



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

<i>Student Name:</i> Xixi Xing	
<i>Module Code:</i> SIHE 5005 <i>Module title:</i> Four Books of Confucian Learning II	<i>Student number:</i> 2304056
<i>For completion by marker:</i> <i>Comments:</i>	

AI Acknowledgement

☐ **I have not used AI in my assignment**

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

☒ **I have used AI in my assignment**

I acknowledge the use of DeepSeek (<https://www.deepseek.com/>), Copilot (<https://copilot.microsoft.com/>) and Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>) on 16 April 2025 to check my work using the prompt(s):

1. Please check the following text for readability, grammar and syntax.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Reading the *Analects* to University Students: Humanity, Hope Theory, and Agency Thinking

In this presentation, I use hope theory to examine the *Analects* (*lunyu* 論語). I will set humanity as the goal, and analyse several pathways to promote goal-directed energy in the *Analects*. The main argument in this presentation is that by integrating hope theory and explicitly framing humanity (*ren* 仁) as the goal, the *Analects* delivers an actionable framework of three self-directed strategies that could contribute to enhancing agency thinking.

According to a 2023 King's College London study, mental health problems among UK undergraduates nearly tripled from 6% to 15% between 2017 and 2023, becoming the leading cause of student dropout.¹ Snyder's hope theory, which was proposed in 1991, may offer a remedy.² Research has confirmed its effectiveness in psychological well-being: facing stress, increasing self-worth, recovering from distress, and interpersonal relationships: enhancing social connection, alleviating loneliness.³ All directly relevant to student mental health.

Hope theory is defined as the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking.⁴ It has three elements: goal, pathway, and agency. Hope is a dynamic process; it begins with a goal, something you want to achieve (from point A to Point B). Pathways thinking generates routes to the goal: "to go to point B, I can use way a, b, or c." Agency thinking provides the mental energy to start and sustain movement: "I have the ability to do way a, b, or c."⁵ Goals set the direction, pathways provide the map, and agency supplies the fuel.

So, how does hope theory connect to the *Analects*? As modern university students have goals to achieve in academic or daily life, in the *Analects*, Confucius and his disciples also had

¹ Michael Sanders, *Student Mental Health in 2023: Who Is Struggling and How the Situation Is Changing* (King's College London: The Policy Institution, 2023), p. 9, 25.

² C.R. Snyder and others, The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60.4 (1991), pp. 570–585.

³ Shane J. Lopez, and C. R. Snyder (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 327–330.

⁴ C.R. Snyder, Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind, *Psychological Inquiry*, 4 (2002), pp. 249–275 (p. 249).

⁵ Ibid., pp. 250–251.

goals they strove to achieve in moral cultivation, the most important of which is *ren*. By taking *ren* as the goal, I analyse how the *Analects* offers ways to promote agency thinking, which in turn, may also be applicable in university life and may raise the sense of hope. *Ren* is an extremely important concept in the *Analects*, appearing 105 times across 58 of the 499 chapters.⁶ However, the *Analects* never gives a fixed definition of *ren*. Confucius once described it as “loving others.”⁷ Following several eminent sinologists, I translate *ren* as “humanity.”⁸

It is necessary to address some technical issues before officially starting. In this presentation, I follow Burton Watson’s numbering,⁹ consult two English translations (Watson and Peimin Ni),¹⁰ and draw on two traditional Chinese commentaries which complement each other philosophically: Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130–1200) *Collected Annotations on the Analects* (*lunyu jizhu* 論語集註) and Liu Baonan’s 劉寶楠 (1791–1855) *Corrected Meaning of the Analects* (*lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義).¹¹

After consulting all *ren*-related passages, I identified three ways the *Analects* promotes agency thinking. In Snyder’s definition, agency has two components: the energy to begin and the energy to continue.¹² The *Analects* offers one promoter for beginning, which is self-initiated will (universal ability and personal choice), and two for continuing: companionship (strengthening motivation through like-minded others) and other-regarding intention (sustaining motivation through the desire to help others).

The first stage is self-initiated will. When starting to pursue a goal, in addition to pathways, one needs mental energy — such as self-talk phrase “I can do this” to initiate movement. In

⁶ Wing-Tsit Chan, The Evolution of the Confucian Concept Jên, *Philosophy East and West*, 4 (1995), pp. 295-319 (p. 296).

⁷ Wing-Tsit Chan, The Evolution of the Confucian Concept Jên, p. 299. Original texts: 「樊遲問仁。子曰：『愛人。』」

⁸ The scholars who translated *ren* as humanity are Wing-tsit Chan (1963), Tu Weiming (1979), and Irene Bloom (2007). Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963). Tu Weiming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979). Irene Bloom, trans., Ivanhoe, Philip J., ed., *Mencius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁹ Burton Watson, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Edward Slingerland, *Confucius Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003).

¹¹ Zhu Xi 朱熹, ‘lunyu jizhu 論語集註’ in *Wenyuan ge siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書, vol. 197 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1986). Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, *lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990).

¹² C.R. Snyder, *Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind*, p. 251.

the *Analects*, Confucius uses three strategies to motivate his students to generate this kind of self-referential thought: (1) the universal ability to begin the journey of pursuing humanity, (2) the recognition that beginning is a personal choice rather than something dependent on others, and (3) the affirmation of beginning, that you are already on the path once you start.

First, in 4.6, as well as 6.12, Confucius states that everyone has the capability to pursue humanity.¹³ Regarding humanity, Confucius observes that he has never seen a person who can dedicate a whole day to practising it, whether someone who loves humanity or someone who hates the lack of it. However, despite never having seen such a person, he maintains that the ability to practice humanity is within everyone. Why does Confucius believe that everyone has the ability, yet no one fully dedicates themselves to practising it? Liu's *Corrected Meaning of the Analects* offers an explanation: Confucius believes that the only legitimate abandonment of the pursuit of humanity is due to old age. If that is not the case, then the real obstacle is not a lack of strength, but a lack of sincere desire to start and a lack of determination.¹⁴ However, human capacities clearly differ from one individual to another. Confucius does not focus on these fixed and inborn differences between individuals; rather, he emphasises their shared potential for change and moral cultivation.¹⁵ Although individuals vary in their talents and dispositions, what he affirms is the universal capacity for self-improvement. More importantly, the realisation of this capacity ultimately depends on one's own choices and efforts.

