinction between 襲 *xi* and 學 *xue* is quite useful for making sense of what is involved in "intelligent imitation."

It is Liuxia Hui's good reputation that makes him different from this nameless (無名 *wuming*) "man from Lu." Speaking of the transformative effect a reputation can have upon the significance and appropriateness of one's conduct, Xu Gan reminds us that

Yi Yin banished Taijia, and Zhan Ji covered a freezing woman with his clothes. The people of Shang and Lu did not say that Taiji was a usurper or that Zhan Ji was licentious. Why? Because of what they had amassed previously (積之於素也 *ji zhi yu su ye*). Thus if the dye does not amass, then people will not be able to see [the cloth's] color; if actions do not amass (行不積 *xing bu ji*), then people will not trust you in your pursuits (事 *shi*). Zisi said: "Two different people may utter the same words but only one will be believed, because trust (信 *xin*) has been established before he has spoken. Two different people may issue the same order but only one will have a transforming effect, because the efficacy of the transformation lies outside the order itself."<sup>477</sup>

Who you are—that is, what you have done previously—influences how others understand your present conduct. And this is quite significant since how one's conduct is understood can impact the appropriateness of one's conduct: were the man from Lu reckless in this situation he would not only put himself at risk but also expose this widow to social stigma. Thus, even when we know a great deal about the environing context, if we are ignorant of the particular persons involved (that is, their roles, relationships, and reputations), *yi* will remain significantly empty of normative content.<sup>478</sup>

In addition to moral contextualism there is evidence of moral indeterminism within the Confucian literature—that doubt or uncertainty is at times an unavoidable aspect of struggling to discern what is appropriate (*yi*). This indeterminism may result from our ignorance of morally salient features of a given context—a form of epistemic

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<sup>477</sup> *Zhonglun* 5

<sup>478</sup> One consequence of having *yi* depend upon context (and a context that entails the persons involved) is what we might call moral perspectivism. When Confucius says that those who study together may not walk the same path nor weigh the situation up the same way, or that 'those that those walk different paths cannot make plans together' (15.40), he might not be simply describing a regrettable state of affairs. If we take Confucian moral contextualism seriously, and remember that the context includes the persons involved, we might need to read such comments as admissions of moral pluralism. But such pluralism is not the same as relativism—the difference rests in the nature of perspectivism.

indeterminism that can affect our ability to justify conduct (this is not surprising, as justification is an epistemic issue). Another source of moral indeterminacy is the tragic conflict of values we have already discussed. The search for what is *yi* can only be a search for what is *optimally* appropriate (*yi*). Still, in our attempts at appropriateness, we will often—as a product of moral indeterminism—remain unsure of the quality of our conduct. Recognizing this indeterminism is perhaps a sign of maturity, for to expect certainty in moral affairs may simply be an infantile wish that the moral life were not so complex, or that experience presented us with absolute standards of conduct. Unless one is willing to engage in moral metaphysics one must learn to live with this uncertainty. Is it any wonder that Confucius did not demand certainty?

It should be clear by now why the Confucian commitment to moral creativity precludes the propriety of appealing to foundational norms. The primacy of *yi* entailed by the occurrence of “moral situations” implies that the early Confucians endorse, at least tacitly, the polynomic hypothesis (since only polynomism can account for the occurrence of “moral situations”). As such, we must assume that mononomism is not entertained by the Confucians. This is quite significant for it rules out any interpretation of Confucian ethics that appeals to a foundational norm. It also rules out the tenability of interpreting Confucian ethics as analogous to any of the moral theories that require a foundational norm—whether a Kantian deontology, some variety of consequentialism, or even a virtue theory (as such theories are often understood).<sup>479</sup>

## 5.2 *The Pragmatic Account of Normative Force in Confucian Ethics*

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<sup>479</sup> A common conception of virtue ethics understands it to be a moral theory that involves an appeal to foundational character traits. This may not be the only way of understanding virtue ethics, but it seems to predominate.

Turning our attention to the Confucian account of normative force and justification we can learn quite a bit from how the practice of justification is presented in the literature. In the same passage of the *Analects* that records Zigong's 'discovery of implications' we find him providing a justification for Confucius's estimation of him.<sup>480</sup> When someone ridicules Confucius for 'not being in government' we see him justify his present situation by challenging the other person's assumption of what it is to be 'in' government.<sup>481</sup> In the *Analects* there are justifications by means of explanations, and justifications by means of questions.<sup>482</sup> We even have an attempt at a justification, on the part of Zilu, that abuses the Confucian commitment to the practical relevance of learning.<sup>483</sup> In every case a defense is mounted in response to a genuine concern or doubt.

The pragmatic character of justification in the *Analects* is reinforced by Confucius's critique of doubting. While uncertainty is an expected result of moral contextualism and indeterminacy,<sup>484</sup> there are times when hesitation ("doubt" in the pragmatic sense of the term) is taken to be a sign of pettiness. If the prospect of poverty or missed gain causes one to doubt one's course of conduct, for instance, or if one doubts the possibility of making any progress along the way (*dao*), one is then entertaining the doubts of petty persons (小人 *xiaoren*).<sup>485</sup> As for idle or speculative doubt, not only is this not a true measure of intelligence but anyone attempting radical moral skepticism would likely be classed among those who belonged to the sophistic tradition (名家

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<sup>480</sup> *Analects* 1.15

<sup>481</sup> 2.21

<sup>482</sup> For the former see 6.5, 13.3, for the latter see 17.2.

<sup>483</sup> 11.25.

<sup>484</sup> 15.16, 16.10

<sup>485</sup> 7.12, 7.16, 14.12, 15.32, 6.12

*Mingjia*), and subjected to the same criticisms as the Confucians directed at useless disputation (辯 *bian*).<sup>486</sup>

In the early Confucian literature the success of any justification (that is, of any extension or re-establishment of normative force) relies upon what Dewey would describe as our “habits”—our moral culture and psychological tendencies. In the first place, moral intellectualism cannot be attributed to Confucian ethics as the literature allows that one might be aware of a norm, even in the sense of agreeing with it, without necessarily acting on that awareness. The *Analects* speaks of this sort of awareness with (derivative senses of) the two terms 知 *zhi* (realizing) and 學 *xue* (studying, learning), as well as with the rather ubiquitous and metaphorical 見 *jian* (seeing, meeting, being acquainted with).<sup>487</sup> That both Confucius and Zengzi worry about not practicing (習 *xi* and 講 *jiang*)<sup>488</sup> what they have learned, and that Confucius speaks of the joy of practicing what he has learned,<sup>489</sup> suggests that it is quite possible to both be aware of the moral culture (學 *xue*) and not practice it. While the primary sense of 知 *zhi* entails activity there is at least one occasion in the *Analects* where it appears to be possible to *zhi* without activity—a derivative sense of *zhi* which is merely a cognitive affair.<sup>490</sup> Still, the clearest expression of the potential divide between *zhi* and action is in a pre-Confucian text where a minister remarks to his ruler: “It’s not all that difficult to know it; to do it—that is truly difficult.”<sup>491</sup> The *Analects* also speaks as if it were possible to see (*jian*) what

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<sup>486</sup> See *Mengzi* et passim and *Xunzi* 17.10. For a precursor to these sentiments, see *Analects* 17.10 and 5.5

<sup>487</sup> On the primary sense of *zhi* as “to realize,” see *Analects* 6.22 and Hall and Ames 1987, 50-56. On the primary sense of *xue* as “to develop oneself,” see *Analects* 5.15, 6.3, 7.17, 12.15, and especially 14.24.

<sup>488</sup> 1.1, 1.4, and 7.4. Zengzi uses the word 傳 *chuan*, not *xue* (1.4).

<sup>489</sup> 1.1

<sup>490</sup> 6.20; cf. Zhang Shi’s (張栻 1133-1180 CE) commentary on this passage.

<sup>491</sup> 非知之艱，行之惟艱 *fei zhi zhi jian, xing zhi wei jian* (*Shangshu* 3.12).

is appropriate and still not do it, or to see what is inappropriate and still not stop doing it.<sup>492</sup> Clearly the early Confucians are prepared to admit that it is possible to be cognitively aware of moral culture and what is appropriate without experiencing the normative force of either. If moral intellectualism is not endorsed by the Confucians, what do they take to be the source of normative force?

We can answer this question by attending to those persons who seem to be unaffected by moral culture or attempts to justify aspects of that culture. Perhaps the most obvious case is Zaiwo.

Zaiwo was still sleeping during the daytime. The Master said, “You cannot carve rotten wood, and cannot trowel over a wall of manure. As for Zaiwo, what is the point of upbraiding him?”<sup>493</sup>

On another occasion Zaiwo questions the normativity of the Confucian proposal to reinstate the ritual of the three-year mourning period upon the death of a parent. Citing the potential damage it will cause the other *li*, and the demarcation of time suggested by a year’s natural patterns, Zaiwo proposes that a single year of mourning should suffice:

If for three years *junzi* were to give up observing the other forms of *li*, the *li* would certainly go to ruin. And if for three years they were to give up the performance of music, music would certainly collapse. The old grain has been used up, the new crop is ready for harvest, and the different woods used ceremonially as drills for making fire have gone through their full cycle—surely a year is good enough.

Confucius’s response is to ask the question, “Would you then be comfortable (安 *an*) eating rice and wearing colorful brocade” after a single year? When Zaiwo confirms that he would be comfortable doing so, Confucius replies, “If you would be comfortable, then do it” (女安則為之 *ru an ze wei zhi*). Confucius is not changing his mind, he is not really

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<sup>492</sup> *Analects* 2.24, 5.27, 6.11

<sup>493</sup> 5.10, translated by Ames and Rosemont.



commending Zaiwo's suggested course of action, and he is not endorsing subjective moral relativism—'whatever you feel comfortable with is okay.' He is simply foregoing any further attempt to persuade Zaiwo of the propriety of the three-year mourning ritual. This much is apparent from what Confucius says after Zaiwo has left. "Zaiwo," he says, "is certainly unfeeling (不仁 *bu ren*)."<sup>494</sup> He then offers a justification for the three-year mourning ritual to the unnamed students in his presence (and, consequently, the reader).<sup>494</sup> There are clearly persons you cannot persuade, and it is important to know when to give up on them.<sup>495</sup>

Such persons fail to be persuaded because they lack the relevant 質 *zhi*—a term that overlaps somewhat with Dewey's "habit." The first aspect of *zhi* to recommend an association with Dewey's term is that the affected dispositions of persons are said to constitute their *zhi*. This is made explicit in Yang Xiong's (楊雄 53 BCE-18 CE) *Fayan*:

Someone asked, "Suppose there were someone who said his surname was Kong, and his personal name was Zhongni<sup>496</sup>—if he entered Confucius's house, ascended his hall, sat in his chair, and wore (襲 *xi*)<sup>497</sup> his clothes, could we call him Zhongni?" I replied, "In his style (文 *wen*), yes; in his habits (質 *zhi*), no." "Might I ask about 'habit'?" "Say some creature with a sheep's habits were wearing a tiger's fur—seeing grass it would be happy (說 *shuo*), seeing a wolf it would tremble with fear (戰 *zhan*) having forgotten that it was wearing the fur of a tiger."<sup>498</sup>

Our affective dispositions—what we find pleasing and terrifying—are clearly thought to constitute our *zhi*. It is worth noting that this passage contrasts *zhi* with a derivative notion of 文 *wen*. *Wen*, here, does not refer to a person's refinement or culture (since these can be said to rightfully inform our affective dispositions or *zhi*), but instead refers

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<sup>494</sup> 17.21

<sup>495</sup> 15.8, 12.23

<sup>496</sup> Kong Zhongni is the pre-Latinized name of Confucius.

<sup>497</sup> This term is at the heart of the difference between bald and intelligent imitation.

<sup>498</sup> 2.12

to superficial show—the external trappings of culture that can be put on or taken off like a fur coat. In light of this contrast we might also say that *zhi* is what lies “beneath” our clothing, dwellings, and titles. It is *zhi*, then, that Confucius is speaking about when he says “Look at what they do, examine their motives, inquire after what makes them comfortable (安 *an*)—can a person remain concealed from you? Can a person remain concealed from you?”<sup>499</sup>

Also, similar to Deweyan habits, a person’s *zhi* is said to be plastic—refined through a process of acculturation (or 文 *wen* in the primary sense of the term).<sup>500</sup>

Someone said, “I study without benefiting from it—what am I to do about my *zhi*?” I replied, “You have not yet reflected on learning. Do those with a knife sharpen it? Do those with jade polish it? If they are not sharpened or polished, what use will they be? What have you been polishing and sharpening (with your studies) if not essentially your *zhi*? If that is not the case, stop studying.”<sup>501</sup>

In the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*, where 性 *xing* is used in much the same way as *zhi* is used elsewhere in the literature to discuss our dispositions, there is still a tremendous emphasis upon human effort and cultural refinement in forming proper dispositions. While *Xunzi* is the most emphatic of the two, *Mengzi* still discusses the role one’s social environment can play in the development of our spontaneously developing human dispositions (人性 *renxing*).<sup>502</sup>

The plasticity of our dispositions, and their potential refinement, is sometimes discussed with reference to *wen*—as in 文質 *wenzhi* (refined dispositions). This suggests a potential contradiction in the literature. We have already seen how the *Fayan*

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<sup>499</sup> 2.10. Given the strong connection between 安 *an* and 說 *shuo*, this only serves to strengthen the connection between this passage and *Fayan* 2.12.

<sup>500</sup> This is a very good reason to avoid following Edward Slingerland in translating *zhi* as “native substance.”

<sup>501</sup> *Fayan* 1.4

<sup>502</sup> For an elaboration on this theme, see *Lunheng* 2.4.

distinguished between these two, letting *wen* stand for superficial refinement that we might put on or take off like a fur coat. Yet in the *Analects* we find a similar suggestion emphatically repudiated.

Ji Zicheng said, “*Junzi* have their *zhi* and that’s enough; what use do they have for refinement (*wen*)?” Zigong said, “How regrettable are this man’s words about the *junzi*. *Wen* is similar to (猶 *you*) *zhi*, *zhi* is similar to *wen*—just as, beneath the fur, the skin of tigers and leopards is similar to the skin of dogs and sheep.”<sup>503</sup>

There are two competing conceptions of refinement involved in this passage.

Commentators often take Ji Zicheng’s initial remark to be an insult directed at Zigong.

Thinking of *wen* as something akin to a fur coat (that is, external to one’s *zhi* and thus as unnecessary ornamentation) Ji Zicheng sets the terms of comparison between himself and Zigong: while Zigong may have studied under Confucius, and be refined in the six arts, he is no match for those like Ji Zicheng who enjoy the *zhi* of noblemen (*junzi*).<sup>504</sup>

Zigong’s initial response is quite humorous. ‘It is too bad,’ he says, ‘that a *junzi* [in the descriptive sense of the term—i.e., a nobleman] spoke in such an unrefined [無文 *wu wen*, so to speak] manner about the *junzi* [this time in the normative sense of the term—i.e., an exemplary person].’ He then proceeds with an objection to Ji Zicheng’s understanding of *wen* and *zhi*. While it is quite possible to think of *wen* as the superficialities of culture Zigong challenges us to recognize the interdependence of culture and dispositions: that our dispositions are not worth having if they are not refined,

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<sup>503</sup> 12.8. There is a tendency (see, for instance, Slingerland 2003) to assume that by the fur of these animals, Zigong has culture in mind—so that, without *wen*, one cannot successfully distinguish the *junzi* from the commoner. While this does offer a possible explanation for why Zigong claims *wen* to be necessary, it rather plays into Ji Zicheng’s aristocratic sentiments; it also allows *wen* and *zhi* to remain untethered, and to simply say that, while they remain independent, you still need *wen*. This does not take into account Zigong’s claim that *wen* is similar to *zhi*, and *zhi* is similar to *wen*. It is a mistaken, then, to think that the metaphor of the four animals is about comparing people (those with and those without *wen*), when it is really about comparing superficial and genuine conceptions of *wen* (superficial as a fur coat, or inseparable from *zhi*).

<sup>504</sup> This is the descriptive, class use of *junzi*.

just as culture is insignificant if it does not contribute to the refinement of our dispositions. And, like the difference between animals without their fur, the interdependence of culture and dispositions renders them inseparable. So, to square this passage with the passage quoted from the *Fayan* above, it is enough to point out that in the latter passage *wen* is being used in the deficient sense, while Zigong is championing what he considers to be the primary notion of *wen*.

Refining one's *zhi* entails the proper orientation of one's affective regard, or what one loves (好 *hao*) and what one enjoys (樂 *le*). Thus in the *Analects* we hear of the importance of 好學 *haoxue*, 好仁 *haoren*, 好義 *haoyi*, 好禮 *haoli*, 好信 *haoxin*, and 好勇 *haoyong*.<sup>505</sup> Minimally, the love of such activities involves a desire to engage in them, but it also establishes our priorities, giving these activities pride of place. In addition, each specific love can involve a complex array of affective dispositions. For example, the love of learning involves the desire to learn, but also a desire to practice what one learns. Since *xue* (learning) is fundamentally understood to be a practice of self-cultivation, it also involves an aversion to repeating mistakes or misplacing blame. It is also associated with a willingness to listen to the remonstrances of others.<sup>506</sup> Finally, a love of learning entails an earnest desire to cultivate methods for helping others to learn—with teaching constituting one side of every relationship involving the practice of learning.<sup>507</sup> There is also the cyclical nature of these dispositions to consider: by loving to learn, for instance, one cannot avoid cultivating (*xue*-ing) one's dispositions, thus cultivating a deeper love of learning.

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<sup>505</sup> 17.8, 4.6; 12.20.

<sup>506</sup> 5.15

<sup>507</sup> 學 *xue* was originally the term used for both teaching and learning. Only later was teaching discussed as 教 *jiao*, and then as 教 *jiao*.

Those who fail to be influenced by the normative force of the moral culture or its justification are, on the Confucian account, persons lacking the requisite refinement of their habits (文質 *wenzhi*). This is evident in Confucius's conversation with Zaiwo about the three-year mourning rite. Zaiwo admits that he would be comfortable with ending the mourning period after a single year. He is, as Confucius concludes, unfeeling (不仁 *bu ren*)—we might even say this is because he does not love extending himself (好仁 *haoren*) and thus does not possess the relevant complex of affective dispositions. The implication is that the normative force of moral culture or a successful justification of an aspect of moral culture remains a cultural (文 *wen*) and conative affair.

### 5.3 *The Pragmatic Conception of Exemplary Persons in Confucian Ethics*

There are several ways to refer to exemplary persons in the early Confucian literature. In the *Analects* alone we have the terms 君子 *junzi* (exemplary person), 聖人 *shengren* (sage), 賢 *xian* (worthy), 士 *shi* (knight, scholar), 仁者 *renzhe* (consummate persons), 大人 *daren* (great persons), 成人 *chengren* (accomplished person), 宗 *zong* (forerunner, predecessor), and 善人 *shanren* (able person).<sup>508</sup> When we widen our survey of the literature beyond the *Analects* we find exemplary persons referred to as 法 *fa* (worthy pattern, usually an institution), 表 *biao* (a prominent person), 則 *ze* (pattern), 刑 *xing*, 象 *xiang* or 象法 *xiangfa* (presentable person), 戒 *jiè* (*exemplum horribilis*), 望 *wang* (prominent person or paragon) 傑 *jié* (outstanding person), 英 *ying* (hero), 英傑 *yingjié* (outstanding person or hero), 嵬 *wei* (glossed as 委 *wēi*, crooked person), 瑣 *suo*

<sup>508</sup> For this rare use of *zong*—a term that is usually used to refer to ancestors—see *Analects* 1.13 and *Liji Tangong* A 49

(deviants), 嵬瑣 *weisuo* (crooked deviants), 範 *fan* (standard), 模 *mo* or 模範 *mofan* (mold), 楷 *kai* (pattern or exemplar), and 哲 *zhe* (wise person). Many of these terms are reserved for designating exclusively positive or negative exemplars, but not both: *shengren* is invariably honorific, just as *wei*, *suo*, *weisuo*, and *jiè* are used exclusively with reference to shameful persons. Yet a few terms, when attributed to a person, can designate *either* positive or negative normative significance—requiring that one refer to the context to determine which is the case. *Biao* and *jié* are such terms. The *Dadai Liji* says that superiors are the *biao* of the people, and goes on to say that when the *biao* is proper (正 *zheng*) all affairs cannot but be proper as well. The implication, of course, is that a prominent person (*biao*) can sometimes be improper (不正 *bu zheng*).<sup>509</sup> This conceptual possibility is confirmed in the *Lunheng*, where Wang Chong talks about using an example (*biao*) as a warning to others—that is, as an *exemplum horribilis* (戒 *jie*).<sup>510</sup> Concerning 傑 *jie*, both Xunzi and Xu Gan speak about the “heroes of petty folk” (小人傑也 *xiaoren jie ye*). When Xunzi uses the term in this way he is turning the tradition against itself: *jie* originally meant something quite close to the Homeric sense of hero (or *heros*). They were warriors—exemplars of martial cunning and might. Yet Xunzi, in this passage, cites several military heroes who, despite their martial prowess, are rightfully considered only the heroes of *xiaoren*.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> *Analects* 1.6

<sup>510</sup> 46.9

<sup>511</sup> We might also speculate about the normative reversibility or indeterminateness of even the terms *junzi* and *shengren*. While *junzi* is usually an honorific term, it can also be used (though rarely) in a pejorative sense (see, for example, *Mengzi* 2B9—unless, that is, *junzi* is being used in the descriptive sense within this passage). And then there is the mention of the “proper” sage (正聖 *zheng sheng*) in the *Yeshu* (樂書) chapter of the *Shiji*.

Among these various terms there is often a correlative scale of normative worth. The simplest of such scales compares good exemplary persons with the bad. This is what we have when Xunzi contrasts outstanding persons (*yingjie*) with crooked deviants (*weisuo*), or when Xu Gan compares *exempla horribili* (戒 *jie*) with worthy patterns (*fa*). But more elaborate spectrums can be found in the literature,<sup>512</sup> where types of exemplary persons are placed along a spectrum of moral self-cultivation—a spectrum with the *shengren* (sage) and the *xiaoren* (uncultivated person) at its poles.<sup>513</sup> Along the positive side of this particular spectrum are also what we might describe as proximal sages (such as the *junzi*) and distal sages (such as the *shi*).

As we will discuss in the next chapter, one's placement along this spectrum of exemplars is not a matter of *individual* moral cultivation. Selfhood is composite; it is the able moral educator who truly possesses a greater degree of “self”-cultivation. The sage is one who can transform others; a *junzi* and *xian* are able to do this as well, but to a lesser degree. Persons described as *xiaoren* or *weisuo* are not described as such primarily because they are educators of immorality (though they *are* that to some degree), but because they are unresponsive to the transformative influence of sages and *junzi*. Simply put, the sage is a good teacher, the *xiaoren* a bad student. Hence, one's placement along

<sup>512</sup> One set is employed in the *Analects*, another in the *Zhonglun*, yet another in the *Liji* (see *Jinxin* 2.71).

<sup>513</sup> As Xunzi has someone object at one point, “There are a hundred sages-kings, which one am I supposed to pattern myself after?” (5.10) Some of the more common sages include Tai Hao (who was thought to first render the eight trigrams), Sui Ren (the inventor of fire), Xuan Di (who harmonized the pitch pipes), Cang Jie (who created writing), Kongzi or Confucius, King Wen (who, if nothing else, provided a commentary to the *Yijing*), King Wu (Wen's son), Cheng Tang, Xia or Great Yu (controller of the floods), Yao, Shun of Yu, Yan Hui (Confucius's best student who, minimally, had the heartmind of a sage). As for anti-sages, Zhou (the last emperor of the Shang dynasty) and Xiang (Shun's homicidal step-brother) are two classic exemplars. As an anti-sage, or what is referred to in classical European rhetoric theory as an *exemplum horribilis*, Zhou is not someone who opposes a sage but someone who is a clear warning sign in the landscape of the moral tradition—the kind of person one should strive never to be like. Some less severe cases of the anti-sage would include the ‘Truebody’ of She (*Analects*), King Li and Wu Qi (both of whom were incapable of learning from others), and Wei Sheng (who promised to meet his wife on the banks of the river, and drowned rather than abandon his promise or his ground even though the storm-fed river kept rising).

this spectrum of exemplary person-types and one's degree of normative significance is largely a matter of how one relates to others in terms of self-cultivation.

Wherever persons fall along the spectrum of exemplary types their normative content is irreplaceable and irreducible to other normative terms. The viability of this claim is supported, in part, by the preclusion of foundational normativity within Confucian ethics. Were foundationalism in play exemplary persons would *necessarily* have only derivative content or non-native normativity—a claim we defended in chapter three. Yet by ruling out Confucian foundationalism, as we did above, we not only keep open the possibility that exemplary persons might have native normativity, we also provide one reason Confucian ethics cannot be considered an “exemplar-based moral theory” if that were to mean that exemplary persons were taken to be the foundational norms of the moral system. And if our previous discussion is not enough to support these two claims, we can supply another reason Confucian ethics cannot be said to treat exemplary persons as its foundational norms—one that stems from the fact that the spectrum of exemplary types does not admit of the perfect extremes of saintliness or villainy.

It is a distinctive feature of the Confucian conception of exemplary persons that sages are never perfectly moral or immoral. Every variety of positive<sup>514</sup> exemplary person, for instance, is morally fallible. The *junzi*, for instance, are capable of ‘going too far’ (過 *guo*), or occasionally lacking 仁 *ren*.<sup>515</sup> And Mengzi asserts that what can be said of the *junzi* can also be said of the sage.<sup>516</sup> Mengzi describes the Duke of Zhou as a sage

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<sup>514</sup> That is, exemplary persons on the sagely, rather than the anti-sagely, side of the spectrum.

<sup>515</sup> *Analects* 19.21 and 14.6; cf. *Zhongyong* 4.

<sup>516</sup> This would seem to contradict the picture of the sage that is presented by Kramers, Cua, and Angle (see below).



even though the Duke made at least one grievous error (*guo*) when he gave the territory of Yin to Guan Shu.<sup>517</sup> Since Guan Shu used that powerbase to stage a failed rebellion, we might wonder how the Duke of Zhou could let this scenario develop. Either he empowered Guan Shu knowing the outcome—in which case he must have been insensitive to the suffering this would cause the commoners of Yin, and thus unfeeling (不仁 *bu ren*); or he was ignorant of what would come to pass—in which case he was unwise (不智 *bu zhi*). Yet, on Mengzi’s own account, *zhi* and *ren* are defining characteristics of the sage.<sup>518</sup> When pressed on this matter in a debate with Chen Jia, Mengzi acknowledges the Duke’s mistake: “The Duke of Zhou was the younger brother of Guan Shu. Is it not natural for him to have made such a mistake?”<sup>519</sup>

One might, however, challenge the orthodoxy of attributing moral fallibility to the sage, and cite *Analects* 8.21 as support. This is how Edward Slingerland translates that passage:

The Master said, “I can find no fault with [the legendary sage-king] Yu. He subsisted on meager rations, and yet was lavishly filial in his offerings to the ancestral spirits. His everyday clothes were shabby, but his ceremonial headdress and cap were exceedingly fine. He lived in a mean hovel, expending all of his energies on the construction of drainage ditches and canals. I can find no fault with Yu.”

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<sup>517</sup> Confucius is also often regarded as a sage. Yet in the *Analects* we can find him committing certain errors (see *Analects* 7.31 and 17.4).

<sup>518</sup> 2B9

<sup>519</sup> The *Lushi Chunqiu*, admittedly an eclectic work, continues the theme of the imperfection of the sages: “It is assuredly impossible for things to be perfect (全 *quan*). To use perfection as a standard for promoting men is surely difficult, given the essential nature of things. People disparage Yao for his reputation as an unloving father, Shun for his notoriety as the debaser of his father, Yu for the aim of coveting the throne, Tang and Wu for the allegations of plotting the expulsion and assassination of their lords, and the Five Lord-Protectors for the claim that their goal was to encroach upon and seize the territory of others. If we consider the implications of this, how can anyone be considered perfect?” (19/8.1). In another passage the *Lushi Chunqiu* says, “In terms of hewing what was fitting and appropriate, even Shennong and Huangdi could be faulted, not merely Shun and Tang. Feitu and Yaoniao, prize horses of antiquity, were deficient in some ways. And thus it is that if you use the blackened marking line to select your timber trees, the house will never be completed” (19/1.1).

