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CONFUCIAN ROLE ETHICS

A VOCABULARY

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III

The Confucian Project: Attaining Relational Virtuosity

"Human *Beings*" or "Human *Becomings*"?

What is a human "being"? This was the perennial Greek question asked in Plato's *Phaedo* and in Aristotle's *De Anima*. And perhaps the most persistent answer from the time of Pythagoras was an ontological one: The "being" or essence of a human being is a permanent, ready-made, and self-sufficient soul. And "know thyself"—the signature exhortation of Socrates—is to know this soul. Each of us *is* a person, and from conception, has the integrity of *being* a person.

In what way does a person *become* consummately human? This was the perennial Confucian question asked explicitly in all of the *Four Books*: in the *Great Learning*, in the *Analects of Confucius*, in the *Mencius*, and again in the *Zhongyong*. And the answer from the time of Confucius was a moral, aesthetic, and ultimately religious one. One *becomes* human by cultivating those thick, intrinsic relations that constitute one's initial conditions and that locate the trajectory of one's life force within family, community, and cosmos.[1] "Cultivate your person" (*xiushen* 修身), the signature exhortation of the Confucian canons, is the ground of the Confucian project of becoming consummate as a person (*ren*): It is to cultivate one's conduct assiduously as it is expressed through those family, community, and cosmic roles and relations that one lives. In this Confucian tradition, we need each other. Becoming consummate in our conduct (*ren*) is something that we *do*, and that we either do together, or not at all.[2]

It will be the argument of this chapter that insufficient attention has been paid to this fundamental difference between ontologically

constituted human "beings" and the Confucian project of "becoming" human. As a consequence, there is a real danger of inadvertently shoehorning the Confucian foot into a Greek sandal. The exciting documents recovered in recent archaeological finds have persuaded our present generation of scholars to go back and take another look at our received texts. In doing so, we have found some issues that we have overlooked, and other things that we have been able to clarify by reference to these new materials.

As an example, we have found that an epistemology of concrete "feelings" (*qing* 情) is fundamental to an emerging Confucian tradition that, after the death of Confucius himself, we associate with the lineage traced from Confucius's grandson, Zisizi 子思子, down through Mencius (*simengpai* 思孟派). As a consequence, we have had to rethink our more cognitive, conceptual, and theoretical interpretations of the early Confucian canons to make sure that we have given the affective dimension of personal cultivation appropriate consideration.

Further, I believe that these same archaeological documents provide us with additional textual evidence for clarifying the Confucian notion of relationally constituted "human becomings" and for distinguishing this notion of "person" fundamentally from an essentialist understanding of discrete human beings. The philosophical implications of this distinction between the Confucian *ren* and a foundational individualism that had its beginnings in classical Greece are pervasive and enduring, and unless and until we are clear on this difference, we will continue to theorize Confucian philosophy according to assumptions that are not its own.

How have contemporary scholars who are not inclined to distinguish *ren* from the notion of the discrete individual and who thus read it in an essentialistic way come by their interpretations? I will begin to address this question by examining one familiar passage from the *Analects*:

> Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having set, one's proper path in life (*dao* 道) will emerge therefrom. As for family reverence (*xiao* 孝) and fraternal deference (*ti* 弟), these are, I suspect, the root of becoming consummate in one's conduct (*ren* 仁).[3]

What does it mean to take the practical activities of revering family members (*xiao* 孝) and of deferring appropriately to elders (*ti* 弟) as the

root (*ben* 本) of becoming consummate in one's conduct as a person (*ren* 仁)?[4] Should we not rather regard such *xiao* and *ti* activities as a practical expression of *ren* as human nature? In making what is taken to be "human nature" the product rather than the ultimate source of human conduct, are we not putting the cart before the horse?

Zhu Xi 朱熹, the Southern Song philosopher who compiled the *Four Books*, seems to worry over this possible inversion, and cites the interpretation of his philosophical predecessors, the Cheng brothers 二程, on this same *Analects* passage for clarification. The Cheng brothers argue that the problematic expression in this *Analects* passage "becoming ren" 為仁 should in fact be read as "practicing ren" 行仁:

> When reverence and deference are practiced within the family, a consummate love (*ren'ai* 仁愛) is extended in all we do. This is what is called expressing affection in kin relations (*qinqin* 親親) and dealing with the people in a consummate manner (*renmin* 仁民). It is in this sense that becoming consummate in one's conduct (*ren*) has its root in family reverence (*xiao*) and fraternal deference (*ti*). But in reference to human nature (*xing*), it is *ren* that is the root of *xiao* and *ti*. Some have wondered whether or not identifying *xiao* and *ti* as the root of *ren* is because *xiao* and *ti* can bring about *ren*. I think not. Saying that practicing *ren* commences from *xiao* and *ti* means that *xiao* and *ti* are expressions of *ren*; saying that they are the root of practicing *ren* is fine, but saying that they are the root of *ren* itself will not do. As for *ren*, it is human nature (*xing*); *xiao* and *ti* are its applications (*yong* 用). Within human nature, there are only the four components: *ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, *zhi* 智. How would *xiao* and *ti* factor into it? Now the main import of *ren* is love, and there is no love greater than that for one's kin. Hence the text reads: "As for family reverence (*xiao* 孝) and fraternal deference (*ti*), these are, I suspect, the root of becoming consummate in one's conduct (*ren*)."[5]

One familiar way of reading this Cheng commentary is to assume that classical Confucianism has a notion of human *beings*, and that the Cheng brothers are, by properly separating nature from nurture, simply clarifying the internal, essential, and exclusive status of human nature (*renxing* 人性) we associate with Mencius. A second way of reading the commentary here is to argue that the Cheng brothers, as neo-Confucian philosophers, influenced as they were by an originally Indo-European Buddhism, departed from a Mencian notion of "human *becoming*"

by internalizing and essentializing human nature, taking it to be an original potential that is then actualized in what it means to become a human being. Yet another reading of this Cheng commentary would begin by allowing that by the Song dynasty, the Buddhism influencing these neo-Confucian thinkers had been so thoroughly sinicized that it would not have introduced such a major disjunction with the Mencian understanding of human nature. This interpretation would further argue that the notion of human nature at play here is consistent with Mencius' "four inklings or sprouts" (*siduan* 四端) in being described as the "root" (*ben*) that nourishes our human behavior—a root that cannot in any way be conceived as independent of the other elements that together constitute the organic process of becoming human. This third interpretation would take nature and nurture as interdependent and correlative categories, rendering them symbiotic and mutually entailing. Indeed, in the Mencius, *xing* is often used verbally as something that is done.[6] In the ecological cosmology that gives this Cheng commentary context, one must understand the notion of root in its relation to the whole process of becoming a tree and must reflect on the nature of a person or any particular thing as the ongoing outcome of the total dynamic pattern of its relationships.

In contesting the first two of the possible interpretations of the Cheng commentary and arguing for this third reading suggested above, I will be seeking an interpretation of how one becomes consummately human that does not violate the basic and persistent assumptions of classical Chinese natural cosmology that we surveyed in chapter two. I want to attempt to make sense of this particular *Analects* passage and the Confucian canons broadly in such a way that it does not insinuate a Greek understanding of an essential human nature into the Confucian canons. By locating the notion of human nature within this relational *qi* cosmology, we will discover that what are sometimes taken to be unilateral and exclusive terms generally associated with human nature such as "root," "potential," "cause," and "source" have to be reconceived as collateral, transactional, and reflexive. The tree is an organic whole, and while the root may be thought to grow the tree, the tree in turn grows its roots. A poem by Tanya Storch comes to mind:

Roots are branches
underground.
Branches—roots
into the sky.[7]

This understanding of the root and the tree as a symbiotic whole as an alternative to thinking of the root as an independent, single source reflects cosmological assumptions that require a situated answer to one of our most fundamental and perennial philosophical questions: "Where does meaning come from?" In the Abrahamic traditions, the answer is simple: meaning comes from a Divine source beyond and independent of the individual: Yahweh, or God, or Allah provides us with life's purpose. For the Confucian project, on the other hand, without appeal to some independent principle, meaning arises *pari passu* from a network of meaningful relationships. A personal commitment to achieving relational virtuosity within one's own family relationships is both the starting point and the ultimate source of personal, social, and indeed, cosmic meaning. That is, in cultivating one's own person through achieving and extending robust relations in one's family and beyond, one enlarges the cosmos by adding meaning to it, and in turn, this increasingly meaningful cosmos provides a fertile context for the project of one's own personal cultivation.

Confucius is adamant that moral motivation is the motor of personal cultivation. While always self-effacing, Confucius not only allows but actually repeatedly endorses one description of himself—that he is a person who "cares deeply for learning" (*haoxue* 好學). And for Confucius, such learning means quite specifically having the unrelenting resolve to become consummate in one's conduct as a person (*ren*). Becoming consummate in one's conduct is a lifelong project that quite literally begins at home, and that is irreducibly collateral and transactional—the refined and elegant expression of a relational virtuosity. As Confucius is reported to have stated in the *Analects*: "Correlating one's conduct with those close at hand can be said to be the method of becoming consummate in one's conduct."[8] Again, he insists that "becoming consummate in one's conduct is self-originating—how could it originate with others?"[9] And further, Confucius has the highest expectations for the transformative outcome of such resolve: "I study what is near at hand and aspire to what is lofty."[10]

Indeed, in this Confucian tradition, there is a direct corridor from the achieved consummate life to a human-centered religiousness as the highest expression of personal cultivation. Confucian religiousness—the powerful sense of achieved worth and personal belonging that arises from the concerted growth of meaningful relations—is the *spirituality* achieved when members of family and community *aspire* to contribute themselves utterly in their relations with others, and thus live *inspired* lives. Such religiousness is itself the source and product of the flourishing family and community, and the quality of this religious life is a direct consequence of the quality of communal living. Said another way, religiosity is not only the root of the flourishing community and the seed from which it grows, but is most importantly its mature fruit, its radiant flower. The synergy between personal cultivation and the numinous is captured in the familiar mantra that is often appealed to by students of Chinese religiousness in distinguishing Confucian familial and communal reverence from Abrahamic God-inspired worship: That is, Confucian religiousness is characterized by "the symbiotic continuity between the natural and cultural context and the human experience" (*tianren heyi* 天人合一).