Second, the *Analects* grounds personal choice in universal ability. Since everyone is capable of practising humanity, where does the determination come from? Confucius states that it is from personal choice. In 12.1, where one of Confucius' favourite students asks about humanity, Confucius replies by emphasising the importance of the self by using the

¹³ Original texts: 4.6: 「子曰：『我未見好仁者，惡不仁者。好仁者，無以尚之；惡不仁者，其為仁矣，不使不仁者加乎其身。有能一日用其力於仁矣乎？我未見力不足者。蓋有之矣，我未之見也。』」 6.12: 「冉求曰：『非不說子之道，力不足也。』子曰：『力不足者，中道而廢。今女畫。』」

¹⁴ Original texts: 「其廢也，由於年數不足，有不得不廢者也。如是而後謂之力不足，是誠不足也。」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu zhengyi*, p. 144.

Watson also believes that the real reason for failing to achieve humanity is a lack of determination. Burton Watson, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 33.

¹⁵ Erica Brindley, Moral Authority and Individual Source of Authority in the Analects, *Journal of Chinese philosophy*, 38:2 (2011), pp. 257–273 (p. 266).

character *ji* (己, oneself) three times.¹⁶ He states that practising humanity means “If one is able of oneself to return to ritual propriety is to be humane.” When one truly does so, all under heaven will bend toward humanity. Confucius makes it clear that even if others are not determined to practice, the pursuit of humanity depends on one’s own choice. According to Liu’s commentary, the importance of the self-choice is also hinted at in Confucius’ instructions on how to adhere to ritual propriety: “Do not look, do not listen, do not speak, do not act if it is contrary to ritual.” These four senses are all controlled by the self.¹⁷ Therefore, self-choice is the centre of practice humanity.

I have just emphasised that the pursuit of humanity depends on your own choice. But this raises a natural question: why would you choose this goal in the first place? The answer, I believe, lies in the power of self-agency itself. The pursuit of any goal, including humanity, must come from your own willingness. No one can force you to want it. Confucius had a remarkably pragmatic attitude about why people choose to pursue humanity.

Consider *Analects* 4.2: “The humane person rests in humanity, the wise person profits from humanity.”¹⁸ Liu Baonan’s commentary explains the difference. “To rest in humanity” means one’s mind is at peace in humanity, seeking nothing else but pursuing the goal for its own sake. “To profit from it” means one knows humanity is advantageous to oneself and therefore acts.¹⁹ This is the person who chooses the goal because they see its value. The reason to choose to pursue the goal may vary from person to person. Some pursue it for its own sake; others pursue it because it brings good things. But in either case, according to Liu, they have something for grounding, therefore, this determination pushes them to start and sustain in either advantageous or disadvantageous circumstances.²⁰ These two passages collectively emphasised that the pursuit begins with your own willingness.

¹⁶ Original texts: 「顏淵問仁。子曰：『克己復禮為仁。一日克己復禮，天下歸仁焉。為仁由己，而由人乎哉？』顏淵曰：『請問其目。』子曰：『非禮勿視，非禮勿聽，非禮勿言，非禮勿動。』顏淵曰：『回雖不敏，請事斯語矣。』」

¹⁷ Original texts: 「視、聽、言、動，皆在己不在人，故為仁由己，不由人也。」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu Zhengyi*, p. 484.

¹⁸ Original texts: 「子曰：『……仁者安仁，知者利仁。』」

¹⁹ Original texts: 「『安仁』者，心安於仁也。『利仁』者，知仁為利而行之也。」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu Zhengyi*, p. 140.

²⁰ Original texts: 「二者中有所守，則可久處約，長處樂。」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu Zhengyi*, p. 140.

Affirmation of beginning is the third element, and it completes the logical chain. Knowing that you can (universal ability) and knowing that it is your choice (personal choice) are still not enough to push you into action. You may still hesitate, waiting for some sign that you are ready. This is where affirmation of beginning comes in. In 7.30, Confucius says: “Is humanity far away? As soon as I desire humanity, it arrives.”²¹ You do not need to wait for success; the moment you begin, you are already on the path. This idea is also echoed in the two passages just discussed, where the phrase “one day” repeatedly appears.²² Why did Confucius emphasise this phrase? Is to make the beginning easy and lower the psychological threshold. These passages affirm that even a single day of effort matters, and by beginning, you are already on the path.

Taken together, these three messages target key barriers to agency at the point of beginning: doubts about one’s own capacity, the reliance on external factors for beginning, and reluctance to start without a sense of full readiness. By addressing these impediments directly, the *Analects* cultivates the mental energy needed for initiation, primarily by reinforcing self-belief and affirming the individual’s capacity to act from within.

Self-initiated will give you the energy to begin. But beginning is not enough, you also need energy to continue. In modern university student life, the ability to persist toward a goal varies from person to person; some can maintain motivation for months, others only for days. The same is true in the *Analects*. Confucius once observed that when pursuing humanity, Yan Hui could maintain his mind for three months, while other students could only maintain it for days or a month (6.7).²³ This raises a question: how can those who struggle to persist be helped?

The *Analects* offers two additional ways to provide this sustaining energy: companionship and other-regarding intention. First, companionship. Companionship as a strategy to promote agency thinking appears five times in the *Analects*, four times attributed to

²¹ Original texts: 「子曰：『仁遠乎哉？我欲仁，斯仁至矣。』」

²² In 4.6, Confucius states that even if one uses all their strength to achieve humanity for just *one day*, it is meaningful (Original texts: 「有能一日用其力於仁矣乎？我未見力不足者。」). In 12.1, Confucius persists that if for *one day* one is able to return to ritual propriety, all under heaven will bend toward humanity (Original texts: 「一日克己復禮，天下歸仁焉。」).

²³ Original texts: 「子曰：『回也，其心三月不違仁，其餘則日月至焉而已矣。』」

Confucius and once to Master Zeng 曾子 (505 –435 BCE).²⁴ These passages can be distinguished into three types based on the relationship described. The first type (1.6, 7.6) emphasises being close to humane people without specifying their position. The second type (12.24, 15.10) explicitly refers to friendship. The third type (4.1) focuses on neighbours, highlighting daily gradual influence through the environment. Since the first type lacks a clear identity and the third emphasises living environment, I will focus on one friendship passage (12.24) to connect with modern university student life.

Master Zeng says: “The noble person uses the arts when learning with friends and uses friends in helping to become humane”. For the first part, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of “art” (*wen* 文) to understand the aim of learning with friends. “Art” has been interpreted differently by various scholars: Kong Anguo 孔安國 (156–74) interprets it as arts and virtue;²⁵ Zhu as the Way;²⁶ Liu as the *Odes, Documents*, ritual, and music, and he interpreted Kong’s explanation as learning of arts rooted in virtue.²⁷ Despite these differences, all interpretations agree that friends gather because they share the same goal.