At the very least Confucius's estimation of Yu, as a man without any faults, suggests that it is *possible* for some sages to be perfect, even if all sages are not entirely faultless. At most this represents a possible difference between the *Mengzi* and *Analects* in how the sage is conceived; yet even this is perhaps more than we can say. After all, just because Mengzi allows some sages to have faults, this does not require him to claim that no sage is faultless—he might be willing to accept the apparent perfection of Yu. Still, this apparent tension between the *Analects* and the *Mengzi* can be resolved with a closer analysis of the passage quoted above. The important line reads 禹，吾無間然矣 *yǔ, wú wú jiàn rán yǐ*. Here, 間 *jiàn* is usually glossed as 間隙 *jiànxi*: a crack, fissure, or fault. Slingerland's translation attributes the 'lack of fault' (無間 *wu jian*) to Yu; yet such a translation would be more compelling if the line were 禹無間也矣 *yu wu jian ye yi*—'Yu was without fault.' Translating it as Slingerland does appears to ignore the pronoun (viz., 吾 *wu*).<sup>520</sup> Once we take the pronoun into our account of *Analects* 8.21 we must conclude that it is Confucius, not Yu, who lacks (無 *wu*) something. This supports Kong Anguo's (孔安國 156-174 BCE) interpretation of this line of the passage. As he comments,

孔子推禹功德之盛。言已不能復閒廁其閒。  
*Kongzi tui Yu gongde zhi sheng. Yan yi bu neng fu jian ce qi jiān.*<sup>521</sup>

[In this passage] Confucius praises the abundance of Yu's great accomplishments. As he [sc. Confucius] put it, he is unable to even have faults of the same caliber as the faults of Yu.

<sup>520</sup> Were this a defensible translation, we could omit the pronoun in *Analects* 7.23 and translate the opening line there (聖人吾不得而見之矣 *shèng rén yú bù dé ér jiàn zhī yǐ*) not as "I have not yet gotten to see a sage", but as "Sages have not yet gotten to see them"—whoever they (之 *zhī*) may be.

<sup>521</sup> 論語集解義疏 pp. 112-113

And this interpretation makes good sense of *Analects* 8.21 once we read 然 *ran* in its original sense of 如之 *ru zhi*: ‘I lack faults *like his*.’ It is not that Yu is without fault, but that his mistakes are of a totally different moral order when compared to the faults of even someone of Confucius’s stature.

In the end, moral perfection—or ‘being without fault’—may count more as a mark against someone than an indication of genuine merit, as Wong Chong suggests.<sup>522</sup> The village worthy, after all, appears perfect insofar as you can find no fault with them—and yet that is the very problem with them! The perfection of such persons is possible only because there are pre-established social expectations and others look for nothing more than how well they satisfy these expectations. Achieving this sort of perfection renders the village worthy morally uncreative—nothing more than the impersonator of worth.

Rather than characterize sages as persons morally perfect or free from error Mengzi claims that they possess an acute responsiveness to their errors.

Moreover, when the *junzi* of the past made mistakes, they would correct it. When the “*junzi*” of today make a mistake, they persist in it. When the *junzi* of antiquity made a mistake it was there to be seen by all the people, like the eclipse of the sun and the moon; and when they made amends the people looked up to them. The “*junzi*” of today not only persists in their mistakes but try to argue that they are not mistakes to begin with.<sup>523</sup>

If we look to the *Analects* we find a similar train of thought, but with a slightly different vocabulary. We are told that “in making mistakes, people fall into groups. If you observe their faults, you can know how far they extend themselves (*ren*).”<sup>524</sup> Instead of dividing people into the two groups of the *junzi* of the past and the “*junzi*” of the present, the

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<sup>522</sup> See *Lunheng* 80.

<sup>523</sup> 2B9; cf. *Analects* 19.21. Given the usually positive sense attributed to “*junzi*” in the Confucian literature, the scare quotes seem justified.

<sup>524</sup> 4.7

*Analects* groups people together either as *junzi* or as *xiaoren*. When they observe their faults, the *junzi* seek to correct themselves; while the *xiaoren* (if they ever realize their mistakes) endeavor to hide their faults from others. In commenting on this difference, Huang Kan (皇侃 488-545 CE) suggests that it is a matter of intention. “When the *junzi* commits a transgression it is because of an error in his behavior, not because he deliberately chose to act that way. Therefore, when he is made aware of his transgression, he corrects it.”<sup>525</sup> When a *xiaoren* commits a transgression, however, he does so consciously and deliberately, and therefore wishes to gloss it over, being unwilling to admit that he has done something wrong.”<sup>526</sup> It would seem that positive exemplary persons—sages, *junzi*, and the rest—might commit errors, but only out of ignorance;<sup>527</sup> as such, they will (despite how strange it may sound) respond positively to criticism from others.<sup>528</sup>

One might suppose that if the sages can make mistakes that there must be a moral standard independent of exemplary persons. How else are we to recognize the errors or imperfections of a sage? The moral errors of one sage can, however, be accounted for with reference to a different sage who lacks these particular errors. Moral fallibilism does not require a foundational norm as we might be able to account for the critical assessment

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<sup>525</sup> See 1.8 and 7.22

<sup>526</sup> 論語義疏 *lunyu yishu*

<sup>527</sup> This much is also supported by the *Mengzi* passage above (2B9) where the Duke of Zhou is thought to have committed his error out of a lack of wisdom.

<sup>528</sup> As Confucius does (*Analects* 7.31). Unfortunately, though not surprisingly, those who will listen kindly to criticisms, let alone own up to their faults, are rare indeed. As Confucius remarks, “My, my! I have yet to meet anyone who, on seeing their own excesses, is ready to accuse themselves” (5.27). Since this sort of responsibility is necessarily linked to the love of learning (好學 *haoxue*), we can name only a handful of persons who possess either trait—namely, Confucius, Yan Hui, Duke Wenzi, and Shun.

of sages from within the moral culture. This is something to which we will turn our attention in the next chapter.<sup>529</sup>

Antonio Cua, Robert Kramers, and Stephen Angle attribute a second type of perfection to Confucian sages,<sup>530</sup> as they conceive of such figures as “saints,” and take the ideal of sagehood to be beyond the scope of human possibility. Angle suggests that the vital function of the Confucian ideal of sagehood is regulative in nature. As he puts it, “taking sagehood as an ideal ... means striving to improve oneself. It means committing oneself to being on the road to sagehood. ... [O]ne will not attain either state, in all likelihood.”<sup>531</sup> He adds,

There is no need to insist that very many people are or can become sages. The only people clearly identified as such are those far in the past, cases in which little is actually known about them and we can almost imagine that their status as ‘sage’ is partly honorific. I think nothing would be lost if a Confucian were to acknowledge the possibility that there never has been a full-on, one-hundred-percent sage.<sup>532</sup>

Angle maintains that the unattainability of this ideal does not vitiate its normative significance. Kramers, in the introduction to his partial translation of the *Kongzi Jiayu*, describes the sage as a person “endowed by Heaven with powers to which ordinary human beings could not attain.”<sup>533</sup> Cua, for his part, claims that the Confucian sage is “divinely inspired and innately wise,” and “a supreme abstract ideal of a perfect moral personality.”<sup>534</sup> As such, the sage is “an imagined vision rather than a possible objective of the moral life.”<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Yet also see our discussion of ethos-based critique in chapter four.

<sup>530</sup> See, also, Csikszentmihalyi 2004.

<sup>531</sup> 2009, 21.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>533</sup> 1950, 5

<sup>534</sup> 1978, 67

<sup>535</sup> Ibid. Part of the problem is that these scholars think of sagehood as an achievement rather than an activity or process (see, for example, Angle 2009, 15, 21, 26). For the rejection of thinking of sagacity as an

Regardless of any possible developments during the Han,<sup>536</sup> at least Mengzi and Xunzi are committed to the non-saintly nature of the sage. This is evident in their claims concerning the continuity between sages and average persons. Mengzi claims that the distant sages, while preeminent in many ways, were still “the same as other men.”<sup>537</sup> We belong to the same category or kind (類 *lei*): we are all persons (人 *ren*) or men (丈夫 *zhangfu*).<sup>538</sup> He emphasizes the commonality between ourselves and the sages to dispel any mystery surrounding the latter. Mengzi does this to encourage his interlocutors to become sages themselves,<sup>539</sup> and to disarm one of the most common excuses for not trying to become a sage.<sup>540</sup> But it is worth mentioning that it is not our biology or gender that establishes our commonality with the sages, nor is it likely that Mengzi is claiming that each of us shares an essence with the sages (which would be the Confucian correlate of Buddha-nature) that need only be uncovered for us to be a sage. The protreptics of Mengzi’s claim comes first—he mentions our commonality with the sages to *encourage*

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achievement, or end-state, see *Liji Biaoji* 18, and *Wuxing Pian* 10; cf. 2, 7, 8.

<sup>536</sup> The saintly conception of the Confucian sage appears to gain support from the manner in which sages are discussed during the Han dynasty—something that is evident in the case of Confucius’s sagehood. Arthur Wright tells us that during the Han “Confucius, the modest teacher of the state of Lu, was dehumanized and transformed into the prophet and patron saint of a united empire of which he had never dreamed.”<sup>536</sup> Kramers describes the transformation of Confucius in more radical terms. On his account, several of the narratives about Confucius that emerge during the Han described him in terms even beyond a saintly sage; he became a superhuman or “divine” personage—a “son of a god, destined to be a ruler for all ages.”<sup>536</sup> Wright and Kramers seem to be drawing upon several specific themes in the Han literature. There are, of course, the strange births attributed to the sages; but if Wang Chong’s discussion of this matter in the *Lunheng* is any indication, while the ascription of strange births to a sage might suggest the significance of the person, these births were not taken to baptize the sage in some sort of divine providence. Kramers is clear that his conclusions are drawn from the discussion of Confucius under the trope of ‘the king without ceremony’ (素王 *suwang*), yet it is doubtful that such a discussion can support his conclusions. Not only is Confucius made to deny the title in the later literature (see Du Yu’s [杜預 222-284 CE] preface to the *Zhozhuan*, and *Kongzi Jiayu* 39), but even when Dong Zhongshu describes Confucius for the first time as a *suwang* it is doubtful that he meant anything more occult than the cultural refinement worthy of a king.

<sup>537</sup> *Mengzi* 4B60.

<sup>538</sup> 4B28 and 3A1. The gender is hard to ignore, especially in the second passage. For a philosopher who can imagine a woman being a sage, we have to turn to Zhuangzi.

<sup>539</sup> “Everyone can become a Yao or a Shun” (6B22; cf. 3A1).

<sup>540</sup> At 4B28 we read, “Shun was a man, I am also a man. Shun made a pattern for the realm that may be transmitted to later generations. Following this, I have no *excuse* to be a common man. This being so, I have cause to be concerned. What am I concerned to be like? Simply to be like Shun.”

his interlocutors. Since his discussion of this commonality is never divorced from this protreptic aim, it is doubtful that he meant it in an absolute sense, or that he was speaking of a category with membership established by a common essence. Our commonality with the sages, rather, consists of our *potential* to become a sage.<sup>541</sup> Yet even when that potential is realized, we will still not share a common essence with the sages; at best, we become *like* them. At all times, this commonality operates by analogy.<sup>542</sup> Xunzi, for his part, thinks that sagehood requires overcoming an initial set of dispositions—which he describes as repugnant (惡 *e*)—and developing, by artifice (偽 *wěi*), a second series of dispositions. Even so, Xunzi accepts the adage that ‘a person on the street can become a Yu.’<sup>543</sup> For Xunzi, the only difference<sup>544</sup> between a common person and the sage is the presence or absence of this second series of dispositions; and since these dispositions are produced by discipline and artifice alone, sagehood is something that every person *might* eventually achieve.<sup>545</sup>

While results are relevant to whether we ascribe some degree of sagely capacity to another person, the early Confucian literature puts more stock in a person’s effort than his or her initial abilities.<sup>546</sup> There is a tendency, even in the pre-Han Confucian literature, to emphasize some aberrant physiological feature in the biographies of former

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<sup>541</sup> In the *Analects* 7.33, Confucius remarks, “How dare I (say that) I am like a sage or consummate person?” In the *Mengzi* a paraphrase of this passage has Confucius remark, “I do not have the *capacity* (能 *neng*) to be a sage.” The shift in the wording is significant. No doubt this capacity, for Mengzi, is informed by his conception of *renxing* (人性)—the set of spontaneously developing moral dispositions (or “sprouts” [端 *duan*]) common to persons. It is also worth noting that a person’s sagely capacity is measured by effort, not natural ability (see below).

<sup>542</sup> *Mengzi* 3A1, 4B28, and *Analects* 7.33. The literature does not speak of *being* a Yao or a Shun, but being *like* them—如 *ru* or 若 *ruo*.

<sup>543</sup> 23.14

<sup>544</sup> 23.7, cf. 23.12

<sup>545</sup> See 23.15; once again, it is a matter of capacity, not essence, that establishes the continuity between the sage and the average person.

<sup>546</sup> In other words, both results and effort are significant.

sages. Yu is said to have looked like a bear. King Wen and Tang are said to be exceedingly tall. Even Confucius's forehead is said to have been graced with a large protrusion.<sup>547</sup> Mengzi downplays not only the significance of these features, but also any other ability the former sages possessed by nature. He maintains that any ability that constitutes an aspect of the sagely capacity is available to anyone if they but put in the effort.

All you have to do is practice (為 *wei*). Here is a man who cannot lift a chicken. He is, indeed, a weak man. Now if he were to lift a ton, then he would indeed be a strong man. In other words, whoever can lift the same weight as Wu Huo is himself as Wu Huo. The trouble with a man is surely not his lack of sufficient strength, but his refusal to practice. One who walks slowly, keeping behind his elders, is considered a well-mannered young brother (弟 *di*). One who walks quickly, overtaking his elders, is considered an ill-mannered younger brother. Walking slowly is surely not beyond the ability (能 *neng*) of any man. It is simply a matter of his refusal to practice. The way of Yao and Shun is simply to be a good son and a good younger brother (孝弟 *xiaodi*).<sup>548</sup>

No doubt much of the value of such effort is not only its potential efficacy, but also its reliability. The strengths that we enjoy without much effort can be a source of weakness since the ease with which we came by them tends to make us lazy in their practice and development. But anyone who has worked to develop a given ability will usually also have the resources to adapt and develop it.

The continuity between sages and average persons also reflects the Confucian commitment to the everydayness of sagacity. Great or extraordinary types of actions do not characterize the Confucian sages; sages are characterized by performing ordinary or

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<sup>547</sup> This bump on his forehead is often used to explain his personal name, 丘 Qui—a word for ‘little mound,’ or ‘hillock.’

<sup>548</sup> *Mengzi* 6B2. Cf. *Analects* 6.12—when Ranyou complains that, while delighting in the way of the Master, he simply lacks the strength (力 *li*) to walk it, Confucius replies that those who lack the strength collapse along the way—“You, on the other hand, have simply drawn an artificial limit.”



everyday actions in extraordinary ways.<sup>549</sup> If the account of the *junzi* in the *Analects* or the biographical sketches of Confucius in the tenth book of the *Analects* are any indication of what we can expect from the sage, sagacity will concern such mundane issues as how one eats and drinks. As the *Zhongyong* puts it

The proper way (*dao*) of exemplary persons (*junzi*) is both broad and hidden. The dullest of ordinary men and women can know something of it, and yet even the sages, in trying to penetrate to its furthest limits, do not know it all. The most unworthy of common men and women are able to travel a distance along it, yet even the sages in trying to penetrate to its furthest limits are not able to travel it all. As grand as the world is, people are still never completely satisfied.

Thus, were exemplary persons to discourse on the profundity of their way, there is nothing in the empire that could take its weight; were they to discourse on its subtlety, there is nothing in the empire that could further refine it. *The Book of Songs* says: “The hawks soar to the limits of the heavens; the fishes plunge to the furthest depths.” This passage gives expression to its height and its depth. The proper way of exemplary persons has at its start the simple lives of ordinary men and women, and at its furthest limits sheds light upon the entire world.<sup>550</sup>

It is broad because it is mundane, hidden because it is contextual and indeterminate. The sage shares this much with average persons: both engage in everyday conduct.<sup>551</sup> As such, it does not take a special social station to become a sage.<sup>552</sup>

A significant implication of this commitment to the continuity between average persons and the greatest exemplary persons is that the latter seem to be functionally reductionistic. If there is no *essential* aspect to the sages that sets them apart, then their sagehood can be nothing more than their dispositions, actions, relations, and contexts—all of which could be attributed to another individual. In other words, sages are nothing more than what they do, or how they relate to others; there is nothing intrinsic to such

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<sup>549</sup> *Zhongyong* 9; cf. Ames 2011

<sup>550</sup> 12, translated by Ames and Hall

<sup>551</sup> For more on this topic see *Zhongyong* 13 and *Analects* 7.30.

<sup>552</sup> Even if sages are often compelled to take on sociopolitical positions of great significance; see chapters six and seven.

persons that makes them a sage.<sup>553</sup> This is perhaps easiest to see in Xunzi's statement on the matter since he attributes sagehood to *nothing more* than acquired relational dispositions. But Mengzi voices a similar conviction when he claims that "If you wear the clothes of Yao, speak the words of Yao, and act as Yao acted, then you will be a Yao for sure. If you wear the clothes of Jie, speak the words of Jie, and act as Jie acted, the you will be a Jie for sure."<sup>554</sup> The person of the sage may have a structure that any number of individuals might inhabit; as such, we might say that the individuality of the sage, or any exemplary person, is fungible.

In the end, attributing sainthood to the Confucian sage—as Kramers, Cua, and Angle all do—is an untenable interpretation of the early Confucian conception. This is yet another reason, in addition to their moral fallibilism, for the impossibility of sages functioning as foundational norms for the Confucians. After all, it is a contradiction to have an imperfect foundational norm: by what more basic standard is a foundational norm to be measured and found wanting? Having displaced the possibility of interpreting Confucian ethics as an exemplar-based moral system in the foundational sense, we can conclude that it is at least *possible*, in Confucian ethics, for exemplary persons to possess native normativity.

Beyond the threat of a foundational interpretation of sagehood perhaps the greatest threat to attributing native normativity to exemplary persons stems from the vital

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<sup>553</sup> Borrowing from Mark Siderits's work on Buddhist ethics (2007), we might describe this theory of sagehood or exemplary personhood as one that, instead of talking about empty persons, speaks about "empty exemplary persons."

<sup>554</sup> In classical Chinese it is possible to take a person's name, especially when they are well-known for some action or trait, and use it a verbal phrase—in a way similar to the use of "Draconian" (Pulleyblank 1995). As such, it is unlikely that Mengzi is suggesting a strict identity between the historical figures and anyone who takes up the relevant aspects—clothes, speech, and conduct. He is more likely saying that anyone who takes up these aspects will perform 'a Yao' or perform 'a Jie'—that is, his or her life will be relevantly similar to the lives of these exemplary persons.

role that exemplification plays in every one of their normative functions within Confucian ethics (which we discussed in the second chapter). Perhaps the most familiar conception of exemplification is where something A exemplifies B, with B being “strictly transcendent” of A in the sense that it really doesn’t matter who or what A is when it comes to the normative content of B. Odysseus might be said to “exemplify” cunning (*metis*) in this way when we take the nature of cunning to exist independent of Odysseus’s conduct—Odysseus, in this case, merely *illustrates* cunning. There are two significant implications of this view of exemplification when applied to persons. First, B becomes a general or abstract norm, such as a virtue trait understood in a general way—孝 *xiao* (filiality) in general, 勇 *yong* (courage) in general. Second, this quality, B, is something that can be divorced from the particular person—hence, a type of action, or a character trait, or some other quality of persons. In fact, the first implication is a prerequisite of the second. Exemplification, so understood, necessarily precludes native normativity since it entails that the normative content of any exemplary person can be fully translated into these abstract and abstractable (general and divorcable) norms.

Such a view of an exemplary person’s normative content seems required for any adequate interpretation of Confucian ethics. On the one hand, there are several cases where persons are attributed quite general, and thus apparently divorcable, normative content—we hear of the *xiao* of Shun, Wei Sheng’s *xin*, and so on. On the other hand, exemplification appears to be part of the practical logic involved in appropriating an exemplary person, and so part of many of the normative functions attributed to exemplary persons in Confucian moral culture. Exemplification, for example, seems implicitly involved whenever one uses an exemplary person as an aspirative object, or to justify

another norm. After all, when we take others to be aspirative objects we do not seek to be like these persons *simpliciter*. We do not wish to be like these other persons in *every* respect—their clothing, stature, dwelling, and so many other aspects are often deemed irrelevant. Yet if we do not emulate the person in their entirety, selectivity is implied. We select out some aspect, general enough (abstractable from the person) and apply it to ourselves, treating *that* discrete aspect or quality as our proper aspirative object. No Hellene aspired to be Odysseus, but *cunning like* Odysseus; no Confucian aspired to be Shun, but *xiao like* Shun. Exemplification is also apparently involved in the justification of a normative claim by appeal to an exemplary person. When we attempt such a justification, even if we are not explicit, it is necessary for there to be a parallel between the exemplary person and our normative claim. Their example must be relevant in some fashion—either they acted in a similar way, or they have the character traits we are praising, and so on. When someone in the Confucian literature uses an exemplary person in a justifying capacity often it is a particular narrative about the exemplary person that is picked out and supplied; it is not just any story that is told—it is a *relevant* story, a story that depicts the needed parallel between that person and the normative claim.

Establishing a relevant parallel, however, is a selective affair. We pick out ‘this’ narrative rather than ‘that’ narrative because ‘this’ narrative focuses our attention on the relevant qualities of the exemplary person’s conduct or character. It is even possible to imagine that justification entails a fundamental appeal to principles—principles that may originate in our initial appeals to exemplary persons, but principles that can ultimately replace the normative content of these persons. For instance, we may start with the claim that ‘Shun did A in situation R,’ and conclude with the normative principle that ‘doing A in situation

R is proper.’ If principles like this are entailed in the establishment of relevant parallels in any justification-by-exemplar, what is to stop us from discarding the quaint narratives of exemplary persons in favor of these more abstract and adaptable principles?

There is, however, an alternative way to account for the “exemplification” involved in the normative functions of exemplary persons. Not only is this alternative account implied in Confucian moral philosophy, it does not preclude—in fact, it entails—the native normativity of exemplary persons. And though we might refer to it as exemplification, it would perhaps be more accurate to call it “significance” or “signification.”

When we utilize an exemplary person as an aspirative object or a basic norm to justify a normative claim, to say that we ‘pick out’ certain features—a character trait, an action, and so on—suggests that we are fundamentally passive when it comes to the normative content of the exemplary person. It is as if we are only active in “recognizing” the relevant content to the person; but that content, whomever it is ascribed to, remains what it is regardless of that act of recognition. Shun will be filial, Odysseus cunning, regardless of our awareness of these features. It also assumes that the normative content of the exemplary person is a *quality*—something we might be able to divorce from the person. Both claims are denied by this alternative conception of exemplification.

Concerning the first point (our passivity with regards to the exemplary person’s normative content), the Confucian literature assumes, instead, that there is a correlative determination of an exemplary person’s normative content. In a sense, the normative content is (within certain limits) *made*, not found. The exemplary person’s content, meaning, or relevance involves what Hall and Ames describe as “conceptual polarity”—

where “concepts which are significantly related are in fact symmetrically related, each requiring the other for adequate articulation.”<sup>555</sup> As social realizations, exemplary persons enjoy conceptual polarity—or “correlativity”—with their society. If exemplary persons are those who initiate and cultivate social integration, one will need to make reference to its exemplary persons in order to make sense of any given society;<sup>556</sup> just as the exemplary persons’ dependence upon their society requires us to make reference to that society in order to make sense of these persons. Martin Luther King, jr. affected his society to a point where one cannot adequately understand the civil rights movement without referring to him. But the significance of Martin Luther King, jr. is also dependent upon the racial oppression of African-Americans as it existed at that time in the United States. One is reminded of the strange irony of South African history, where the significance of people like Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela must be derived, in part, from the Nationalist Party’s program of *apartheid*.

The correlative significance of exemplary persons, however, involves other correlates besides their contemporary society. The significance of exemplary persons is correlative with their tradition (both in the past and in their future), as well as those who appropriate an exemplary person’s pattern. By establishing the cultural practices of the rites associated with the five relationships, and the *Shao* music, Shun constitutes a tradition.<sup>557</sup> But exemplary persons are not only authors of tradition; they are authored by their tradition. They inherit a moral culture—just as Shun inherited previous rites for sacrifice and mourning. An exemplary person’s significance and greatness is also largely depends upon the labors of later generations. In the classical Chinese tradition it was the

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<sup>555</sup> 1987, 17

<sup>556</sup> A culture’s icons are not only indexicals of its values, but key to any interpretation of the culture.

<sup>557</sup> The early Confucian literature talks about this in terms of the *dao* of the Duke of Zhou.

historian and philosopher who co-authored exemplary persons—describing them, recommending them, elevating them.<sup>558</sup> This explains the significance, often acknowledged in the literature, of the court scribes whose task it was to record the words and actions of their rulers: these scribes co-authored their king’s exemplary personhood (regardless of whether it became a positive or negative form of exemplary personhood). This also explains why one cannot deem oneself an exemplary person, but must wait upon others to do so.<sup>559</sup>

Those who apply an exemplary person’s example to their own lives—or those whom we might call an emulator or appropriator—also co-author the exemplary person’s significance. Mengzi illustrates this point in his several comments on two exemplary persons: Bo Yi and Liuxia Hui. According to Mengzi, Bo Yi would not listen to improper sounds, nor listen to improper sights.<sup>560</sup> When it came to the company he kept, he would only befriend the right sort of people.<sup>561</sup> He was averse to the company of his villagers;<sup>562</sup> and if one of his fellow-villagers didn’t have his cap on correctly, Bo Yi “would walk away without even a backward look, as if afraid of being defiled.”<sup>563</sup> He would think of serving only the right sort of prince, but since he would also avoid office in times of disorder—and he was living at the end of the Shang Dynasty under the rule of the debauched King Zhou—Bo Yi would reject even the most polite requests from feudal lords to take office under them. In the end he retired to the North Sea “to wait for the

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<sup>558</sup> A contemporary example can be found in South African history. Mandela’s elevation to an icon of the African Nationalist Congress and the international anti-*apartheid* movement was largely the work of the ANC’s president in exile, Orlando Tambo.

<sup>559</sup> Cua 1978. Confucius never describes himself a sage, but is so described by his students and later authors; there is also merit automatically granted to those whose words are recorded by others rather than themselves (see chapter six).

<sup>560</sup> 5B1

<sup>561</sup> 2A9

<sup>562</sup> VB1

<sup>563</sup> 2A9

choppy waters of the realm to quite down.”<sup>564</sup> The affable Luixia Hui, on the other hand, was the antithesis to Bo Yi. As Mengzi describes him:

Luixia Hui was not ashamed of a prince with a tarnished reputation, neither was he disdainful of a modest post. When in office, he did not conceal his own talent, and always made use of the *dao*. When he was passed over he harbored no grudge, nor was he distressed even in straightened circumstances. When he was with a fellow-villager he simply could not tear himself away. “You are yourself, I am myself. Even if you were to be stark naked by my side, how could you defile me?”<sup>565</sup>

In another passage, Mengzi elaborates on this last characteristic of Luixia Hui: “he was in no hurry to take himself away, and looked perfectly at ease in the other man’s company, and would stay when pressed. He stayed when pressed, simply because it was beneath him to insist on leaving.”<sup>566</sup>

Offering a pragmatic analysis of their significance, Mengzi suggests that the example of Bo Yi will transform a covetous man and a weak man—breaking the former of his covetousness, and giving the latter resolution. In a similar vein, the example of Luixia Hui is said to be capable of making a mean man generous, and a narrow-minded man tolerant.<sup>567</sup> Should we be startled that Mengzi also describes Bo Yi as “too straight-laced” and Luixia Hui as “not dignified enough”—or that Mengzi, even though he refers to both men as sages, claims that “a *junzi* would follow neither extremes”?<sup>568</sup> One can only be startled if one resists the pragmatic analysis of exemplary persons—an analysis that must presuppose that their significance depends, in part, upon the nature of their emulators. Bo Yi will have a positive effect upon weak persons, but a negative effect

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<sup>564</sup> 5B1

<sup>565</sup> 5B1

<sup>566</sup> 2A9

<sup>567</sup> 7B15

<sup>568</sup> 2A9



upon *junzi*; and Bo Yi's significance depends upon the faults or excellences of the people who hear of his life.

Yet emulators affect the significance of exemplary persons in other ways as well. As Xunzi expresses the notion, those who excel at harnessing the rhetorical force of exemplary persons within debates will “modify and change them to suit the occasion, adapt and adjust them to suit the age, sometimes indulgent, sometimes urgent, sometimes expansive, other times restrictive. He will channel them like canal ditches, force them like the press-frames, accommodating them to the circumstances so that his interlocutors will get hold of the idea under discussion.”<sup>569</sup> This is not necessarily playing fast and loose with exemplary persons but is rather a consequence of the fact that the appropriation of exemplary persons is, as Sor-Hoon Tan puts it, interpretive:

What narratives of paradigmatic characters, whether as history or as literature, have to say to us is not some absolute truth, but depends on what we ourselves bring to the conversation. ... A re-telling is not mere repetition. Every encounter with a narrative is an interpretive occasion.<sup>570</sup>

Tan says that the practice of appropriating and emulating exemplary persons “is not a rule-governed activity—its emphasis is not the exercise of reason, but the education of the imagination and emotions.”<sup>571</sup> She elaborates: “To treat paradigmatic characters merely as the basis for some kind of argument—whether deductive, inductive, or analogical—about what we should do in any particular situation will not account for their special importance, and indeed their power, within the Confucian tradition. Rational

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<sup>569</sup> *Xunzi* 5.14

<sup>570</sup> 2005, 416

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, 423

argumentation is secondary to the presentation of paradigmatic characters to move us to emulate them.”<sup>572</sup>

I can agree with Tan that the justificatory function of exemplary persons does not exhaust their potential normative functions within Confucian ethics; she is quite right to insist on the conative function exemplary persons can have in causing us shame, emulation, or even envy. Yet I must object to Tan’s ranking of these two functions, for two reasons. First of all, our pragmatic account of normativity renders the normativity of exemplary persons dependent upon their conative function—their normative force cannot be purely rational but requires a conative dimension very often experienced as the emotion of emulation. Secondly, given the Confucian assumption of the continuity, rather than the division, of heart and mind, it appears untenable to use a distinction between reasoning and emotion or imagination to characterize the Confucian understanding of the function of exemplary persons. These two reasons preclude ranking these two functions of exemplary persons—rational justification and conative aspiration—for the simple reason that one cannot rank what one cannot cleanly distinguish.