Setting the Project: The *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學)

The *Great Learning* 大學, the seminal, foundational canon that sets and anchors this Confucian project early in the tradition, describes the process of becoming human. It insists that it is only through committing oneself to a resolute regimen of personal cultivation that one can achieve the comprehensive intellectual and moral understanding that will make the most of the human experience. The central message of this terse yet comprehensive document is that while personal, familial, social, political, and indeed cosmic cultivation is ultimately coterminous and mutually entailing, it must always begin from a commitment to personal cultivation. In the language of the text itself:

> The way of achieving greatness through learning lies in demonstrating real personal excellence, in cherishing the common people, and in dedicating oneself to doing what is best. Such a course of learning can only be set once one has made this commitment. Only in having set such a course is one able to find equilibrium, only in having found equilibrium is one able to become self-assured, only in having become self-assured is one able to be deliberate in what one does, and only in being deliberate in what one does is one able to get what one is after. There is the important and the incidental in things and a beginning and an end in what we do. It is in realizing what should have priority that one approaches the proper way (*dao*).[11]

Having endorsed the priority of making a commitment to personal cultivation, the text then continues by rehearsing the cosmic proportions the ancient sage-kings were able to achieve once they dedicated themselves to this project:

> The ancients who sought to demonstrate real excellence to the whole world first brought proper order to their states; in seeking to bring proper order to their states, they first set their families right; in seeking to set their families right, they first cultivated their own persons; in seeking to cultivate their persons, they first knew what is proper in their own heartminds; in seeking to know what is proper in their heartminds, they first became sincere in their purposes; in seeking to become sincere in their purposes, they first became comprehensive in their wisdom. And the highest wisdom lies in seeing how things fit together most productively.
>
> Once they saw how things fit together most productively, their wisdom reached its heights; once their wisdom reached its heights, their thoughts were sincere; once their thoughts were sincere, their heartminds knew what is proper; once their heartminds knew what is proper, their persons were cultivated; once their persons were cultivated, their families were set right; once their families were set right, their state was properly ordered; and once their states were properly ordered, there was peace in the world.[12]

Each person stands as a unique perspective on family, community, polity, and cosmos, and through a dedication to deliberate growth and articulation, everyone has the possibility of bringing the resolution of the relationships that locate and constitute them within family and community into clearer and more meaningful focus. The "learning" (*xue* 學) of the *Great Learning* is the cultivation of productive, transpersonal habits of conduct.[13]

As the *Great Learning* enjoins us, in the singularly important project of becoming consummate persons, we must get our priorities right:

> From the emperor down to the common folk, everything is rooted in personal cultivation. There can be no healthy canopy when the roots

> are not properly set, and it would never do for priorities to be reversed between what should be invested with importance and what should be treated more lightly.[14]

The *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) version of the *Great Learning* concludes this text by declaring that giving priority to achieving personal excellence is wisdom at its best. In its own words:

> This commitment to personal cultivation is called both the root and the height of wisdom.[15]

Here again, the "root" and its product, wisdom, are to be perceived as an organic whole that grow together or not at all.

In appealing to an understanding of Chinese natural cosmology as the relevant interpretive context for this Confucian project, I have tried to provide a language that will distinguish this worldview from the reductive, single-ordered, "One-behind-the-many" ontological model that grounds classical Greek metaphysical thinking wherein one comes to "understand" the many by knowing retrospectively the foundational and causal ideal that lies behind them. Instead, we have found that in Chinese correlative cosmology there is a symbiotic and holistic focus-field model of order that is illustrated rather concisely here in the organic, ecological sensibilities of the *Great Learning*. The meaning of the family is implicated in and dependent upon the productive cultivation of each of its members, and by extension, the meaning of the entire cosmos is implicated in and dependent upon the productive cultivation of each person within family and community. Personal worth is the source of human culture, and human culture in turn is the aggregating resource that provides a context for each person's cultivation.

While certainly having important theoretical implications, the enduring power of this Confucian project is that it proceeds from a relatively straightforward account of the actual human experience. It is a pragmatic naturalism in the sense that, rather than relying upon metaphysical presuppositions or supernatural speculations, it focuses instead on the possibilities for enhancing personal worth available to us here and now through enchanting the ordinary affairs of the day. A grandmother's love for her grandson is at once the most ordinary of things, and the most extraordinary of things.

Confucius develops his insights around the most basic and enduring aspects of the ordinary human experience—family reverence, deference to others, friendship, a cultivated sense of shame, growth and education, life in community, and so on—and in so doing, he has guaranteed their continuing relevance. One characteristic of Confucianism prominent in the words of Confucius himself that has made his teachings so resilient in the Chinese tradition is its porousness and adaptability. His contribution was simply to take ownership of the cultural legacy of his time, to adapt the wisdom of the past to his own present historical moment, and then to recommend to future generations that they do the same.[16]

The personal model of Confucius that is remembered in the *Analects* does not purport to lay out some generic formula by which everyone should live their lives. Rather, the text recalls the narrative of one special person: how he in his relations with others cultivated his humanity, and how he lived a fulfilled and a fulfilling life, much to the admiration of those around him. We might take liberties and play with the title of the *Analects*, reading "discoursing" (*lunyu* 論語) more specifically as "role-based discoursing" (*lunyu* 倫語). Indeed, in reading the *Analects*, we encounter the relationally constituted Confucius making his way through life by living his many roles as best he can: as a caring family member (5.1, 5.2), as a strict teacher and mentor (16.13), as a scrupulous and incorruptible scholar-official (15.1), as a concerned neighbor and member of the community (9.10), as an always-critical political consultant (12.18), as the grateful progeny of his progenitors (7.5), as an enthusiastic heir to a specific cultural legacy (3.14, 9.5), indeed, as a member of a chorus of joyful boys and men singing their way home after a happy day on the river Yi (11.26). He offers us historical models rather than principles, and exhortations rather than imperatives. The power and lasting value of his insights lie in the fact that, as I will endeavor to show, these ideas are intuitively persuasive, and readily adaptable to the conditions of ensuing generations, including our own.

Indeed, in invoking the Chinese natural cosmology as context, what makes Confucianism more empirical than empiricism—that is, what makes Confucianism a *radical* empiricism—is the fact that it respects the uniqueness of the particular, and the need for a generative wisdom that

takes this uniqueness into account in anticipating a productive future. Rather than advancing universal principles and assuming a taxonomy of natural kinds grounded in some notion of strict identity, Confucianism proceeds from always-provisional generalizations made from those *particular* historical instances of successful living, the specific events recounted in the narrative of Confucius himself being a case in point.

"Family" as the Governing Metaphor

The timelessness and broad appeal of the teachings of Confucius begins from the insight that the life of almost every human being, regardless of where or when, is played out within the context of his or her own particular family, for better or for worse. For Confucius and for generations of Chinese that have followed after him, the basic unit of humanity is *this* particular person in *this* particular family rather than either the solitary, discrete individual or the equally abstract and generic notion of family. In fact, in reading Confucius, there is no reference to some core human *being* as the site of who we *really* are and that remains once the particular layers of family and community relations are peeled away. That is, there is no "self," no "soul," no discrete "individual" behind our complex and dynamic habits of conduct. Each of us is irreducibly social as the sum of the roles we *live*—not *play*—in our relationships and transactions with others. The goal of living, then, is to achieve harmony and enjoyment for oneself and for others through behaving in an optimally appropriate way in those roles and relationships that make us uniquely who we are. The analogy with music here is irresistible. Harmony requires that each component maintain its own integrity and be itself while simultaneously joining in and integrating with the other participants to form an organic unity distinct from, and more than, the sum of its parts. The unity of each of us emerges as we pursue this inclusive harmony within the orchestra of our roles and relations.

Confucianism is grounded in the everyday lives of the people, and has as its source of animation the natural deference that pervades family living. For Confucianism, the meaning and value of family relations is not just the primary ground of social order; family relations have cosmological and religious implications as well. Family bonds properly

observed are the point of departure for understanding that we each have moral responsibility for an expanding web of relations that reach far beyond our own localized selves.[17]

The profound influence of family on personal development begins from the utter dependency of the infant upon the family relations into which it is born. If infancy teaches us anything, and it teaches us much, its first lesson should be the inescapably interdependent nature of the human experience. Indeed, when Confucius's rather unremarkable student, Zaiwo, resists the burden and inconvenience of the traditional three-year mourning period for his parents, Confucius chides him by observing that parents quite literally give to infants three years of themselves, nourishing them and ensuring the continuing viability of their offspring as persons.[18]

The family is conceived as the center of all order, social and cosmic, and as we have seen in the *Great Learning*, all meaning ripples out in concentric circles from personal cultivation within family, and then returns again to nourish this primary source. In fact, if we ask after the meaning of personal "roles" (*lun* 倫) or perhaps a more primarily gerundive expression of them—"the living of one's roles and relations"—as this process is understood in the classical Chinese language, this character *lun* is one of a cluster of immediately cognate terms that offer various ways of characterizing radial order. We might begin from the notion of "a wheel, or taking turns" (*lun* 輪). And the notion of "bonding" in our roles is reinforced by cognates such as "selecting out" (*lun* 掄) and "twisting a cord, the woof" (*lun* 綸). This family of terms shares in the association of developing and strengthening a functional pattern of relations and of achieving a desired order. But the dynamic, articulate, and discursive aspects of living our roles are perhaps best captured in cognates such as "conversing, conversation" (*lun* 論), "rippling, ripples" (*lun* 淪), and the root character, "turning over in one's mind, thoughts, ordering, achieving coherence" (*lun* 侖). Indeed, this root character *lun* 侖 dates back to the oracle bones, and is constructed from an "opened mouth" and "an orderly bundle of bamboo written strips," ***[iii]*** suggesting a coherent exposition that elicits from and brings coherence to a particular written document.[19]

[iii]



When we bring these various associations of this family of characters together, the insight gleaned is that the perceived source of growing

proper "relations" is fundamentally discursive: an aggregating "relating to" and "giving an account of oneself" within the compass of one's roles that define family, and by extension, community. Simply put, a thriving, family-based community derives from continuing familial patterns of effective communicating. Said another way, "speaking" family roles in the broadest sense of living them is the ultimate source of coherence and order within the human experience. Family roles as a strategy for getting the most out of relations are thus an inspiration for order more broadly construed—social, political, and cosmic order. We might say that Confucianism is nothing more than a sustained attempt "to family" the lived human experience. For Confucianism, it is through discursive living in a communicating family and community that we are able to enchant the ordinary, to ritualize the routine, to invigorate the familiar, to inspire the customary habits of life, and ultimately, to commune spiritually in the common and the everyday.

The Discursive Nature of Family Relations

When all is said and done, what is a family "relationship"? To begin with, we are not separate "I" entities that then come into "we" relationships. As relationally constituted persons, "we" is the starting point, and we grow our lives significantly only through the extension and amplification of those relations that we already share as mother and wife and neighbor. For the relationally constituted conception of person, a relationship is comprised of various levels and modalities of discourse sustained over time. We shape each other linguistically through a sustained discourse, and also through other discursive media such as body, touch, and gesture. Certainly *li*—an achieved propriety in one's roles and relations—is linguistic, but it is not just speaking to each other. It is also the language of body and gesture, of music and food, of deference and attentive respect in the roles and relationships that we live. For Confucius, the human being is a social achievement, an adaptive success made possible through the applications of social imagination and intelligence. Society is not derivative of individual properties, nor is the individual the product of social forces. Rather, it is from the ecological and organic "doings and undergoings" of always-unique persons in their communities that both society and individual emerge together.[20] Given the reality of change, any success is

always provisional, leaving us as incomplete creatures with the always new challenge of contingent circumstances. And yet this success is at the same time progressive, programmatic, and consummatory.