Our attention, however, is on the second half of Master Zeng’s saying: “uses friends as a resource to become humane.” According to Kong Anguo, friends enable mutual learning.²⁸ Zhu Xi adds that by learning from friends’ goodness, one’s virtue improves daily.²⁹ But how does this actually happen? Liu Baonan argues that it happens through influence. In his commentary, Liu quotes a passage from the “Teaching and Learning” (*xueji* 學記) chapter of the *Record of Ritual* (*liji* 禮記), which describes how exemplary persons study.³⁰ This passage, I believe, perfectly explains the mechanism of companionship: from self-generated

²⁴ The passages that attributed to Confucius are 1.6; 4.1; 7.6; 15.10, and the only one that related to Master Zeng is 12.24. Original texts: 1.6: 「子曰：「弟子入則孝，出則弟，謹而信，汎愛眾，而親仁。行有餘力，則以學文。」」 4.1: 「子曰：「里仁為美。擇不處仁，焉得知？」」 7.6: 「子曰：「志於道，據於德，依於仁，游於藝。」」 12.24: 「曾子曰：「君子以文會友，以友輔仁。」」 15.10: 「子貢問為仁。子曰：「工欲善其事，必先利其器。居是邦也，事其大夫之賢者，友其士之仁者。」」

²⁵ Original texts: 「孔曰：『友以文德合。』」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu Zhengyi*, p. 513.

²⁶ Original texts: 「講學以會友，則道益明。」 Zhuxi, *lunyu jizhu*, p. 62.

²⁷ Original texts: 「『文』調詩、書、禮、樂也。……『文德』者，言所學文皆在德也。」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu Zhengyi*, p. 513.

²⁸ Original texts: 「孔曰：『友相切磋之道，所以輔成己之仁。』」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu Zhengyi*, p. 513.

²⁹ Original texts: 「取善以輔仁，則德日進。」 Zhuxi, *lunyu jizhu*, p. 62.

³⁰ Original texts: 「故君子之於學也，藏焉修焉，息焉游焉。夫然，故安其學而親其師，樂其友而信其道。是以雖離師輔，而不反也。」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu Zhengyi*, p. 513.

motivation, to the facilitating role of companions, and finally to the internalisation of belief. It also serves as a useful summary of what we have discussed so far.

First, the exemplary person “gathers knowledge, cultivates themselves, and immerses themselves in learning even during leisure.” What does this tell us? It tells us that they already have a goal and are striving to achieve it. This is the first step, as mentioned earlier, it is your own choice to pursue the goal. Then, because they continue to strive, they begin to “find satisfaction in learning, grow close to their teachers, enjoy their friendships, and become committed to the Way.” What is happening here? In the process of learning, as one gains satisfaction, one naturally finds things that assist their learning, including teachers and friends, and gradually learns from the goodness of their friends. There may be several psychological mechanisms at work here. First, according to Brindley, when discussing the moral exemplar and its relationship to human agency, she states that the exemplary person provides a concrete idea of what morality looks like when embodied by a human being.³¹ This means that when one sees that one’s friends are doing well, they gain more confidence in the goal, because they witness firsthand that the goal is attainable. Second, as Zhu Xi explains, they also recognise the strengths of their friends that they themselves do not yet possess.³² Because their friends perform better in certain aspects, they desire to emulate them. These examples show how companionship promotes agency thinking. Most importantly, the passage concludes by saying that this commitment stays with the exemplary person even after they leave their companions; they remain steadfast without faltering. Why? Because the example of more advanced friends does not cause one to lose individuality by merely conforming to external dictates or mimicking what they do. Rather, it calls forth one’s own desire to improve, as they want to learn from friends who inspire them.³³ The goodness observed and learned from friends ultimately becomes one’s own will.

From this passage, we can clearly see a hierarchy: one must first have one’s own motivation for learning. Friends are facilitators, not creators or enforcers. This does not mean that you can become motivated simply because your friend is working hard toward their goal.

³¹ Erica Brindley, *Moral Authority and Individual Source of Authority in the Analects*, p. 265.

³² Original texts: 「取善以輔仁，則德日進。」 Zhuxi, *lunyu jizhu*, p. 62.

³³ Erica Brindley, *Moral Authority and Individual Source of Authority in the Analects*, p. 265.

Emulating others is ultimately your own choice; it is through this choice that the goodness of others can be internalised and become your own motivation.

The second way to promote goal-directed energy is through what I call other-regarding intention. To begin with, we need to understand that humanity is fundamentally one's own task. As Master Zeng suggests, the pursuit of humanity ultimately comes down to one's own responsibility.³⁴ Liu further clarifies this point by arguing that humanity is not something external that we must acquire, but something internal that we already possess. Precisely because it is already within us, its realisation becomes our own responsibility rather than something that can be imposed from outside.³⁵ I must achieve humanity for my own sake.

Because of this necessity, Confucius provides a concrete method for realising humanity. In *Analects* 6.30, he says that the humane person, wishing to establish themselves, also helps others establish themselves, and wishing to succeed, also helps others succeed. He further instructs us to "proceed by analogy from what is near at hand."³⁶ According to Liu, this means using one's own mind as a basis for understanding others.³⁷ For example, when you want to achieve your own goal, you can use this desire as a basis to imagine others' aspirations. Similarly, when you experience the need for support in pursuing your goal, you can use that feeling to understand others' sense of urgency when they encounter difficulties.

However, the question remains: how does using one's own feelings to understand others actually promote agency thinking? To answer this, we can turn to Confucius' own self-description in 7.33. There, he modestly claims that he is not a sage, but simply someone who "works without tiring and teaches without growing weary."³⁸ Zhu Xi interprets this by distinguishing between "working," which is directed toward oneself, and "teaching," which is directed toward others.³⁹ Yet in Confucius' own practice, these two are deeply

³⁴ Original texts: 「曾子曰：『士不可以不弘毅，任重而道遠。仁以為己任，不亦重乎？死而後已，不亦遠乎？』」

³⁵ Original texts: 「仁者，性之德，己所自有，故當為己任。」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu Zhengyi*, p. 397.

³⁶ Original texts: 「夫仁者，己慾立而立人，己欲達而達人。能近取譬，可謂仁之方也已。」

³⁷ Original texts: 「如己之心，以推諸人，此求仁之道。」 Liu Baonan, *lunyu Zhengyi*, p. 250.