Tan characterizes the interpretation of exemplary persons in terms of imagination. “A good interpretation,” she says, “requires us to imaginatively participate” in the experience of exemplary person. “We need to imagine what her emotions and attitudes were on that occasion, what she was responding to, what purpose she had in mind.”<sup>573</sup>

This imaginative exercise underwrites our ability to emulate the conduct of our exemplars

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 418-419

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 419

by conducting ourselves as they would in novel circumstances, as well as our ability to render our heartmind similar to the heartmind of the exemplar.<sup>574</sup>

Yet even if this imaginative exercise is necessary for the practice of emulating a person's actions, thoughts, and feelings, this exercise cannot be divorced from the practice of analogical reasoning—and this is where I differ from Tan. The significance of any imaginative exercise hinges upon its application; the imaginative interpretation of exemplary persons is necessarily linked to the novel situation that prompts the imaginative exercise to begin with. As she says, “what narratives of paradigmatic characters ... have to say to us is not some absolute truth, but depends upon what we ourselves bring to the conversation.” And part of what we bring to the conversation is the urgency of a practical problem or “moral situation” that compels us to emulate an exemplary person. This is really nothing more than the application of Dewey's empirical method to historical research—a specific application of this method discussed by George Herbert Mead in “History and the Experimental Method.”<sup>575</sup> When we appeal to exemplary persons—especially those who are elevated to the status of sages—we are appealing to history. Yet, as Mead puts it, “the significant content which historical research reveals” is not some past person or event implied by some present narrative or ritual institution; rather, it is “a newly discovered present which can only be known and interpreted in the past which it involves.”<sup>576</sup> Imagination, disconnected from the present “moral situation” has vague meaning at best; it is only when the past enables us to resolve a present problem—when exemplary persons are interpreted in such a way as to illuminate the present—that it has any real significance. The past has significance only in

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 419; 420

<sup>575</sup> 1938

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 94

the immediate present; yet that significance will change with the emerging problems of every novel situation. “We speak of the past as final and irrevocable. There is nothing that is less so, if we take it as the pictured extension which each generation has spread behind itself”—a conception of the past we must embrace if we are to think of historical research in light of the empirical method. As the *Analects* puts it, “People are able to extend the way; the way does not extend people” (人能弘道，非道弘人。 *Ren neng hong dao, fei dao hong ren*).<sup>577</sup> In other words, the significance and breadth of the moral culture, including exemplary persons, stems from the utilization of that culture in the present to address particular situations. The significance of the past is neither independent of the present, nor fixed in its content. In short, the application of exemplary persons is an integral aspect of their interpretation.

Despite Tan’s insistence to the contrary, the application of exemplary persons to novel situations commonly, and defensibly, involves analogical reasoning. Analogical reasoning is a species of induction that involves not just a similarity between two terms (simile), but a similarity between the *relationships* between two pairs of terms (analogy, in the strict sense). The following, for instance, is not an argument from analogy, but an argument from simile:

- P1.) Timothy is a cat
  - P2.) Dorothy is similar to Timothy in that she has whiskers, a long tail, and likes cat food.
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- C.) Dorothy is also a cat

In *A System of Logic* John Stuart Mill provides us with the following example of an argument from analogy:

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<sup>577</sup> 15.28

- P1.) Children should obey their parents  
 P2.) This country is like a mother to that colony  

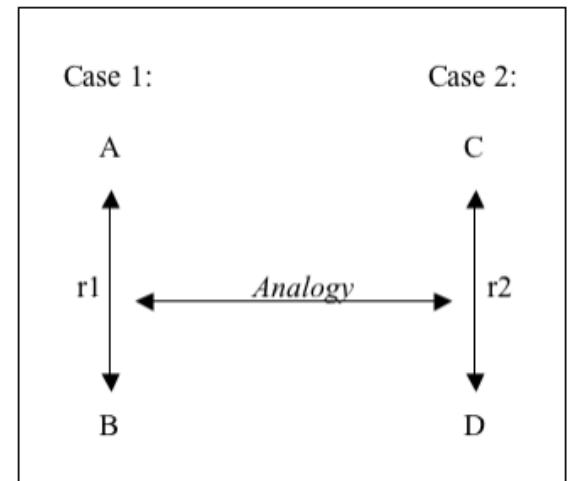

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 C.) That colony should obey this country<sup>578</sup>

Notice that the second premise of this argument is not that colonies are like children, or that ‘this country’ is like a mother, but that mothers and their children share a *relationship* that is similar to the *relationship* between countries and their colonies.<sup>579</sup>

This premise draws upon the idea that ‘this country’ has “given birth” to ‘that colony,’ has “nurtured” its economy and political system, and so forth—all supporting the parallel in the relationships between itself and the colony, and between a mother and her child.

The general structure of any analogy may be schematized in the following way (see figure). In Mill’s argument, the first case (1) involves the relationship (r1)



between a mother (A) and child (B), and the second case (2) involves the relationship (r2) between ‘this country’ (C) and ‘that colony’ (D). The success of any analogy between r1 and r2 relies upon the parallel aspects true of r1 and r2. In this particular argument, something approximating “parenthood” is found in each relationship, and on the strength of that parallel in the relationships (the analogy, in other words), the conclusion is drawn that the obedience children owe their mother ‘that colony’ also owes ‘this country.’

<sup>578</sup> 1904, 364

<sup>579</sup> Mill cautions us that an adequate analogical parallel requires that the two pairs have similar circumstances and consequences. The Mohists voices a similar concern about ‘analogical fit.’ 效者，為之法也。所效者，所以為之法也。故中效，則是也。不中效，則非也。“An analogy is to take something as a pattern. Those things that are taken to form a pattern are the things that are brought into analogy. When they fit the analogy, then the argument is sound. When they do not fit the analogy, then the argument is unsound” (*Mozi* 45.2).

What we described in chapter two as the “probabilistic” and “prototypical”: uses of exemplars persons are really two different types of analogical arguments—an *argument from example* and an *argument from exemplar*. The conclusion of an *argument from example* is a normative claim, and the “example” cited is a person. The person cited is a term (viz., term A of the first case (1), or what we might call the “preceding case”). He or she is said to relate to some action or consequences (term B), and reference to the first case—its relationship (r1) between person and result (A-B)—is drawn upon to make the argument that a person (C), in a parallel relationship to his or her environment, will produce or experience a similar result (D). I might conclude, for example, that when I fly from Tokyo to San Francisco I will sustain injuries similar to my friend’s, whose flight from South Korea crashed at SFO. Here I am using my friend as an example, and generating certain expectations or predictions for actions on my part that involve taking a flight. It is worth pointing out that the argument as a whole is unlikely to be persuasive. This is because all of the parallels in r1 and r2 that one can imagine—both airplanes are modern aircraft, both are manufactured by Boeing, both are or will be flown from East Asia to SFO, and so on—do not seem all that relevant. The strength of any particular analogy does not rest on the *number* of parallels you can discover between the relationships (r1 and r2) internal to the two cases, but the *significance* of the parallels.<sup>580</sup>

The normative significance of the person cited in the first case stems from that person’s connection to some consequence of note—a normative significance that depends upon our investment in the relevance of such consequences. Hence, the normativity of a person who is part of an *argument from example* is “hypothetical” in the Kantian sense of

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<sup>580</sup> There are, of course, many types of “significance”: causal, legal, and ethical, to name a few. Clearly which type of significance is relevant hinges, minimally, upon the nature of one’s conclusion.

the term—it is independent of the particular person. The normative status of my friend in the airplane argument has really nothing to do with who they are, but with their situation and its connection to my interest in avoiding injuries.

The *argument from exemplar* is, however, the argument of greater interest. Not only does it play a role in justificatory discourse, it seems to form the reasoning process involved in the emulation of exemplary persons. In *arguments from exemplar* the normativity of the person is dependent upon their identity; furthermore, unlike with *arguments from example*, the conclusion is not some predicted outcome but an imperative. Using our structural analysis of analogical reasoning we can also point to an interesting distinction between *arguments from example* and *arguments from exemplar*. In the former arguments, the last term (D) is in question. All the aspects to each relationship, the parallel between the relationships, the accuracy of the first case—of all that must be accepted before the last term, a prediction, can be asserted.<sup>581</sup> With an *argument from exemplar*, on the other hand, all terms must be assumed, for the real target of such argument—the conclusion—is that one aspect that is true of the relationship of the first case (r1) should also be true of the relationship of the second case (r2). This was the case with Mill’s analogical argument supplied above—an *argument from exemplar*. This argument assumes the general relationship between mother and child involves nurture from the mother and obedience from the child, and treats that general relationship as normative, exemplary.<sup>582</sup> It also assumes the existence of ‘this country’ and ‘that

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<sup>581</sup> *Arguments from example* are more likely to persuade when only the conclusion—the predicted outcome—is disputed. This is why Aristotle and Anaximenes of Lampsacus, writing on this sort of argument in their respective works on rhetoric, recommend that the example one cites be well-known and accepted (for this reason, historical examples are promising cases to argue from).

<sup>582</sup> Incidentally, since no particular mother is named, we are dealing with a case Aristotle would describe as “parabolic.”

colony,’ and a history of “nurture” in the relationship of ‘this country’ to ‘that colony.’

On the basis of all that the argument suggests that one of the aspects that is true in one the cases (obedience in response to nurture) ought to hold in the other case. Something similar occurs when one appropriates an exemplary person: based on some perceived analogical parallel between yourself and your context and the exemplar person and his or her own context,<sup>583</sup> one concludes that something true of that person in his or her context ought to also apply to you in your situation. This is what we find in the passage from the *Mengzi* where the eponymous character objects to the state of Lu’s proposal to attack the state of Qi.<sup>584</sup> He argues that even if the campaign were a military success it would be a moral failure since to engage in this sort of offensive warfare is to be motivated simply by the acquisition of more land, and seeking territory at the cost of human lives is to bring disaster upon the people. Yet, as Mengzi makes plain, “one who brings disaster upon the people would not have been tolerated in the days of Yao and Shun.” In this passage much of the normative force of Mengzi’s case against the proposed campaign rests upon the status of Yao and Shun—hence, it is an *argument from exemplar*. To make his case he is certainly being imaginative—associating the past with the present; but he is also engaged in analogical reasoning. He is drawing much more than a simile between the ruler of Lu and these sage-kings; he is focusing upon certain aspects of the relationship these sage-kings had to their state and its surrounding territories, and claims that while there is some overlap between the cases of the sage-kings and the case of the ruler of Lu (political authority being perhaps the most obvious), there are other aspects to

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<sup>583</sup> It could be a parallel in situations, in one’s roles, in nationality, in class, and many other aspects. Of course, not every possible parallel is necessarily worth one’s attention.

<sup>584</sup> 6B8



their relationships that should be cultivated on the part of the ruler of Lu (specifically, a certain orientation to the considerations involved in offensive warfare).

Analogical reasoning, in short, appears to be a prevalent aspect of *arguments from example* as well as *arguments from exemplar*. Yet Tan is concerned that interpreting exemplars analogically will force us to forego the dynamism of imagination and instead embrace a rule-following paradigm;<sup>585</sup> a paradigm, incidentally, that would preclude the possibility of native normativity for exemplary persons. While she does not specify what it means for analogical reasoning—or any form of reasoning—to be a “rule-following” process, I suspect the following might capture much of what she has in mind. First, when one engages in reasoning—analogue or otherwise—there is a tendency that your argument will be analyzed from the “logical,” or what Aristotle called the “dialectical,” point of view. In other words, one’s argument will be evaluated in terms of its logical attributes—whether it is well-structured and all the premises are made explicit, and so on. If this is the perspective we take when evaluating analogical reasoning, no analogical argument will pass inspection unless the analogy is made explicit: one must nail down just what aspects of the two relationships, internal to the two cases, are considered parallel. And when one does that, one will necessarily subsume the two cases, with all their uniqueness and particularity, under a general term—or what Aristotle refers to as a “universal.”<sup>586</sup> In addition to having analogical reasoning follow the rules of logical rigor, one might also expect analogical reasoning to follow an interpretive rule—this is the second way in which analogical reasoning might be understood to involve ‘rule-

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<sup>585</sup> Tan 2005, 423.

<sup>586</sup> See, especially, *Posterior Analytics* 1.1: “By universal I mean a statement that something belongs to all or none of something; by particular that it belongs to some or not to some or not to all.” A “universal” is, in other words, a term of grouping, not conceptual abstraction.

following.’ This concerns the fixity of the universal or bridging principle between the two cases. How can we be sure that our analogy is *right*—that our interpretation of the significance of the exemplary person is *right*? Assuming there is a right (single and final) interpretation of the significance of exemplary persons, we would conclude that there is only one proper universal to be applied as the bridging principle—and in this way every future bit of analogical reasoning that appropriates the same exemplary person will be required to apply the same bridging principle. If such rule-following is required of analogical reasoning, the significance of all cases—exemplars, as well as examples—will be reduced to fixed principles. Native normativity will simply be impossible for exemplary persons—and basic normativity will be pushed aside if not entirely taken off the table.

The claim that analogical reasoning must always involve an appeal to an Aristotelian universal is itself the product of a very specific conception of how analogies are established. When discussing case-based arguments—a general category of analogical argumentation under which our *argument from example* and *argument from exemplar* would fall—Aristotle describes them in two ways. He says that they are arguments ‘from particulars to particulars’ (i.e., case to case),<sup>587</sup> yet he also describes them as arguments that move from the particular to the universal, and then apply the universal to a second particular.<sup>588</sup> At stake here is how one goes about establishing an analogy—the necessary steps involved. If one moves from particular to particular without explicating the mediating universal the analogy is really nothing more than the immediate association of

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<sup>587</sup> *Rhetoric*, book 1.

<sup>588</sup> *Rhetoric*, book 2; *Prior Analytics* 2.24

two cases.<sup>589</sup> Yet one might also draw an analogy in an inductive-deductive fashion, first generating a universal on the basis of one or many cases, and then applying that universal to the present case. For Aristotle, these two descriptions of analogical reasoning stem from two different perspectives. The inductive-deductive model is employed when his discussion aims at satisfying the demands of dialectical or logical rigor; yet when he is concerned with matters of rhetoric, or persuasion, it is the association model he uses.<sup>590</sup> That the association model is a live option—and might even be said to be a better approximation for how we actually think when we think analogically—allows us to maintain that exemplars, when appropriated in a bit of analogical reasoning, need not be reduced to the content of the universal. One’s commitment to the native normativity of exemplary persons can thus be preserved.

The idea that analogies require fixed universals if they are to count as rational arguments seems to be simply a farcical conception of the process. Similar to the way a preceding judiciary case takes on new meaning when it is appropriated in case-law reasoning,<sup>591</sup> the significance of exemplary persons (including the optional universal that bridges the case of the exemplar and the emulator’s case) may be reshaped every time an emulator, by a bit of analogical reasoning, applies the exemplary person’s example to a

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<sup>589</sup> For the linguistic form of this process of immediate association in the Chinese intellectual traditions, see Ames 2008.

<sup>590</sup> Jonardon Ganeri’s account of case-based arguments in classical Indian logic suggests that it underwent a transformation in similar terms. Previous to the commentarial work of Vatsyayana, arguments were evaluated not in terms of formal criteria but informal, pragmatic criteria “according to which arguments have to be evaluated as good or bad with regard to their contribution towards the goals of the dialogue within which they are embedded” (35)—a perspective, we might add, that is quite similar to the one Aristotle embraces when discussing arguments from the perspective of rhetoric. After Vatsyayana, however, formal properties of sound inference with a rule-based account of formal logical reasoning inform the evaluation of arguments, and the role of concrete examples—even the *sapaksha* and *vipaksha*—were reduced to argumentative appendices. Arguments are thus evaluated in terms of “dialectical” considerations. The difference, here, is that Aristotle retains his access to both perspectives, while in Indian logic—if Ganeri is right—one perspective was overshadowed by the other.

<sup>591</sup> See Levi 1949.

course of conduct or normative claim. Once the significance of exemplary persons is understood to be correlative in nature it becomes obvious that an exemplary person's normative content can remain fluid.<sup>592</sup> It is a property that cannot be attributed to an individual in isolation; it is, rather, a relational property, only true between exemplary persons and their emulators, between exemplary persons and their tradition, and between exemplary persons and their society. Hence, one cannot hope to explain, once and for all, why a person is normative—as if it were a product of having certain traits of character, or having behaved in a certain fashion. One can only hope to explain why a person is normative *for* a tradition, a society, or emulator. And what makes them normative at one time, or for one society, tradition, or person is not necessarily what will make them normative at another time or for another society, tradition, or person.

As to the idea that we must be able to divorce the normative content from exemplary persons when we utilize them—or the second aspect to the initial conception of exemplification—it would seem that the context-dependency of value in Confucian ethics precludes this possibility. It is true that the Confucian literature often associates exemplary persons with general normative terms like filiality (*xiao*), doing one's utmost (*zhong*), making good on one's word (*xin*), and similar normative terms. Exemplary persons are even associated with what we might describe as meta-normative terms, such as consummating relations (*ren*) and attempting optimal appropriateness (*yi*). It is not that the Confucian tradition avoids using general normative terms or thinking about norms in abstract ways; yet Confucian moral contextualism renders the value of these norms, when discussed at an abstract level, indeterminate. Not only is an abstract conception of *xin* capable of producing what is inappropriate (*bu yi*), *xin* is also something that may be

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<sup>592</sup> Such a view is expressed in the Confucian literature. See, for example, *Fayan* 9.8 and *Zhongyong* 13.

enacted by different people in contrary ways. The value of meta-norms, such as *ren* and *yi*, also await the situation, remaining empty or morally indeterminate when considered independent of a specific context. Take norms out of their context and they lose their normative content (and tend to lose their normative force as well). And, as the story of the widow and the man of Lu illustrates, the persons involved in any bit of conduct are an essential aspect of the context. In that particular narrative, for example, the permissibility of one's proximity to a member of the opposite sex hinges upon the reputation (名 *ming*) of the two men, Liuxia Hui and the man of Lu. If one's reputation can inform the normative content of one's actions in this way it must be that while agents author actions, actions also author agents. Every action is peculiar to the person, non-translatable into terms that are neutral on matters of context (especially since that context includes the persons involved). Hence, what a person "exemplifies" cannot be distinguished from who or what they are—action and agent are mutually entailing. Exemplars, if they "exemplify" *yi* or *xiao* or *ren*, do so in ways peculiar to themselves. Shun does not exemplify *xiao*; he exemplifies Shun-*xiao*—a form of filiality peculiar to Shun. This is why the normative content of an exemplary person cannot be subsumed by what they exemplify—the person and "what" they exemplify simply cannot be divorced.

But reducing an exemplary person's normative content to general terms is not only impossible; it is also inadvisable. While one may talk about the Confucian normative terms in abstraction and use them as analytic tools in this way, their utility in fostering moral insight is rather limited by such abstractness. If the utility of the terms of one's moral theory is measured by their ability to foster creative and sensitive responses to moral situations, then exemplary persons can often prove to be more useful than

principles. While there is merit to deploying principles in certain circumstances (when members of different moral sub-cultures engage in a moral discussion where nothing more than a basic agreement is necessary, for instance), sometimes meditating upon norms as complex as particular exemplary persons in their specific contexts can be a more adaptive and fruitful resource for moral insight. This is one way to explain why the Confucian literature persists in associating normative terms with exemplary persons-in-context.<sup>593</sup>

We have shown why the normative content of Confucian exemplary persons cannot be divorced from the specificity of the person involved, and why they cannot be said to merely “exemplify” in the initial conception of the term. Yet one may object that this alternative picture of exemplification, or “signification” as we might call it, cannot make sense of our appropriation of exemplary persons for the sake of justification or as aspirative objects. If their normative content is always particular, how can exemplary persons possibly be relevant to our own lives? Are we not always forced to generalize when we establish a parallel? As we have seen, how we answer this question hinges upon our understanding of analogical reasoning—specifically, whether the mediation of a principle, generalization, or Aristotelian universal is always necessary in the formation of an analogical argument. Yet we have shown that a universal is not always involved in analogical reasoning.

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<sup>593</sup> See, for example, *Xunzi* 5.10 and *Lunheng* 8.

PART III.  
THE CONFUCIAN SAGE

## CHAPTER 6. THE COMMUNITY OF THE SAGE

We have discussed several general features to the Confucian conception of exemplary persons, and offered a defense of their basic and native normativity. We will now turn our attention to the positive extreme along the spectrum of the Confucian types of exemplary persons: viz., the sage (聖人 *shèngrén*).<sup>594</sup> This new focus will enable us to apply our previous discussion of exemplary persons to a particular type of exemplary person; but discussing the notion of the sage, as an extreme type, will also enable us to clarify a response to two of the puzzles introduced in the first chapter: (a) how we might go about assessing would-be exemplary persons, and (b) the problematic aspects to the invisibility of the sage. We will address the first puzzle in this chapter, and the second in the following chapter.

聖 *shèng* may *denote* an individual (i.e., “sage”) but it *designates* a community. Hence “sagehood”—that which *shèng* designates—is not an attribute true of an individual, but is rather a communal process. This claim can be substantiated in at least three ways. First of all, the early literature claims that the title of *shèng* is never properly self-ascribed but must be bestowed upon an individual by others. Second, the general terms used in the early Confucian literature to describe the various sages—viz., ‘achieving propriety in one’s relationships’ (禮 *lǐ*), ‘wisdom’ (知 *zhī*), ‘consummateness’ or ‘extending oneself’ (仁 *rén*), and ‘keeping oneself unsullied’ (潔 *jié*)—are relational in

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<sup>594</sup> My claims about the Confucian conception of sagehood either draw upon the passages in the early literature that mention 聖 *shèng*, or the biographies of those described as sages by “Confucian” authors. Drawing upon the *Analects* and *Mengzi* the latter set would included the rulers Huang Di 黃帝, Yao 堯, Shun of Yu 舜, Yu 禹 or Lord Xia (夏后 *Xia hou*), Tang 湯 or Cheng Tang 成湯, King Wen 王文, King Wu 王武, Duke of Zhou 周公, as well as the sages who did not rule—Yi Yin 伊尹, Bo Yi 伯夷, Liuxia Hui 柳下惠, and Kongzi 孔子.



focus and participatory in nature.<sup>595</sup> Sagely wisdom, for example, concerns one's relationships with others (thus it is 'relational in focus'), and is a wisdom that requires the active participation and contribution from others (rendering it 'participatory in nature'). This is true also of the other descriptors, rendering sagehood a process of integrating and cultivating the social relations that constitute and situate the selfhood of the sage. Third, while these common descriptors of the sages (role-specific propriety, wisdom, extension of self, and integrity) are realized in unique ways by each sage, these descriptors have at least one thing in common: they are most reliably achieved by individuals who think of themselves *as* their respective communities. Efficacy, in these four processes, presupposes a socially composite sense of self.

### 6.1 *The Title of "Sage"*

The early literature presents us with what appears to be a complex, if not paradoxical, account of the relationship between those who are referred to as sages and given the title "sage." If the examples of Confucius and Mengzi are any indication, even

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<sup>595</sup> The 'extension' referred to here is social in effect. Not only does the etymology of 仁 *rén* connote something social but the term is invariably associated in the early literature with particular ways of relating to others; in the *Analects*, Confucius even describes *rén* on one occasion as 愛人 *ài rén*, 'caring for others' (12.22). Its social effects are achieved through a process of extending one's *self*. "It is," Confucius says, "by disciplining oneself (克己 *kè jǐ*) and returning to achieving propriety in one's relationships (禮 *lǐ*) that one practices *ren*' (12.1). In fact, it is only by disciplining oneself that one can truly care for others—social extension must be personal. *Xunzi* 29.7 illustrates this point vividly (cf. *Zhongyong* 25). In this passage Confucius asks three of his students what *rén* might mean, and receives three different responses. The silver and bronze medals, so to speak, go to those who describe *rén* as either 'causing others to care for you' (使人愛己 *shǐ rén ài jǐ*), or 'caring for others' (愛人 *ài rén*). The best response comes from Yan Hui who describes *rén* as 'caring for oneself' (自愛 *zì ài*). *Xunzi* is not endorsing egoism but is insisting that one cannot really care for others when they are *other*; others must instead become part of oneself, part of one's own personal concerns and identity. It is by re-composing one's self that one achieves genuine social extension. This is what sets the normative sense of extending oneself apart from what we might attribute to a bully. Bullies can make themselves felt by an extended range of persons, but bullies—I think definitionally—refuse to expand their selves. While translating *rén* as 'extending oneself' risks making the normative aspect of *rén* invisible, the normative aspect should be understood as implied. Second, extending oneself captures only one aspect of the notion of *rén* in early Confucian philosophy; we will discuss other aspects as we proceed.

the best exemplars apparently ought to avoid accepting the title.<sup>596</sup> Does this mean others are wrong to call Confucius or Mengzi a sage—is the tradition wrong to describe any person as a sage? Furthermore, if even Confucius and Mengzi reject the title, must we not conclude that only those who are somehow greater than Confucius and Mengzi warrant the title? If so, we were wrong to insist on the accessibility of sagehood. Fortunately, there is a way to answer these two questions without precluding the applicability of the title of sage to anyone, or the accessibility of the ideal of sagehood.

Answering the first question comes down to being clear about what Confucius and Mengzi are avoiding. An examination of the relevant passages reveals that they say nothing that would actually preclude having the title attributed to them. In one passage in the *Analects* Confucius asks, “How dare I describe myself as sagely or extensive (聖與仁 *shèng yú rén*)?” He continues: “What can be said of me is simply that I continue my studies without respite and instruct others without growing weary.”<sup>597</sup> His student, Zihua, responds—“it is precisely this commitment that we students are unable to learn.” Commenting on this passage Mengzi takes Confucius’s commitment to teaching and learning as *evidence* of his sageliness. In his own depiction of this conversation Mengzi has Zigong, instead of Zihua, respond to Confucius’s remark. “Not to tire of leaning,” Zigong says, “is wisdom; not to weary of teaching is to extend yourself (仁 *rén*). You must be a sage to be both wise and extensive.”<sup>598</sup> In another passage in the *Analects* we find Zigong in conversation with a Grand Minister; the latter remarks, “Your master is a sage, is he not? Then how is it he is skilled in so many things?”<sup>599</sup> The implication, here,

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<sup>596</sup> For Confucius’s example see *Analects* 7.1, 7.34, 9.6, and *Mengzi* 2A2; for Mengzi, see *Mengzi* 2A2

<sup>597</sup> 7.34

<sup>598</sup> 2A2

<sup>599</sup> 9.6

is that the Grand Minister assumes that it is impossible for someone from the lower social classes to become a sage when they are distracted by material needs and the diverse occupations forced upon the poor by such needs. When he hears about this conversation Confucius seems to agree with the minister's assumption—"The Grand Minister certainly knows me! We were poor when I was young, so I learned many a menial skill. Does a *jūnzǐ* have these skills? I think not."<sup>600</sup> It is, however, a bit unclear how sincere Confucius is in this remark. He thinks of Yan Hui as his best student and well on his way to becoming a sage, and yet Yan Hui was extremely impoverished; and then there is the tradition of Shun of Yu who, presumably because of economic necessity, was employed at different times as a fisherman, potter, and farmer—and yet conducted himself as a sage in every one of these contexts. Poverty and a diversity of occupations are clearly not absolute barriers to sagehood. So what is Confucius up to? Perhaps he is returning the Grand Minister's veiled insult—if the Grand Minister problematizes Confucius's sagehood with a comment upon the latter's previous poverty, Confucius problematizes the Grand Minister's noble class by distinguishing between the descriptive sense of *jūnzǐ* as "nobleman" and the normative sense of *jūnzǐ* as "exemplary person." His response then becomes: "Does a *nobleman* have these skills? I think not." Regardless of whether this is the best way to interpret this passage, its incongruity with the cases of Yan Hui and Shun render its significance less than obvious; it is unwise, therefore, to use this passage to support the claim that Confucius would deny his own sagehood. Finally, Confucius describes himself at *Analects* 7.1 as someone who does not initiate (作 *zuò*) but merely loves and follows the ancients. The obvious implication—given the reputation the ancient

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

sages had as initiators—is that he would not describe himself as a sage. Yet we have already discussed the “creativity” (*zuò*) of the sages and seen that it is much closer to what Confucius describes himself as doing than some sort of radical originality.<sup>601</sup>

Nothing Confucius or Mengzi says prevents the attribution of the title to themselves *by others*; they are, however, unwilling to ascribe the title *to themselves*. As Confucius explicitly puts it, “How dare *I describe myself* as sagely and extensive?” (若聖與仁則吾豈敢 *ruò shèng yú rén zé wú qǐ gǎn*).<sup>602</sup> Presumably some form of humility motivates them in this, but we can also explain their conduct with reference to the pragmatic significance of self-ascribing the title. First of all, nothing is gained by describing oneself as a sage. The normative force assigned to the traditional sages is obviously not supplied by the title itself but by how others—and the tradition—view these persons. It is much like the authority of Confucius himself: the normative significance of his utterances stem, in part, from the fact that he did not record them himself, but were instead recorded by his students and philosophical descendents. His authority is, in this fashion, authored and authorized by others. Likewise, claiming to be a sage is not nearly as persuasive or as significant as a tradition’s bestowal of that title. Secondly, much is actually lost when one dares to describe oneself as a sage. For instance, the *Shangshu* suggests that rulers often describe themselves as sages only because their ministers are sycophants: “when the ministers flatter (諛 *yú*), the ruler will consider himself a sage (自聖 *zìshèng*).” Here, the self-ascription of the title is explicit in the language. Such flattery is destructive to the flattered ruler and to the ruler-minister

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<sup>601</sup> See chapter two for this discussion.