The community is nothing more or less than a sustained "conversation" among a population of people, and exemplary persons within community are those who are virtuosic in effective speech and action, and who are both relationally and contextually catalytic in bringing to fruition the thriving community. The efficacy of what exemplary persons say and do not only influences the immediate community, but can have a profound and lasting effect on the world broadly.

In this early and persistent Chinese cosmology, human becomings and the discoursing that constitutes them are the inside and the outside of the same event, where meaning is made through productive associations. Human becomings are their meaningful relations. Hence the flourishing family is the outcome of an increasingly "familiar" discourse, and the thriving community is the outcome of an increasingly robust "communicating" and "communion" among its members. Importantly, in this Confucian tradition, all relationships—even the cosmological relationships between the heavens and the earth—are construed in discursive familial terms.

In reflecting on the power and substance of language, Hans-Georg Gadamer observes:

> The "use" of words is not a "using" at all. Rather language is a medium, an element: language is the element in which we live, as fishes live in water.... In the exchange of words, the thing meant becomes more and more present. A language is truly a "natural language" when it binds us together in this way.[21]

The Chinese processual cosmology would perhaps take this Gadamerian insight into language one step further and claim that, in its broadest sense, "language," more than a medium, is constitutive of who we are as irreducibly relational people. The *Great Commentary* of the *Book of Changes* turns explicitly to the way in which communication functions to form persons discursively. The identity of a person, while certainly localized by "body" and "home," is in fact defined as a concentrated focus of patterns of deference established and fostered through effective discourses that entail body and gesture, but that also

include the written and spoken language, music, ritualized roles and relationships, food, and so on. Throughout classical Confucianism, the contention is that the proper and effective use of language (*zhengming* 正名) is the substance of relationships, and is basic to the flourishing community in all of its overlapping dimensions. Using language properly is how we achieve what is most *appropriate* in our associations, and hence what is most *meaningful*. Indeed, both of these qualities of conduct—appropriateness and meaningfulness—are captured in the term *yi* 義, a central terminology in this Confucian vision of the consummate life. This power of language as the primary source for effecting social order is not lost on Confucius:

> "Were the Lord of Wey to turn the administration of his state over to you, what would be your first priority?" asked Zilu.
>
> "Without question it would be to insure that names are used properly (*zhengming*)," replied the Master.
> "Would you be as impractical as that?" responded Zilu. "What is it for names to be used properly anyway?"
>
> "How can you be so dense!" replied Confucius. "Exemplary persons defer on matters they do not understand. When names are not used properly, language will not be used effectively; when language is not used effectively, matters will not be taken care of; when matters are not taken care of, the achievement of a ritual propriety in roles and relations and the playing of music will not flourish; when the achievement of ritual propriety and the playing of music do not flourish, the application of laws and punishments will not be on the mark; when the application of laws and punishments is not on the mark, the people will not know what to do with themselves. Thus, when exemplary persons put a name to something, it can certainly be spoken, and when spoken it can certainly be acted upon. There is nothing careless in the attitude of exemplary persons toward what is said."[22]

This notion of *zhengming* has conventionally been translated as "the rectification of names," suggesting that in our conduct we need to satisfy the stipulated definition of names and ranks. And this requisite is certainly part of the story. For Confucius, there is an immediate association between using political titles of office strictly, and the integrity of the state. In the *Zuozhuan* commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* there is an account of a person who in being rewarded

for saving a prominent man's life declines the offer of a city and asks instead to be allowed to use the dress and accoutrements of a prince. On hearing of this, Confucius denounces this charade bitterly in language reminiscent of the *Analects* passage cited above:

> What a pity! It would have been better to give him many cities. It is insignias of office and titles alone that cannot be conceded to pretenders—they must be managed by the ruler. Proper titles give rise to confidence, and confidence is what protects the insignias of office. It is insignias in which the meaning of ritual propriety is invested, and it is ritual propriety that carries appropriate conduct (*yi*) into practice; appropriate conduct is what gives rise to benefit, and it is benefit that brings equanimity to the people. Such things are what structure government, and if you concede them to pretenders, you concede the government along with them. If the government is lost, the country will follow, and there can be no stopping it.[23]

A major theme that runs through the *Analects* is Confucius's insistence that unrelenting attention must be given to retaining a strict correspondence between formal ritual practices and the ranks of office, with the risk of political collapse being the consequence of doing otherwise.[24] More specifically, in his home state of Lu, Confucius was repeatedly chagrined at the powerful Ji family's usurpation of practices and privileges appropriate to the royal house.[25]

Certainly, living language is informed by a history of usage that allows for its content to be stipulated, and in this sense, is retrospective in its meaning. But the need to *zhengming* does not end here. It is also prospective. That is, it is a living language and has to be used in a way that is sensitive to the specifics of the always changing context and in a way that respects the uniqueness of the persons involved in the conversation. It is often remarked upon that on six different occasions in the *Analects,* Confucius is reported to have been asked by his protégés about the meaning of "consummate conduct" (*ren*), and on each of these occasions he gives each of these different students a different answer. This is because an impoverished, reticent, respectful, and conscientious Yan Hui would need a different understanding of what it means to become consummate in his conduct than a wealthy, self-possessed, assertive, and sometimes self-serving Zigong. We might

reflect on the fact that language has syntactical and morphological implications as well as semantic force, and as such, requires a sensitivity to "positioning and place" (*wei* 位) as being integral to its meaning. It is not just what one says that conveys meaning, but where, when, and to whom one is speaking.[26]

Indeed, the efficacy of what the exemplary person has to say not only influences the immediate community, but also has a profound and lasting effect on the world broadly. The exemplary person as the source of effective speech and action has to be understood as catalytic within a configuration of circumstances in precipitating a certain course of events:

> If what the exemplary persons say even while remaining at home is felicitous, those in distant quarters will respond to it; how much more so those near at hand. If what is said is not felicitous, those in distant quarters will oppose it; how much more so those near at hand. What is said comes from one's person but has an effect on the people; actions arise near at hand but are seen from a distance. Words and actions are the hinge and trigger of exemplary persons. And the operations of hinge and trigger control honor and disgrace. Since it is with words and actions that exemplary persons move the heavens and the earth, how could they be but circumspect with respect to them?[27]

The quality of discourse is measured by its degree of appropriateness (*yi*), and this feeling of appropriateness is whence a sense of genuine commitment and of belonging within meaningful relations emerges. Indeed, it is the quality of genuineness within the discourse that is the ground of effective communication, and that distinguishes virtuosic orchestration from manipulation, ethical exhortation from propaganda, liberating intimacy from an invasion of privacy, and inspiration from sensationalism.

Achieving Personal Identity through Embodying (*ti* 體) Propriety (*li* 禮) in One's Roles and Relations

In attempting to explore the Confucian focal notion of personal identity, we might begin from the challenge that William James directs at the familiar "substance" understanding of the unity of "essence" and "attribute" in the notion of our foundational individuality. James uses the analogy

of "climate" to illustrate the redundancy that a superordinate substance such as "soul" or "self" or "mind" introduces into an analysis of personal identity:

> The low thermometer to-day, for instance, is supposed to come from something called the "climate." Climate is really only the name for a certain group of days, but it is treated as if it lay *behind* the day, and in general we place the name, as if it were a being, behind the facts it is the name of. But the phenomenal properties of things ... do not inhere in anything. They adhere, or cohere, rather, with each other, and the notion of a substance inaccessible to us, which we think accounts for such cohesion by supporting it, as cement might support pieces of a mosaic, must be abandoned. The fact of the bare cohesion itself is all the notion of the substance signifies. Behind that fact is nothing.[28]

The Confucian alternative to locating personal identity in some superordinate soul or self or mind is to find this same coherence in the achieved coordination and integration of one's conduct expressed through one's embodied roles and relations. In the *Zhongyong*—a canonical text included along with the *Great Learning*, the *Analects* and the *Mencius* as the fourth and most inspirational of the *Four Books*—we are told explicitly that family feeling is the ultimate source of the civility and propriety that is fostered within our ritualized roles and institutions:

> Consummate conduct (*ren* 仁) means comporting oneself as a person (*ren* 人), wherein devotion to one's kin is most important. Appropriateness (*yi* 義) means doing what is fitting (*yi* 宜), wherein esteeming those of superior conduct is most important.[29] The degree of devotion due different kin and the degree of esteem accorded those who vary in excellence of conduct is what gives rise to the achievement of propriety in our roles and relations (*li* 禮).[30]

Qian Mu 錢穆 insists that these family-based ritualized roles and relationships (*li*) are a deep cultural identity that must be distinguished fundamentally from the highly variable local customs (*fengsu* 風俗) that separate region from region. For Qian Mu, it is shared *li* rather than different customs that constitute the resilient and enduring fabric of Chinese culture:

> You might say that the *jia* [家], or "family," is the place in Chinese culture where *li* [禮] is transmitted. But it is important to distinguish between *jiating* [家庭], "the family living group," and *jiazu* [家族], the "family descent group." It is through the *jiazu* that the standards of social relationships extend beyond the family to relatives. The descent group, which includes the relatives on both sides of the family, can only exist if the standards of *li* are applied. So, when the *li* are extended, a family descent group is made, and when they are further extended, a "people's descent group," or *minzu* [民族] is made. The Chinese are a *minzu* because the *li* set the standards in social relations for all of the people.[31]

Coordinated family relations (*lun* 倫) then are quite literally the fabric (*lun* 綸) of the Chinese as a particular "people."

Tang Junyi like Qian Mu affirms the centrality of family feeling as the distinguishing Confucianism value. The centrality of family is for Tang one of the most profound differences separating Western and Chinese values. He establishes a contrast with the Western philosophical narrative in which "family" as an institution has not been a significant inspiration for order within the broad sweep of the evolution of Western philosophy and culture.[32] Indeed, we are unable to find any family-centered philosophical notion that is comparable to and that has had the vital importance that "family reverence" (*xiao* 孝) holds for Confucian philosophy. The key characters cognate with the term "family reverence" (*xiao*) are revealing of its invested cultural value. This "intergenerational reverence" (*xiao* 孝) that binds families together through the "respect and emulation" (*xiao* 效) of family models and cultural exemplars is one of two elements that constitutes the Chinese graph for "teachings" (*jiao* 教) broadly.

Using Qian Mu's language, just as the "family living group" (*jiating* 家庭), the "family descent group" (*jiazu* 家族), and the "people's descent group" (*minzu* 民族) are radial extensions outward from the conduct of particular family members, it is the coherence in the conduct within these embodied roles and relations that constitutes the identity of the particular members themselves. We might use a traditional expression that continues in the modern Chinese language as a heuristic for explicating the fundamental importance of family as ground for the achieved identity of Confucian persons. In the English language we might say "*everybody* (or *everyone*), please stand up," using the "body"

and a presumed discreteness ("one") as indices for "person," thereby reinforcing linguistically an assumption that the "indivisible" individual is the lowest unit in our social organization. By extension we refer to "anybody," "nobody," and "somebody" (or "anyone," "no one," and "someone").