³⁸ Original texts: 「子曰：『若聖與仁，則吾豈敢？抑為之不厭，誨人不倦，則可謂云爾已矣。』公西華曰：『正唯弟子不能學也。』」

³⁹ Original texts: 「為之，謂為仁聖之道。誨人，亦謂以此教人也。」 Zhuxi, *lunyu jizhu*, p. 41.

interconnected rather than separate. Confucius works tirelessly not merely for his own sake, but because what he learns can eventually be used to benefit others. He recognises that others may need guidance in achieving similar goals, and this awareness motivates him to continue working diligently. This leads us to the crucial mechanism: if one has the intention to help others, one must also have the capacity to do so. When one becomes aware of the gap between this intention and one's current abilities, this awareness generates a strong motivation for further self-cultivation. In this way, a feedback loop is formed. The intention to help others reveals one's limitations, and these recognised limitations, in turn, drive continued effort and development. Rather than distracting from one's focus, other-regarding intention actually sharpens and sustains it. The key insight, then, is that benefiting oneself and helping others are not two separate or competing pursuits, but structurally intertwined. In helping others, one is simultaneously cultivating oneself, and in cultivating oneself, one becomes better able to help others.

With humanity as the ultimate goal, the *Analects* presents three ways to cultivate agency thinking. For beginning, the *Analects* emphasises self-initiated will through three interrelated ideas: (1) the universal ability to work toward humanity, (2) the importance of personal choice rather than external intention, and (3) the affirmation that you are already on the path the moment you start. For continuing, the *Analects* offers two ways to promote goal-directed energy. The first is companionship: by staying with good friends who share the same goal, one learns from friends' goodness and internalises it as one's own motivation. The second is other-regarding intention: when you want to help others achieve the same goal, you work harder to gain the ability to do so.

Although these three strategies can be presented as equally important, the two promoters that sustain continuation are largely dependent on the promoter that initiates action. This is why, in my main argument, I emphasise that all three approaches to fostering agency thinking are fundamentally self-directed. A useful metaphor here is that of fire and wind: one's intrinsic motivation toward a goal is the fire, ignited by self-initiated will, while both companionship and other-regarding intentions function as the wind. They do not create the fire themselves, but they stabilise it, intensify it, and allow it to burn stronger and longer.

In Snyder's theory, agency and pathways interact reciprocally: having agency motivates you to find pathways, and moving along pathways in turn strengthens your agency.⁴⁰ By applying the three ways of promoting agency from the *Analects*, modern university students may be able to strengthen their motivation, discover more pathways to their goals, and ultimately achieve what they set out to do.⁴¹ By using hope theory as a bridge between the *Analects* and contemporary university life, the wisdom of ancient Confucian thought can be brought into practice. It is my hope that this framework can help university students enhance their sense of hope in pursuing their goals — and through this hope, perhaps alleviate, at least to some extent, the growing mental health challenges facing students today.

⁴⁰ C.R. Snyder, *Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind*, pp. 251–252.

⁴¹ The mechanism of hope model, see C.R. Snyder, *Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind*, pp. 253–255.

Reading the *Analects* to University Students: Humanity, Hope Theory, and Agency Thinking

Module code: SIHE 5005

Module tutor: Prof. Katherine Ngo

Student name: Xixi Xing

Student ID number: 2304056

Date: 06 May 2026



Main argument

By integrating hope theory and explicitly framing humanity (*ren* 仁) as the goal, the *Analects* (*lunyu* 論語) delivers an actionable framework of three self-directed strategies that could contribute to enhance agency thinking.

Figure 1: Proportion of UK undergraduates reporting mental health difficulties

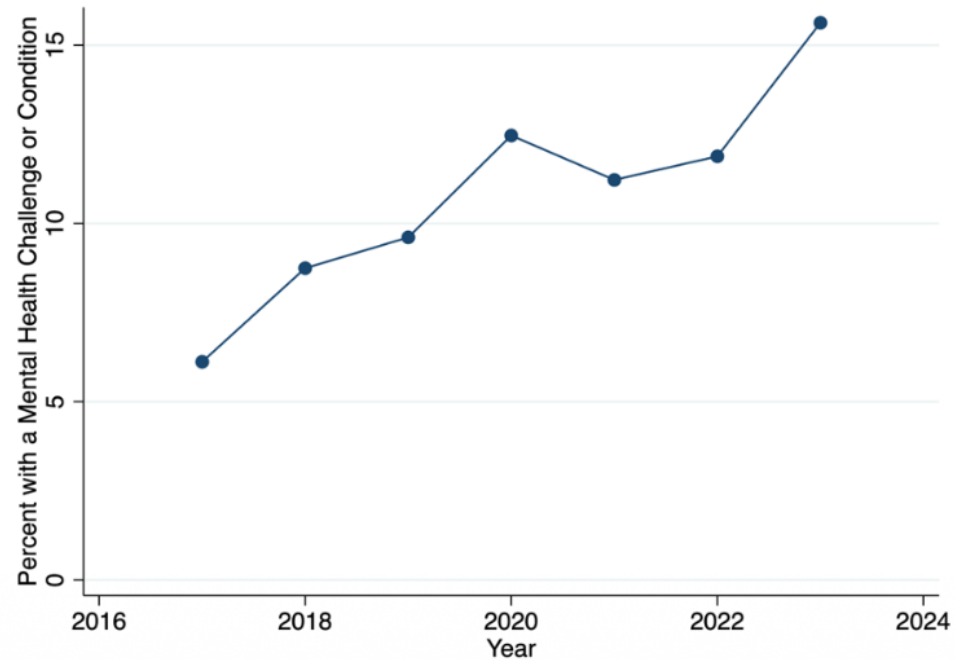
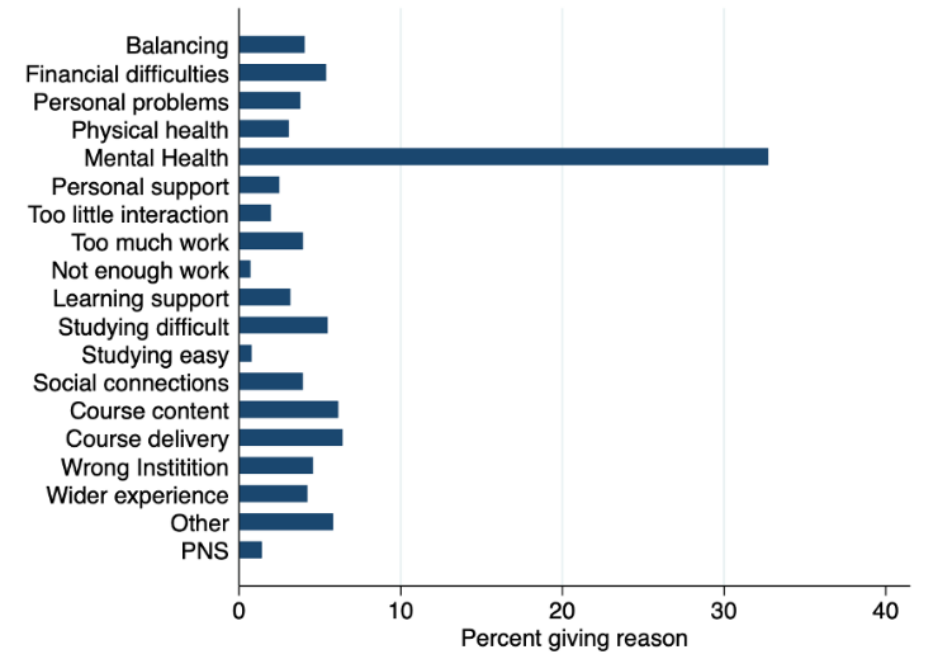