<sup>602</sup> Cf. *Shangshu* 4.28 where delusional rulers are said to ‘sage themselves’ or ‘refer to themselves as sages’ (自聖 *zìshèng*). Self-ascription is the heart of the problem.

relationships. It blinds the ruler to their own faults and undermines the very practice used to bring a ruler's faults to their attention: remonstrance. Regardless of the cause, when persons describe themselves as sages they implicitly embrace an "achievement" conception of sagehood rather than a "process" conception of sagehood.<sup>603</sup> Thinking of sagehood in this fashion prevents any further moral growth and renders a love of learning (好學 *hàoxué*) unnecessary and unsustainable. If one has accomplished sagehood, one has nothing left to learn and no room for further moral growth. This appears to be the reason Confucius, in each of the three immediately relevant passages in the *Analects*, dismisses the title only to insist on what sets him apart from others—viz., his love of learning. It is his love of learning that is put at risk whenever he is given an opportunity to describe himself as a sage since doing so, especially if sagehood is understood as an end-state of achievement rather than a process, he would be in danger of thinking of himself as fully accomplished and without anything left to learn. Yet, in addition to the loss of one's self-awareness as well as of the practice of remonstrance and of one's love of learning, to describe oneself as a sage also puts one's social influence (or 德 *dé*) at risk. In the *Dayu* chapter of the *Shangshu* sage Yu describes the villainy of Miao. Among his many faults Yu includes his "self-aggrandizement" (自賢 *zìxián*)—or, as James Legge translates the expression, "he thinks that all ability and virtue are with himself."<sup>604</sup> Miao thinks of his greatness (and here we could be talking about 自賢 *zìxián* as much as the parallel expression of 自聖 *zìshèng* found in another passage in the *Shangshu*) not only as an accomplishment, but as an individual accomplishment—as a fixed quality true

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<sup>603</sup> See Ryle 1949, 149-153 and Hall and Ames 1998, 229

<sup>604</sup> 1971, 24.

of himself in isolation. Because of this particular conception of greatness, Miao is described as spiteful and insolent towards others, effectively undermining the good institutions of his community as well as his social influence. By keeping superior persons in obscurity and employing only mean persons it is said that the common people rejected him and refused to protect him from the forthcoming punitive campaign. When, on the other hand, the title of “sage” is not self-ascribed but is attributed by others a person’s authority is sustained and these various risks are not taken. Thus, Confucius and Mengzi certainly have good reasons for not describing themselves as sages; yet these reasons do not require that they prevent others from describing them in this way.

Whenever someone describes another person as a sage, the description is as much about *that* person’s relationship with the so-called sage as it is about the person described as a sage. It would appear that sagehood is communal or relational in nature: something that can only be said about those whom we consider to be our teachers or those whom we most wish to emulate (which is yet another reason one ought not assign the title to oneself). In the literature, calling someone a sage expresses something about one’s moral goals. It is quite different from simply acknowledging the moral worth of someone for it necessarily expresses one’s desire to be more like that person. This is evident in the way Mengzi speaks about Confucius; in the way Confucius speaks about the Duke of Zhou, and the Duke of Zhou—in turn—speaks about King Wen; or in the way Yan Hui and Yi Yin speak about Shun. It is rare to find a speaker refer to someone as a “sage” without also finding them also mention, at least eventually, their desire to be more like that person, just as it is rare for a person’s highest exemplar not to be referred to as a “sage.”

The social significance of bestowing the title on others brings us back to the second question: whether sagehood is an unreal ideal because even the likes of Confucius and Mengzi will not accept the title of “sage.” As we have seen, these two are not denying that they are sages; they are simply unwilling to describe themselves as such. Hence, they are not saying that someone must be better than they are to warrant the title. Besides, leaving the question open as to whether they *are* sages Confucius and Mengzi do not hesitate to describe other persons as sages. Sagehood is not as fantastical as their avoidance of the title at first suggests.

## 6.2 *The Predominant Descriptors of the Sage*

In addition to the relational significance of the title, the terms used to describe and designate the traditional sages are themselves terms that refer to communal processes. The four most common descriptors of the sages in the *Analects* and *Mengzi* are ‘realizing propriety in one’s role-specific relationships’ (*lǐ*), ‘wisdom’ (*zhī*), ‘extending oneself’ (*rén*), and ‘integrity’ or ‘keeping oneself unsullied’ (*jié*). Mengzi treats ‘extending oneself’ and ‘wisdom’ almost as sufficient conditions for sagehood,<sup>605</sup> and the discussion of the Duke of Zhou in *Mengzi* 2B9 suggests that these two might well be necessary conditions for sagehood. In another passage Mengzi picks out 潔 *jié* as the common feature to all sages—“The conduct of the sages is not always the same. Some live in retirement, others enter the world; some withdraw, others stay on; but it all comes to keeping their integrity intact.”<sup>606</sup> Turning to the *Analects* we find Confucius suggesting that all four are all somehow necessary.

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<sup>605</sup> 2A2

<sup>606</sup> 5A9

The Master said, “Persons may be sufficiently wise (知 *zhī*) for a task, yet if they are unable to sustain its implementation by their extension of self (仁 *rén*), even if they at first succeed, they will in the end surely fail. Persons may be sufficiently wise for a task, and able to sustain its implementation by their extension of self, yet if they lack integrity (莊 *zhuāng*)<sup>607</sup> in their dealings with others, the common people will not respect them. Persons may be sufficiently wise for a task, able to sustain its implementation by their extension of self, and have integrity in their dealings with others, yet if they fail to inspire the common people with their example of proper custom (禮 *lǐ*), they are still not truly adept (善 *shàn*).”<sup>608</sup>

Following his treatment of these four descriptors it would seem that each is necessary for sagehood, but none of them is alone sufficient.<sup>609</sup>

While these four are clearly relevant to the description and designation of sages, it is important to realize that they are not “attributes” of the sage, and that they do not come in degrees; they are, instead, merely descriptors of the sages. While they are quite generic normative terms, whenever they are realized by a sage they are realized in a way that is particular and unique. One can, for example, practice *rén* in very different ways.

“Viscount Wei left him, Viscount Ji was made his slave, Bi Gan remonstrated and was put to death. Confucius said, ‘Even at the close of the Shang Dynasty there were three consummate persons to be found in it (殷有三仁焉 *yīn yǒu sān rén yān*).’”<sup>610</sup> These persons are deemed exemplary for what they did, and yet every one of them conducted

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<sup>607</sup> Glossed as *jié*

<sup>608</sup> 15.33

<sup>609</sup> As we will see when we discuss the four descriptors in more detail, they appear to be mutually supportive and thus, from the perspective of practice, to be mutually entailing. There is reason for thinking, however, that seeking to fit them into a schema of necessary and sufficient conditions of sagehood is a mistake. It is quite possible for a sage to lack some of them or to have realized them in a deficiently appropriate manner. Bo Yi and Liuxia Hui present us with extreme cases. If wisdom involves a willingness to take up an acceptable official position, we might say that Bo Yi’s integrity cost him his wisdom, while Liuxia Hui’s willingness to associate with just about anyone may have afforded him a measure of wisdom, but cost him his integrity. While relational propriety, wisdom, extension of self, and integrity may not be necessary conditions for sagehood, still the best sages will, according to Mengzi, realize all of them in an optimally appropriate fashion and with a proper measure or balance. Hence, Mengzi describes Confucius as the best of sages and as the timely sage—where timeliness is understood in part as borrowing the good aspects of Bo Yi and Liuxia Hui, while discarding their extremism. The same could be said of Shun of Yu, as we will see below, since he was able to preserve all four without sacrificing one attribute for another.

<sup>610</sup> *Analects* 18.1



themselves in a unique way.<sup>611</sup> Each sage is different, and the wisdom or integrity of one sage is inseparable from his or her person and situation.<sup>612</sup> As such, the wisdom of Shun or Confucius or any of the other sages is wedded to their person; and since the particular realization cannot be divorced—in content or force—from their person, we cannot refer to them as “attributes” or “qualities” or “traits.” Because the realization is always unique, it does not fall along a generic scale or come in “degrees” of perfection or imperfection. There are occasions in the literature when one person’s wisdom is compared to the wisdom of another. This affords a correlative evaluation of their wisdoms. But there remains no fixed or objective scale of wisdom for determining absolute degrees of realization.<sup>613</sup>

In addition to these four descriptors of the sage there is a tendency in the early literature, as well as the contemporary scholarship, to associate sagehood with kingship, or at least with some official position in government. This raises the issue of whether an official position is necessary for sagehood, and if an official position is a reliable descriptor of the sages. Several sages, after all, held the position of ruler (viz., Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, and King Wu), while others rose to the position of a high-ranking minister (viz., Yi Yin and Bo Yi). 聖 *Shèng* is also present in the vocabulary that is used to

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<sup>611</sup> A similar point may be taken from *Analects* 15.7 if we can assume that both Shiyu and Qu Bo are exemplars of comparable merit.

<sup>612</sup> When discussing the moral contextualism of Confucian ethics in the last chapter we mentioned that the potential contradiction of allowing divergent behavior to equally qualify as exemplary could be resolved by attending to *who* each person was. Viscount Wei was the older son of the previous emperor; thus, his flight can be seen to be appropriate insofar as it allowed him to continue the dynastic line and provide sacrificial offerings to its ancestors. Viscount Ji and Bi Gan were both uncles to Zhou, and both attempted to correct their nephew through remonstrance. In the end, Viscount Ji protected his potential of exercising a positive political influence in the future by feigning madness, thus securing his enslavement in lieu of his execution. But Bi Gan, having no such potential, felt at liberty to follow the course of remonstrance to its conclusion. Thus the particulars of a person—his or her roles, relationships, and reputation—are morally salient aspects of the context, and must be accounted for as one attempts to realize what is optimally appropriate.

<sup>613</sup> This is a significantly different from Aristotle’s virtue ethics—the mean that Aristotle says is relative to us is still calibrated to the objective scale of the practical wisdom of the *phronimoi*.

describe excellent rulers. Thus we hear Mengzi speak of the dearth of worthy and sagely rulers (賢聖之君 *xián shèng zhī jūn*) in the era between Tang and King Wu. Yao, Shun, and Yu are often referred to as sage-kings (聖王 *shèngwáng*) and are referred to as the first kings (先王 *xiān wáng*) as much as they are referred to as sages (聖人 *shèngrén*). The term “sage” is also associated with institutions; we hear of “the sage’s government” (聖人之政 *shèngrén zhī zhèng*) and of “the sage’s administrative methods” (聖人之道 *shèngrén zhī dào*). The phrase “sagely within and kingly without” (內聖外王 *nèi shèng wài wáng*), despite the fact that it first appears in the *Zhuangzi*, resonates quite well with the early ideal in the Confucian texts, and is appropriated by later Confucians.<sup>614</sup>

While there is a tendency for sages to find themselves saddled with an official position, an official position is not a necessary condition for sagehood. To begin with the passive construction “find themselves saddled with an official position” seems most apt: the sages, according to the early literature, do not seek the role of king. In fact, more often than not, a sage is elevated to the position of ruler only after they attempt to decline the post.<sup>615</sup> Furthermore, there are several matters of circumstance—which Mengzi delineates—that must be satisfied before a sage can come to power. First of all, it often requires the recommendation (薦 *jiàn*) of the sitting ruler.<sup>616</sup> This, no doubt, hinges upon the quality of the ruler. But the ruler cannot exactly “give” someone the realm, Mengzi says; the person recommended by the ruler must meet with the approval of *tian*. This requires that the candidate’s performance of the sacrifices meets with the approval of the

<sup>614</sup> See the *Tianxia* chapter of the *Zhuangzi* (cf. Tan 2005, 125-127).

<sup>615</sup> One is reminded, here, of something Douglas Adams said: ‘anyone wishing to be made president should, on no account, be allowed to do the job.’ Likewise, the Confucians claim that the best rulers are also those who are reluctant to rule.

<sup>616</sup> 5A5

gods—something that can be seen in natural events. But it also requires that the candidate meet with the approval of the people. Of the two requirements Mengzi emphasizes the latter; quoting the *Shangshu* he says, ‘*tian* sees with the eyes of the people, hears with the ears of the people.’ It is, on the other hand, possible for a sage to rule the empire without the recommendation of the sitting ruler, but this requires that the latter be depraved like Jie or Zhou—the last rulers of the Xia and Shang dynasties, respectively, who were overthrown because of their abuse and neglect of the people. Even then, the sage must have the support of the people: it was, after all, their popular support that enabled Cheng Tang to overthrow Jie and King Wu to overthrow Zhou. Still the common people may be rather slow to turn their backs on their ruler, no matter how depraved they might be. The tradition of the dynasty, including its good policies and able ministers, can often sustain the rulership of even the most depraved persons for quite some time. With so many material preconditions—conditions that Mengzi describes as “fate” or “circumstance”—it is not surprising that several sages never ruled. Yi, Yi Yin, Bo Yi, Liuxia Hui, Confucius, and “King” Wen are all examples of traditional sages who did not rule the empire.

Yet an official position of *any* rank does not even seem necessary for sagehood.

As Confucius remarked when asked why he didn’t presently have an official position,

“The *Shangshu* says, ‘It is all in filial conduct! Just being filial to your parents and befriending your brothers is carrying out the work of government.’ In doing this I am employed in governing. Why must I be ‘employed in governing’?”<sup>617</sup>

There is a seamless continuity between family and state, or what we might be inclined to call “morality” and “politics.” The sage as a king or minister will not be radically different from the sage as father, son, or friend. Certainly these are different roles and will call for role-specific differences, but there remains a greater continuity than

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<sup>617</sup> *Analects* 2.21

these role-specific differences might suggest.<sup>618</sup> It was Shun's abilities as a son and community member, after all, that recommended him to Yao as a tenable replacement. Thus rule or an official post is not a necessary condition of sagehood; yet this should not lead us to conclude that an appeal to the rulership of the sages—that is, to how the sages conducted themselves while in office—is irrelevant to our discussion of sagehood. Though Confucius distinguished between “noblemen” (*jūnzǐ* in its descriptive sense) and “exemplary persons” (*jūnzǐ* in one of its normative senses), it is unlikely that his intention was to secure the normativity of persons independently of their socio-political status. Given the significance attached to office by the early Confucians, and by their insistence that one *must* take office when it is viable to do so, we must conclude that the purpose of Confucius's distinction between *jūnzǐ* in its socio-political descriptive sense and *jūnzǐ* in one of its normative senses was to champion a way of securing office through self-cultivation rather than birth. Likewise, while an official position is not a necessary condition for sagehood, it remains a worthy aspiration for any sage and a natural extension of what they are already doing as teachers and community members. It is interesting to note that “office” can be awarded post-mortem. Such was the case with Confucius whose socio-political significance grew tremendously after he died.

### 6.3 *The Wisdom (知 Zhī) of the Sage*

The wisdom that characterizes the sage is communal in origin, participatory in nature, and best realized by those who sustain a composite sense of self. These are, at least, the claims that I will endeavor to defend in this section. Along the way we will

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<sup>618</sup> See *Daxue*

have the opportunity of discussing one of the puzzles mentioned in the first chapter—the problem of appreciating others.

While it is possible to translate *zhī* as “knowledge” or “to know,” and thus make practice accidental to *zhī*, such a translation captures only the aberrant variety of *zhī*—at least as the term is used in the early Confucian literature.<sup>619</sup> In its primary sense, and as something that is commendable in some sense, *zhī* entails practice; it is, as Hall and Ames put it in *Thinking Through Confucius*, “performative.”<sup>620</sup> In addition to the etymological and semantic evidence that Hall and Ames provide to support this claim, we can turn to the description of those with *zhī* in the *Analects*. They are said to be appropriate (*yì*) with others, never in a quandary, respectful yet distant with the spirits, and able to ‘know others.’ The last aspect is, as we will see shortly, quite involved. Perhaps best understood pragmatically rather than merely epistemically, ‘knowing others’ is an essential prerequisite to proper employment, characteristic of both grounded meritocracy and the ability to accept only those official positions that are consistent with the preservation of one’s integrity. ‘Knowing others’ also involves experimentation or trial—those whom a superior wishes to ‘get to know’ are often given small positions so they might reveal their abilities. Yet, in addition to the description of those with wisdom, we can find the performative aspect of *zhī* by following Hall and Ames in turning our attention to *Analects* 15.33. In this passage, at least on one translation of the opening line, 知 *zhī* is said to be incomplete if it cannot be sustained in action; *zhī* must be practiced, and must result in successful practice, to be genuine *zhī*.<sup>621</sup> Or, as the *Zhongyong* puts it,

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<sup>619</sup> See *Analects* 15.33 and 6.20 and our discussion of *zhī* above, in chapter 2

<sup>620</sup> Hall and Ames 1987, 50-56; cf. Ames 2011.

<sup>621</sup> 知及之，仁不能守之，雖德之，必失之。 *Zhī jí zhī, rén bù néng shǒu zhī, suī dé zhī, bì shī zhī*. It depends on what the second 之 *zhī* means: the office or official task, or the 知 *zhī* mentioned in the first

“completing events is *zhī*.”<sup>622</sup> Given its performative nature, “wisdom,” “kenning,” or “realizing” seem much better translations of *zhī* than “to know” or “knowledge.”

There is, however, a distinction in the *Analects* between morally laudatory wisdom and the kind of “wisdom” that is much closer to an amoral skill of cunning or cleverness.<sup>623</sup> In *Analects* 15.33 we are told what sustains our wisdom—that which brings it to good result—is *rén* or extending ourselves. It is thus possible for *zhī*, as mere cunning, to stand apart from an extension of self. This ethically “thin” or ethically “neutral” notion of *zhī* divorced from *rén* is discussed in *Analects* 4.2 and illustrated by Zang Wuzhong.<sup>624</sup>

The Master said, “Those who do not extend themselves are not able to endure austerity, nor able to sustain their happiness. Those who extend themselves are content with extending themselves; those who are ‘wise’ (*zhī*) profit by it.”

By one interpretation the wise persons Confucius mentions at the end of the passage are genuinely or fully wise, and benefit in some fashion from extending themselves. It is hard, however, to connect the concluding remark—so interpreted—with what has come before. This suggests an alternative interpretation, one that is expressed in a parallel passage in the *Liji*:

子曰：仁有三，與仁同功而異情。與仁同功，其仁未可知也；與仁同過，然後其仁可知也。仁者安仁，知者利仁，畏罪者強仁。

The Master said, “There are three ways of extending yourself (仁 *rén*)—while the results of extending yourself may be common, the emotions (情 *qíng*) involved are different. The true nature of a person’s extension of self can never be known by looking to the common results of extending oneself; it is only after you notice common aberrations that you can know their true extension of self. Those who

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phrase.

<sup>622</sup> 25

<sup>623</sup> In addition to the passages discussed below, see also 17.8. This claim goes against Raphels’s account of *zhī* in the early Confucian literature (1992, 28-49), but not her account of *zhī* in the pre-Confucian literature (see 9-25).

<sup>624</sup> See 14.12, 14.14, and 5.17

genuinely extend themselves are at ease with it; those who are ‘wise’ (知 *zhī*) profit by it; those who are afraid of punishments may be induced to extend themselves.”<sup>625</sup>

It would appear that the ‘wise’ rank somewhere between those who are genuine in their extension of themselves and those who might be encouraged to do so on threat of punishment; such wisdom is distinct from a genuine extension of self, since anyone who is ‘wise’ in this senses is primarily interested in personal gain or profit (利 *lì*).<sup>626</sup>

Understanding *zhī* as cunning or ethically thin “wisdom” helps us make sense of *Analects* 4.2. The cunning are, unlike those who are genuine in their extension of themselves, unable to endure austerity or sustain their happiness because they are invested in external goods and personal gain. Austerity is a positive evil for such folk; their joys are contingent upon their fortunes and thus expensive in a fashion. This is the opposite of those who, like Confucius and Yan Hui, genuinely enjoy extending themselves; they are able to endure hardship and sustain their happiness because they are able to dismiss the evils conventionally attributed to poverty, finding their happiness in their relationships rather than in the marketplace or storeroom.<sup>627</sup> Incidentally, this interpretation suggests one way of reading the famously cryptic statement of Confucius, that those who extend themselves enjoy mountains while those who are ‘wise’ enjoy water; that those who extend themselves are still while those who are ‘wise’ are active.<sup>628</sup> Taking water to refer to rivers—something Confucius uses to refer, in another passage, to

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<sup>625</sup> 表記 *Biaoji* (“The Record of the Gnomon”), 14

<sup>626</sup> It is certainly possible to read *lì*, here, as benefit in a normatively positive sense (see Ames 1992). Hence, those who are wise might produce benefits (for themselves and others) by engaging in *rén*. Still, there is the possibility that while others might engage in *rén* because they enjoy doing so, those who are wise engage in *rén* because of its general utility.

<sup>627</sup> This sort of interpretation is also supporting by Kong Anguo’s commentary (see Slingerland 2003, 29-30).

<sup>628</sup> 6.23: 知者樂水，仁者樂山。知者動，仁者靜。知者樂，仁者壽。 *Zhī zhě yào shuǐ, rén zhě yào shān. Zhī zhě dòng, rén zhě jìng. Zhī zhě lè, rén zhě shòu.*

the rapidity of change—we might say that what Confucius is driving at is that the ‘wise,’ or the cunning, are fond of change. Unlike those who are genuine in their extension of themselves, the cunning require their situation to improve before they can be happy. And even then they will seek diversions to sustain their happiness. While this interpretation is supported by the pejorative use of *zhī* we find in the *Liji*, it is certainly not the only way to interpret this passage. Many contemporary translations of the *Analects* render *zhī* positively, as the compliment to *rén*. Fortunately, my point does not depend upon which interpretation of this passage is the most defensible.

We can also see the disparity between true wisdom and mere cunning illustrated in the case of Zang Wuzhong. While Confucius does refer to this fellow as an exemplar of *zhī*, he also alludes to actions on Zang’s part that conflict with his own account of wisdom.<sup>629</sup> According to Confucius, wise persons are appropriate with others.<sup>630</sup> Zang Wuzhong, however, appears to have acted with impropriety towards his own ruler. “Zang Wuzhong,” Confucius says, “took the walled city of Fang in order to demand from the Duke of Lu that his half-brother Wei be made his successor. Although he said that he was not trying to force his lord’s hand, I do not believe it.”<sup>631</sup> Drawing upon the fuller depiction of this story in the *Zuozhuan*, Edward Slingerland explains the scenario as follows:

Zang Wuzhong ... was a wise minister in Lu. As a result of the machinations by the Meng Family, who slandered him to the head of the Ji Family, Zang was forced to flee the state and take refuge in the neighboring state of Zhu. Disturbed that he, as the eldest son in the family, would no longer be able to keep up the sacrifices at the family’s ancestral temple in Lu, he sent a message to his half-brothers to approach the Duke of Lu and request that one of them be made his official successor. Simultaneously, he re-entered Lu and took possession of the

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<sup>629</sup> 14.12

<sup>630</sup> 6.22

<sup>631</sup> 14.14



walled city of Fang, which traditionally belonged to his family. Although he denied it at the time, this was clearly an implicit threat that, if his request were not granted by the Duke, he would continue to hold Fang in open revolt. The Duke acquiesced, and Zang Wei, one of Zang Wuzhong's half-brothers, was appointed successor.<sup>632</sup>

Zang Wuzhong was certainly able to bring about his desired outcome, and was thus cunning. But by being inappropriate towards his superior, he lacked the ethically thick sense of wisdom.

Those with ethically thick wisdom, on the other hand, are 'appropriate with others'<sup>633</sup>—something that entails an extension of themselves (*rén*), an appeal to proper custom (禮 *lǐ*), and integrity or, more literally, keeping oneself 'unsullied' (*jié*). There is, in other words, an implied unity among the various marks of the sage so that one cannot properly realize any one of these traits without also realizing the other two. The wise are also said to "never be in a quandary."<sup>634</sup> This can be understood either psychologically or practically. Psychologically, whenever personal advantage (利 *lì*) would conflict with propriety (義 *yì*), the wise will favor propriety; they will, in fact, not feel conflicted by such choices, but will look on personal advantage in such circumstances as so many "floating clouds" (浮雲 *fúyún*).<sup>635</sup> This is a result of their extension of self, or *rén*.

Practically speaking, on the other hand, the truly wise will also possess the "wisdom" we find in the case of Zang Wuzhong. Foreknowledge (先知 *xiānzhī*, 前知 *qiánzhī*), or the ability to anticipate events, is characteristic of the sages; it is also a prerequisite for effective governing and draws upon the same skills required to know others.<sup>636</sup> While this

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<sup>632</sup> 2003, 159-160; cf. *Zuozhuan*, Duke Xiang, year 23

<sup>633</sup> 6.22: "they are appropriate in dealing with the affairs of the common people" (務民之義 *wù mín zhī yì*).

<sup>634</sup> 9.29: 知者不惑 *zhī zhě bù huò*.

<sup>635</sup> 7.16

<sup>636</sup> *Kongzi Xian Ju* 1; *Ziyi* 25

ability may appear “numinous” or “mysterious” (神 *shén*) —as Yangzi puts it—it does not involve superhuman capacities. While the Sixth Wing of the *Yijing* commentary claims that ‘the sage’s wisdom encompasses all things’ (知周乎萬物 *zhī zhōu hū wànwù*), Wang Chong insists that it is not as if the sages are “able to look through things, or perceive them from the greatest distance, to hear through solid bodies, or catch imperceptible sounds, or ... talk to heaven-and-earth or converse with ghosts and spirits.”<sup>637</sup> The sages have the same senses as the rest of us, but they are able to pick up on the subtle indicators of what is to come—an ability that rests upon their wide base of experience and learning, and their ability to reason by analogy from the past and present to the future. Thus by observing the present they are able to know the future. This explains how the wise can afford to maintain a respectful distance from the spirits—since they are able to realize their own ends, they will not need to curry favor with the spirits or depend upon their aid. Rather, as Stephen Angle expresses it, “sages can do things—in fact, can do them with ease—that less developed people may fail to do, no matter how conscientious they are.”<sup>638</sup> This accounts for the “strength” of the sages, and at least one sense of their “timeliness.”<sup>639</sup>

The practical side of the sage’s wisdom, that which allows them to avoid quandaries, can be said to be both social in origin and participatory in nature. While Confucius does comment on the possibility of ‘knowing as a matter of birth,’ the traditional sages most favored by the Confucians—Shun, Yan Hui, Confucius himself—are those who learn from others. And anyone who might teach a sage something

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<sup>637</sup> *Xici zhuan* 4; *Lunheng* 79

<sup>638</sup> 18

<sup>639</sup> See *Mengzi* 5A1

*participates* in the cultivation of that sage’s wisdom. This form of participation may be passive, as when a sage appropriates from the examples of others without those persons necessarily even being aware of it; but it can also be rather direct and active, as when the ministers to the sage-king go about either correcting the king or putting the king’s policies into action (wisdom, remember, is performative and is thus constituted by what we might, a bit erroneously, call its “application”). Finally, ethically thick wisdom (*zhī*) involves knowing or realizing others (知人 *zhī rén*). This is how Confucius explains the words to Fan Chi, and it seems to be this understanding of *zhī* that is assumed in Mengzi’s discussion with Chen Jia as to whether the Duke of Zhou was “wise” to invest Guan Shu with the territory of Yin.<sup>640</sup>

There are at least three role-specific practices in which knowing others can feature: offering an official post to someone, accepting or refusing an offer of an official post, and communicating while in office. The first is when a social superior, often a ruler, invests another person with an official post. This is clearly role-specific insofar as it is the prerogative of social superiors. It is—as Confucius makes plain in his discussion of wisdom with Fan Chi mentioned above—a practice integral with the policy of meritocracy—a policy that is utilized by various sage rulers (Yao, Shun, Tang, and King Wu, to name a few). While we will delay our discussion of the features of this policy that render it particularly efficacious in the building of a community, we can at least point out some of the ways in which this form of wisdom is participatory. First of all, the ability to establish others presupposes one’s social position—and this position itself requires the support and recognition of others (whether it is a ruler or a minister that recommends

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<sup>640</sup> 2B9; see chapter five.

you, or the common people who support you). As Confucius puts it at *Analects* 6.30, “Those who are *rén*, themselves wishing to be established will establish others, themselves wishing to go far will further others. This ability to correlate oneself with others (近取譬 *jìn qǔ pì*) can be said to be the method (方 *fāng*) of extending oneself.” Still, even after one is in a social position to establish others, knowing others often depends upon a recommendation from others, the quality of the relationships of the person recommended for office, and the candidate’s willingness to take the position that is offered (because wisdom entails its own efficacy, the success one has in establishing others is itself an aspect of one’s ‘knowing others’).<sup>641</sup> As for the other two practices associated with ‘knowing others’—each is characteristic of the traditional sages, as well as role-specific and participatory. We have already mentioned that taking an acceptable official position is itself a mark of wisdom; yet wisdom in the form of knowing others is required to assess the acceptability of a position. We might say that Bo Yi was unwise in his refusal of office—and that his lack of wisdom stemmed from his ignorance of others, just as we might say that Confucius, as the “timely” sage (or the sage best adept at taking office at the right time and avoiding office at the right time) evinced a tremendous acuity when it came to knowing others (regardless of whether he came by this knowledge before or after accepting the position). If knowing when to take office is the second practice informed by one’s knowledge of others, the third will be a group of practices concerned with effective communication. Knowing others is instrumental for anyone in the business of edifying or remonstrating with others—be they teachers, children, ministers, or

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<sup>641</sup> This is one reason translating *zhī rén* as ‘realizing other’ is advisable.

friends. Just as the wise will not waste persons nor words, so the wise will adapt their words to the person, as Confucius does on several occasions.<sup>642</sup>

Of the three practices that rely upon our ability to know others (viz., employing others, taking office, and communicating with efficacy), it is the first that I wish to focus on. There are several reasons for this selective focus. First, while the traditional sages practices all three, realizing others was itself the practice of the sages who enjoyed the greatest degree of social influence—as rulers. Second, of the three, it is the most clearly communal and participatory. Third, of the three it is the one with the greatest importance—in scope and impact. Finally, and most important of all for our purposes, this kind of knowing others, along with what it involves and how it is discussed, most directly touches upon the issue of appreciating or evaluating others. We can, in other words, use the account of the sage’s approach to assessing others to inform the general practice of assessing others and thus answer one of the initial problems mentioned in the the first chapter—viz., how we were to appreciate or adequately evaluate those who might be sages?