In vernacular Chinese, however, we would say "*dajia qing zhanqilai*" 大家請站起來—literally, "*big family*, please stand up," suggesting that family relations are perceived as constitutive of our persons, and that indeed it is life together within our specific familial roles rather than any single individual that is the lowest social unit. Implicit in this usually unconscious but rather stark contrast between the expressions "everyone" and "big family" (*dajia* 大家) is a fundamental, default distinction between individuated, self-sufficient, and thus discrete human *beings*, and situated, relational human *becomings* who grow and realize themselves as distinctive persons through a sustained commitment to their always-collaborative, transactional roles within the nexus of family and community.

Applying this Confucian perspective to an understanding of my own person, I might reason that I am certainly incarnate and live my life as an embodied individual, and that my somaticity is integral to my "big family" identity. At the same time I must allow that I am D. C. Lau's student, and Bonnie's husband, and Jason and Austin's father, and Sor-hoon's old teacher, and Tze-wan and Chan-fai's friend and colleague, and David and Henry's long-time collaborator, and so on—and that these roles and relationships as we have grown them together over a lifetime weigh heavily in any adequate understanding of personal identity. After all, these wonderfully satisfying roles and intimate relations are complex and enduring, and are truly the inspiration that animates my always-embodied conduct. In considering personal identity from a Confucian perspective, we must appreciate fully the way in which both our somaticity and our complex manifold of relations with others enable us to achieve and sustain our coherence as a person, a coherence that is best understood as a dynamic focus of identity rather than as something separate and discrete. We might recall the focal and functioning understanding of the psychophysical and spiritual heartmind (*xin* 心) as an apposite analogy for the Confucian notion of person. At the same time, just as "what is the

heartmind in itself?" is a meaningless question, so we must resist the familiar, uncritical assumption that being embodied and being "enroled" necessarily commits us to the notion of superordinate, individual "selves."

The character for "body" (*ti* 體) that has "bones" (*gu* 骨) as its classifier emerges relatively late in antiquity.[33] Although by the time of the silk manuscripts dating from 168 BCE that were recovered at Mawangdui *ti* does occur in this present form, it appears earlier on the Zhou dynasty bronzes with a "lived body" (*shen* 身) signifier as ***[iv]***, and then on the bamboo strip manuscripts with a "flesh" (*rou* 肉) signifier as ***[v]***.[34] We can use these three alternative classifiers that constitute the varient forms of this character *ti*—*gu* 骨, *shen* 身, and *rou* 肉—as a heuristic for parsing *ti*'s range of meaning. We must allow that *ti* with the "bones" (*gu* 骨) classifier references the "discursive body" as a process of "structuring," "configuring," "embodying," and thus "knowing" the world not only cognitively and affectively, but also viscerally. Each of us collaborates with the world to discriminate, conceptualize, and theorize the human experience, embodying and giving form to our culture, our language, our habitat. Above I cited Hilary Putnam who in *Realism with a Human Face* insists that our "language" and our "minds," together with the values that attend them, penetrate so deeply into human experience that it would be a nonsense to try to separate out some reality that stands independent of them.[35] The more holisitic Confucian philosophy would take Putnam's claim further in arguing that it is not just language, mind, or indeed, a human face, that penetrates our reality, but our persons in their entirety.

[iv]



[v]



Ti with the "lived body" (*shen*) classifier highlights another dimension of embodying experience by referencing the vital, existentially aware lived-body in its dynamic social relations with others. Experience always has a subjective dimension, an inside as well as an outside. And *ti* with the "flesh" (*rou*) classifier references the carnal body—the body as flesh and bone. At the most primordial level, the body via these three mutually entailing modalities serves as the bond that conjoins our subjectivity with our environments and that mediates the processes of thinking and feeling with our patterns of conduct.

Zhang Yanhua describes the active and intentional nature of the term *shenti* 身體 in precisely these terms:

> *Shenti* is both physical and extraphysical, capable of feeling, perceiving, creating, and reasoning or embodying changes and transformation on the social world as well as in the natural world. It is the world: at the same time, emotive, moral, aesthetic, and visceral.... In other words, the domains of body, mind, and emotion are mutually penetrating and activating.... Its practical logic involves a language of "bodies" in dynamic process and constant transformation and a language of relations.[36]

The idea that the entire world is brought into focus by and implicated in each of our embodied persons is captured in the expression "valuing one's person" (*guishen* 貴身) that appears as a strong theme in the *Daodejing*. That is, attending to one's own relationally constituted person is by extension treasuring the world:

> Thus those who value the care of their own persons more than the care of the world can be entrusted with the world. And those who begrudge their persons as though they were the world can be put in charge of the world.[37]

In the Confucian tradition, the body is an inheritance we receive from our families, and as a current in a genealogical stream that reaches back to our most remote ancestors, brings with it a sense of continuity and belonging, and the religious significance that such feelings bring with them. To respect one's own body is to show reverence for one's ancestors and one's relationship to them, while disregard for one's body is to bring shame upon one's lineage. As it states in the opening chapter of the *Classic of Family Reverence* (*Xiaojing* 孝經):

> Your physical person with its hair and skin is received from your parents. Vigilance in not allowing anything to do injury to your person is where family reverence begins ...[38]

This responsibility to preserve one's body intact is a major theme throughout the Confucian canons. In the *Book of Rites*, it says:

> Among those things born of the heavens and nurtured by the earth, nothing is grander than the human being. For the parents to give birth to your whole person, and for one to return oneself to them whole is what can be called family reverence. To avoid desecrating your body or bringing disgrace to your person is what can be called keeping your person whole.[39]

Confucius's protégé, Master Zeng, is a name often associated with family reverence (*xiao* 孝) in the canonical literature, and in the *Analects* it is recorded that on his deathbed he said the following:

> Master Zeng was ill, and summoned his students to him, saying, "Look at my feet! Look at my hands! The *Book of Odes* says:
>
> Fearful! Trembling!
> As if peering over a deep abyss,
> As if walking across thin ice.[40]
>
> It is only from this moment hence that I can be sure I have avoided desecration of my body, my young friends."[41]

This relationship between the responsibility one has for keeping one's body intact and the appropriate attention to family reverence (*xiao*) works in the opposite direction as well. Traditionally, in the application of penal law (*xing* 刑) as is captured with the knife element (*dao* 刀) in the character itself, amputory and branding punishments were often meted out for serious crimes. Such punishments are a deliberate strategy for not only alerting the community to the presence of a ne'er-do-well in its midst, but also as a way of assuring that such felons wear their shame before their ancestors in the world beyond.

Nathan Sivin has explored the correlations between body, cosmos, and state in the pre-Qin and early Han dynasties, arguing that "the ideas of Nature, state, and the body were so interdependent that they are best considered a single complex."[42] Perhaps the writings traditionally ascribed to the Han dynasty Confucian, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, are the *locus classicus* for describing the many correspondences between the human person and the cosmos—between microcosm and macrocosm.[43] Therein Dong describes not only associations between the changing seasons of the year and the rise and fall of the human passions, but also explores the many ostensive correlations between the anatomy and physiology of the human body and the structure of the material cosmos.[44] Further, early in the tradition, an elaborate vocabulary evolved that associates specific family relations with different parts of the body: the "living person" (*shengshen* 生身) is a metaphor used to refer to one's parents, "bones and flesh" (*gurou* 骨肉) for one's children, "hands and feet" (*shouzu* 手足) for one's brothers, "stomach and heartmind" (*fuxin* 腹心) for one's friends, and "of the same womb" (*tongbao* 同胞) for one's countrymen.[45]

In the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*) and several other canonical texts, there is a further correlation pursued in associating the proper structure of the cosmos (*li* 理) as a whole with propriety in human roles and relations (*li* 禮), suggesting that human morality has its counterpart in the harmonious workings of the cosmos. What is significant in this reflection on our embodied persons is that physically, socially, and religiously, our bodies are a specific matrix of nested relations and functions, and are invariably a collaboration between our persons and our many environments. "Nobody" and no "body"—not the vital, the social, or the carnal bodies—do anything by themselves.

In this Confucian tradition, we might correlate "body" (*ti* 體) and its cognate character "achieved propriety in one's roles and relations" (*li* 禮) by arguing that they express two ways of looking at the same phenomenon: That is, they reference "a living body" and "embodied living" respectively. If we use the vocabulary of contemporary medical anthropology to capture the nonanalytical relationship between living and embodying, we might cite Zhang Yanhua who concludes that "*jingshen* 精神 is not perceived in opposition to *shenti* 身體 but constitutive of it"—that is, our animated life activities are not distinct from our embodiment, but are integral to and an expression of it.[46]

Ti and *li* are further correlated in the *Book of Rites* as a "corpus" or a "body" of ritual proprieties:

> Now the great corpus of ritual proprieties (*li zhi dati* 禮之大體) is embodied (*ti*) in the heavens and the earth, emulates the four seasons, takes *yin* and *yang* as its standard, comports with human feeling, and is thus called "ritual proprieties" (*li*). As for those who would denigrate these proprieties, they have no idea where such things come from.[47]

Peter Boodberg in searching for the common ground shared by these two cognate terms, *ti* 體 and *li* 禮, allows that "form, that is, organic form ... appears to be the link between the two words, as evidenced by the ancient Chinese scholiasts who repeatedly used *t'i* [*tǐ*] to define *li* in their glosses."[48] Deborah Sommer goes back to the usages of *ti* in the *Book of Odes* to quite literally dig out its earliest connotations. *Ti* is associated in the early literature with vegetable propagation that is "accomplished not with seeds but by dividing the roots, stems, tubers or other fleshy parts of plants into segments that are then replanted to develop into 'new

plants.'"[49] Sommer observes that "for people of an agriculturally based society, the notion that plants can be multiplied through vegetative division would have been a commonplace."[50] There is both continuity and origination in the process of sprouting tubers being dissected and grown again and of the unusable roots of defoliated herbs generating a new harvest of leaves and stems. From these early references, Sommer offers an abstracted understanding of the *ti* body as

> ... a polysemous corpus of indeterminate extent that can be partitioned into subtler units, each of which is often analogous to the whole and shares a fundamental consubstantiality and common identity with that whole.... When a *ti* body is fragmented into parts (literally or conceptually), each part retains, in certain aspects, a kind of wholeness or becomes a simulacra of the larger entity of which it is a constituent.[51]