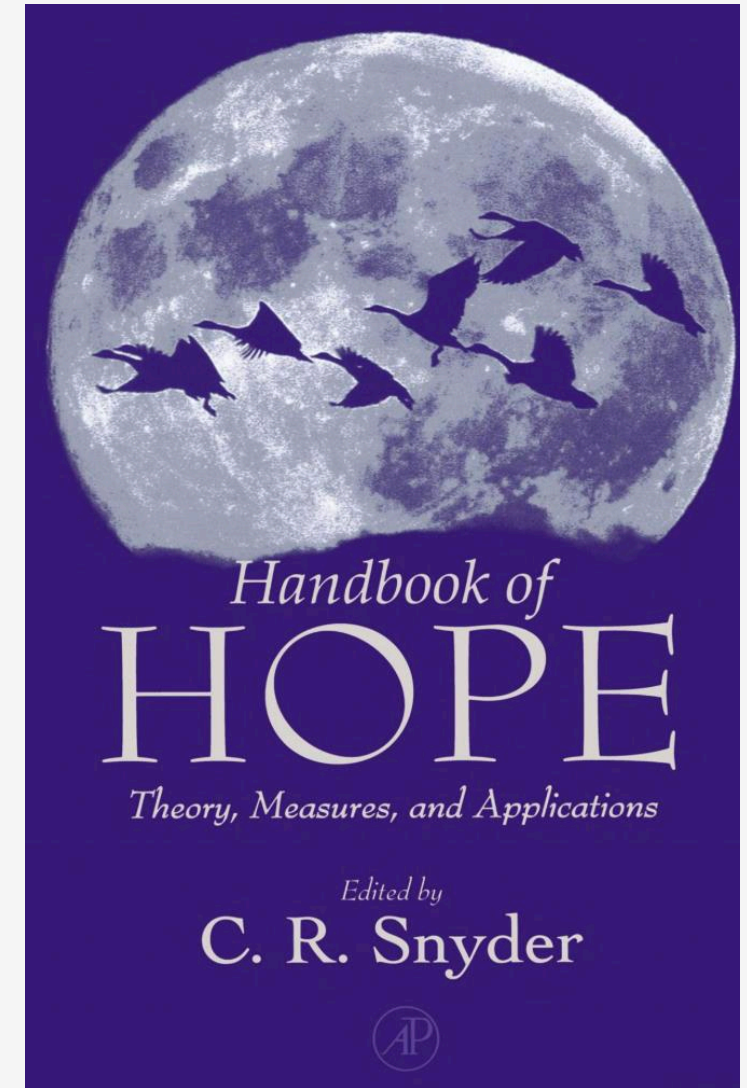
Figure 15: Main reasons given by UK undergraduates for considering dropping out of university



(Sanders 2023, 9 and 25)

Hope theory

- Proposed by Snyder and his colleagues in 1991.
 - The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60.4 (1991), pp. 570–585.
 - Practical implications:
 - **Psychological adjustment** (positive affect, stress resilience, self-worth, distress recovery)
 - **Interpersonal relationships** (social connection, support, competence, less loneliness)
- (Lopez and Snyder 2009, 327–330)



Definition of hope

The perceived capability to derive **pathways** to desired **goals** and motivate oneself via **agency** thinking to use those paths. (Snyder 2002, 249)

Three elements:

1. **Goal:** the mental target that guides the human action sequence (cognitive component).
2. **Pathway:** routes (primary/alternative) connecting the present and desired future.
3. **Agency:** the mental energy to begin and continue using a pathway through all stages of the goal pursuit (motivational component).

Humanity (*ren* 仁) in the *Analects* as the goal

- One of the central themes in the *Analects*, with 58 of the 499 chapters discussing *ren*, occurs 105 times.
- Confucius does not offer a fixed definition in the *Analects*.
- Described as “love others” in 12.22.
(Chan 1955, 296 and 299)
- Translation: “humanity” (Wing-tsit Chan, Tu Weiming, Irene Bloom)



Translations and commentaries consulted

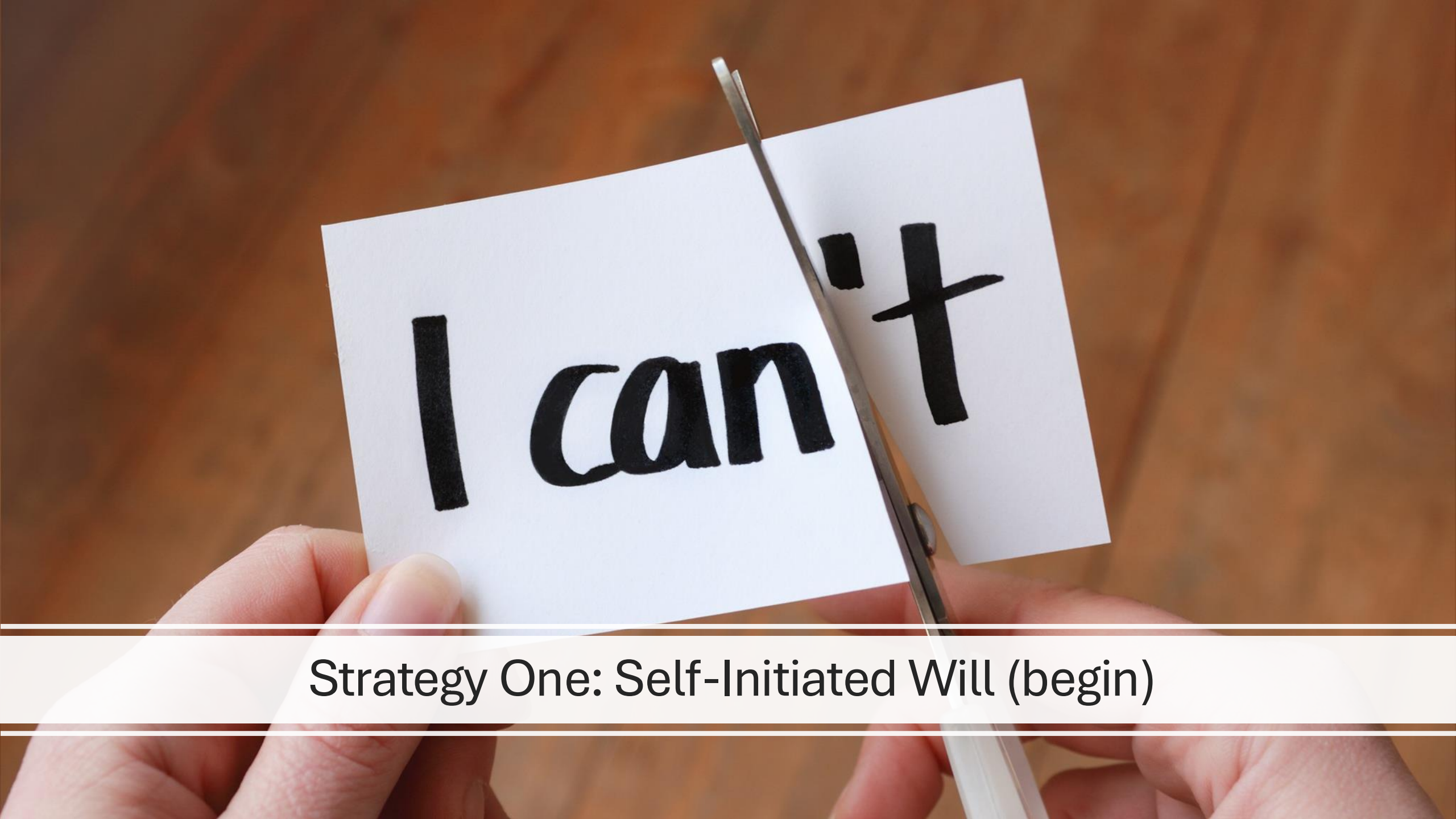
- **Book and chapter number:** Burton Watson (2007)
- **Translation:** Watson, Peimin Ni (2017)
- **Commentary and sub-commentary:**
 - Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200): *Collected Annotations on the Analects* (*lunyu jizhu* 論語集註)
 - Liu Baonan 劉寶楠 (1791–1855): *Corrected Meaning of the Analects* (*lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義)