Knowing others, in the sense of realizing or establishing them, is necessary for the successful implementation of a policy of meritocracy or ‘raising the straight above the crooked’; and meritocracy is largely how the Confucian sage is able to rule in a fashion that can be described as 無為 *wúwéi*.<sup>643</sup> Mengzi insists that the sage’s rule is not *wúwéi* because the sage literally “does nothing.”<sup>644</sup> Rather, and perhaps a bit paradoxically, *wúwéi* is a way of doing more, or—given its normative dimension—a way of optimal

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<sup>642</sup> For more on this see Ames 2011, 194-200.

<sup>643</sup> 2.19, 13.2; 15.5

<sup>644</sup> *Mengzi* 3A4—such an understanding of the phrase would miss its binomial nature.

doing.<sup>645</sup> *Wúwéi* rulership implies a participatory form of government, one where rulers are effective as rulers because they do not attempt to do everything; they eschew technocratic rule and instead achieve social order by relying upon the strengths and abilities of others in addition to their own. The Confucian literature points to two methods for realizing this sort of rulership, and each relies upon the policy of meritocracy—a policy, incidentally, that presupposes the wisdom of the ruler in the form of ‘knowing others.’ The first method is to delegate the labors of governing to others. This is entailed by the policy of meritocracy, but it is also constitutive of *wúwéi* rulership. The second method involves securing social influence on the basis of moral example (exemplariness), a positive sense of shame, and the emulation each inspires—rather than on the basis of law, punishment, and fear.<sup>646</sup>

It is clear by the examples of the sage-rulers that they often delegated tasks to others. Yet delegation was not simply a matter of asking others to implement one’s plans; the sages also delegated the development of these plans in the sense that the sages were masterful students of others. They would explicitly ask for advice from their ministers, but they were also lovers of good acts and good words and able to learn something from just about anyone. Additionally, all but the first sages had the example and institutions of previous sages to help them in the development of their own plans. Beyond this cognitive inheritance, there is a way in which the sages live on as somatic traditions in music and ritual. As Mengzi puts it, “Our form and countenance is born of circumstance, yet the sage comes along after and can bring his form to complete fulfillment.”<sup>647</sup> Ritual, music,

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<sup>645</sup> This is certainly its meaning in the *Laozi* (see Ames and Hall 2003, 137-139, 146-147).

<sup>646</sup> *Analects* 2.3

<sup>647</sup> 7A38

and all the other aspects of cultural refinement (文 *wén*) are the embodied traditions of the sages, able to transform our own bodies and comportment.

Underpinning either form of delegation runs a socially composite sense of selfhood. One of the images commonly used to convey this composite sense of self is familial: those who employ a composite sense of self are described as “parent of the people” (民之父母 *mín zhī fùmǔ*).<sup>648</sup> Essentially, the sage’s sense of self is composite because it includes the likes and dislikes of the people—the people and the sagely ruler are like-heartminded. According to the commentary on the *Daxue* not only are the sagely rulers “anxious like a mother watching her infant” and thus able to anticipate the needs of the people, the sagely ruler loves what the people love and hates what the people hate; and it is this, it says, that “we call being the parent of the people.”<sup>649</sup> The *Laozi* takes the matter even further:

Sages lack a constant heartmind; they take the heartmind of the common people as their own. ‘Those who are able I treat as able; those who are inept I still treat as able—this is a gain in ability. Those who are reliable I treat as reliable; those who are not reliable I still treat as reliable—this is a gain in reliable-ness.’ When residing within the realm the sage attempts to draw things together; when dealing with the realm the sage muddies his heartmind. All the common people lend the sage their ears and eyes, and the sage in turn treats them all as his own children.<sup>650</sup>

As sagely rulers share the likes and dislikes of the people they are able to care for the people, but—as the *Zhongyong* explains—‘sharing their likes and dislikes is the way to encourage kinship’ as the people will begin to identify themselves with their ruler.<sup>651</sup>

Sages, however, are also able to cause the people to think-and-feel like themselves. Part of the logic of this process is simply a matter of social position.<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>648</sup> See, for example, *Shijing*, *Daxue Zengzhu* 10.3, and *Laozi* 49.

<sup>649</sup> *Daxue Zengzhu* 10.3, 9.2, and 10.17

<sup>650</sup> *Laozi* 49

<sup>651</sup> 20

Future *jūnzǐ* esteem what the previous sage-rulers esteemed, they love what these others loved. Even *xiǎorén* delight in what these others delighted in, and profit by what these others profited by.<sup>653</sup> This is because people tend to love what their superiors love—a statement, once again, on the social influence of position and emulation.<sup>654</sup> Yet, of all social superiors, the sages are most adept at cultivating like-heartmindedness because they make use of their good example to influence others. By using good example and *lǐ* the sages allow the people to think-and-feel *as a community*. It allows them to think in terms of shame and a common aim, where leading the people with laws tends to cultivate an individualistic or non-communal heartmind in the people.<sup>655</sup>

While both the *Daxue Zengzhu* and *Laozi* treat being a ‘parent to the people’ and ‘taking the heartmind of the people as one’s own’ as the marks of a sage, they disagree on what these practices might entail. The *Daxue Zengzhu* distinguishes between those who are “good” (善 *shàn*) and those who are “not good” (不善 *bùshàn*), and encourages us to remain clear on this distinction: “To see worthies and not be able to establish them, or to establish them and not be able to promote them; to see those who are inept and not be able to remove them from office, or to remove them from office, yet be unable to exile them—this is error.”<sup>656</sup> The *Laozi*, on the other hand, collapses the two categories, treating the able (*shàn*) and inept (*bùshàn*) as the same. What’s more, the *Laozi* recommends that we “muddy” our heartmind on this matter, and thus learn to forget the significance we might attach to the difference between the able and inept. Doing so will

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<sup>652</sup> *Ziyi* (“Black Robes”) chapter of the *Liji*, 5 and 6

<sup>653</sup> *Daxue*

<sup>654</sup> *Daxue Zengzhu* 9.2, 3, and 4; cf. 10.21

<sup>655</sup> *Analects* 2.3, see *Ziyi* 17

<sup>656</sup> 10.16



free us to use our ingenuity to find the abilities of those who are “inept”—a practice that will result, the *Laozi* says, in a quantum gain in ability among the people.<sup>657</sup>

The 表記 *Biaoji* (or “The Record of the Gnomon”) chapter of the *Liji* offers us a critical integration of these two conceptions of composite selfhood, touching upon the strengths and weakness of each extreme.<sup>658</sup> It begins by distinguishing between the gender roles of the two parents—the mother (母 *mǔ*) and the father (父 *fù*). The father “loves the worthy among his sons, and places on a lower level those who do not show ability.”<sup>659</sup> A ruler who cultivates fatherly affection for his people will distinguish between the able and the inept, commission them accordingly (with honors, title, position), and thus ‘instructs them in doing their utmost (忠 *zhōng*) and what is beneficial (利 *lì*).’<sup>660</sup> The affection of the mother, on the other hand, is less discriminate—“while she loves the worthy, she pities those who do not show ability.”<sup>661</sup> The father works in terms of honor and rank; the mother in terms of love and parity. Those who follow the way of the mother may keep the people close, may encourage loyalty and personal-cultivation among those so inclined; yet, without also employing the way of the father, the people will become “stupid and ignorant, arrogant and wild, rough and unrefined.”<sup>662</sup> This is the problem with the recommendation of the *Laozi*. Following the *Daxue Zengzhu*, which involves the exclusive use of the way of the father, may stir the people to personal-cultivation; still, it also produces bad results as the people will become turbulent

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<sup>657</sup> *Laozi* 49

<sup>658</sup> See especially 28-34

<sup>659</sup> 29

<sup>660</sup> 34

<sup>661</sup> 29

<sup>662</sup> 30: 蠢而愚，喬而野，樸而不文 *chǔn ér yú, qiáo ér yě, pǔ ér bù wén*.

and restless, striving to surpass one another without any sense of shame.<sup>663</sup> Sympathy without discrimination makes the people lazy; discrimination without sympathy makes them competitive and instrumentalizing. The solution suggested by “The Record of the Gnomon” is to fuse the two approaches, retaining the benefits of each while simultaneously preventing either method from going to extremes. To be an effective parent to the people, one must employ the way of the father *and* the mother. Hence, the composite sense of self combines a wide sense of sympathy for others, regardless of their abilities, with the capacity to assess the relative worth of others. How this is done, and what it involves, is discussed in the commentary to the *Daxue* under the notion that “the regulation of one’s family depends on the cultivation of one’s person.”<sup>664</sup> We will discuss this in the next section.

There are several other aspects of the composite sense of selfhood enjoined by the Confucian literature. One must look on the abilities of others as one’s own, rather than as a cause for envy; to see others as collaborators rather than competitors. As the *Daxue Zengzhu* puts it, “When others have talents, he thinks it is like he has those talents.”<sup>665</sup> As a corollary, the efficacy of the sage—something that constitutes an aspect of their wisdom—is often understood as a matter of communal accomplishment rather than an individual accomplishment. Mengzi tells us that Tang was able to overthrow the Xia Dynasty and its last emperor, Jie, only because this was also the will of the people. We might go further and say that it was not only the people that partly constituted the efficacy of Tang; Jie’s own vile behavior also contributed to Tang’s success.<sup>666</sup> Mengzi

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<sup>663</sup> Cf. *Ziyi* 25

<sup>664</sup> *Daxue Zengzhu* 8

<sup>665</sup> *Daxue Zengzhu* 10

<sup>666</sup> See the “Declaration of Tang” in the *Shangshu* and *Mengzi* 1A2—cf. 1B18 (‘every state wanted him to

says something similar about the “greatness” (大行 *dà xíng*) of King Wen—that it required the efforts of his son, King Wu, and the Duke of Zhou before it was fully realized.<sup>667</sup>

It is quite significant that this composite sense of self is not merely part of how these “great persons” are described by *others*; a composite sense of self is also involved in how the sages think of themselves—and this notion of selfhood actually contributes to their greater effectiveness at up-building their community by means of delegation. Perhaps the strongest statement to this effect comes from the *Yiqi* chapter of the *Shangshu*, repeated in the *Shiji*. In this passage Shun reflects on the nature of his ministers, and goes so far as to describe them as composing his body—

My ministers constitute my legs and arms, my eyes and ears. I want to assist the people; you assist me! I want to observe the manifestations of the ancients in the garments embroidered with the sun, moon, and planets. You made them. I want to hear the sounds of the six pipes, the five tones ... and the eight sounds, to observe whether the country is in order or disorder, so I can modify my five teachings. You make me hear them. If I become close to the depraved, you correct and assist me.<sup>668</sup>

The corporate image of the body, with its various members, continues with song. Shun sings,

Hands and feet understand each other  
The head be inspired  
The one-hundred tasks thrive!

Gao Yao, one of Shun’s chief ministers, sings his reply:

The head be bright  
The arms and legs have might  
And every enterprise run right!

When the head takes care of the trivial

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rule them’). Part of this, no doubt, is a corollary with the claim that Tang’s strength was *dé*, not military might (2A3; cf. 3B5). In a way we could even say that Jie aided Tang (4A9).

<sup>667</sup> 2A1

<sup>668</sup> 2.79-80

The arms and legs become idle  
Then ten thousand things are unattended!

Shun's composite sense of selfhood contrasts sharply with lord Miao's sense of self, discussed above. Miao, we were told, 'worthies-himself' (自賢 *zìxián*): he restricts his personhood to his individuality, and places all worth and credit upon his own shoulders. By doing this he undermined his positive influence upon others and prevents others from participating in the realization of social order.

We have suggested that a second method for promoting a participatory (*wúwéi*) form of government is by 'knowing others' in the sense of elevating the worthy into official positions. The various traditional sages are unified in their use of meritocracy in their rule. And it is noteworthy that the efficacy of this meritocratic policy comes from its participatory nature, as well as its involvement of a composite sense of self on the part of the one employing this policy. The participatory nature of meritocracy is evident in the way this policy influences society. First of all, the policy is thought to draw those who are "good" while simultaneously alienating those who are "bad."

Placing "good" and "bad" in scare-quotes seems appropriate since it is possible for a policy of meritocracy to target something that might not have genuine social merit, and yet it would still draw a certain sort of person to the ruler while also driving away those who do not fit the ruler's notion of "merit." Han Feizi, who claims that such a policy will inspire unscrupulous behavior, describes this rather amoral realization of "meritocracy":

Because the king of Yue admired boldness, many of his subjects defied death; because King Ling of Chu liked slim waists, his state was full of half-starved people on diets. Because Duke Huan of Chi was jealous and loved his ladies in waiting, Shudiao castrated himself in order to be put in charge of the harem;

because the duke was fond of unusual food Yiya steamed his son's head and offered it to the duke.<sup>669</sup>

The conclusion Han Feizi draws from these stories is that an able ruler will hide his preferences from others—even his preference for genuine worth. “If the ruler shows a fondness for worth, his ministers will all strive to put on a pleasing façade on their actions in order to satisfy his desires. In such a case, they will never show their true colors, and if they never show their true colors, then the ruler will have no way to distinguish the able from the worthless.”<sup>670</sup> Yet anyone who champions meritocracy, with its open display of one's own example and preferences, might hold out against Han Feizi's argument. First of all, the force of his argument could be undermined if we can successfully account for the sage's ability to see through such cases of duplicitous conduct and “glossing.”<sup>671</sup> Secondly, are we to ignore the practical significance of at least pretending to be appropriate? Even the social inferiors who might begin by simply conforming to social expectations of proper conduct—the external side of *lǐ*, for instance—may naturally come to embody a deeper commitment to this form of behavior, even if only through habit. In any case, others are necessary participants in the ruler's ability to ‘know others.’ By coming near and displaying a certain kind of conduct, the candidates for office help the ruler know them—meritocracy, in this way, actually allows others to aid the social superior in the task of knowing others (if not who they are, at least who they hope to be).

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<sup>669</sup> *Han Feizi* 7.3

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>671</sup> Either in the form of covering up (揜 *yǎn*) one's infelicities (*Daxue Zengzhu* 6), or refuting (辭 *cí*) the claim that they are mistakes to begin with (*Mengzi* 2B9). Cf. J.L. Austin's distinction between “excuse” and “justification” (1961, 123-152).

Those employed by the ruler under a meritocratic policy also participate in the ruler's example and help to extend the social influence initiated by the policy. Those employed by the ruler act as moral representatives of that ruler's own personal example, reflecting his preferences. Yet they also encourage those who might wish to be employed under similar terms, and thus act to extend the moral influence of the ruler to an even wider community. Still, perhaps the greatest participatory aspect of meritocracy stems from this policy's reliance upon emulation as opposed to law and fear to effect its social order. Meritocracy seeks to ensure a form of social influence that relies upon moral example and a sense of emulation this might inspire, as opposed to the non-participatory form of influence associated with law and punishment. Yet it is true that the exclusive use of either method—law or example—carry their own risks. While laws might secure a greater degree of consistency in our interactions, it simultaneously diminishes the role played by our discretion and judgment and tends to encourage us to think of ourselves as individuals before thinking of ourselves as a community or as community-members. Relying upon the strength of example certainly allows more room for discretion and judgment, and may encourage us to think of ourselves as a community or community-members first, and individuals second, yet it can also lead to tyrannical abuse if that example is found wanting in some regard.

Just as the positive effects of the policy of delegation is greatly improved on the basis of a composite sense of self, so too is meritocracy more effective when it is employed by those who endorse a composite notion of themselves. Emulation is the life-force of meritocracy; and others are more inclined to respond to your example with emulation, for example, when you employ a composite notion of yourself (specifically, a

composite notion of personal responsibility). The pragmatist and proto-social worker<sup>672</sup> Jane Addams (1860-1935) records a relevant example in her *Twenty Years at Hull-House*. She informs us that her father, a state senator in Illinois during the mid-nineteenth century, was said not only to have never taken a bribe but to have never been offered one—“because,” an old acquaintance of the man remarked, “bad men were instinctively afraid of him.”<sup>673</sup> This illustrates perfectly what the Confucians have in mind when they speak of the influence of personal example upon others. But Addams draws a further lesson from her father’s example. Addams, along with Ella Flagg Young, had established the Hull-House settlement in 1889 in Chicago. This settlement was seen as a way “for some socially conscious members of the new generations of college-educated women to use their recently acquired skills to alleviate the worst effects of industrialization on the waves of immigrants crowding into the inner city.”<sup>674</sup> During her time at Hull-House, Addams made a point of representing the interests of the laborers. On one occasion this led two representatives of the local manufactures to offer to fund some of the activities at Hull-House if Addams would cease supporting the so-called “sweat shop bill.” Addams writes,

As the fact broke upon me that I was being offered a bribe, the shame was enormously increased by the memory of this statement [sc. about her father]. What had befallen the daughter of my father that such a thing could happen to her? The salutary reflection that it could not have occurred unless a weakness in myself had permitted it, withheld me at least from an heroic display of indignation before the two men making the offer...<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>672</sup> Social work, in its best sense and understood in a particular way, is a proper aspect of the Confucian notion of extending oneself (*rén*).

<sup>673</sup> Addams 1945, 33

<sup>674</sup> Seigfried 1999, 212

<sup>675</sup> Addams 1945, 33

And she declined “as gently as I could,” she says, the proffered money.<sup>676</sup> There is a curious sense of responsibility reflected in her statement that the mere offer of a bribe must be in part due to her own weakness. This is the very same response Shun has to the failings of his own family members—he does not speak of bad fortune, or blame his family for their vileness. Rather, he blames himself and renews his attempts to cultivate good relations with them. The efficacy of this approach—this self-blame and composite sense of self—is revealed in the way that it prevents Addams from a “heroic display of indignation,” and thus affords the offending parties a continued relationship with herself and the opportunity to correct themselves without spending time justifying or excusing themselves. This sense of self also reflects an extensive sense of responsibility, calling Shun and Addams to renew their efforts whenever they encounter the faults of others. In both affects—upon the other and oneself—this composite sense of self promises to be an effective cure to inappropriate relating, and constitutive of a cultivated “personal” example for others.

This composite sense of self, especially the entailed sense of shared responsibility, is itself predicated upon the extension of one’s self—a process we have referred to as *rén*. Yet before we turn our attention to the *rén* of the sages, I would like to first discuss the issue of assessing the worth of others. We first encountered this problem because we observed that it is paramount that any ethics that draws upon exemplary persons with native normativity be able to properly recognize the merit of those it takes as exemplars—that such an ethics must be able to sort exemplars into their positive or negative variety. One way to develop a Confucian response to this issue is by looking to the way the sages—especially as rulers or at least social superiors—go about evaluating

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<sup>676</sup> Ibid.



those whom they employ and the ‘knowing others’ form of wisdom (知 *zhī*) required for the successful implementation of meritocracy. Knowing how the traditional sages knew others, we might have a sense of how we might know the contemporary and un-canonized sages for ourselves.

Invariably the traditional sages evaluate others, at least initially, on the basis of either an explicit recommendation from others or upon the other person’s general reputation (名 *míng*). Both were part of Yao’s initial assessment of Shun, and Shun’s initial assessment of Yu. In each case, the Chiefs of the Four Mountains—chief ministers of state, it would seem—recommended the eventual successor to the sitting ruler. In a similar fashion, our own assessment of nominal sages begins with the recommendation of tradition—whatever its source. In this way, we might say that most of the time a title or reputation transmits the normative status of a person, recommending them to our attention. Regardless, there may arise a question of legitimacy. Just as a sage-ruler may dismiss the recommendation of his ministers, so we may find that we come to doubt the legitimacy of the moral tradition’s appreciation of persons. Yet even if there is no cause for dismissing a person’s candidacy, the sages do not trust to reputation or recommendation alone. For them, knowing others is necessarily observational and thus experimental in this sense; it is also performative.<sup>677</sup>

According to tradition, when Yao asked his chief ministers to recommend his successor, the ministers eventually suggested Shun. To this Yao remarked, “I have heard of him. What kind of person is he?” The ministers replied with a retelling of Shun’s deeds.

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<sup>677</sup> What we might call observation-driven experimentation or research rather than hypothesis-driven research.

He is the son of a blindman. His father is obstinate, his mother is mean, his younger brother is presumptuous, and he is able to keep harmony among them by filial love. He graciously keeps them in order, lest things end up evil. His father became blind and his mother died. His step-mother came and so did his half-brother who was spoiled (presumptuous). The Blindman always had the intention of killing Shun, but Shun would avoid being killed and run away. But when he made a small mistake, he would accept the punishment. Shun obediently served his father, his step-mother, and his younger brother. Every day he was sincerely attentive and never had a moment to relax ... When they wanted to kill him, they were not able to find him. But when they needed him, he was always around.<sup>678</sup>

On the basis of this recommendation Yao married his two daughters to Shun and sent his nine sons to live with the man that he might observe Shun's "kind deeds with respect to the two daughters" (his domestic conduct) and his conduct with the sons (his 'public' or "extra-domestic" conduct).<sup>679</sup> Shun succeeded in instructing Yao's daughters in the social norms of women in general, rather than the customs of noble women: "despite their noble status, [they] dared not treat Shun's parents and relatives too haughtily. And they both had the proper manner of a wife."<sup>680</sup> As for the nine sons—they "all became even more sincere."<sup>681</sup> Having observed the community Shun was able to coordinate among his children, Yao gave Shun the task of harmonizing the five teachings and instructing the common people in their lessons—encouraging fathers to be appropriate (義 *yì*), mothers compassionate (慈 *cí*), elder brothers friendly (友 *yǒu*), younger brothers respectful (恭 *gōng*), and the children filial (孝 *xiào*).<sup>682</sup> After Shun's success as a moral educator Yao commissioned him in several other official positions: as gatekeeper in the capital city (where those around him were said to become respectful), and with a mission in the wilderness where Shun successfully weathered the elements. All along the way Yao

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<sup>678</sup> *Shiji* 1.32-33

<sup>679</sup> "Extra" in both of the senses of 'beyond' and 'more of.' *Shiji* 1.33, *Mengzi* 5B6

<sup>680</sup> *Shiji* 1.33

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>682</sup> *Shiji Benji* 1.35

watched Shun, giving him tasks of greater difficulty and scope. We can see this series of commissions as Yao's attempt to uncover the "true character" of Shun, yet we might also view this process as the "tutelage" of Shun whereby Yao attempted to encourage and cultivate the man who would one day replace him as ruler. We will return to this performative aspect of the assessment of others momentarily.

We are, however, rarely in the position of experimenting with nominal sages in the same fashion—not simply because we often lack the requisite social station and relevant social institutions to do so, but also because many of the nominal sages are deceased. Furthermore, even if we were in the relevant position we would most likely fail in our assessment. This is because, to borrow a term from Michel Foucault, the normative assessment of others is a question of *spiritualité*. As he explains,

Spirituality [*spiritualité*] postulates that the truth is never given to the subject by right. Spirituality postulates that the subject as such does not have right of access to the truth and is not capable of having access to the truth. It postulates that the truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge (*connaissance*), which would be founded and justified simply by the fact that he is the subject and because he possesses this or that structure of subjectivity. It postulates that for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself. The truth is only given to the subject at a price that brings the subject's being into play. For as he is, the subject is not capable of truth.<sup>683</sup>

Insofar as the assessment of others presupposes one's own moral cultivation, we are dealing with an issue best approached as a matter of *spiritualité*. This explains Confucius's remark in the *Analects* that only those who are consummate (仁者 *rén zhě*) know how to approve or disapprove of others.<sup>684</sup> Assessing exemplary persons for ourselves is compounded by their native normativity, since their particular and unique

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<sup>683</sup> 2005, 15

<sup>684</sup> 4.3

normative significance makes it impossible to assess them simply with reference to set standards or “generic” norms.

Still, we can follow the example of the sages by assessing the nominal sages for ourselves by employing the method of experimentation. In our own case, with the possible exception of meeting the sages of the past within our dreams, our experiments must be confined to our various attempts to appropriate the example of the sages.<sup>685</sup> It may be difficult to distinguish between a lack of moral creativity on our own part and a lack of merit on the part of the person we are emulating, but it would seem that this approach to assessing the nominal sages is certainly bound to be experimental. Of necessity, this approach renders the merit of the sages participatory and composite. After all, we are partly responsible for the living merit (or normative force) of the sages when we successfully emulate them, and the greatness of the sage’s person—the extent of their accomplishments—is extended even further when we appropriate them to meet some present or future situation. This brings us back to the performative dimension to the assessment of others.

Instead of looking at the assessment of others merely as something that can be done at a distance, so to speak, or understood by the rubrics of accuracy, the Confucians also consider the matter from another perspective—one where knowing others or assessing others is performative, relational, and participatory. In a chapter dedicated to discussing the challenges involved in knowing others, the *Lushu Chunqiu* suggests that

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<sup>685</sup> There is some indication in the early Chinese literature that dreams were understood to be “real” in a sense. It was possible for Zhuangzi to describe the waking world as one that kept us apart, and the dreaming world as one that brought us together. And when Confucius talks about dreaming of one of his exemplars, it seems that these dreams offered the possibility for learning from the exemplar—perhaps by dialogue.

using a fixed standard in the assessment of others will render even the traditional sages deficient.

It is assuredly impossible for things to be perfect. To use perfection as a standard for promoting men is surely difficult, given the essential nature of things. People disparaged Yao for his reputation as an unloving father, Shun for his notoriety as the debaser of his father, Yu for the aim of coveting the throne, Tang and Wu for the allegations of plotting the expulsion and assassination of their lords, and the Five Lords-Protector for the claim that their goal was to encroach upon and seize the territory of others. If we consider the implications of this, how can anything be considered perfect?<sup>686</sup>

Rather than assess others with the use of a single, fixed standard, it is suggested that we use a flexible approach in the assessment of others: “When evaluating others the *jūnzǐ* uses the persons as the standard; when evaluating themselves, they use what is appropriate to themselves.”<sup>687</sup> Not only is this a comment of the need for a role-specific calibration of our evaluations; it also suggests an individual-specific sort of calibration. Dewey, in *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, makes a remark that is surprisingly similar. He tells his reader that one of the consequences of taking an experimental approach to moral matters is that

No individual or group will be judged by whether they come up to or fall short of some fixed result, but by the direction in which they are moving. The bad man is the man who no matter how good he *has* been is beginning to deteriorate, to grow less good. The good man in the man who no matter how morally unworthy he *has* been is moving to become better.<sup>688</sup>

Dewey immediately proceeds to point out the pragmatics of this sort of assessment of ourselves and others: “Such a conception makes one severe in judging himself and humane in judging others. It excludes that arrogance which always accompanies

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<sup>686</sup> 19/8.1

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

<sup>688</sup> 177

judgment based on degree of approximation to fixed ends.”<sup>689</sup> Looked at in this way assessing others becomes less a matter of comparing a person to some fixed norm, and more about the sort of influence our assessments may have upon ourselves and others. In short, knowing others must also be assessed by a pragmatic scale of effect—that is, by the difference our evaluations will have upon others, upon how others will see us, upon how it will encourage or discourage them and ourselves, and so on. Emphasis is placed on how our judgment of ourselves and others will impact future conduct, not upon a retrospective evaluation for its own sake. This is, arguable, what Yao was up to in his promotion of Shun. Yao was not merely, or primarily, seeking to discover Shun’s true worth; he was *cultivating* Shun, making him something he was not before the “assessment” began. To 知人 *zhī rén* is not merely to “know them,” but is also to “realize them”—but we have already mentioned this performative aspect of wisdom. And this is perhaps where we should leave the matter of evaluating the nominal sages: it is not so much a question of accuracy, but of the possibility of cultivating a productive association between our conduct and their example.