Although in Sommer's survey of this early literature she concludes that "*ti* bodies often act more like plants than like humans,"[52] I would hesitate in making such a sharp distinction between these two categories. Indeed I would want to press her analysis a step further as providing real insight into the early Chinese way of thinking specifically about human genealogical continuity, and in so doing, provide an opportunity to extrapolate from horticulture to human culture. In chapter two above we rehearsed Tang Junyi's proposition, "the inseparability of the one and the many, of uniqueness and multivalence, of continuity and multiplicity, of integrity and integration" (*yiduo bufen guan* 一多不分觀). If we take human procreativity as an illustration of this proposition, such a characterization is another way of affirming *paisheng* 派生, the birthing of a distinctive and unique person from those who are genealogically prior. At the same time, within the ongoing, ceaseless process of shaping and being shaped called *huasheng* 化生, the "many" prior progenitors persist and live on in this process of transforming into someone else. That is, while persons emerge to become specifically who they are as individuals, the parents and grandparents of such individuals continue to live on in them, just as they too will live on in their future progeny. The focus-field language that we have proposed as a way of thinking about the relationship between particulars and the totality seems immediately relevant to the kind of holography Sommer alludes to when she says that "each new plant in some sense is still the parent plant, and there exists a

material continuity of identity from one life form to the next.... Mother and daughter plants are at once autonomous and yet consubstantial."[53]

We might take an elaboration of this *ti* genealogy a step further. This process of division, diffusion, and derivation can provide additional illumination if we reflect upon the complex transmission of always-embodied knowledge from generation to succeeding generation. The body is the site of a conveyance of the cultural corpus of knowledge—linguistic facility and proficiency, religious rituals and mythologies, the aesthetics of cooking, song, and dance, the modeling of mores and values, instruction and apprenticeship in cognitive technologies, and so on—as a continuing, intergenerational process through which a living civilization itself is perpetuated.[54]

The communal *shen* body is diffused in the dynamic family and communal roles and relations that constitutes it, and just as the *ti* body does not carry with it a superordinate notion of "self" or "soul"—some ghost in the machine—likewise, achieved propriety in living one's roles and relations (*li*) that complements this body in constituting one's person is also primordial. That is, the quality of one's conduct is not mediated by or reduplicated in some notion of a discrete "agent" or "character" that would isolate and locate persons outside of the concrete pattern of their social and natural relations. Instead, the identity of persons lies in the achieved amalgamation, the integration, and the sustained coherence of their continuing habits of conduct within the embodied roles that constitute them.

These roles have their beginnings in "family reverence" (*xiao*), and are then extended in a process that quite literally brings the community home through surrogate family relations. As we perform our various roles, so we are in turn formed as persons. Tang Junyi describes the function of *li* in the following terms:

> When the "Ritualizing Experience" (*liyun* 禮運) chapter of the *Book of Rites* discusses the ideal of the era of Great Harmony (*datong* 大同), what is intended is simply that everyone should get what they deserve. Herein the concepts of propriety (*li*) and appropriateness (*yi*) are subsumed under the concept of person. As such, persons in the course of realizing this purpose must participate fully and appropriately in their symbiotic ritualized roles and relations before each person can get what they should get out of these relationships.[55]

Tang is here rehearsing a proposition that is also found in the *Analects* where it insists that any genuine harmony must be mediated through a robust sense of propriety in the roles and relations that situate us within family and community (*Analects* 1.12). Confucian "harmony" is much more than merely an absence of discord that could be maintained by indiscriminately enforcing social order. The ultimate achievement of an orchestrated harmony grounded in family feeling is to bring into focus and resolution the persons who make up a community in which everyone has developed a sense of shame and responsibility (*Analects* 2.3).

We find the Latin *proprius*—literally, "making something one's own"—as the root in words such as "proper," "appropriate," "propriety," and "property." This root provides us with a series of cognate expressions that are felicitous in translating those key Confucian philosophical terms defining of personal identity because such translations locate one as an active participant committed to personalizing one's various life forms—physical and social—and thus making them one's own. This always-reflexive personalization of one's roles—I am this son to this mother—has immediate consequence in the search for effective renderings of this philosophical vocabulary. For example, if we acknowledge the persistence of a relational rather than essential understanding of the Confucian person, *yi* 義 cannot be "righteousness"—putatively an individual's compliance with some external divine directive. Rather, *yi* must be an inclusive "conducting oneself appropriately" in those relations within one's particular family and community. That is, *yi* is doing what is most fitting within the specific circumstances, as opposed to simply following some external principle or rule in doing what is deemed correct. Similarly, *zheng* 正 cannot be simply "correct" or "rectified" conduct or language—again, an appeal to some external standard. Rather *zheng* must be an inclusive "conducting oneself properly" or "using language properly" as negotiated by a particular person within a particular social context. Relatedly, *zheng* 政 is not simply "government" but a reflexive "governing properly" that necessarily begins at home in the life of the family and then extends radially outward in the community and polity.[56] And *li* ("ritual propriety") is not just "performing formal observances flawlessly," but is the quality of propriety achieved by *personally and consistently* doing what is most appropriate in the roles and relations that define one. As is recounted in the *Analects*:

> The expression "sacrifice as though present" is taken to mean "sacrifice to the spirits as though the spirits are present." But the Master said, "If I myself do not participate in the sacrifice, it is as though I have not sacrificed at all."[57]

On the informal and uniquely personal side, full participation in a ritually constituted community requires the appropriation and reauthorization of the prevailing institutions and values that are defining of a culture. What makes the mechanism of achieving ritual propriety in one's roles and relations profoundly different from merely comporting with law or rule is the sense of shame one develops in the ongoing process of making the tradition one's own. As we will see in the next chapter, shame looms large as a key element in ethical motivation because shame is an earned awareness that we live together interdependently in family and community, and that each of us is responsible in our conduct for the well-being of the world that we share.

A careful reading of the classical Confucian literature uncovers a way of life carefully choreographed down to appropriate facial expressions and physical gestures, a world in which a life is an embodied performance requiring concentrated and unrelenting attention to detail. Importantly, this *li*-constituted performance begins from the insight that personal refinement is only possible through the discipline provided by formalized roles and behaviors. But form alone without sustained personalization is coercive and dehumanizing law. On the other extreme, creative personal expression in the absence of form is randomness at best, and license at worst. It is only with the appropriate combination of and balance between formality and functional personalization that family and community can become elegant, refined, and self-regulating.

Zhang Yanhua appeals to "an aesthetics of relationships" in her attempt to take full cognizance of the powerful emotional dimension of family flourishing that is instrumental in fostering an immediate sense of both intra- and inter-generational continuity and belonging:

> The cultural aesthetics of *renhe* 人和 (harmonious interpersonal relationships) finds its full expression in Chinese family ethics that guide the way the family members care for and interact with each other according to their places within the family. The harmonious family also includes a vertical dimension. This concern for harmonious family relationships extends to the deceased

> members of the family, that is, the spiritual world.... This is also related to the Chinese sensibility of *tong* 通 (connection and flowing).... For the Chinese, harmony presupposes a healthy process of connecting and extending.[58]

In addition to the vertical concern for ancestors that reinforces the continuity of family identity, there is an important horizontal dimension of interdependent family relations that expands outward through the vital role of friendship in the Confucian project. As Zhang Yanhua reports:

> It is also important that the cultural aesthetics of *renhe* (harmonious interpersonal relations) extend beyond one's immediate circle of family members and relatives through extensive networks of "human emotions" (*renqing* 人情) created and maintained diligently by all forms of social exchanges, of gifts, labor, services, respect, and so on.[59]

The Liberating Role of Friendship

Zhang Yanhua's observation about cultural aesthetics leads us to a reflection on the vital importance of the notion of friendship in Confucian role ethics. Within the web of Confucian relations, intimate friendships take on a transformative force that can only be adequately explained by understanding them as an extension and amplification of the family itself. As a dimension of a Confucian family-centered ethic, friendship serves as a definite, sometimes compensatory source of meaning and value. While immediate family relations are usually a matter of birth and blood, developed friendships are contingent, and entail diversity and deliberate choice. We might describe the role of friendship as a doorway through which erstwhile outsiders enter to join and add a remarkable depth to the ranks of family relations.

The vital importance of friendship for Confucianism lies in its function as an open conduit that leads from the security and stability of one's own family out into the more uncertain and sometimes taxing social, political, and cultural realm. When Zilu asks after the makings of a scholar-official, Confucius says plainly:

> Persons who are critical and demanding, yet amicable can be called scholar-officials. Persons need to be critical and demanding with their friends, and amicable and acquiescent with their older and younger brothers.[60]

Confucius thus anticipates that friendships can in some ways be more challenging than intimate family relations. One can fairly take for granted the love and protection of one's immediate family, while successful life in the public sphere requires a higher degree of discrimination and a more critical sense of engagement. But then again the dividends to be reaped from enduring friendships over a lifetime are truly substantial, introducing into the project of personal growth resources that provide a deeper degree of difference. In this Confucian tradition, to "make" friends is quite literally to participate in the "making" of each other to the extent that it is the friendship itself that becomes what is most concrete, while the "individuals" who participate in the growth of the relationship become increasingly an abstraction from it.

In choosing one's friends, Confucius is emphatic: "Exemplary persons ... do not have as a friend anyone who is not as good as they are."[61] This declaration is a clear acknowledgment of his understanding that personal growth and diminution are a function of associated living. It prompts us to ask again: For Confucius, where does the meaning in a "meaningful" friendship come from? In a Platonic-come-Christian world wherein meaning has a transcendent reference, friendship is instrumentalized as a commitment to a common end. The conclusion of the reflection on friendship in the *Phaedrus* is that friends hold all things in common. And when what they hold in common is an *eros* directed toward the transcendent Good, they are *true* friends. Similarly, for the Christian, *philia* as the love among friends and family members is subordinated to *agape*, the love of a transcendent God channeled through His creatures as their love for one another.