Three ways to promote agency thinking

Agency: the mental energy to **begin** and **continue** using a pathway through all stages of the goal pursuit.

Promote goal-directed energy for the goal of humanity through:

1. Self-initiated will (begin)
2. Companionship (continue)
3. Other-regarding intention (continue)



I can't

Strategy One: Self-Initiated Will (begin)

Self-initiated will

1. Universal ability
2. Personal choice
3. Affirmation of beginning

1.1 Universal ability

The Master said, “I have never seen a person who really loved humanity or a person who really hated the lack of humanity. [...]

Is there someone who for a whole day is willing to use all his strength to achieve humanity? **I’ve never seen anyone who lacked the strength to do so—there may be such a person, but I’ve never seen one.**

子曰：「我未見好仁者，惡不仁者。……有能一日用其力於仁矣乎？我未見力不足者。蓋有之矣，我未之見也。」

Analects 4.6 (cf. 6.12)

(Trans. Watson with modifications)



- ## Commentary

The abandonment was due to the old age, leaving no choice but to abandon. If it is said to be due to the lack of strength, it is truly the lack of sincerity.

其廢也，由於年數不足，有不得不廢者也。如是而後謂之力不足，是誠不足也。

Corrected Meaning of the Analects

(Trans. self)

1.2 Personal choice

Yan Yuan asked about humanity. The Master said, “If one is able of **oneself** to return to ritual propriety is to be humane. A day one is able of **oneself** to returning to ritual propriety is practised, all under heaven will bend toward humanity. To be human is dependent on **oneself**. How can it be dependent on others?”

Yan Yuan said, “May I ask about its details?” The Master replied, “**Look** not if it is contrary to ritual propriety; **listen** not if it is contrary to ritual propriety; **speak** not if it is contrary to ritual propriety; **act** not if it is contrary to ritual propriety.” Yan Yuan said, “Though I am not quick-witted, allow me to follow these instructions.”

顏淵問仁。子曰：「克**己**復禮為仁。一日克**己**復禮，天下歸仁焉。為仁由**己**，而由人乎哉？」顏淵曰：「請問其目。」子曰：「非禮勿**視**，非禮勿**聽**，非禮勿**言**，非禮勿**動**。」顏淵曰：「回雖不敏，請事斯語矣。」

Analects 12.1
(Trans. Ni with modifications)

Why choice the goal?

The Master said, A person lacking in humaneness cannot endure straightened circumstances for long, nor can he enjoy favorable circumstances for long. The humane person **rests in humanity**, the wise person **profits from humanity**.

子曰：「不仁者不可以久處約，不可以長處樂。仁者安仁，知者利仁。」

Analects 4.2 (Trans. Watson with
modifications)

1.3 Affirmation of beginning

The Master said, “Is humanity so far away? If I want humanity, then humanity is right here.”

子曰：「仁遠乎哉？我欲仁，斯仁至矣。」

Analects 7.30

(Trans. Watson with modifications)





“One day” effort

- 4.6: Is there someone who **for a whole day** is willing to use all his strength to achieve humanity?
 - 12.1: **A day** one is able of oneself to returning to ritual propriety is practised, all under heaven will bend toward humanity.
-

The Master said, “Hui [Yan Hui] is able to maintain his heart-mind not to deviate from humanity for three months. The others are only able to maintain this for days or a month.”

子曰：「回也，其心三月不違仁，其餘則日月至焉而已矣。」

Analects 6.7

(Trans. Ni with modifications)





Strategy Two: Companionship (continue)

Strengthen through companions

-
- Appears five times in the *Analects*, with four time attributed to Confucius (1.6; 4.1; 7.6; 15.10), and one time to Master Zeng (12.24).

1) Unexplicit relationship (being close to)

1.6: seek close association with those who are humanity (親仁).

7.6: rely on humane people (依於仁).

2) Friendship

12.24: uses friends in helping him to become humane (以友輔仁).

15.10: become friends with the men of station who are humane (友其士之仁者).

3) Neighborhood

4.1: humanity is what constitutes the excellence of a neighborhood (里仁為美).

(Trans. Watson and Ni with modifications)

Strengthen through companions

Master Zeng said, The noble person uses the arts when learning with friends and uses friends as a source to become humane.

曾子曰：「君子以文會友，以友輔仁。」

Analects 12.24

(Trans. Watson with modifications)

Interpretation for “art” (*wen* 文)

- **Kong Anguo** says, “Friends are gathered by **arts and virtue**.”

孔曰：「友以文德合。」

- **Zhu**: Learning to gathering friends, **the Way** will become clear.