#### 6.4 *The Extensivity and Intensivity (仁 Rén) of the Sage*

仁 *Rén* involves “extending oneself” by laboring to care for others, being sensitive to the experiences and concerns of others, and developing a socially enlarged sense of responsibility—all of which are characteristic of an enlarged, social, communal, or composite sense of self. There is, however, an “internal” (內 *nèi*) side to *rén* that we

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<sup>689</sup> 177; cf. *Analects* 15.15, 15.21, and *Biaoji* 21.

will need to discuss. Hence, the sage is both the most “extensive” and “intensive” of persons.

When Fan Chi asks about *rén* Confucius explains it as 愛人 *ài rén*.<sup>690</sup> 愛 *ài* is often translated as “love” or an affective regard for another, with *rén* then being glossed as “benevolence.” This overly psychological account of *rén*, however, fails to square neatly with the various aspects of *rén* attribute by other passages in the *Analects*; it also fails to realize the labor involved in the 愛 *ài* of 愛人 *ài rén*. When he explains the propriety of a three-year mourning period upon the death of one’s parents Confucius appeals to the three years of *ài* we receive from our parents when we were first born. The first three years of our lives are not distinct because our parents necessarily adore us more at that stage than any other; rather, at that stage we are utterly helpless and dependent upon their care. Hence, it is the labor of love, and not just the affection of love, that Confucius denotes with the term. This is why *ài* is perhaps best translated as “care” rather than “love”: “care” implies an affective regard, but it can also refer to the labor often involved in caring for others.

The practices of care that we expect from parents—their emotional, material, and pedagogical care for their children—can also be seen in the case of the sage-rulers. In fact, the ideal rulers are often described as those who see themselves as parents to the people. First of all, sage-rulers care for the needs of the people, engaging in what we might call “material care.” The sage-rulers “bring succor to the multitudes” and “govern the kingdom so as to cause pulse and grain to be as abundant as water and fire.”<sup>691</sup> Huang Di and Yu, for example, were both known for their public works—building roads and levies,

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<sup>690</sup> 12.22

<sup>691</sup> 7A21

dredging channels, and subduing the neighboring peoples.<sup>692</sup> Mengzi goes so far as to suggest that true rulers will think of the people first, then the grain, then themselves.<sup>693</sup> Material care, in this sense, is deemed necessary for the moral cultivation of the people, while at the same time being acknowledge as insufficient for that task: “When pulse and grain are as abundant as water and fire, how shall the people be other than virtuous?”<sup>694</sup> still, in years of abundance, Mengzi admits, “the young men are mostly lazy.”<sup>695</sup>

When the basic needs of the people are met, the sage-ruler must care for the people in another way—in a pedagogical fashion. This type of care relies upon the personal example of the sage-ruler, the use of *lǐ* and dignity.<sup>696</sup> As Confucius remarks, “Can you really care for someone without urging them on?”<sup>697</sup> Mengzi makes the connection between teaching others and 仁 *rén* rather explicit: teaching others, he says, is a form of *rén*.<sup>698</sup> The sage seems to be nothing if not an educator. We are told that “a sage is the teacher of a hundred generations” and that “a great man who transforms others may be called a sage.”<sup>699</sup> The sage rectifies the heartminds of others, lays heresies to rest, opposes extreme action, and banished excessive views.<sup>700</sup> As we have already noted, the sages go about educating or edifying others largely, though not exclusively, by means of their example. In fact, teaching by example is indicative of the sage. The sage is a concrete gnomon, an exemplar of human relationships (*rénlún*).<sup>701</sup> Teaching others is not, however, the only way to engage in “pedagogical care”; it appears that learning from

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<sup>692</sup> *Shiji*

<sup>693</sup> 7B60

<sup>694</sup> 7A21

<sup>695</sup> 6A7

<sup>696</sup> 15.33

<sup>697</sup> 14.7

<sup>698</sup> 2A2

<sup>699</sup> 7B61; 7B71

<sup>700</sup> 3A9

<sup>701</sup> 4A1-2



other is also characteristic of *rén*. After all, when we learn from others we allow them to edify another person—namely, ourselves. We thus enable them to do good; and we can thus be said to nourish them, to care for them. We might say that by learning from others we contribute to their significance, and thus “establish” them. The practice of learning from others is evident in the narratives of almost every one of the traditional sages: sages will ask for advice, they will defer to that advice, they will learn skills and plans from others, and most importantly, they will delight in the example of former sages and take these persons as their models.

Thinking of themselves as the parent to the people, the sages will naturally care for the people in an emotional capacity as well. We can see this illustrated in Yao’s justification for establishing Shun as his successor rather than his own son. He says that to establish his son, who was incapable of the position, would be to please one person yet displease the people of the realm. Yao appears to thus open himself up to the charge of being un-filial towards his son—yet we must understand that Yao, as a true ruler, saw the people as his children, equal in status with his own son. As a corollary to this type of care, the sage-rulers will eschew consequentialistic calculations.<sup>702</sup>

In addition to extending oneself by means of caring for others sages also extend themselves in terms of an expanded sense of “personal” responsibility. Mengzi singles out Yi Yin as ‘the sage who accepted responsibility.’ It is said that even before he took on the duties of chief minister he considered the empire his responsibility: when he saw commoners deprived of the way of the former sage-rulers, Yao and Shun, Yi Yin felt as if

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<sup>702</sup> They are unwilling to entertain plans that sacrifice some of the people for the good of the majority. If we can trust the account of Winston Churchill’s complicity in allowing the city of Coventry to be bombed during the Second World War in order to protect the successful reconstruction of the Nazi cipher by British Intelligence, we could—on the basis of this alone—exclude Churchill from the canon of sages.

he had pushed them into a ditch—“he took the weight of the realm upon himself like this.”<sup>703</sup> Among the traditional sages Yi Yin is not alone in extending himself in this way. It is said that Yu, when he was tasked with controlling the floods, felt whenever someone drowned as if he had drowned them himself, just as Ji, when minister of agriculture, felt responsible for every person who starved—‘as if he had starved them himself.’ In the *Shangshu* Yu, as ruler, says, “if I should personally commit an offense, let not the punishment be visited upon the inhabitants of the myriad regions; if the inhabitant of the myriad regions commit offenses, let the punishment be visited upon me personally”—this asymmetry is characteristic of the sage’s brand of responsibility.<sup>704</sup> We find something similar in the case of King Wu. In the *Analects* he says, “If any of the Hundred Clans commit a transgression, let the punishment be visited upon me alone.”<sup>705</sup> Mengzi tells us that if there were one bully in the realm, King Wu took this to be a personal affront and was ashamed of it.<sup>706</sup>

The sages’ extension of themselves is also reflected in their approach to personal advantage (利 *li*) and wealth. Tang is said to have used his larger state to serve the smaller state of Ge;<sup>707</sup> King Wen served the Kun barbarians despite their inferior numbers and, though a great number of people would have supported his claim to the realm, he continued to defer to the Shang clan.<sup>708</sup> What is significant about these three anecdotes is that they are all said to illustrate *rén*. Personal advantage (*li*) is simply not

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<sup>703</sup> 5A7

<sup>704</sup> 20.1

<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

<sup>706</sup> 1B3. Mengzi suggests, however, that one may place acceptable limits upon this asymmetrical or inclusive sense of personal responsibility—even if one were a sage, apparently. If a fight were to break out in your lodgings, even if your hair were down and your cap untied, it would be inappropriate not to extend yourself and intervene, he says. But if a fight were to break out in the streets, it would be okay to bolt your door, since to go out with your hair down and cap untied would be unseemly (4B29; cf. 4B28).

<sup>707</sup> 1B10

<sup>708</sup> 1B3; *Analects* 8.20

the sage's highest priority, nor his or her deepest motive. First of all, the sages are not motivated by the acquisition of personal gains.<sup>709</sup> Confucius claims that Shun and Yu did not actively seek the realm or the position of ruler.<sup>710</sup> This is clearly reflected in Sima Qian's description of Yu in the *Shiji*. There, the story is that Yu took over the task of controlling the floods from his father, who had failed and was exiled for his failure. It is said that Yu was saddened by his father's failure and punishment—that it was his filial regard for his father, and not fear of punishment or a sublimated desire for revenge or even an aspiration on the realm, that drove Yu to “rack his body and weary his mind, to live outside his home for thirteen years not daring to enter his house even when he passed its gate.”<sup>711</sup> Confucius commends Yu for his priorities, reflected in his personal attire and diet: Yu ate meagerly, but was lavish in his sacrificial offerings; his everyday clothes were shabby, but his ceremonial clothes were exceedingly fine.<sup>712</sup> We can see a similar disregard for personal gain, even personal comfort, in the examples of Huang Di and King Wen. The former ruler is said to have had no permanent residence, spending his time instead in the labors of public works and military campaigns. King Wen apparently gave up his noontime meal so that he could give audience to the knights (士 *shi*) of his territory.<sup>713</sup>

Secondly, not only are sages not motivated by the acquisition of personal advantages, they are rather indifferent to living in wealth or poverty. Yan Hui, whom we

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<sup>709</sup> It should be pointed out that though sages are not motivated by personal gains, they can acquire by them all the same. Furthermore, when the sage's person extends to the entire realm, what we might describe as his or her “personal” gains or advantage (利 *li*) will necessarily also be an advantage for others, and thus appropriate (義 *yi*). In short, when you extend your person, personal gains are no longer exclusive or “private” goods.

<sup>710</sup> 8.18

<sup>711</sup> *Shiji*

<sup>712</sup> *Analects* 8.21

<sup>713</sup> *Shiji* 4.116-119.

might describe as a proto-sage (that is, someone on the way to sagehood even if he did not live long enough to bring it to fruition) was at ease in rather trying circumstances. We have already mentioned the way Yu disregarded the advantages of office—his clothes, dwelling, and diet were rather simple when he was a minister, but they continued to be simple even after he became ruler. Shun confirms this aspect of the sage. Though he began life as a commoner, Mengzi says that he was equally at ease eating parched grain as he was in the luxury of sovereignty.<sup>714</sup> One might assume that the sages, who do not go after pecuniary profit, would eschew affluence. But to be at home with affluence is perhaps the clearest form of indifference. One is reminded of the story told by Muju Ichein about the 19<sup>th</sup> century Zen Monk, Tanzan:

Tanzan and Ekido were once traveling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was still falling. Coming around a bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the intersection. “Come on, girl,” said Tanzan at once. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud. Ekido did not speak again until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he no longer could restrain himself. “We monks don’t go near females,” he told Tanzan, “especially not young and lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?” “I left the girl there,” said Tanzan. “Are you still carrying her?”<sup>715</sup>

Indifference, in other words, does not entail avoidance.

Given the sages’ disregard for personal gain, it should be obvious that when profit (*li*) comes at the price of inappropriate (*bùyì*) conduct, they will not pursue the personal advantage. This has implications for how the sage will think about official positions.

The Master said, “To eat coarse food, drink plain water, and pillow oneself on a bent arm—there is pleasure to be found in these things. But wealth and position gained through inappropriate (不義 *bùyì*) means—these are to me like floating clouds.”<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>714</sup> 7B”52”

<sup>715</sup> Morris 1985

<sup>716</sup> 7.16

Confucius says that it is shameful to profit by a corrupt state of affairs, and recommends a timely approach to the matter: taking office when it is permissible, and refusing when it is not. This is one way to explain why Tang and King Wen, when faced with easy opportunities for enlarging their realm of political influence yet, at the expense of propriety, chose to sustain propriety. This is one of the differences between exemplary persons and petty persons—the former think about what is appropriate and will privilege the appropriate above the personally and exclusively advantageous, the latter think about what is personally and exclusively advantageous and will use inappropriate means to secure their personal advantages.<sup>717</sup>

Whatever advantages sages enjoy will invariably be used to the advantage of their neighbors or subjects. It is said that Yu liquidated his own estate, “humbling his houses and rooms,” in order to pay for part of the expense of building the ditches and canals used to control the floods. Another sage, King Wen, expressed a similarly communal sense of self or personal property in his management of his park. Mengzi tells us that while the common people labored for his tower and pond, they called them majestic; his park was 70 square *li*, but the people called it small. The reason for both descriptors was that King Wen shared these things with his people—they could share their joy in it, and both could derive benefit from them. The common people derived material benefit while King Wen derived both political and personal benefit—gaining a greater source of public support and the ability to personally enjoy the park. “It was only by sharing that King Wen could himself take pleasure in his park.”<sup>718</sup> In short, he established *his* park by establishing a park *for the people*. This reflects a certain sense of self at least insofar as one’s self may

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<sup>717</sup> 4.11, 4.12, 4.16

<sup>718</sup> 1A2, 1B2

be associated with one's property or possessions. This type of approach to property actually sustains *wúwéi* rulership since it stimulates an emulous response on the part of others while also providing for the basic needs of the common people. As was said of King Wu: he won over the masses because of his generosity (or, we might say, his expansive notion of “possession”).<sup>719</sup> This approach also preserves one's integrity (*jié*)—as we will see.

We suggested at the beginning of this section that the extension of one's person depends upon intension or ‘intensivity’ (the inward corollary of extension or “extensivity”). The role played by intensivity in the extension of oneself is made explicit in the *Daxue* and the *Zhongyong*. We are told in the *Daxue* that the sages of the past, wishing to influence the realm, to govern the state, and regulate their clan—wishing, in short, to cultivate their person or extend themselves—would first “rectify their heartminds” (正其心) and “be honest in their intentions, desires, and thoughts” (誠其意 *chéng qí yì*). In a similar vein the *Zhongyong* tells us that the cultivation of one's intensivity comes first, and is the very thing that allows one to cultivate others.<sup>720</sup> Intensivity is a normative form of authenticity; it is a matter of being sincere in one's intentions and being able to say that you initiate appropriate conduct for its own sake and without external stimuli.

The topic of intensivity in its relation to *rén* is discussed at length in the *Biaoji*. In the passage we discussed above (in the section dedicated to the wisdom of the sages) we were told that there are at least three possible motivations (情 *qíng*) for extending oneself.

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<sup>719</sup> 20.1

<sup>720</sup> 20, 22, and 29. Focusing on the intensive side of *rén*, the claim in *Zhongyong* 25 that ‘*rén* is completing oneself, *zhī* is completing events’ says much the same thing. The psychology involved is partly that of sincerity (cf. *Zhuangzi* 33).

One may extend oneself with ease or delight (安 *ān*), one may extend oneself for instrumental reasons (利 *lì*) and for the social advantages it brings, or one may extend oneself in a minimal fashion because one is afraid a being punished (畏罪 *wèi zuì*).<sup>721</sup> As the *Biaoji* continues it become obvious that the issue at stake is whether one initiates the extension of oneself, or if one extends oneself only in response to external stimuli. The issue is whether one can claim, along with Confucius, that “*rén* originates from oneself”—that “no sooner than I wish to be *rén* and it is here.”<sup>722</sup> Only when we can answer in the affirmative may we say that *rén* truly belongs to us. To fail to take responsibility for the extension of oneself is akin to denying or ignoring the intensive side of *rén*; it is to think of *rén* as Gaozi thinks of 義 *yì*—that is, as purely situational (外 *wài*) and not in any way personal (內 *nèi*).<sup>723</sup> If, however, one is intensively *rén*, or *zhī*, or *lǐ*, or *yì* then one initiates the relevant behavior on one’s own; and one’s conduct will be stable, reliable, and consistent. To achieve or detect this sort of consistency the literature suggests that we pay attention to a person’s solitary moments (獨 *dú*). The *Daxue* Zengzhu warns us that pretense only works so long—that “our genuine intentions become manifest” (誠於中，形於外 *chéng yú zhōng, xíng yú wài*). Thus at least one of the reasons the *jūnzǐ* care for their intensivity (慎其獨 *shèn qí dú*) is because they know that their particular intension, including what they enjoy and loathe, only *appears* to be hidden from view.<sup>724</sup> “Watch their actions, observe their motives, examine wherein they

<sup>721</sup> *Liji Biaoji* 14: 仁有三，與仁同功而異情。... 仁者安仁，知者利仁，畏罪者強仁。 *Rén yǒu sān, yú rén tóng gōng ér yì qíng*. ... *Rén zhě ān rén, zhī zhě lì rén, wèi zuì zhě qiáng rén*. Cf. Aristotle’s distinction in *Eudemian Ethics* 8.3 between the Lacedaemonian man and the fine-and-good man (*kalos kagathos*).

<sup>722</sup> 12.1 and 7.30

<sup>723</sup> See *Mengzi* 6A4

<sup>724</sup> *Daxue* Zhu 6; cf. *Zhongyong* 1 and *Wuxing Pian* 8.

dwelling content; won't you know what kind of person they are? Won't you know what kind of person they are?"<sup>725</sup>—In our solitary moments our true intension is disclosed.

Cultivating the proper intension—one that begins with us and is genuinely set upon the best possible conduct—is discussed in terms of the heartmind (心 *xīn*) by the *Daxue*, *Biaoji*, and *Wuxing Pian*, while Mengzi speaks of it as his “flood-like *qi*” (浩然之氣 *hàorán zhī qì*).<sup>726</sup> In either case, we are dealing with an inwardness—something “within the heartmind” (中心 *zhōng xīn*) or that “takes shape within” (行於內 *xíng yú nèi*).<sup>727</sup>

Proper intension is affective—it involves what the *Daxue* refers to as the “rectification of the heartmind” (正其心 *zhèng qí xīn*). Too often we are blinded by our affections and thus prevented from cultivating our relationships with others. We are partial (辟 *bì*) towards those whom we feel close to or love, those whom we find repugnant or distasteful, those whom we fear or respect, those whom we pity or have compassion for, those whom we find to be listless or lazy. This is the real challenge to combining the way of the father and the mother, mentioned in the *Biaoji*. As the *Daxue Zengzhu* puts it, “To love others yet know their faults, or to hate others yet know their good parts—those who can do this are rare.” It is to achieve this rare balance that the *Daxue* recommends we rectify our heartminds (正其心 *zhèng qí xīn*). This process seems to involve at least one of two different possibilities: either restraining our affections and thus not letting them go to extremes, or training our affections to respond only to salient stimuli. The first interpretation can be supported with reference to the *Daxue Zengzhu*

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<sup>725</sup> 2.10; cf. 1.14

<sup>726</sup> *Mengzi* 2A2.

<sup>727</sup> See *Biaoji* 19 and *Wuxing Pian* 1



and to the first chapter of the *Zhongyong*. The *Daxue Zengzhu* reminds us that when we are enraged or terrified, overly fond or anxious, we fail to grasp things aright (不得其正 *bù dé qí zhēng*). Surely the solution is not to try to evade our affections—they are undeniable and unavoidable. But perhaps we should strive for what the *Zhongyong* recommends: that we harmonize our affections and never let them get out of hand. On the second interpretation the problem is not with extreme affections but affections that arise in response to the wrong objects. In the *Analects* Confucius is fully prepared to admit that exemplary persons will experience worry and rage, sorrow and joy—even in extreme forms. The affections themselves are not the problem, nor their degree; the problem, rather, is when we feel worry or joy about the wrong sorts of things. Even if this is not how we should interpret the *Daxue Zengzhu*, it is certain that part of proper intension is matching affective responses to their proper objects. We must, like the *jūnzǐ*, come to love what is appropriate and be at ease with it; and to hate what is inappropriate.<sup>728</sup>

This education of our affections involves the development of something akin to a habit—making our affective intension dispositional. The *Daxue* speaks of it as making one's intentions sincere—and the *Daxue Zengzhu* elaborates on the subject in terms of avoiding duplicity and deception. One makes one's intentions sincere only when one's true desires coincide with one's actions. The moment these two diverge we have the duplicity of the *xiaoren* who pretend to be good, but who—when alone—allow themselves to err without limit.<sup>729</sup> Mengzi's discussion of his flood-like 氣 *qì* (inclination, drive, disposition) is instructive at this point. "It is," he says, "a *qì* which unites appropriateness with one's conduct. Deprive it of conduct or appropriateness, and it will

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<sup>728</sup> *Analects* 4.3, 6.20; cf. *Ziyi* 15 and 20

<sup>729</sup> *Daxue Zengzhu* 6

starve. It is born of accumulated appropriate conduct and cannot be appropriated by anyone through a sporadic show of appropriateness.”<sup>730</sup> Rendering one’s intentions sincere is a matter of establishing the relevant affective dispositions—dispositions that influence one even when alone (allowing what one does while alone to stand as evidence of one’s genuine intentions). It should be obvious that proper intension is more than just behavior, even repeated behavior. The very first line of the *Wuxing Pian* makes the distinction between behavior and intension evident: “When extending oneself (仁 *rén*) takes shape within we call it virtuous behavior (德之行 *dé zhī xìng*); when extending oneself does not take shape within, we call it mere behavior (行 *xìng*).” When any of the five, praiseworthy modes of conduct—仁 *rén*, 義 *yì*, 禮 *lǐ*, 智 *zhì*, or 聖 *shèng*—“take shape within” (形於內 *xíng yú nèi*), one’s delights, ease, and desires are directed at, or realized by, one of these five. Only when we take to doing something with ease (安 *ān*), genuinely enjoy doing it (好 *hǎo* or 樂 *lè*), and desire to continue doing it can we say it takes shape within and constitutes an aspect of our intensivity.<sup>731</sup>

Finally, in addition to being affective and dispositional, intension is also cognitive. According to the *Daxue*, rendering one’s intentions sincere rests upon extending one’s knowledge and investigating affairs. Unfortunately, the commentary on this line in the *Daxue Zengzhu* is lost. In its place we have the common interpretation, stemming from Zhuxi, that ‘the extension of knowledge and investigation of affairs’ is the investigation of things with the ultimate aim or understand the underlying patterns of

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<sup>730</sup> 2A2

<sup>731</sup> See *Biaoji* 14, 19; *Ziyi* 15, 20; *Analects* 6.20

all things. The Japanese Confucian, Ogyu Sorai (1666-1728), offers a refreshing criticism of this interpretation:

Ever since the Song Confucians misread the words “investigating things” and “extending knowledge,” people have believed that learning requires that one determine everything from the disposition of the wind, cloud, thunder, and rain to the principle of every blade of grass and each tree. When one examines the motives of those who do this, one discovers that they want to have contemplated everything in heaven and earth to the fullest possible extent, to know everything in heaven and earth, and to become erudite. In the *Doctrine of the Mean* [*Zhongyong*], there is mention of how “there are things which even the sages do not know.” How can someone with only average intelligence know everything?<sup>732</sup>

If we interpret the line of the *Daxue* in a way consistent with the rest of the text it would seem that ‘extending knowledge’ is akin to what Confucius speaks of in the *Analects* as knowing what you know and what you do not know. A more relevant interpretation of the phrase 格物 *gewu* can be established by borrowing a line from the *Ziyi* chapter of the *Liji*: “words should be capable of proof by instances (物 wù), and conduct should conform to the pattern (格 gé).”<sup>733</sup> This suggests that *gèwù* might refer to the attitude best suited to sustaining and cultivating a proper intension. By anticipating one’s fallibility and remaining open to criticism one is in the best position to avoid claiming to know what one does not know, to make sure that one’s words match one’s deeds, and to make sure that one’s deeds stand up under scrutiny.<sup>734</sup>

Given that we have spoken of proper intension in terms of affective dispositions, a parallel to Aristotle’s account of character or habits seems obvious. That the parallel is misleading, and that Confucian ethics is not a genuine example of a virtue ethics, are two

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<sup>732</sup> Yamashita 1994, 52

<sup>733</sup> 8; cf. *Biaoji* 47 and 51

<sup>734</sup> A theme discussed not only in the *Ziyi*, but also in the *Analects* and *Zhongyong* (see *Ziyi* 18, 19, 24).

claims worth defending.<sup>735</sup> But doing so will also allow us to address the social dimension the Confucians attribute to one's intension—something quite germane to our general thesis that sagehood is a social process and that even if the sages are the most intensive persons, they are that way only in relation to others.

The question is whether Aristotle's *ethike arete* (character virtues) ought to be used as an interpretive analog to the Confucian 德 *dé* ("virtue"). Much like the early Confucian philosophers, Aristotle thinks that a person's behavior is insufficient grounds for praising them. While behavior may constitute or produce desirable events, the person may have achieved these results by chance or by blindly following directions. In either case we may express encomia or felicitations, he says, for the results; but the person cannot be said to be responsible for the result, nor can they be relied upon to produce similar results in the future.<sup>736</sup> This explains why Aristotle inquires into intension. And when we turn to his account of intension we find several parallels with the early Confucian account.

First of all, both respond to ethical contextualism by attributing significance to a kind of wisdom or cognitive acumen.<sup>737</sup> Interestingly we cannot describe their accounts of wisdom as purely cognitive since in both cases what is discussed as wisdom involves an affective dimension. Secondly, Aristotle also includes affections and affective *habitus* in his account of intension. He is most adamant on this head when discussing the moral philosophy of Socrates. "Socrates," he says, "in one respect was on the right track while in another he went astray; in thinking that all the virtues were forms of practical wisdom

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<sup>735</sup> For a parallel discussion see Rosemont and Ames 2009, 40-45.

<sup>736</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.4

<sup>737</sup> For the contextualism in Aristotle, see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104a7 and 2.6. For the part of wisdom in proper intension, see *Wuxing Pian* 2, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6 and 1107a.

he was wrong, but in saying they implied practical wisdom he was right.”<sup>738</sup> Socrates, in reducing intension to a purely cognitive affair, ignored the part affections and character (or affective *habitus*) play in virtue—an error that becomes obvious when we realize that, if Socrates were right in his account of virtues, simply knowing what justice or courage was would be sufficient to make us just or courageous. The early Confucian philosophers and Aristotle both see this as inaccurate. Aristotle distinguishes between several of the virtues in terms of their predominant affection. Courage concerns boldness and fear, temperance concerns pleasure and pain, and mildness concerns anger.<sup>739</sup> Furthermore, affections are a necessary aspect of praiseworthy intension. “The sort of person who does not delight in fine actions does not even qualify as a person of virtue: no one would call a person just if he failed to delight in acting justly, nor open-handed if he failed to delight in open-handed actions.”<sup>740</sup> Yet, for at least the sake of praise and reliability, Aristotle insists that the proper affections must be firm; these affections must be dispositions or *habitus*, and not simply momentary moods. Hence, Aristotle describes our momentary affections simply as signs of our affective *habitus*—that is, signs of our dispositions to experience certain affections in specific types of situations and in response to our own conduct. Much like Mengzi, Aristotle regards these dispositions as the product of habituation—they “come about from activities of a similar sort.”<sup>741</sup>

While these parallels suggest that Aristotle and the early Confucians are speaking about the same thing, the association of Aristotelian *ethike arete* and Confucian *dé* has unfortunately clouded a very serious issue: whether Confucian *dé* can be understood as

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<sup>738</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1144b17-20

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.7

<sup>740</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.8; see Hursthouse 1999, 11.

<sup>741</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.1; cf. *Mengzi* 2A2

agent-based. For Aristotle, many of the character virtues are other-regarding; but even those are possessed by discrete individuals. Furthermore, Aristotle is capable of distinguishing between the dispositions of individuals and their behavior.<sup>742</sup> Thus, the Aristotelian virtues can be said to be agent-based. Perhaps it is something similar that Confucius means when he speaks of *rén* as ‘starting with me’ or what the *Biaoji* means when it describes those of the highest intensity as having *rén* “belonging to them”<sup>743</sup> or having their “heart of heart naturally resting in *rén*.”<sup>744</sup> Yet, in order to regard praiseworthy dispositions as agent-based one must be willing to accept that a person might have the proper intension without corresponding behavior, and might have the proper intension regardless of any changes in their natural, but especially social, environment. And this is just what Aristotle accepts. He says that “it is possible for the disposition [i.e., *habitus*] to be present and yet produce nothing good, as for example in the case of the person who is asleep, or in some other way rendered inactive.”<sup>745</sup> In addition to allowing the possibility that the *habitus* might exist without the associated behavior, Aristotle also describes those who possess the virtues as acting—*when* they act, we must add—“from a firm and unchanging disposition.”<sup>746</sup> The relevant dispositions or *habitus* will last longer than a momentary mood (hence, “firm”), but they must also be capable of withstanding the force of circumstance, whether that force is natural or social.