Aristotle, like Plato, takes commonality as the basis for friendship. In both cases, there is a high value invested in self-sufficiency. For Aristotle, there is a lower level of incidental friendship that seeks utility and pleasure. But *true* friends by contrast are "another self" or "a second self" because they mirror one's own virtuous character and the intellectual activity of *nous* that is identical in all people. Indeed, Aristotle appeals to the mirror metaphor to illustrate how the real friend in being similarly virtuous is a source of self-knowledge.[62] He allows that "contemplative friendships" are higher than the practical kind, and that such virtue friendships are rare; they are only available to an elite circle of equally virtuous people.[63] There is a superiority of the theoretical life over the

practical, and of the speculative vision over daily moral activities. Thus, for Aristotle, the eternal truth that can be grasped by *nous* must be given priority over friendship, even when it means turning one's back on one's own teacher—in his case, Plato:

> We had perhaps better consider the universal good and discuss thoroughly what is meant by it, although such an inquiry is made an uphill one by the fact that the Forms have been introduced by friends of our own.... [W]hile both are dear, piety requires us to honor truth above our friends.[64]

For Confucius, like his Greek cousins, friendships are in some ways a matter of common cause:

> Master Zeng said, "Exemplary persons attract friends through their refinement, and through these friends promote consummate conduct (*ren*)."[65]

May Sim has identified many resonances between the Confucian and Aristotelian models of friendship, taking careful account of their important similarities.[66] But beyond these commonalities, it must be allowed that there is significant distance between the accounts of friendship we find in Aristotle and Confucius. We must take into account the metaphysical and biological uniformities in Aristotle's foundational individualism, the self-sufficiency of final and unchanging first principles and causes that are the object of contemplation, and the centrality of rationality as the ground in making moral decisions. For Confucius, *contra* Plato and Aristotle, the ultimate source of meaning is not external, but emerges through the nurturing process of the friendship itself. And it is the ways in which friends are qualitatively superior to and different from each other that provides the opportunity for a collaborative advancement. Confucian friendship is a classic illustration of the mantra: "Exemplary persons seek harmony not conformity; petty persons are the opposite."[67] When Zigong was asked who Confucius had as his teacher, his reply is inclusive:

> The moral vision (*dao*) of Kings Wen and Wu has not collapsed utterly—it lives on in the people. Those of superior character have grasped the greater part of it, while those of lesser quality have grasped a bit. Everyone has something of Wen and Wu's way in them. Who then did the Master not learn from? Again, how could there have been a single constant teacher for him?[68]

The message here is that since each person is different, Confucius had something—sometimes more, sometimes less—to learn from everyone. This generous appreciation of both the positive and negative possibilities that most relations with other people provide us for moral development is made abundantly clear:

> The Master said, "In strolling together with just two other persons, I am bound to find a teacher in their company. Identifying their strengths, I follow them, and identifying their weaknesses, I reform myself accordingly."[69]

Personal growth is a function of the quality of the specific productive relations achieved among family and friends. In seeking out and developing meaningful friendships, we have latitude and a degree of freedom that is not characteristic of our relations with blood relatives. Confucius is keenly aware that broadening and expansive friendships, compensating to an important degree for family constraints, can serve as a real opportunity for personal growth. Poorly chosen, however, these erstwhile friendships can also be a source of personal diminution. He observes:

> Having three kinds of friends will be a source of personal improvement; having three other kinds of friends will be a source of personal injury. One stands to be improved by friends who are true, who make good on their word, and who are broadly informed; one stands to be injured by friends who are ingratiating, who feign compliance, and who are glib talkers.[70]

Confucius's point here is that friendship provides a porous border on the institution of family that allows for a more deliberate and purposeful shaping of one's own personal relations, and hence, one's own person. These voluntarily chosen relations are still to be construed as familial, and yet they have a potential to provide a degree of growth and complexity that can often go beyond our more formal family bonds.

Commonality and overlap is covered in the vocabulary of friendship by the term *peng* 朋. In the oracle bone script this character originally identified a denomination of two strings of cowry shell currency as ***[vi]*** and later came to mean "peer" or "comrade" in the specific sense of being students of the same master. Although the power of the role of "classmate" (*tongxue* 同學) and "student older brother/sister"

[vi]



(*xuexiong*/*jie* 學兄/姐) continues down to the present day, the emphasis in Confucian friendship is on interdependence and difference rather than on sameness and self-sufficiency. Friendship as an opportunity for creative growth is built into the associations that the more frequently used term for "friend"—*you* 友—evokes. The oracle bone version of this character has "two hands" ***[vii]*** that are sometimes joined together ***[viii]***, suggesting a common bond of friendship.[71] *You* is first cognate with *you* 右, "the right hand," and by extension, with what is to be honored and revered. It is further cognate with *you* 佑 "to assist," and *you* 祐 "a blessing." Combining these several associations, we might observe that a true friend is an object of deference to be honored and esteemed as a blessing that assists in one's personal growth.

[vii]



[viii]



A second philological correlation for "friend" (*you* 友) is its cognate and homophonous relationship with *you* 有, "to have, to be around (= wealth)," a term that also appears as a loan character for it. *You* 有 is depicted suggestively on the bronzes specifically as the honored right hand grasping a piece of meat, a scarce, valuable, and sometimes sacred commodity in an agrarian community: ***[ix]***.[72] Again, the implication is that a true friend is a matter of proximity—someone who is there for you—and a resource whence to garner increased meaning in one's life.

[ix]



That Confucius insists upon this restricted and specific use of "friend" (*you*) is suggested in a disagreement on the meaning of "establishing relations with others" (*jiao* 交) that involves two of his closest protégés, Zixia and Zizhang. In the years following the death of the Master, these two disciples matured into patriarchs in their own right and had their own interpretations of what Confucius had said and what he had meant by it:

> The disciples of Zixia asked Zizhang about establishing relations with others. Zizhang queried, "What has Zixia told you?" They replied, "Associate with those who are worthy of your efforts; spurn those who are not."

It would seem from Zixia's definition of "establishing relations with others" that he is retaining the strictness and the discrimination with which Confucius himself approaches friendship. But such a narrow reading does not go unchallenged. Zizhang counters:

> This is different from what I have learned. Exemplary persons exalt those of superior character and are accommodating of everyone, praise those who are truly efficacious, and are sympathetic with those who are less so. If in comparison with others, I am truly superior in character, who am I not able to accommodate? If I am not superior in the comparison, and people are thus going to spurn me, what basis do I have to spurn others?[73]

In evaluating these two very different interpretations of Confucius's attitude to establishing relationships, it is helpful to recall the profile of these two students that emerges from frequent reference in the *Analects* and elsewhere.

Zizhang with his free-wheeling altruism is repeatedly rebuked by Confucius for paying more attention to appearances than to substance, and for using language without due care.[74] In one telling passage,

> Zizhang asked about the way of the truly efficacious person (*shanren* 善人). The Master replied, "Not following in the footsteps of others, one does not gain entrance to the inner sanctum."[75]

Confucius is here criticizing Zizhang specifically for not deferring sufficiently to moral exemplars—those who would be *true* friends—thereby precluding the possibility of his ever having access to those relations that open the door to real personal worth.

Zixia, on the other hand, is a man of letters, and being credited more than any other of Confucius's protégés for his scholarship, he is remembered by tradition as having played a major role in the transmission of the Confucian classics. Zixia has a central place in the last five chapters of the *Analects* where he underscores the importance of learning. Trying to compensate for his image as a pendent, Zixia insists that virtuosity in one's personal relationships is what learning is all about. Indeed, Confucius allows that he himself has gained a great deal from his conversations with Zixia. With these two profiles in mind, then, we can speculate that while many of us might admire the logic of Zizhang and prefer his seemingly more egalitarian and inclusive sentiments on the proper expression of what it means to be a friend, it is probably Zixia who, in underscoring the vital function of friendship for the possibility of personal growth, is transmitting the more genuine understanding of what Confucius himself expected from friendship.

But if Confucius has learned a great deal from Zixia, he has on his own admission learned much more from his favorite disciple, Yan Hui. Throughout the *Analects*, Confucius repeatedly singles out Yan Hui for

high praise, according this one exceptional student alone the description of being consummate in his conduct (*ren*)[76] and of being truly fond of learning (*haoxue*).[77] Indeed, he places Yan Hui far above himself and everyone else in his capacity for learning:

> The Master remarked to Zigong, "Comparing yourself with Yan Hui, who is the better person?" Zigong replied, "How dare I have such expectations. With Yan Hui, learning one thing he will know ten; with me, learning one thing I will know two." The Master said, "You are not his match. Neither you nor I are a match for Yan Hui."[78]

Of course, "learning" here has an immediate moral and religious reference to personal growth achieved through assiduous cultivation and a demonstrated relational virtuosity in family and community. Confucius himself, far from being mysterious and aloof with his students, is candid about the limits of the mentorship that he can offer them:

> The Master said, "My young friends, you think that I have something hidden away, but I do not. There is nothing I do that I do not share with you—this is the person I am."[79]

At the same time, Confucius insists that it is one's contribution to the community rather than one's seniority that is deserving of deference. And he encourages an appropriate respect for the as-yet undisclosed potential and possibilities that might well attend the next generation:

> The Master said, "The young should be held in high esteem. After all, how do we know that those yet to come will not surpass our contemporaries? It is only when one reaches forty or fifty years of age and yet has done nothing of note that we should withhold our esteem."[80]

Given Confucius's critical attitude toward his contemporaries and his judicious admiration for the ways in which his students excel, we can surmise that his strict understanding of a mentoring friendship is more a matter of substantial difference than it is of hierarchical superiority. After all, since good teachers learn much from good students, we would have to conclude that on his own premises, Confucius would allow that students too can be a source of meaningful friendship. This would certainly seem to have been the case in his fervent admiration for Yan Hui:

> When Yan Hui died, the Master grieved for him with sheer abandon. His followers cautioned, "Sir, you grieve with such abandon." The Master replied, "I grieve with abandon? If I don't grieve with abandon for him, then for whom?"[81]

The Embeddedness and Growth of "Human Becomings"

As we have seen, in this Confucian model of what I have called a "human becoming," one's personal realization is irreducibly "other-entailing" and all relations are inclusively familial. Friends too become family. The flourishing of one's person and the thriving of one's family and community are isomorphic and co-terminus. We might bring this distinction between the "human being" and the "human becoming" into clearer focus by reflecting on Aristotle's understanding of the human being. The extent to which the contrasting understandings of person constitute a fundamental disjunction between Aristotle and Confucius is not lost on the comparative philosopher, May Sim:

> Confucius appeals to no entity that we call the "self" (in several meanings of that term), much less a metaphysical *psychê*.... When Aristotle asks about human well-being, he quickly turns to questions about human *being*. The focus and source of this being is the *psychê*—even more precisely the rational "part" of the *psychê* that marks what is distinctive to humankind. The well-functioning of this part of ourselves is the best thing in us and most to be prized, Aristotle argues. Although it is formally identical in every member of the species and thus what underwrites our talk of shared human nature and common basic virtues (and according to later Aristotelians, the moral equality of persons), an actual *psychê* is always *this-psychê* and hence individual.[82]

In what follows I will contend that the classical Confucian texts, taken on their own terms rather than on Aristotle's, appeal to a relatively straightforward account of our actual life experience rather than to abstract entities, and in so doing, provide a justification for reinstating the intimacy of family feeling as the concrete ground of an always-emergent moral order. I will further argue that there is a difference between Western ethical theories that are directed at enabling people to think and to talk about ethics more cogently, and a Confucian vision of a consummate life that seeks to inspire people to be better persons.

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Following Henry Rosemont in referring to this Confucian vision as a *role ethics*, we do not intend to advance it as an alternative moral *theory* so much as a vision of human flourishing, one that integrates the social, political, economic, aesthetic, moral *and* the *religious* dimensions of our lives. In this view, we are not individuals in the discrete sense of an Aristotelian *psyche*, but rather are interrelated persons living a multiplicity of roles that constitute who we are, and that allow us to pursue a unique distinctiveness and virtuosity in our conduct. We are, in other words, the sum of the roles we live in consonance with our fellows.