講學以會友，則道益明。

- **Liu**: “arts” refers to the **Odes, Documents, rites, and music** [...] “Arts and virtue” states that the learning of arts is on virtue.

正義曰：「文」謂詩、書、禮、樂也。……
「文德」者，言所學文皆在德也。

(Trans. Self)



Interpretation
for “uses friends
as a source to
become
humane”

- **Kong:** Friends have a way of mutual learning; thus can assist the realisation of one's humanity.

孔曰：「友相切磋之道，所以輔成己之仁。」

- **Zhu:** Learning from the goodness to promote humanity, virtue will improve daily.

「取善以輔仁，則德日進。」

(Trans. Self)



Therefore, as exemplary persons study, they gather knowledge from all sources, cultivate themselves with it, immerse themselves in it even during their leisure and respite, and roam freely within it.

As such, they find satisfaction in their learning, grow closer to their teachers, enjoy their relationship with friends and peers, and are ever more committed to the proper way.

Thus, even when separated from teachers and companions, they remain steadfast in the way of learning without faltering.

故君子之於學也，藏焉修焉，息焉游焉。夫然，故安其學而親其師，樂其友而信其道。是以雖離師輔，而不反也。

Corrected Meaning of the Analects

(Trans. Xu et.al)

The psychological mechanism of companionship

- Enjoy their relationship with friends and peers, and are ever more committed to the proper way.
 - 1) As an inspirational source of authority rather than a prescriptive or coercive one, *de* provides people with a desire for morality along with a concrete idea of what morality looks like when embodied by a human being. (Brindley 2011, 265)
 - 2) Zhu: Learning from the goodness to promote humanity, virtue will improve daily. 「取善以輔仁，則德日進。」

Therefore, as exemplary persons study, they gather knowledge from all sources, cultivate themselves with it, immerse themselves in it even during their leisure and respite, and roam freely within it.

As such, they find satisfaction in their learning, grow closer to their teachers, enjoy their relationship with friends and peers, and are ever more committed to the proper way.

Thus, even when separated from teachers and companions, they remain steadfast in the way of learning without faltering.

故君子之於學也，藏焉修焉，息焉游焉。夫然，故安其學而親其師，樂其友而信其道。是以雖離師輔，而不反也。

Corrected Meaning of the Analects

(Trans. Xu et.al)



Strategy Three: Other-Regarding Intention (continue)

Humanity as own mission

Master Zeng said, the scholar must be both broad-minded and resolute. His burden is heavy, and the road is long. Humanity is the burden one is charged with—heavy, is it not? The road ends only with death—long, is it not?

曾子曰：「士不可以不弘毅，任重而道遠。仁以為己任，不亦重乎？死而後已，不亦遠乎？」

Analects 8.7

(Trans. Watson with modifications)

Liu: Humanity is a virtue inherent in human nature, naturally possessed by oneself. Therefore, one should take it as one's own responsibility.

仁者，性之德，己所自有，故當為己任。

The humane person wants standing, and so he helps others to gain standing. He wants achievement, and so he helps others to achieve. To know how to proceed on the analogy of what is close at hand—this can be called the humane approach.

夫仁者，己慾立而立人，己欲達而達人。能近取譬，可謂仁之方也已。」

Analect 6.30

(Trans. Watson with modification)

Liu: To use one's own mind to extend understanding to others, it is the way to pursue humanity. 如己之心，以推諸人，此求仁之道。

(Trans. Self)

Intention to helping others

The Master said, The title of sage or humane person—how could I dare lay claim to such? But **working without tiring, teaching others and never growing weary**—yes, that much could be said of me.

Gongxi Hua said, It's precisely this that we, his disciples, cannot equal him in!

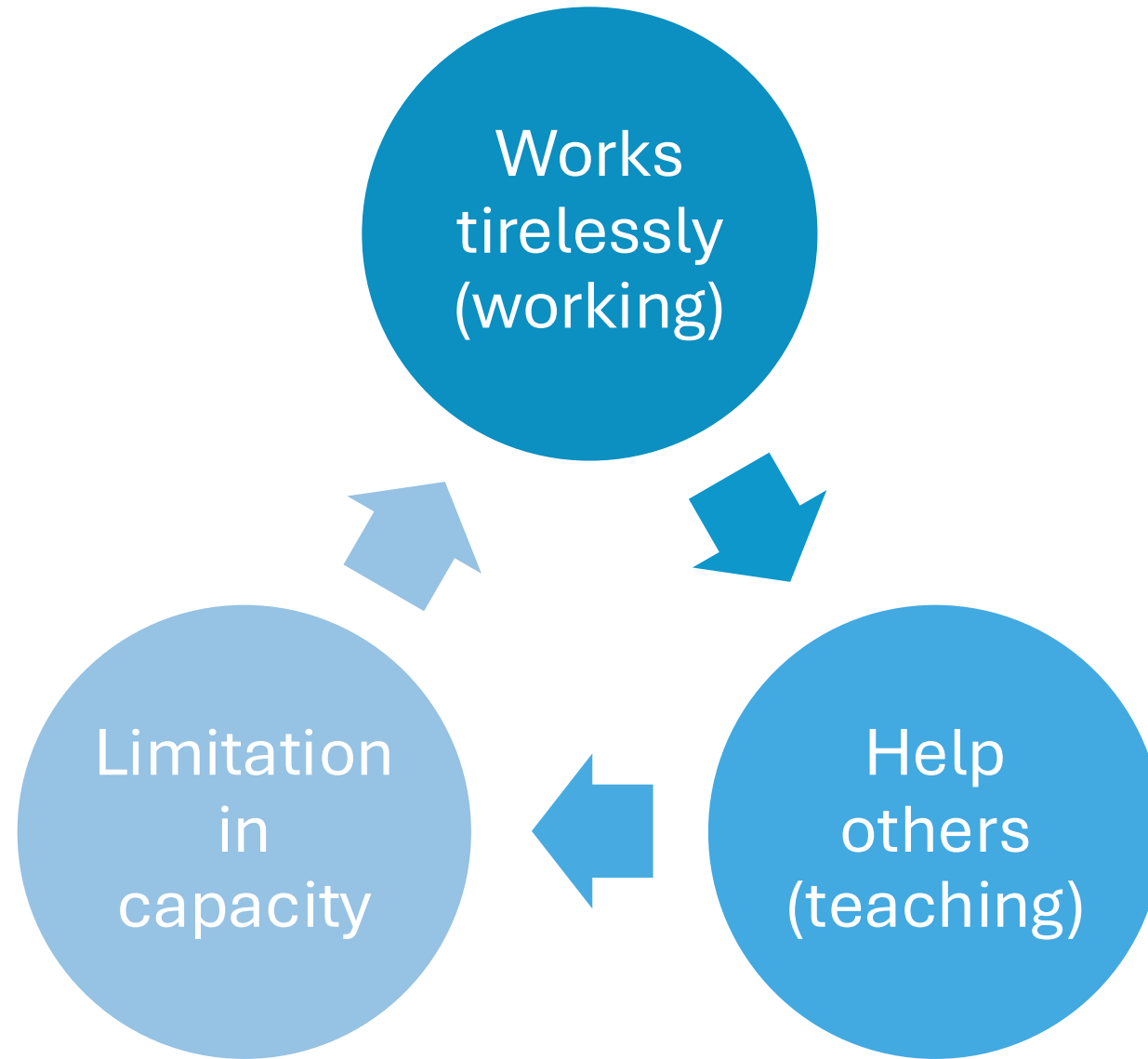
子曰：「若聖與仁，則吾豈敢？抑為之不厭，誨人不倦，則可謂云爾已矣。」公西華曰：「正唯弟子不能學也。」