The early Confucian philosophers, however, do not share Aristotle’s position that the proper intension can be divorced from behavior or largely immune from circumstance. For them, one’s proper intension is always behavioral and, thus, always

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<sup>742</sup> See, especially, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.8

<sup>743</sup> 14

<sup>744</sup> 19

<sup>745</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.8

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.4

social or relational. In the *Wuxing Pian*, for instance, there is no thought of there being *dé* without conduct (行 *xíng*); just as there is no thought given in the literature in general to 心 *xīn* or 思 *sī* untethered to *xíng*. Conduct is a given. As Mengzi puts it, ‘when there is something within it necessary take form without.’<sup>747</sup> The only question is whether your behavior has a deep root in your *xīn*, or a shallow root—whether it is something you would *do* when alone, perhaps, and thus with minimum outside force. The *Wuxing Pian* also addresses the inextricably social dimension of the various ‘excellences of conduct’ (德之行 *dé zhī xíng*). At one point the text describes the process by which the intension proper to *rén* takes shape within one’s heartmind.

Reflecting on 仁 *rén* you [must first] be clear; when you are clear then you are insightful; when insightful then you are at ease; when you are at ease then you are gentle; when you are gentle then you are happy; when you are happy then you have a pleasant demeanor; when you have a pleasant demeanor then you treat others as kin; when you treat others as kin then you care for them; when you care for them then you display a jade-like countenance; when you display a jade-like countenance (玉色 *yù sè*) then [*rén*] takes shape [within your heartmind]; when [*rén*] takes shape [within your heartmind] then you are *rén*.<sup>748</sup>

One becomes *rén* through a transformation in how you relate to others and, no doubt, in how they relate to you.<sup>749</sup> Intension, in short, is inseparable from extension. Aristotelian character virtues are thus poor analogs for Confucian 德 *dé*. Fundamentally it ignores something the Confucians maintain—that the excellences of persons are socially situated and dependent (something Dewey captures in his idea of “conduct”).<sup>750</sup>

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<sup>747</sup> 6B6

<sup>748</sup> 5

<sup>749</sup> Cf. *Wuxing Pian* 9, 19 and *Mengzi* 5B1; cf. Ames 2011, 292n126

<sup>750</sup> See chapter four, above.

### 6.5 *The Integrity (潔 Jié) of the Sage*

The third distinguishing characteristic of the traditional sages, according to Mengzi, is their ability to keep themselves “unsullied” (潔 *jié*). Primordially, remaining unsullied is a matter of properly taking, refusing, and leaving official positions. Thus it is that while the sages may conduct themselves differently—“some live in retirement, others enter the world [i.e., take office]; some withdraw, others stay on.”<sup>751</sup> Still, despite this variation, the sages have this in common: they have never compromised themselves for the sake of an official position.<sup>752</sup>

The question of when it is appropriate to accept an official post is a matter of some debate in the *Analects*. Not only does this question grow in significance as the work progresses—very likely reflecting a historical shift in the circumstances of the early Confucians or 儒士 *Rúshì*; it is also a source of some tension within the text. The eighteenth book, entirely dedicated to this question, takes up a position opposite to one expressed in the earlier portion of the work. Regardless of this tension, the *Analects* as a whole agrees that there are times when it would clearly be inappropriate to take office,<sup>753</sup> and in several passages—across the entire text—several traditional figures<sup>754</sup> are praised for their “timeliness” in taking office when it was appropriate and leaving office when *that* was appropriate.

Because Confucius is praised for his abilities at this sort of timeliness—of taking and leaving offices when appropriate<sup>755</sup>—we might turn our attention to the accounts of his conduct in order to develop our understanding of ‘keeping oneself unsullied.’

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<sup>751</sup> See chapter four.

<sup>752</sup> 5A7

<sup>753</sup> 8.13, 14.1

<sup>754</sup> Nanrong, Ning Wuzi, Confucius, Yan Hui, Shiyu, Qu Boyu, Liuxia Hui, among others.

<sup>755</sup> 7.11, 5B1



Confucius refused office when it would not contribute to the general good, or when it would support a factious or rebellious group.<sup>756</sup> He would leave office when he realized he could no longer exercise a positive influence upon his ruler, claiming that it was unwise to waste one's words in this fashion.<sup>757</sup> These are at least the occasions on which it is clearly appropriate to refuse or leave an official post. Uncertainty arises, however, when taking an official position will put one at risk, or when one's employer is corrupt or 'without the way' (無道 *wúdào*).

Ning Wuzi is praised for feigning stupidity to avoid office and thus keep himself intact, just as Nanrong is praised because "when the way prevails in the land, he does not go unemployed, but when it does not prevail, he avoids punishment and execution"—with the implication that he refuses office when the way does not prevail *in order to* avoid suffering physical harm.<sup>758</sup> The significance these passages attach to keeping oneself physically intact contrasts, however, with passages in the later books of the *Analects*. In one of these passages we are told that true knights (*shi*) are willing to risk their lives: they will not give up on consummateness (*rén*) simply to stay alive, but they might very well sacrifice their lives in order to realize consummateness. In the eighteenth book we hear Confucius praise Bi Gan as a consummate person even though Bi Gan was executed because he refused to abandon his office and its duties of remonstrance. When the madman from the state of Chu says that "Those who seek office these days are in real danger" Confucius and his students offer no rebuttal; it is as if the authors of this section of the *Analects* were admitting the danger and no longer excusing themselves from taking serious risks with their lives. Between the two extremes—of refusing office if it puts one

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<sup>756</sup> 6.9, 17.1

<sup>757</sup> 18.3, 18.4, 15.8

<sup>758</sup> 5.21, 5.2; cf. 11.25

in danger, and insisting that a threat to one's life is no excuse—there stands a moderate position expressed at *Analects* 7.11. After Confucius commends Yan Hui and himself for their “timeliness” in taking and leaving official positions, he is asked by Zilu—“if you, Master, were given command of the combined armies, who would you want to go along?” Confucius responds, “The person who would wrestle a tiger bare-handed or march across the Yellow River, and would go to his death without regret—this person I would not take along. It would have to be someone who would approach any situation with trepidation, and who would be fond of planning with an eye of success.” Connecting the two halves of this passage together—the one on taking office, the other on leading an army—we might see Confucius's response to Zilu as a criticism of those who would risk their lives or sacrifice themselves when doing so will produce no positive results.

Confucius does not commend rashness or useless martyrdom. In other words, whether an official position puts you at risk is not a sufficient reason to refuse the post; but if by risking your life you stand no chance of improving affairs—that is a sufficient reason to refuse the offer.

On the matter of corrupt rulers or states that are said to lack the way, we can say that a state has lost its way when it is in danger of collapse, or when there is a rebellion brewing within its borders—if only because these are symptomatic of misrule. There are countless ways to misrule a state and so prevent the way from prevailing. A ruler might, for instance, be excessive in his taxation of the common people, or have a calloused disregard for the cost of human life attached to his military ambitions. In Confucius's criticism of his home state of Lu he denotes yet another way in which a state may lose the way: whenever ritual proprieties, music, or punitive campaigns are in the hands of

ministers or powerful clans—as they were in the state of Lu—this, Confucius says, is sufficient evidence that the way does not prevail in the state. Regardless of how a state may lose its way, the earlier Confucians were uncertain as to whether one should accept a post in such a state. It is said to be shameful to have rank or salary in a state that has lost its way, and several figures are praised for refusing office when the state lost its way. This would suggest that the way not prevailing in a state is sufficient reason to refuse an official position. Yet there are other passages that appear to deny this claim. The seventeenth book records two occasions when Confucius wants to accept an official post under rulers who are less than impeccable—much to the chagrin of some of Confucius’s students. And then there are the passages in the eighteenth book that dismiss the relevance of the way not prevailing in the state. In one of these passages, Confucius claims that it is only *because* the way does not prevail in the world that he is compelled to do something about it.

Old Marsh and Boldly Sunk were out in harness ploughing the field. Confucius, passing their way, sent Zilu to ask them where to ford.

Old Marsh asked him, “Who is that man holding the reins of your carriage?”

“He is Confucius,” replied Zilu.

“The Confucius of Lu?”

“Indeed.”

“Then he already knows where the ford is.”

Zilu turned and asked Boldly Sunk where to ford.

“Who are you?” asked Boldly Sunk.

“I am Zilu.”

“You are the follower of Confucius of Lu?”

“The very one.”

He then said, “We are inundated like floodwaters. And the whole world is the same. Who then is going to change it into a new world? You follow after a teacher who avoids people selectively. Wouldn’t you be better off following a teacher who avoids the world altogether?” As he spoke he continued to turn the earth over the seeds.

Zilu left to inform Confucius. Confucius, with some frustration, replied, “We cannot run with birds and beasts. Am I not one among the people of this

world? If not them, with whom should I associate? If the way prevailed in the world I wouldn't need to change it.”<sup>759</sup>

In a second passage, Zilu delivers a diatribe on hermitage:

To refuse office is to fail to do what is important and appropriate. If the differentiation between young and old cannot be abandoned, how could one think of abandoning what is appropriate between ruler and subject? This is to throw the most important relationships into turmoil in one's efforts to remain personally untarnished (潔 *jié*). The opportunity of the exemplary person to serve in office is the occasion to effect what is judged to be important and appropriate. That the way does not prevail—that is known already.<sup>760</sup>

It is clear that by the eighteenth book ‘the way not prevailing in a state’ is no longer an acceptable excuse for avoiding office; it is, itself, a *reason* to take office. And in a world in which *every* state is misruled to some degree it remains the only viable option—we cannot run with birds and beasts, if only because self-cultivation is necessarily communal. While this younger portion of the *Analects* is willing to consider taking office even within a state that has lost its way, this compromise is not indiscriminate: at least two preconditions are stipulated in the *Analects* for taking office in a misruled state. First of all, prudence dictates that one guard one's words: “When the way prevails, be perilously high-minded in your speech and conduct; when it does not prevail, be perilously high-minded in your conduct, but be prudent in what you say.”<sup>761</sup> Second, and this appears to be one way to resolve the tension between those passages in the *Analects* that commend avoiding office when the way does not prevail and those passages that dismiss the significance of the way not prevailing: one must be careful about one's motives for taking office. The question is whether one is taking office for the sake of

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<sup>759</sup> 18.6 (translation by Ames and Rosemont).

<sup>760</sup> 18.7 (translation by Ames and Rosemont).

<sup>761</sup> 14.3

wealth and rank, or if one is taking office in order to improve affairs.<sup>762</sup> It is a shameful and sullyng affair if one is motivated by the former, but it is hoped that the latter motive will serve to keep one unsullied even if the state is corrupt.

That one might properly take up an official position in a corrupt state complicates the task of remaining unsullied, demanding that one abandon any fixed policy on the matter, and use intelligence instead of rules. Book eighteen of the *Analects* and portions of the *Mengzi* respond to this complication, endeavoring to inform the nature of the intelligence needed by thinking through particular exemplars. Both texts treat Bo Yi and Liuxia Hui as positive exemplars—as sages or at least consummate persons. Mengzi regards them as successfully remaining unsullied, but in deficient ways; and if the *Analects* doubts whether Liuxia Hui was entirely successful in this regard, the text is at least in agreement with the assessment of Bo Yi in the *Mengzi*.<sup>763</sup> Despite praising these two exemplars each text expresses certain reservations about their role as exemplars. Both texts agree that Bo Yi was too fastidious in his pursuit of remaining unsullied, and Liuxia Hui was too liberal in his associations. That Bo Yi is regarded as deficient in his realization of *jié* is particularly significant—it suggests that keeping oneself unsullied cannot be accomplished simply by keeping oneself out of society. Remaining unsullied is not the quality of individuals in isolation, but a quality of social interaction.

Regarding the deficiencies of these two exemplars, Mengzi says that these two may be proper subjects for emulation if one is narrow-minded or mean-spirited, or covetous or irresolute; but for those who are not so wayward as all that, these exemplars present particular approaches to keeping oneself unsullied that are much too extreme to

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<sup>762</sup> 18.6

<sup>763</sup> 18.8

be emulated. The image here is one that Xunzi expresses in terms of the markers (表 *biǎo*) of a ford.<sup>764</sup> It was a practice in ancient China to place markers on the banks of the river on either extreme of the safe place to cross. Using this image we might say that for those who are too far up or down the moral riverbank to make a crossing between the two pairs of markers, the markers will themselves stand as a proper target. Yet for those who stand a chance of staying within these markers and making a safe crossing, these two pair of markers are not targets but warnings—delineating the borders of propriety.

According to Mengzi, for anyone who is neither covetous or irresolute, nor narrow-minded or mean-spirited, Confucius is one of the best persons to emulate when it comes to keeping oneself unsullied. This is because Confucius, unlike Bo Yi and Liuxia Hui, is—as Mengzi puts it—“timely” (時 *shi*).<sup>765</sup> Timeliness is minimally the absence of inflexibility (固 *gù*). When asked why he often shifts his speech, like a bird moving from perch to perch, Confucius replies that it is not because he wishes to ingratiate himself to his listeners but because he hates inflexibility. Confucius sees himself as different from Bo Yi and Liuxia Hui in exactly this regard, saying that, unlike them, he does not have preconceptions about what can or cannot be done (無可無不可 *wúkě wúbùkě*). Like the *jūnzǐ*, he is not categorically for or against anything, but pursues what is appropriate.<sup>766</sup> This at least prevents him from Bo Yi’s fastidious pursuit of purity, or Liuxia Hui’s fastidious pursuit of openly associating with others. Yet the absence of fastidiousness or inflexibility is not a real response to the demand for intelligence when deciding to take, leave, or refuse office.

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<sup>764</sup> 17.14; cf. 27.13

<sup>765</sup> 5B1; cf. p. 227

<sup>766</sup> 4.10

Confucius accompanies his flexibility with responsiveness or a timely adaptation to circumstances. “When he left Qi,” Mengzi tells us, “Confucius started after emptying the rice from the steamer” in a hurry to leave the state.

But when he left Lu he said, ‘I proceed as slowly as possible.’ This is the way to leave the state of one’s father and mother. When it was proper to hasten one’s departure, he would do so; when it was proper to prolong his departure, he would do so; when it was proper to take up residence in a state, he would do so; when it was proper to serve in an official capacity, he would do so—this was Confucius.<sup>767</sup>

In an attempt to further explain Confucius’s timeliness, Mengzi makes use of the image of archery.

Wisdom is like an archer’s skill, shall I say, while sageliness is like strength. It is like shooting from beyond a hundred paces. It is due to your strength that the arrow reaches the target, but it is not due to your strength that it hits the mark.<sup>768</sup>

Working with this image we can say that the “target” in question is the task of improving the affairs in the realm. This is the only motive that will keep one unsullied as one takes or leaves office. And yet changing the affairs in the realm is not something individuals can accomplish on their own. One must extend oneself (*rén*) if one is to sustain one’s plans and see them through to fruition.<sup>769</sup> So the “strength” in question is the efficacy sages achieve by extending themselves, letting others contribute to the task at hand and thus allowing others to compose their own efficacy. And yet it is not enough to simply have one’s eye on the target, and sufficient strength to cover the distance. Remaining unsullied, when achieved intelligently, is really about modulating one’s relations with others so as to extend oneself with successful results. Archery in ancient China was ritualized with the accompaniment of music, and the good archer took his shot in time

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<sup>767</sup> 5B1

<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

<sup>769</sup> 15.33

with the music. Using this image Mengzi is suggesting that the sage, like a successful archer, must not merely have the right target and strength, but must have the right timing. Just as it would be much easier for the archer to take the shot right away, so it is easy to have the right aim when one is just starting in an official post. The challenge is, of course, to have the right aim when the time arrives. The archer must remain relaxed until, in the moment before the shot is to be taken, he draws the bow back, only to hold it for a second—releasing it at the precise moment. Achieving political results requires the same timing, the same flexibility leading up to the proper moment, and the same timely responsiveness at the precise moment for action.

Mengzi suggests much about the precise nature of timely responsiveness when he describes Confucius's timeliness as “combining the best” of the sages Bo Yi, Liuxia Hui, and others. These two exemplars in particular may have failed to be intelligent in their associations with others or in their acceptance or rejection of office, yet they were excellent in their own ways. Bo Yi was never compromised and Liuxia Hui was always approachable. It is Confucius's genius that he was able to combine the affability of Liuxia Hui with the integrity of Bo Yi without succumbing to either of their particular forms of inflexibility.

In several passages of the *Analects* we find the conduct of Liuxia Hui implicitly commended. The *jūnzǐ*, Confucius says, “associates openly with others and are not partisan”<sup>770</sup> They also do not form cliques. On another occasion he suggests that we ought to decide whether to associate with a persons not on the basis of their past conduct nor the conduct they are likely to have in the future, but simply upon their present

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<sup>770</sup> 2.14



conduct.<sup>771</sup> While we must be more selective in our friends and employers, when it comes to those with whom we associate we must be like Luixia Hui—tolerant of all.<sup>772</sup> Yet, for all our liberality, we do well to follow Bo Yi: to make sure that we avoid ever being duped or compromised.

Zaiwo asked, “With consummate persons—if they were informed that there was another consummate person down a well, would they go in after him?”

Confucius replied, “How could this be? The *jūnzǐ* might save him but they would not fall into the well themselves; the *jūnzǐ* may be cheated but not deceived.”<sup>773</sup>

Confucius recommends blending intelligence with liberal association: “Without anticipating duplicity or suspecting dishonesty,” he remarks, “to still be the first to become aware of each conduct—is this not a mark of superior character (*xián* 賢)?”<sup>774</sup>

Timeliness can thus be understood as the combination of open association and perceptiveness, or wisdom (*zhī*). With wisdom sufficient to the task, timeliness enables us to extend ourselves (*rén*) without needlessly endangering ourselves or compromising our ability to sustain our extended selves. The best of the sages are able to bring all three—wisdom, extension, and remaining unsullied—into a balanced and productive relationship.

## 6.6 Summary

Sagehood is communal. Each of the four marks of the sages—propriety in one’s relationships, wisdom, extension, and remaining unsullied—necessarily requires the participation of others; no one may be proper, wise, extended, or unsullied on his or her own. Sagehood thus denotes specific relationships or communities, not individuals.

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<sup>771</sup> 7.29

<sup>772</sup> See 19.3

<sup>773</sup> 6.26

<sup>774</sup> 14.31 (translation by Ames and Rosemont).

Furthermore, these four descriptors are best realized when persons think of themselves *as* their communities—when they embrace an expansive or communal sense of self.

Community is thus at the center of sagehood. Yet what sort of community are we talking about? There are several suggestions in what we have discussed in this chapter but in the next chapter we will develop our account of the type of community correlated with Confucian sagehood. Drawing upon the work of John Dewey and Jane Addams I will articulate a notion of democracy that captures the Confucian social ideal. Discussing the role sages play in fostering such democratic communities will allow us to address the reason why the communal activity of the sage, when taken to its logical extreme, threatens to render the sage invisible. The exact nature of this problem will be characterized and disarmed

## CHAPTER 7. DEMOCRACY AND THE INVISIBLE SAGE

The notion that sagehood is a community is a natural extension of our earlier discussion on the native normativity of exemplary persons, as well as the participatory nature of the exemplar's normativity and significance. Yet this communal nature to sagehood suggests another dimension to our conversation—namely, that the conception of exemplary persons we have developed from the Confucian literature reflects a democratic sensibility. While interesting in its own right, developing this claim promises to help us resolve the challenge we discussed in the first chapter—namely, the problem of the invisible sage.

While attributing democratic ideals to Confucian philosophy may seem to be rather strange, if not flatly anachronistic, such a claim is not without precedent. David Hall and Roger Ames, Sor-Hoon Tan, and Joseph Grange have all written on the parallels between democracy—particularly the Deweyan conception of democracy—and Confucianism.<sup>775</sup> Beyond the charge of anachronism the usual objections to this sort of project rest either upon the assumption that democracy requires specific governmental institutions, or upon the assumption that democracy is necessarily linked to liberalism and its faith in discrete individuals. It is little wonder, then, that the scholars who make the sort of claim I wish to defend have invariably turned to Dewey's conception of democracy—a conception that does not employ either of these two assumptions.

In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey distinguishes between democracy as a social idea, and democracy as a system of government that usually involves the political

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<sup>775</sup> Hall and Ames 1998, Tan 2004, and Grange 2004.

institutions of “general suffrage, elected representative, majority rule, and so on.”<sup>776</sup>

While these institutions function, or are thought to function, so as to secure the social idea of democracy, the social idea is much “fuller and wider” than the political notion. It is *fuller* because “it is not a fact and never will be”—it is an *ideal* that political states might aspire to realize, but an ideal that ought never to be reduced to the historical attempts to realize it. If we allowed the social ideal to be reduced to the political realities, the criticisms that might justly be leveled against the institutions of “democratic” states will also serve as severe indictments of democracy itself. Those who are sympathetic to Confucianism, communism, or any one of the various religious traditions often make similar allowances. In the case of communism, there are states that describe themselves, or are described by others, as communistic; and then there is the idea espoused by Karl Marx and others. Without separating the two—the political realities and the philosophical idea—the critiques of the communist states would silence the political philosophy.

The social idea of democracy is also *wider* than the political notion. The political institutions reflect, at best, only the political phase of the idea. In its widest sense, “democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself.”<sup>777</sup> Or, as Dewey puts it in *Reconstructions in Philosophy*, “It is but a name for the fact that human nature is developed only when its elements take part in directing things which are common, things for the sake of which men and women form groups—families, industrial companies, governments, churches, scientific associations

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<sup>776</sup> 1927, 293

<sup>777</sup> Ibid., 295

and so on.”<sup>778</sup> Democracy is associated living grounded upon the communication of, and participation in, common goods.

Dewey’s notion of democracy is sometimes contrasted with the notion of democracy that relies upon human rights and liberal notions of the individual. Hall and Ames provide a useful synopsis of this second notion of democracy by highlighting its dominant features.<sup>779</sup> First of all, liberal democracy regards the individual as somehow prior to the society to which he or she belongs, thus assuming that individuals are discrete individuals possessing natural rights. This conception of individuals is thus made sympathetic to the ‘free market’ associated with capitalism. Secondly, rights are thought to take priority over the social good; the rights enjoyed by these discrete individuals are regarded as sacrosanct and cannot be violated or impinged for the sake of the common good or the interests of the group. If these traits are definitive of liberal democracy, Dewey cannot fairly be said to be party to its conception of democracy. First of all, Dewey rejects the possibility that discrete individuals might antedate society. The individual is a social realization; individuals may be particular, but never discrete. Secondly, Dewey does not consider political rights to be grounded in an absolute nature or the result of a divine dispensation; they are social practices, nothing more. Finally, when it comes to the social good, Dewey believes that individuals and the community can mutually benefit from one-another—that capitalism, in fact, is detrimental to democracy as communal living if only because it operates under the conception that the principle reward available to an individual is pecuniary advantage (what the Confucians

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<sup>778</sup> Ibid., 209

<sup>779</sup> 1998

refer to as 利 *li*), while it is quite possible for an individual's chief reward to be realized by an exemplary performance of one's roles.

When we look to the content of Dewey's notion of democracy, we discover a parallel with the content of Confucian exemplary persons. Such persons, by extending themselves to others and thus communicating and cultivating a common good, are thereby endeavoring to realize the social idea of democracy. This parallel in *content* has implications for how we *conceive* of exemplary persons. This is something Jane Addams touches upon in *Twenty Years at Hull-House*.<sup>780</sup>

In a chapter titled "The Influence of Lincoln" Addams records a moment when her understanding of exemplary persons underwent a dramatic transformation—a transformation that led her away from the work of Thomas Carlyle and towards that of Carl Schurz. This shift involves the realization on her part that different sociopolitical ideals are reflected not simply by *whom* one takes to be exemplary but also by *how* one understands exemplary personhood. This parallels the difference between the features of the sage (what we might summarize as the content of sagehood) and the composite selfhood of the sage (the structure of sagehood).

In this particular chapter Addams is chiefly interested in using the personal example of Lincoln to address the main difference she sees between the settlement movement in England where the movement had its birth, and the settlement movement as it had adapted to American soil. She understands Lincoln as a leader committed to the ideals of self-government and democracy. He knew, she says, "that if this tremendous

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<sup>780</sup> Including Jane Addams in our conversation is not accidental. Dewey admits that the Hull-House settlement Addams co-founded in Chicago was one of the exemplary communities he drew upon in developing his notion of democracy. We can also add that these two philosophers share a common notion of democracy as a social ideal (see Seigfried 1999).

experiment [sc. in self-government] was to come to fruition, it must be brought about by the people themselves; that there was no other capital fund upon which to draw ... That the people themselves were the great resource of the country.”<sup>781</sup> She agrees with Edward Caird’s assessment of Lincoln as the great American “who was content merely to dig the channels through which the moral life of his countrymen might flow”—or what we could describe as the moral equivalent of Yu: a leader who employs a 無為 *wúwéi* approach to social influence.<sup>782</sup> She also describes Lincoln as an able appropriator of culture and tradition, so much so that she often presented him as an exemplar to the culturally diverse group of recent immigrants that were part of the Hull-House community.

Whenever I held up Lincoln for their admiration as the greatest American, I invariably pointed out his marvelous power to retain and utilize past experience; that he never forgot how the plain people in Sangamon County thought and felt when he himself had moved to town; that this habit was the foundation for his marvelous capacity for growth; that during those distracting years in Washington it enabled him to make clear beyond denial to the American people themselves, the goal towards which they were moving. I was sometimes bold enough to add that proficiency in the act of recognition and comprehension did not come without effort, and that certainly its attainment was necessary for any successful career in our conglomerate America.<sup>783</sup>

While the American and English settlements shared a common response to the “inequalities of mankind” and a desire to do something about it, Addams claims that for the English, with their aristocratic bent, the settlement was understood to be a movement on the part of the upper class in their attempt to make the commoner’s life ‘a bit more bearable.’ This conception of social work, however, maintained class division and looked upon its business simply as a kind of alms-giving to the poor. The American model of social work, on the other hand, was richly influenced by democracy and sympathetic to

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<sup>781</sup> 1945, 35

<sup>782</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>783</sup> Ibid., 37

Lincoln's approach to the resolution of social problems. Rather than maintain social divisions, Addams saw the American settlement movement in general, and the Hull-House in particular, as tasked with facilitating communication between classes, generations, and the established residents of the United States with those newly arrived from Europe—with the ultimate aim of cultivating and sustaining common interests. The influence of Lincoln, as Addams sees it, is his demonstration of the efficacy of democratic leadership.

Our democracy is still our most precious possession, and we do well to resent any inroads upon it, even though they may be made in the name of philanthropy. Is it not Abraham Lincoln who has cleared the title to our democracy? He made plain once and for all, that democratic government, associated as it is with all the mistakes and shortcomings of the common people, still remains the most valuable contribution America has made to the moral life of the world.<sup>784</sup>

—And, she might have added, to the settlement movement and its conception of social work.

The difference between the English and American conceptions of social work is paralleled, in this chapter, by Addams's own re-conceptualization of the "hero" or exemplary person. She attributes the beginning of this re-conceptualization to an experience during a celebration of "Old Settlers' Day" in rural Illinois when she was fifteen years old.

My father had made a little address of reminiscences at a meeting of "the old settlers of Stephenson County," which was held every summer in the grove beside the mill, relating his experiences in inducing the farmers of the country to subscribe for stock in the Northwestern Railroad, which was the first to penetrate the county and to make a connection with the Great Lakes at Chicago. Many of the Pennsylvania German farmers doubted the value of "the whole new-fangled business," and had no use for any railroad, much less for one in which they were asked to risk their hard-earned savings. My father told of his despair in one farmers' community dominated by such prejudice which did not in the least give

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<sup>784</sup> Ibid., 42. Of course if our thesis is correct, Lincoln and the United State is not the sole vindicator of democracy; strangely enough, ancient China could teach us a thing or two about democracy.



way under his argument, but finally melted under the enthusiasm of a high-spirited German matron who took a share to be paid for “out of butter and egg money.” As he related his admiration for her, an old woman’s piping voice in the audience called out: “I’m here to-day, Mr. Addams, and I’d do it again if you asked me,” The old woman, bent and broken by her seventy years of toilsome life, was brought to the platform and I was much impressed by my father’s grave presentation of her as “one of the public-spirited pioneers to whose heroic fortitude we are indebted for the development of this country.” I remember that I was at that time reading with great enthusiasm Carlyle’s “Heroes and Hero Worship,” but on the evening of “Old Settler’s Day,” to my surprise, I found it difficult to go on.<sup>785</sup>

Presented with a vivid illustration that the stature of someone like her father, an Illinois state senator, rested in part upon a farming woman—along, no doubt, with countless other persons in the community—is it any wonder that she found Carlyle’s “sonorous sentences and exaltation of the man who ‘can’,” and who ‘can’ *on his very own*, rather unconvincing?<sup>786</sup> During the first Christmas at Hull-House, roughly fourteen years after this incident, she gave twenty-five copies of Carl Schurz’s biography of Lincoln to “a club of boys” in a deliberate substitution for copies of Carlyle’s text—a text that she had once told herself, before her experience on Old Settlers’ Day, she would make a point to give each year “to noble young people of my acquaintance.” This substitution is significant for it does not represent merely a shift in persons deemed exemplary (Lincoln, in any case, could not have figured in Carlyle’s lectures on the hero), but a shift in the very *conception* of exemplary persons.