From the Confucian perspective of the relational human *becoming*, we are inclined to make the same miscalculation in thinking about ethical principles and virtues as we do in thinking about human nature as the ground of "being" human. Principles, virtues, and human nature too are all abstractions from concrete instances of continuing conduct. With human nature, as with principles and virtue, we are inclined to default to a retrospective causal or a teleological explanation rather than provide a more holistic, prospective, contextual, and processive account of what it means to *become* human—a *human becoming*, as it were. In so doing, we come to presuppose that human nature is either a given potential to be actualized or some pre-existing ideal to be attained. It is believed by some scholars that free agency and moral responsibility require the isolation of individuals from their relationships by positing such a definition of what it *is* to be human, a ready-made definition of human *being* or a guiding teleological hand that in fact truncates any robust existential notion of agency or responsibility.[83]

Negative freedom as the absence of constraint is not, in and of itself, productive. As Dewey observes: "No man and no mind was ever emancipated by being left alone."[84] In the Confucian tradition, real freedom is concrete: It is the opportunity to realize oneself fully within the roles and relations that constitute one first in the family, and then by extension within the world more broadly construed. Freedom is maximizing personal growth as it is determined by full participation in and enjoyment of one's family and community relations.

Similarly, equality, rather than being quantitative and entailing some essential shared identity, is an equitable getting and giving. It is having available to one's person everything that is needed to pursue one's own unique trajectory as an increasingly consummate person through the

various phases of one's life, and in the process, making full return on this investment by enhancing the worth of the family and community. Such equality allows for the optimizing of resources in the successive stages of beneficiary, benefactor, and again beneficiary in the living of the many roles that make up the process of a normal human life. For always-unique persons, such equality means having all the assets necessary to accomplish what in the fullness of time will allow them to become their own best thoughts.

And the notion of justice—rather than being an appeal to abstract principles to enforce a blind impartiality that requires all particular differences to be set aside and all persons be treated equally—references the complex, creative process of achieving what is most appropriate in the specific, usually inequitable relations and situations that locate us within family and community. The resolutely hierarchical and dynamic pattern of the human experience that begins in family relations is going to have to be included in the equation that expresses a Confucian notion of justice. Such a Confucian understanding of freedom, equality, and justice, without deploying such terms specifically, is nested in the concrete project of achieving consummate conduct (*ren*) by being optimally appropriate (*yi*) in one's proper roles and relations (*li*).

We might rehearse an anecdote from the later Confucian text, the *Xunzi* 荀子, that gives us a starting point for clarifying the enormous difference between the unilateral integrity of *psyche*-invested, discrete "human beings" who aspire to a self-sufficient autonomy, and the multilateral integrity of "human becomings" as they are embedded in and emerge from the "big family." Indeed, integrity for the "human becoming" is not "being resolutely who you already are," but is rather a continuing process of "becoming one together."

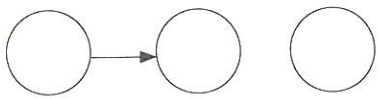
It is because Confucius himself introduces and develops the neologism, "consummate person or conduct" (*ren* 仁), as a key philosophical idea that his students ask him repeatedly to clarify what he means by this term. And he in turn provides each of them with an explanation—indeed, as we have seen, an explanation that is tailored to the different needs of different students. One day, recounts the *Xunzi*, the Master is holding court with his protégés, and quizzes each of them to evaluate their current understanding of his new term, *ren*.

The first, a passionate but less-capable student, Zilu, demonstrates

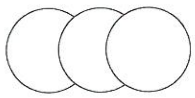
some degree of insight in his response. He insists that *ren* means raising the self-esteem of others by making them feel good about themselves—that is, "causing others to love themselves" (*shiren aiji* 使人愛己). Indeed such persons, says Confucius, have achieved a degree of refinement, and might be called scholar-officials (*shi* 士). His more imaginative student, Zigong, in replying to Confucius's question about the meaning of *ren*, reverses the direction and asserts that *ren* is a kind of altruism—"loving others" (*airen* 愛人). Confucius allows that such persons in loving others have indeed attained a higher degree of refinement, and might be called not only scholar-officials but also exemplary in their persons (*shijunzi* 士君子).

Then Confucius's favorite student, Yan Hui steps up to take his turn, stating flatly that *ren* means "self-loving" (*ziai* 自愛). Confucius is delighted with what he takes to be a most concise and penetrating understanding of *ren*, describing such a self-regarding person as being a truly enlightened, exemplary person (*mingjunzi* 明君子).[85]

Of course, among discrete "human beings," it would be hard to see how "self-loving" would lead to consummatory conduct. Indeed, *ren* so defined might be misconstrued as a self-regarding narcissism that would hardly lead to excellence in one's relations. The difference that makes a difference for the "human becoming" lies in an alternative understanding of "self" as an evolving configuration of relationships. Yan Hui's point in this passage is that given the collaterality of the "human becoming," "self-loving" is neither the self-directed egoism assumed when one encourages others to love themselves nor the other-directed altruism of loving other people. Indeed, for the person comprised of intrinsic rather than extrinsic relations in constitutive rather than contingent roles, such a self-regarding love with its embedded sense of "we" is bi-directional; it is at once reflexive and inclusive.



Extrinsically related, discrete human "beings"



Constitutively related, collateral human "becomings"

That is, "self-loving" would mean to cherish those specific roles and relationships that I am committed to nourishing as the very source

and substance of my own personal realization—it is loving me in my relationship with my spouse, my children, my students, my colleagues, and so on.

This use of a reflexive binomial such as "self-loving" (*ziai* 自愛) found in this passage from the *Xunzi* that defines one within one's relationships is quite common in the early Confucian texts. Indeed, Herbert Fingarette suggests that, in translating the Confucian philosophical literature that includes terms such as *zixing* 自省, we do better to use the reflexive prefix form of "self-" as in "self-examining" or the postfix "-self" as in "examining myself" as a deliberate strategy for avoiding the entification of a substantial, superordinate self. That is, he would have us avoid altogether the independent noun "self" as in "examining the self."[86] I quote Fingarette at some length here:

> Why should we reify "self" by giving it the independent noun form in English, and thus impute to Confucius the notion of some inner entity, some core of one's being—whether egoistic or ideal.... [W]e ought to make it a point to avoid speaking of "the self" in Confucius. We ought to speak of a person as acting, but not suggesting by "person" this notion of an Actor who somehow embraces inwardly a moral or psychic core which is then expressed in action. On the contrary, the fundamental moral-human reality is ... the social nexus, and persons along with many other things received their specific, humanly relevant nature, as well as their humanly relevant location, by reference to and as a result of the communal life-forms. "Person" is an abstraction, a set of complex attributes conceptually abstracted from the social reality; social reality on the other hand is not an abstraction but is the concrete reality.[87]

This claim by Fingarette has been frequently misunderstood. He is not denying a vital subjective dimension to the human experience, but is rather insisting that such a subjective aspect is never independent of our communal life-forms, our social reality. Said another way, he is unwilling to abstract and reify the Confucian notion of person and locate it outside of the wholeness of the personal experience itself that is lived through the roles and relations with others as constituting our concrete social reality.

"Human Becomings" as *Creatio in Situ*

When Hellmut Wilhelm observes that "the division of the creative process into two aspects is an idea frequently found in early Chinese writings," he is remarking upon this relational and contextual nature of the personal, social and cosmic reality that makes all creativity a matter of "co-creativity."[88] Wilhelm's insight is borne out by the description that is offered repeatedly in the *Analects* of how we create ourselves as persons by modeling ourselves on others:

> Consummate persons establish others in seeking to establish themselves, and promote others in seeking to get there themselves.[89]

When Confucius says that consummate persons promote both themselves and others in what they do, he means that they accrue dividends of significance from their meaningful relationships that enhance the worth of both themselves and others as persons. Using Fingarette's language, their persons are situated in and constitute a configuration of relations within the social reality, and any notion of a discrete and independent "self" is an abstraction from and in fact a distortion of this same reality. Thick and robust relations are a source of growth in the world, enriching the family, the community, and the cosmos. It is thus that in the vocabulary of personal realization in Confucian philosophy, the negative example of "the morally deficient person" (*xiaoren* 小人)—literally "a small, petty, or mean person"—is contrasted with those who are characterized in a language of personal growth and extension: "personal excellence" (*de* 德), for example, is defined paronomastically as "getting" (*de* 得), "spirituality" (*shen* 神) is a "stretching and extending" (*shen* 伸), "becoming exemplary" (*jun* 君) is a "gathering in of others" (*qun* 群), "becoming human" (*ren* 人) is a "becoming relationally virtuosic" (*ren* 仁), and so on. Indeed, the cosmos grows bigger and better because contemporary encounters with Confucius continue to produce meaningful people.

A reflection on the Confucian notion *cheng* 誠—conventionally rendered "sincerely," "honestly," or "with integrity"—is revealing of this sense of relational growth. First, etymologically the character *cheng* is comprised of "completing" (*cheng* 成) and "discoursing" (*yan* 言)—

suggesting an accomplishment achieved through the various modalities of communicating effectively with one another. Beginning with the *Shuowen* 說文 as the earliest lexicon, in the traditional dictionaries *cheng* 誠 and *xin* 信 as "living up to one's word" are most frequently glossed by appeal to each other. *Xin* 信 denotes the situational rather than agency-centered combination of perceived "credibility" and the concomitant "trust" that such credibility inspires; it describes a situation in which its participants conduct themselves sincerely and honestly with mutual regard. The cultivation of these honest relationships entails integrity not only in the sense of the persistent particularity of persons, but also in the integrative sense of becoming one together in their concrete, social relationships. And the spontaneous emergence of significance in these relationships is the very meaning of this collaborative personal creativity. Indeed, the prefix "co-" is made redundant by the fact that it is *only* this kind of situated co-creativity—at once cognitive and affective, aesthetic and intensely religious—that can legitimately be called "creativity." Or stated negatively, *creatio ex nihilo* as creativity without context is incoherent because there is nothing that does anything in isolation and by itself.

Again, "self-loving" (*ziai* 自愛) gives primacy to immediate feelings, suggesting as it does that the dominant site of personal growth lies in the exercise of the thinking and feeling that we associate with the "heartmind" (*xin* 心). The activities of the mind cannot be divorced from the feelings of the heart; the cognitive is inseparable from the affective. There are no rational thoughts devoid of feeling, nor any raw feelings lacking cognitive content. As we observed in chapter two above, in the classical Chinese worldview in which process and change have priority over form and stasis, it is frequently observed that, in TCM, physiology has priority over anatomy, and function takes precedence over site. This being the case, it might well be argued that *xin* means "thinking and feeling" first, and then derivatively and metaphorically, the specific organ with which these experiences are to be associated. *Xin* is only metaphorically an organ because it is in fact an unbounded center or focus of activity. And the site of realizing a trusting relationship with each other is the reservoir of thoughtful feelings that fill our hearts and minds. This is only to say that the creative personal transactions—the doings and undergoings among persons that disclose

their feelings for one another—are the source and the substance of meaningful relations.