Analects 7.33 (cf. 7.2)

(Trans. Watson with modification)

Zhu: “Working” means working for the way of humanity and sagehood. “Teaching” means using this to instruct others. 為之，謂為仁聖之道。誨人，亦謂以此教人也。

(Trans. Self)



General discussion

Begin
(self-initiated will)

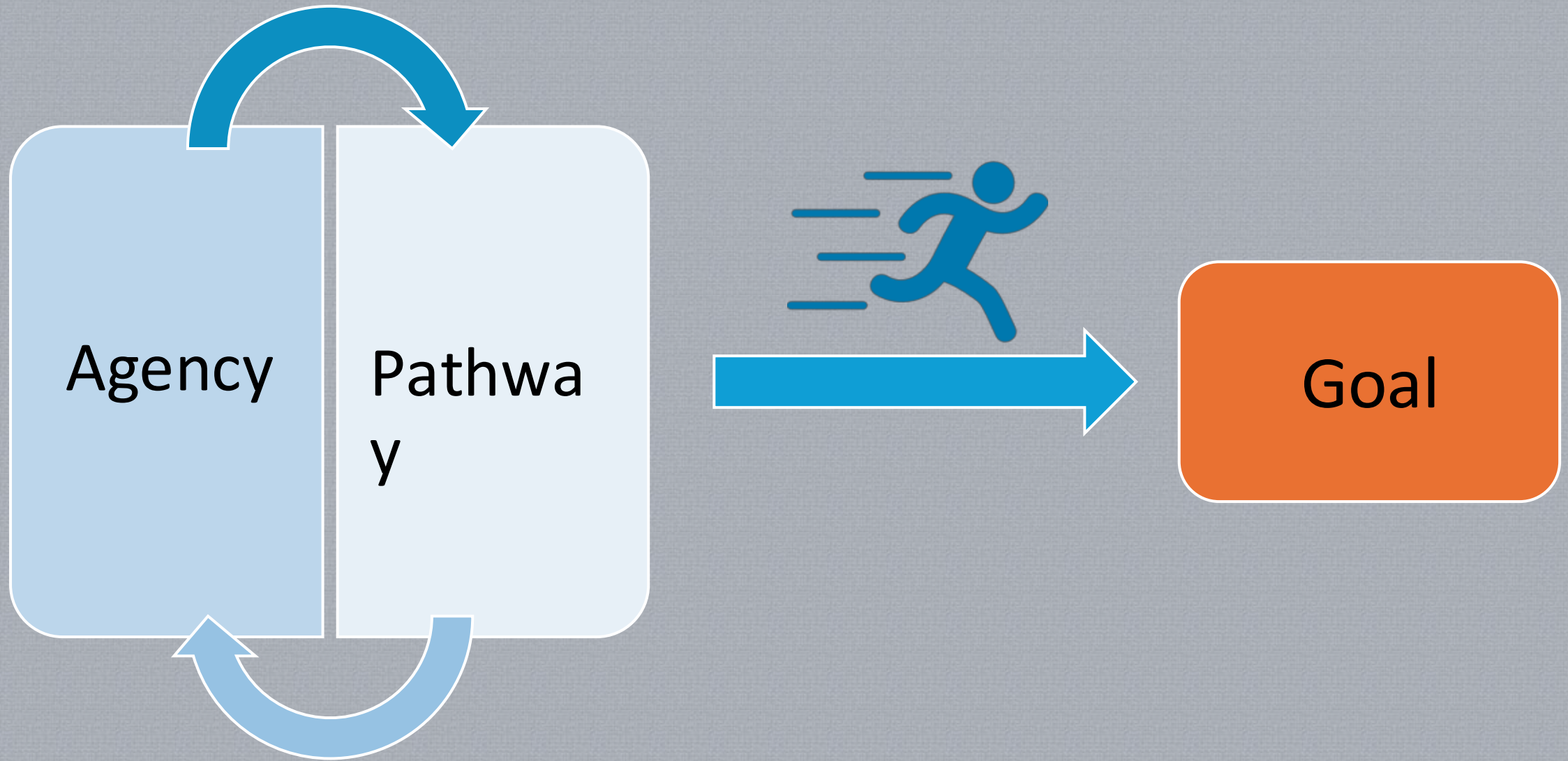
- universal ability
- personal choice
- affirmation of beginning

Continue

- companionship
- other-regarding intention



The *Analects* delivers an actionable framework of **three self-directed strategies** that could contribute to enhance agency thinking among university students.



Thank You for Listening

Bibliography

- Brindley, Erica, Moral Authority and Individual Source of Authority in the Analects, *Journal of Chinese philosophy*, 38:2 (2011), pp. 257–273, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6253.2011.01648.x>
- Chan, Wing-Tsit, The Evolution of the Confucian Concept Jên, *Philosophy East and West*, 4 (1995), pp. 295-319, doi: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1396741>
- Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, *lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990)
- Lopez, Shane J., and C. R. Snyder (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Ni, Peimin, *Understanding the Analects of Confucius: A New Translation of Lunyu with Annotations* (Albany: State University of New York, 2017)
- Sanders, Michael, *Student Mental Health in 2023: Who Is Struggling and How the Situation Is Changing* (King's College London: The Policy Institution, 2023)

Slingerland, Edward, *Confucius Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003)

Snyder, C.R., Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind, *Psychological Inquiry*, 4 (2002), pp. 249–275, doi: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1448867>

Snyder, C.R., and other, The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60 (4), pp. 570–585

Watson, Burton, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007)

Xu Di and Hunter Mcewan, *Chinese philosophy on teaching and learning : Xueji in the twenty-first century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016)

Zhu Xi 朱熹, 'lunyu jizhu 論語集註' in *Wenyuan ge siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書, vol. 197 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1986)