Thomas Carlyle’s lectures on the hero, published as *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, were delivered in 1840. The significance of gods, poets, priests, writers, and kings—Carlyle suggests—can be accounted for in terms of their roles as heroes. History, he claims, “is at bottom the History of Great Men who have worked

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<sup>785</sup> Ibid., 35-36

<sup>786</sup> Ibid.

here,” just as religion is really nothing more than the worship of heroes.<sup>787</sup> In addition to the universal significance of the hero, Carlyle claims that all heroes derive their significance from a common source: “For at bottom the Great Man, as he comes from the hand of Nature, is ever the same kind of thing ... Are all originally of one stuff.”<sup>788</sup> The common essence to all heroes is found whenever “a great soul, *open to the Divine Significance of Life*” is thus “fit to speak of this, to sing of this, to fight and work for this, in a great victorious, enduring manner.”<sup>789</sup> Any difference we might attribute to the various heroes of world history will only reflect, Carlyle suggests, differences in how these heroes were received, how cultures garb these figures—yet such differences will not influence the essential significance of the hero.

Carlyle also thinks of heroes as socially non-composite selves—as men who “can” on their own. Those who are skeptical about the existence of heroes, Carlyle says, would have us reduce such persons to their situations: the hero, he imagines the skeptic saying, is a creature of his time: “the Time called him forth, the Time did everything, he nothing.”<sup>790</sup> But this, he suggests, is like claiming that “it is the sticks that make the fire” when it is really the great man, “with his free force direct out of God’s own hand,” who strikes like lightening and thus starts the fire.<sup>791</sup> He continues, “no sadder proof can be given by a man of his own littleness than disbelief in great men,”<sup>792</sup> and he closes with a restatement that without the lightening the fuel would never have burnt. As he puts it in the last lecture of the series, “The Commander over Men ... may be reckoned the most

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<sup>787</sup> 1901, 1 and 16

<sup>788</sup> Ibid., 49

<sup>789</sup> Ibid., 132; italics added

<sup>790</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>791</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>792</sup> Ibid.

important of Great Men. He is practically the summary for us of all the various figures of Heroism”: all great men “*command* over us” and “tell us for the day and hour what we are to *do*.”<sup>793</sup> This commander is the king—the *Konning*, can-ning, the Able-man.<sup>794</sup> The Carlylean hero, as Addams properly summarizes, is the man that “can.” This, of course, reflects Carlyle’s British sentiments—specifically, his love of kingship and his sympathy for the aristocratic identity of his audience. The social idea of democracy is, for Carlyle, beneath the hero.

In Carl Schurz’s biography of Lincoln we encounter not only an exemplary person who worked to realize the great community (or social idea of democracy), but also an account of an exemplary person that parallels our previous account of Confucian exemplary persons, and especially the Confucian sage. First of all, Schurz avoids the grand synthesis of Carlyle, preferring to deal with Lincoln’s person in concrete terms rather than in abstraction. The greatness of Lincoln, for Schurz, is particular and cannot be reduced to a feature common to every great person. Echoing a claim Addams attributes to Lyman Trumbull (“that Lincoln was no cheap popular hero, that the ‘common people’ would have to make an effort if they would understand his greatness, as Lincoln painstakingly made a long effort to understand the greatness of the people”)<sup>795</sup> Schurz begins his biography of Lincoln with a critical remark regarding all such idealizations of the man that drift into “indiscriminating eulogy, painting his great features in the most glowing colors, and covering with tender shadings whatever might look like a blemish”—restricting themselves to the “mere praise of his virtues and

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<sup>793</sup> Ibid., 225

<sup>794</sup> Ibid.

<sup>795</sup> 1897, 34

abilities” and a total “concealment of his limitations and faults.”<sup>796</sup> “Abraham Lincoln,” Schurz says, “has already become a half-mythical figure, which, in the haze of historic distance, grows to more and more heroic proportions, but also loses in distinctness of outline and feature. This is indeed the common lot of popular heroes.”<sup>797</sup> Such idealizations may stem from “a state of mind of love,” yet such a state of mind is, as Schurz puts it, “unfavorable to the exercise of sober critical judgment.”<sup>798</sup> Furthermore, the only way to polish out all the flaws from another’s biography is through a process of abstraction and idealization—fitting the person to our own sensibilities and baptizing our moral prejudices in the process. In the case of Lincoln, if not in the case of other exemplary persons, the great person will rather lose than gain by the idealization and abstractions which so easily run into the commonplace and renders exemplary person utterly, yet erroneously, familiar.<sup>799</sup> Schurz’s notion here parallels our earlier claim that exemplary persons can only have true significance, or native normative force, when their normative content is irreducibly unique or particular.

Schurz’s account of the greatness of Lincoln, in content and structure, parallels the concept of democracy we encounter in the work of Dewey and Addams as well as the Confucian conception of exemplary persons and sagehood. In stark contrast to Carlyle’s theory of greatness, Schurz explains the efficacy of Lincoln not in terms of his determination or solitary abilities as a man who ‘can,’ but in terms of the man’s circumstances and the participation of the people—rendering Lincoln’s greatness participatory and his person composite. Schurz accounts for Lincoln’s rise to presidency

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<sup>796</sup> Ibid., 1-2

<sup>797</sup> Ibid., 115

<sup>798</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>799</sup> Ibid., 2

largely in terms of circumstantial forces. First of all, there was the repeal of the Missouri Compromise in 1854, which strengthened anti-slavery sentiments in the northern States and led, in part, to the establishment of the Republican Party. To account for Lincoln's nomination for the Republican candidacy Schurz points to Lincoln's debate with Senator Stephen A. Douglas during Lincoln's bid for Senator of Illinois. The issue they debated was, of course, slavery; and their debate was treated by the nation as emblematic. During the debates Douglas sought a compromise that served only to offend both Southern and Northern sentiments. Lincoln came out of the debates losing the bid for Senator, but retaining his principled stance against slavery and thus winning the approval of the North. Douglas became Senator but Lincoln was nominated for the presidency. With the Democratic Party divided between the Northern Democrats and Southern Democrats Lincoln won the election. On the matter of Lincoln's efficacy as president during the American civil war, Schurz claims that Lincoln benefited from the fact that the South struck the first blow at Fort Sumter, and he prosecuted the war successfully by relying upon the advice of those around him—cabinet members, generals, and soldiers.<sup>800</sup> By making the war about slavery Lincoln alienated the Confederate States from European powers and could justify the proclamation of emancipation, transforming the South's wealth of slaves into a hopelessly disorganized labor force and a potential resource for the Union army.<sup>801</sup> While the proclamation was "Lincoln's own resolution and act ... practically it bound the nation, and permitted no step backward."<sup>802</sup> Yet the greatest source of Lincoln's influence stemmed from his understanding of the situation—that conflict between the States was inevitable, and that the means and men must be supplied

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<sup>800</sup> Ibid., 107

<sup>801</sup> Ibid., 83; 87

<sup>802</sup> Ibid., 86

voluntarily—by voluntary enlistment, voluntary taxation, and the voluntary granting of extraordinary powers to the president. This illustrates an abiding commitment on Lincoln’s part to the social idea of democracy: the way forward was by means of the voluntary action on the part of the people. The best he could do was to “propitiate, inspire, mould, organize, unite, and guide the popular will” in terms of a common good—or, as Schurz describes it, “to direct while appearing to obey.”<sup>803</sup> “This was the kind of leadership he intuitively conceived to be needed when a free people were to be led forward *en masse* ... the leadership which does not dash ahead with brilliant daring, no matter who follows.”<sup>804</sup> Rather than risk a policy of “heroic methods”—a policy that would no doubt be embraced by Carlyle’s man who ‘can’—Lincoln saw that while such a policy might initially accomplish great results, it would be incapable of sustaining continued successes. Instead he followed a policy that relied upon the labor of the people—“a policy which was in friendly contact with the popular force and therefore more fit to stand the trial of misfortune on the battlefield.”<sup>805</sup> Such an approach to leadership reflects the participatory or *wúwéi* approach to rulership that is utilized by the traditional Confucian sage. It also reflects the sage’s composite sense of selfhood on Lincoln’s part.

In addition to the force of circumstance and Lincoln’s participatory approach to leadership, Schurz explains Lincoln’s social influence—or what the Confucians would describe as the man’s 德 *dé*—by appealing to the “uprightness of his character,” his “ever-flowing spring of sympathetic kindness,” his knowledge of the people and what moved them, and his “judgment” in the affairs of state. That these illustrate three

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<sup>803</sup> Ibid., 63-64

<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 64

<sup>805</sup> Ibid., 94-95

common aspects of the sage—extending oneself (仁 *rén*), remaining unsullied (潔 *jié*), and being wise (知 *zhī*)—justifies not only discussing Lincoln under these three headings, but of also thinking of Schurz’s Lincoln as a modern Confucian sage.

While Lincoln’s commitment to the abolition of slavery was not widely shared by his neighbors or, later, by many of his constituents in Illinois, they overlooked it because they knew him to be an “uncommon good fellow.”<sup>806</sup> This reputation (or 名 *míng*) afforded him this conviction without damaging his political career. It was his reputation as an honest fellow that explained, when he practiced law, his uncanny influence upon jury and judge alike. Lincoln kept himself unsullied by accepting or rejecting his clients on the basis of their innocence: he would not defend those whom he thought guilty and he would cease defending anyone whom he discovered to be guilty during the course of the trial. “It is not surprising that the mere appearance of so conscientious an attorney in any case should have carried, not only to juries, but even to judges, almost a presumption of right on his side, and that people began to call him, sincerely meaning it, ‘honest Abe Lincoln.’”<sup>807</sup>

Yet the influence of Lincoln was mainly due, Schurz claims, to his sympathy—something he says was “the strongest element in his nature” and the key to understanding the man’s influence upon others. What Schurz describes as Lincoln’s “sympathy” includes two very different, yet related, things: an extension of oneself through empathy,

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<sup>806</sup> Ibid., 15; Schurz describes Lincoln as having held this conviction with a “rare depth and genuineness.” While this might suggest a rather non-Confucian aspect to the man, we must be careful in our understanding of the flexibility commended by Confucius. When Confucius says that ‘the *junzi* is not for or against anything, but goes with what is appropriate,’ he is not ruling out principles or convictions if they are held with intelligence or awareness of the situation. The problem is when we decide, before the situation arises, that we will stick with our principle no matter what—that we will treat it as a fixed rule for action. Given Lincoln’s situation, his conviction is no doubt appropriate. It is hard to say, however, whether he treated this principle as a fixed rule for action; and unless he did, he is not being fastidious or inflexible.

<sup>807</sup> Ibid., 17

and an extension of oneself in terms of identity or selfhood. Concerning the first, Lincoln's sympathy involved the extension of his affective regard towards others, causing him to be affected by their fears and pains. While not accounting for its origin Schurz mentions several formative events in Lincoln's youth: there were the boys he witnessed torturing a wood turtle by putting a burning coal on its back, the brutal behavior of some drunk men, a slave auction in New Orleans, the old Native American who wandered into his company's camp during the Black Hawk war whom Lincoln saved from his men at the risk of his own life, and the pig drowning in the swamp that he retrieved by wading waist-deep into the mud.<sup>808</sup> Even if these events did not initiate Lincoln's affective regard for others, they certainly afforded him occasions upon which to exercise and extend it. These events also indicate the unusual scope of the man's sympathies. Not only was the suffering of animals (the wood turtle in Lincoln's youth, the pig in Lincoln's maturity) sufficient to stir his sympathy, but—Schurz claims—his sympathy was not “confined to individual cases of suffering witnessed with his own eyes.”<sup>809</sup> He was capable of extending this emotion to work against cruelty, injustice, and oppression in general.<sup>810</sup> This is vividly illustrated in his reaction to the boys who tortured the wood turtle—not only did he “angrily reprove the boys,” he was also moved to composed an essay “against cruelty to animals in general.”<sup>811</sup>

His sympathy for others may partly explain his ability to persuade others, but it also explains his ability to stimulate a reciprocal sympathetic response on the part of others. Commenting on Lincoln's persuasive speech, Schurz states

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<sup>808</sup> Ibid., 6, 10, 11, 32-33

<sup>809</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>810</sup> Ibid., 32-33

<sup>811</sup> Ibid., 33



He commanded none of the outward graces of oratory as they are commonly understood. His charm was of a different kind. It flowed from the rare depth and genuineness of his convictions and his sympathetic feelings. ...The natural kindness of his tone, softening prejudice and disarming partisan rancor, would often open to his reasoning a way into minds most unwilling to receive it.<sup>812</sup>

His sympathetic nature was apt not only to persuade, but to draw the sympathies of others to himself.<sup>813</sup> “As his sympathy went forth to others,” Schurz says, “it attracted others to him. Especially those whom he called the ‘plain people.’”<sup>814</sup>

Lincoln was also sympathetic in a second sense. Beyond his sympathy to the suffering of others, he enjoyed what Schurz describes as “fellow-feeling” and “mutual sympathy” with others. This type of sympathy reflected an extension of Lincoln’s personal identity along both class and familial lines, and suggests a composite sense of selfhood. Schurz says that the plain people “felt themselves drawn to him by the instinctive feeling that he understood, esteemed, and appreciated them.”—

He had grown up among the poor, the lowly, the ignorant. He never ceased to remember the good souls he had met among them, and the many kindnesses they had done him. Although in his mental development he had risen far above them, he never looked down upon them.<sup>815</sup>

They thus continued to consider Lincoln as one of themselves.<sup>816</sup>

Lincoln was able to preserve this class-sympathy, despite his station and cultivation, by means of his peculiar comportment and speech. The anecdotes he learned in rural Illinois among the plain people were a constant resource for his rhetoric: “He loved to point and enliven his reasoning by humorous illustrations, usually anecdotes of Western life, of which he had an inexhaustible store ... he used them with great effect,

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<sup>812</sup> Ibid., 31

<sup>813</sup> Ibid., 64-65

<sup>814</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>815</sup> Ibid., 35-36

<sup>816</sup> Ibid., 36

while amusing the audience, to give life to an abstraction, to explode an absurdity, to clinch an argument, to drive home an admonition.”<sup>817</sup> His origin as one of the plain people, not to mention his disregard for personal advantage, was shown in his “rusticity of habit.”<sup>818</sup> His clothes were ill-fitting and he carried a peculiar cotton umbrella “without a handle, and tied together with a coarse string to keep it from flapping.” This manner of dress was natural to him, and even if in “his ways of thinking and feeling he had become a gentleman in the highest sense ... the refining process had polished but little the outward form.”<sup>819</sup> Finally, in the rituals of office, he was said to meet his fellow-citizens, “high and low, on a footing of equality, with the simplicity of his good nature unburdened by any conventional dignity of deportment.”<sup>820</sup> Schurz also suggests that there existed a familial sympathy between Lincoln and the general public.

His popularity was far different from that of Washington, who was revered with awe, or that of Jackson, the unconquered hero ... To Abraham Lincoln the people became bound by a genuine sentimental attachment. It was not a matter of respect, or confidence, or party pride ... it was an affair of the heart, independent of mere reasoning.”<sup>821</sup>

The sympathetic attachment the people had for Lincoln was also modulated by a familial analogy. The plain people of the North and the Union soldiers often spoke of the President as “Father Abraham,” and there was more than a Biblical resonance to the phrase.

They felt that their President was really caring for them as a father would, and that they could go to him, every one of them, as they would go to a father, and talk to him of what troubled them, sure to find a willing ear and tender sympathy. Thus,

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<sup>817</sup> Ibid., 30-31

<sup>818</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>819</sup> Ibid., 35-36

<sup>820</sup> Ibid., 68-69

<sup>821</sup> Ibid., 92

their President, and his cause, and his endeavors, and his success gradually became to them almost matters of family concern.<sup>822</sup>

This mutual sympathy, or extension of himself, enabled Lincoln to know (知 *zhī*) the people.<sup>823</sup> “He understood the plain people,” says Schurz, “with all of their loves and hates, their prejudices and their noble impulses, their weaknesses and their strength, as *he understood himself*.”<sup>824</sup> The mutual sympathy also sustained a common identity so that Lincoln’s accomplishments were their own, and his social elevation was taken by the plain people as another reason to be proud of him rather than cause to envy his position. His wisdom and their affection—both aspects of this mutual sympathy—facilitated Lincoln’s democratic leadership of communicating and sustaining a common interest in a shared good.<sup>825</sup>

A person such as Lincoln, who is capable of fostering the social idea of democracy, must employ a notion of selfhood that is both participatory and composite, where its qualities will be taken as social realities, and the person as a process of social integration. Yet, while reflecting the social idea of democracy, the communal and participatory selfhood of the democratic sage leaves us with a rather pressing problem—one that we described in the first chapter as the invisibility of the sage. If the democratic sage is a communal accomplishment, why speak of exemplary *persons* at all? What sets the sage apart? This issue is different from the problem of assessing persons. In our discussion of that topic in chapter six we described the *assessment* of others; we assumed that we might encounter a sage, and simply worried about the criteria for assessing such

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<sup>822</sup> Ibid., 92

<sup>823</sup> Lincoln’s wisdom (*zhī*) is also reflected in his willingness to listen to criticism, “to take advice with candid readiness, and to weigh it without any pride of his own opinion” (ibid., 76; cf. 89). This trait, which Confucius describes as 文 *wén*, is also attributed to King Wen.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid., 64, emphasis added

<sup>825</sup> Ibid., 36, 64-65, 101

persons. But now we are faced with another problem: viz., whether we can even *encounter* the person of the sage to begin with, or if the sage—particularly, the democratic sage—will remain hidden from view despite whatever abilities we might have in assessing others.

There are several reasons a Confucian sage, and the sage in particular out of all the other varieties of Confucian exemplary persons, will remain hidden from view. Wang Chong supplies some of these reasons in the “定賢 *Dingxian*” (“Determining the Worthy”) chapter of the 論衡 *Lunheng*.<sup>826</sup> “Sages,” he says, “are difficult to recognize (知 *zhī*); compared to the sage, a worthy (賢 *xián*) is easier to recognize. Still, your average person is unable to recognize a worthy—can they be expected to recognize a sage?”<sup>827</sup> Much of his discussion in this chapter concerns “knowing” (知 *zhī*) worthies in the sense of assessing or evaluating others. In this sense of the term the difficulty we have in recognizing a person’s sageliness is explained with reference to the expertise required to do so—something we have already discussed with the help of Wang Chong in chapter six. Yet in one section of this chapter he discusses “knowing” (*zhī*) in the sense of *seeing* the sage or seeing the “person” of the sage (rather than “knowing” in the sense of seeing a person *as* a sage).<sup>828</sup> The question he entertains in this section is whether the efficacy of worthies and sages renders these persons invisible. As he puts it, “With great worthies few can name their quality; with small worthies many can mention their deeds”—with the implication that if it is difficult to see the worthy, the sage is utterly invisible.<sup>829</sup>

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<sup>826</sup> 定 *dìng* in the sense of (a) *defining* worthiness, and (b) *recognizing* worthy persons.

<sup>827</sup> 80.1

<sup>828</sup> The section in question is section ten.

<sup>829</sup> 80.10. “Quality” translates 節 *jié*—a term that can mean quality, worth, but may also mean restraint. Given the context we should not lose sight of the fact that Wang Chong is talking about the “moral

He offers a detailed explanation for this counterintuitive claim. First, he points out that ‘upstanding conduct’ (清高之行 *qīng gāo zhī xìng*) is largely circumstantial, or the product of the situation. To be filial (孝 *xiào*) you must have a father, just as you must have an older brother if you are going to be ‘brotherly’ (第 *dì*). Beyond simply having the other participant in role-specific excellences, your quality as a person is correlated to their own. Your father must be unkind (不慈 *bù cí*) if your filiality is to be seen; your ruler must be hateful if your commitment to him (忠 *zhōng*) is to be visible. The greatness of Shun needed his blind father just as much as the greatness of Churchill needed Hitler, and the greatness of Mandela needed the South African Nationalist Party. Finally, Wang Chong says that great deeds, such as dying for one’s ruler, require a specific opportunity. One’s ruler and state must be placed in jeopardy before you can rescue them or at least die trying. “The highest and noblest feelings are displayed under a regime at the verge of ruin, and the purest and finest acts done in an epoch of universal decay.”<sup>830</sup> Heroism, in other words, requires chaos. And if the visibility of one’s qualities requires role-specific participants with deficiencies, often within a wider context of social decay, it follows that whether a worthy or sage is seen at all is largely a matter of fortune (and a certain kind of mis-fortune, at that).

Wang Chong adds a second explanation for the invisibility of sages and worthies. He suggests that the greatness of great worthies—their efficacy, in other words—works to make them invisible. He makes his case with a short dialogue:

Zhan of Qi asked Yanzi, “How does a committed (忠 *zhōng*) minister serve his ruler?”

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restraint” of great worthies.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid.

Yanzi responded, “When the ruler faces a calamity, the minister will not die with him. When the ruler is forced into exile, the minister will not see him off.”

Zhan said, “If after receiving land, title, and wealth the minister does not die with his ruler, or does not see the ruler off as he goes into exile—how can we possibly call this minister committed?”

“If the minister offers sound advice and sees that the ruler puts it to use, what cause will there be to die with one’s ruler? If he remonstrates and sees that the ruler complies with the remonstrance, in the end the ruler will not go into exile, so what cause will there be for seeing the ruler off? On the other hand, if the minister offers sound advice but does not see it put to use, to die with one’s ruler is an idiot’s death. If the minister remonstrates but does not see the ruler comply with the remonstrance, to see the ruler off when he goes into exile is to put on airs. This is why a committed minister is able to exhaust the goodness of his ruler, yet incapable of being ensnared by the ruler’s own calamities.<sup>831</sup>

Able ministers are those who work to prevent the very circumstances that would advertise their worth; if such circumstances arise it is because the ruler ignored the advice of remonstrance of such ministers—and able ministers have no reason to sacrifice themselves for such a ruler. As for those who die because their ruler is ruined, they—Wang Chong concludes—do not count as truly committed ministers. In short, the worth of worthy ministers is the very thing that prevents their worth from ever being seen, or their person widely known.<sup>832</sup>

We might take this idea a bit further by pointing out that the Confucian *wúwéi* brand of efficacy, and not efficacy alone, renders great exemplars all the more likely to be invisible. *Wúwéi* is a unique approach to efficacy insofar as it is participatory: it works by enlisting the efforts of others. This, of course, deflates the agency of the exemplary persons who employ this approach to efficacy, transforming their personal labor into social forces or communal efforts. In a way, we might say that *wúwéi* enlarges the person of the sage or great worthy till their personhood includes the community, and their

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<sup>831</sup> Ibid.

<sup>832</sup> One is reminded of *Laozi* 17: “With the best social superiors those below them know only that they exist.”

horizon or boarders extend beyond view. Much like a continent, the person becomes so large and their extension so expansive that they simply cannot be seen.

What, then, are we to say about the persons of Lincoln, Shun of Yu, Confucius, or all the other sages we can name? We know their names; we recognize their worth. Are we then to conclude that they cannot be sages, or even great worthies? I would suggest that visibility is not always correlated to worth or lack of worth. Visibility is a product of the times—there is a temporal contingency, perhaps even an epochal aspect, to sagehood. Lincoln was “timely” in the sense that he came into the presidency at a particular moment in history; and it was this timeliness that accounts for his visibility. The same can be said for the ancient Confucian sages—that they stood out in contrast to the depravity of their times and contemporaries. Wang Chong was right to point this out. Yet even if visibility depends upon more than a person’s worth, this is no reason to think that visibility is itself a mark against a person. Like so much in life, sagehood is—in several ways—accidental.

## CHAPTER 8. EPILOGUE

During the long course of this dissertation we have attempted to identify, characterize, and defend the non-derivative or native normative significance attributed to exemplary persons in Confucian philosophy. In addition to the scholarly and historical value of this task there are the practical implications of this approach. If we find foundational normativity dissatisfying, or if we wish to take Confucian philosophy seriously, these practical implications will be all the more relevant as they will influence how we think of our own exemplary persons today. Of the various ways in which the non-derivative conception might alter our practices—whether we are talking about moral education, emulation, persuasion, argumentation or other practices centered on exemplary persons—I will focus, here, on only three. First, the non-derivative conception of exemplary persons forces us to see exemplars and those who emulate them (or “exemplates”) as experimenters. Second, this conception challenges us to avoid glossing over the particularity of exemplary persons, and to especially avoid the desire to have perfect exemplars. Finally, the non-derivative conception of exemplary persons—especially when understood in terms of the Deweyan empirical method or pragmatic normativity in general—suggests that exemplary persons may not really exist after all.

We have already discussed how the non-derivative normativity of exemplary persons entails their dynamic, correlative, and participatory significance. Taken seriously, this conception of exemplary persons would require that we think of any appeal to, or appropriation of, an exemplary person as an act of moral creativity. This process can be characterized with the aspects of moral creativity that we discussed in the fifth chapter: ‘discovering implications’ (知來者 *zhi lai zhe* “knowing what follows”), ‘tailoring’ (損益



*sunyi*), and ‘weighing’ (權 *quan*). To avoid the pitfalls of mere imitation the appropriation of exemplary persons necessarily involves detecting relevant parallels and imagining the conduct of these persons within new situations. We must also, as Xunzi suggests, tailor the example of the person to the situation—both for practical guidance and for persuasive purposes.<sup>833</sup> Finally, we must be sure to fit the exemplary person to the proper situation and, as Mengzi suggests, to the proper exemplar.<sup>834</sup> As the non-derivative conception calls for creative engagement it also fosters the practice of democracy—as each exemplar contributes to the significance of the exemplary person, and each exemplar person is able to communicate common aims to the community.

Yet if we embrace this experimental approach to exemplary persons we must also be fallibilists when it comes to the appropriateness of a given exemplar or exemplar. We must, especially, embrace the imperfections of our exemplary persons. Too often we produce expurgated versions of the lives of our exemplars in an attempt to elevate them to the level of either saints or demons—perfectly good or perfectly evil. We seem to be incapable of dealing with the moral complexity of our exemplars, choosing to ignore Hitler’s vegetarianism or forget Gandhi’s spousal abuse. Essentially what is at stake here is the practice of “glossing”—something the *xiaoren* are said to do to themselves yet is also often done to exemplary persons.

When one glosses an exemplary person one is necessarily being selective in one’s presentation or recollection. Yet selectivity alone does not account for glossing. After all, the moral creativity involved in “tailoring” entails selectivity. Glossing is unique because it involves the practice of either “concealing” (揜 *yǎn*) or “excusing” (辭 *cí*)

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<sup>833</sup> Xunzi 5.14; see p. 194 above.

<sup>834</sup> Mengzi 7B15; see pp. 193-194 above.

imperfections. And in both cases the concealment or excuse is done to render the exemplary person perfectly saintly or perfectly villainous. Glossing not only presupposes a standard external to the exemplary person (hence, a derivative conception), it also reduces the significance of an exemplary person.

While the motivation for glossing an exemplary person may be one's admiration for that person, as Schurz suggests, it is likely to produce several problems. First of all, this type of abstraction promotes imitation rather than emulation and conventionalism rather than moral creativity. Secondly, it diminishes the significance or utility of positive exemplary persons by ignoring the full range of their particularities—and yet it is their particularities that render them effective resources for moral creativity. With negative exemplary persons this type of abstraction tends to exaggerate the errors of these persons, rendering them completely evil. Hitler, for example, has become evil without qualification: his evil is uniquely his own and, at the same time, totally abstract. This gives us the false sense that the errors of Hitler can never be repeated, and prevents us from learning from the particulars of this *exemplum horribilis*. Thirdly, when we think of exemplary persons as saints or heroes we tend to think of them, or their situation, as a species apart from average human beings and their mundane situations. Yet this conception seems more likely to produce either envy or acedia than emulation. Finally, glossing exemplars also tends to facilitate a subtle form of moral colonialism, one where we interpret *their* hero as an exemplar of *our* values. Were Percy Shelly and William Blake, for instance, devotees of the Church of England? Then why are their busts in Westminster Abbey? Alternately, glossing might also serve nationalistic ends. Was Spinoza an orthodox Jewish thinker? Then why does his grave marker in Southern

Holland proclaim him, in Hebrew, *amach*—one of The People? It is, of course, noteworthy that the tablet that declares this about Spinoza was the gift of the first Prime Ministers of Israel.

There is one other practical implication of the non-derivate conception of exemplary persons I would like to discuss—and it is fitting that it comes at the very end of this dissertation. In many ways it seems appropriate to deny the existence of exemplary persons. Not only does the participatory and composite nature of exemplary persons render their existence rather tenuousness, but once we apply the empirical method to our own researches we discover that exemplary persons are largely the product of inquiry—whether that inquiry is academic or everyday. This is not to deny the efficacy of the concept, or the practices associated with exemplary persons; it is simply to deny that exemplary persons are natural kinds and to suggest that they are, in a sense, discovered within moral inquiry itself.

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