Tang Junyi 唐君毅 on "Human Nature" (*renxing* 人性) *as* Conduct

In Tang Junyi's general discussion of the Confucian understanding of the "nature" (*xing* 性) of things, he quite appropriately begins from the etymology of the term by allowing for its immediate association with "life" (*sheng* 生) itself. Expanding upon this connection, he acknowledges the irreducibly relational and contextual character of the content of the human experience, and notes that for this reason, the *xing* of anything including human beings necessarily has two referents: *Xing* denotes the continuing life and function of a particular thing itself, and also refers to that whereby a thing continues and contributes to the life of other things. The "nature" of the earth, for example, lies not only in its own conditions—something that has various mineral properties or something that is stable and firm. The "nature" of earth also lies in its propensity to grow and give life to other things—the way in which earth provides sustenance for plants and by extension, animals, and the way in which it provides a foundation on which suitable human habitation can be built.[90] Analogously, Confucian persons are defined relationally and collaterally—not only by what they "are," but more importantly, by what they "do" with and for other persons and things in the world.

In the concluding portion of chapter two, we rehearsed a series of propositions that Tang Junyi offers as generalizations that are defining of a persistent yet always changing Chinese natural cosmology. These propositions proffered by Tang Junyi have provided us with an alternative vocabulary for reiterating and reinforcing the characterization of Chinese cosmology we were able to abstract from the *Great Tradition* 大傳 commentary on the *Book of Changes* 易經. Tang in one final proposition invokes yet another feature of Chinese cosmology that provides insight into the vectoral yet always contingent nature of the human experience. For Tang Junyi, as a Confucian, "nature" (*xing*) is a provisional, generalized disposition that is at once persistent and yet always under revision in its interactions with other things. In

Tang's own words, Chinese cosmology entails the notion that "'human nature' is nothing but the unfolding of the natural and cultural processes themselves" (*xing ji tiandao guan* 性即天道觀).[91] He further clarifies what he means by this proposition:

> Within Chinese natural cosmology what is held in general is not some first principle. The root pattern or coherence (*genben zhi li* 根本之理) of anything is its "life force" (*shengli* 生理), and this life force is its "natural tendencies" (*xing* 性). Anything's natural tendencies are expressed in the quality of its interactions with other things and events. "Natural tendencies" or "life force" then entailing spontaneity and transformation have nothing to do with necessity.... The emergence of any particular phenomenon is a function of the interaction between its prior conditions and other things and events as external influences. So how something interacts with other things and events and the form of this interaction is not determined by the thing in itself.... Thus the basic "nature" of anything includes this transformability in response to whatever it encounters.[92]

For Tang Junyi, any teleological or genetic assumptions we might have about being human have to be qualified by the spontaneous emergence of novelty within any specific context, and by a creative advance in the continuing present of any situation. "Human nature," then, is a generalization regarding the aggregating, purposeful yet open-ended disposition of human beings over time, and is nothing more or less than an expression of the ongoing attainment of relational virtuosity (*ren* 仁) within our inherited natural and cultural legacy (*tiandao* 天道). That is, the nature of each person must be recovered from and understood in terms of the continuous unfolding of the entire cosmos. In fact, rather than referencing some fixed endowment, for Tang it is precisely the indeterminate possibility for deliberate, creative change that is the most salient feature of the human *xing*. What is given in the *xing* of persons—that is, in their initial conditions—is most importantly the propensity for growth, cultivation, and refinement.

To illustrate this notion of contingent emergence, Tang provides a gloss on the opening passage of the *Zhongyong*. In his commentary on this text, Tang seeks to preclude any theistic interpretation of *tian* 天 (conventionally translated "Heaven") and any essentialistic interpretation of human nature. In explanation of the phrase "what *tian* commands

is called natural tendencies" (*tianming zhi wei xing* 天命之謂性), he states explicitly:

> What is meant by this claim is not that *tian* according to some fixed fate determines the conduct and progress of human beings. On the contrary, *tian* endows humans with a natural disposition that, being more or less free of the mechanical control of their established habits and of external intervening forces, undergoes a creative advance within their context that is expressive of this spontaneity.[93]

Tang then goes on to identify what he takes to be distinctively human, where it is the degree of self-conscious freedom and creativity that distinguishes humans from other things:

> It is only in having more interactions with other things that something increases its creative impulse.... The quality of something is a function of what novelty emerges and is manifested in its interactions with other things and events. It is also a function of the ongoing tendency toward expansiveness that comes with being self-consciously able to constantly seek out more and better interactions, and being able to abandon the mechanical control of one's own past habits and those mechanical habits from external intervening forces. But this is not something that the ordinary run of things can do—it is only we humans who can do it.[94]

It is in this sense that the *Book of Rites* can claim that "humans are the heartmind of the world."[95] It is through an irreducible intersubjectivity that persons become reflexive and self-conscious in their conduct, and thus have the freedom and creativity to strive after optimal relations.

In Tang Junyi's extensive work on "human nature" (*renxing*), he demonstrates a great sensitivity to the existential coloring of the classical Confucian conception of what it means to become human. For Tang, "since any particular existent has life, in saying that it has a *xing*, what is important is not in saying what the nature and character of this entity is, but in saying what the direction of its life's existence is."[96] It is only in that existing things have life, growth, and purpose that they have *xing*. And among things, as we have seen, humans are a special case. The *xing* of humans cannot be approached in the same way as our understanding of the *xing* of other phenomena because humans have an internal existential perspective on their own evolving constitution that is not available to them in the investigation of other things. In reflecting

on the relationships between experience and conceptualization, Tang asserts that:

> It is not certain that human realization can exhaust human possibilities; if one wants to understand human possibilities it is not like seeking to know the possibilities of other things that can, on the basis of inference and hypothesis, be known objectively. Rather it comes from the way in which persons realize their internal aspirations and how they then come to know them. Once we have an understanding of this human *xing*, we will of our own accord surely have the linguistic concepts through which to express it. Such linguistic conceptualization follows upon what is known, and is formed continuously as the opportunity presents itself.[97]

Tang thus emphasizes the primacy of the actual existential realization of human aspirations as they emerge in an ever-changing context over the conceptualization and articulation of these pursuits, giving full notice to the personal locus of that realization. He disassociates the conversation among classical Chinese philosophers over the meaning of *xing* from the contemporary science of psychology to the extent that in the latter case, there is a desire to treat the human "being" as an objective phenomenon. For Tang, it is the reflexive and self-conscious existential project that is the fundamental distinguishing characteristic of the classical Confucian conception of *xing*. In fact, it is precisely the indeterminate possibilities for inspired, creative change that Tang identifies as the most significant feature of the human *xing*:

> Usually what is meant by "nature" as quality or character, as when Westerners refer to it in the language of "property, characteristics, propensity, and essence" is a fixed quality, disposition, or directionality. But when we reflect upon what nature is from the perspective of the experience of the inner aspirations that we as humans have in relation to our world, there is a real question as to whether or not we can say that humans have any fixed nature. This is because the world that humans encounter and the aspirations they bring to it both entail limitless change.... For the most part, the discussion of human nature in Chinese thought has had as its one common feature a reference to this capacity for boundless change as wherein the special nature of the human lies. This then is the human's spiritual nature (*lingxing* 靈性) that differs from the fixity and lack of spirituality in the nature of other things.[98]

What is an initial condition in the nature of human beings is most importantly the propensity for purposeful growth, cultivation, and refinement—a human capacity for radical changeability. Thus throughout Tang's analysis, and especially in reference to the human phenomenon, he underscores the fundamental relationality and collaterality of *xing*:

> It is my opinion that in looking at the beginnings of a theory of human nature in China's early philosophers, the basic idea was not to take humans or their *xing* as some objective thing that can be looked at and discussed in terms of its universal nature or its special nature or its possibilities. As humans encountered the myriad things and heaven and earth, and as they encountered the inner experience of their own aspirations, what was important for them was to reflect on what the *xing* of this human is, and what the *xing* of heaven and earth and the myriad things is. The way the human was perceived within the mainstream of Chinese thought was as a kind of thing amidst and among the myriad things, and not just as one kind of the myriad things.[99]

If we were to summarize the notion of "human becoming" that follows from Tang Junyi's description of "human nature" (*renxing*), taking the notion of "growing and living" (*sheng* 生) within its contextualizing relations as its defining feature, we would have to allow that such an irreducibly complex notion of person is vital and inherently active, and is not only responsive to its environments, but is further characterized by the freedom of purpose and the creativity to be self-defining and self-aware. This reflexive, gerundive "self-" has to be understood as irreducibly transactional: shaping and being shaped in its contextualizing relations. This process of person-making is first and foremost a striving and a "doing" that expresses its life and growth, and that in the production of enhanced meaning, brings with it aspiration, frustration, and hopefully sometimes, satisfaction. Such an understanding of person is wholly naturalistic in that it makes no appeal to a metaphysics of self or to any unifying substratum such as soul or mind, and thus is more of a centered, concentrated vitality than a bounded unity. This process of becoming a person is always embodied and embodying as a porous membrane that strives to achieve meaning and coherence in the changing configuration of its relations. It is hylozoistic—that is, at once psychic and physical. It offers a

revisionist and emergent understanding of person that is animated and projective, and that, having developed its own inflected and reflexive sense of itself out of its intersubjective relations with others, becomes increasing enculturated through the semiotic processes and symbolic competencies that come to shape it in these associations. It is radically embedded, and can only be understood by moving from field to focus, from the totality to the particular, taking into account the full compass of its contextualizing relations. Against the background of its *creatio in situ* cosmology, becoming a person is the creative and always-unique process of aggregating and integrating relations in the world over the span of a human narrative. Indeed this understanding of person in the Confucian terms of art is an expression of the ongoing attainment of relational virtuosity (*ren* 仁) within our inherited cultural legacy (*tiandao* 天道), allowing Tang to insist that "human nature is nothing but the unfolding of the natural and cultural processes themselves" (*xing ji tiandao guan* 性即天道觀). It is this sense of growth in its achieved personal uniqueness and its intimate continuity with the totality through family and community relations that provides a direct line from the self-conscious deference, veneration, and gratitude of the consummate life to the spirituality we associate with an increasingly religious sensitivity. This notion of human becoming breathes life into the Confucian vocabulary, transforming terms such as "excellence" (*de* 德) into striving after and "realizing oneself" (*zide* 自得) and "appropriateness" (*yi* 義) into a self-conscious sense of responsibility and accountability in one's relations with others.

I want to argue further that, with respect to this notion of human nature, Tang Junyi's "New Confucianism" is not so new. Indeed, this collateral and multilateral understanding of person-making is in fact consistent with the Confucianism espoused in the *Great Learning* that sets the Confucian project. And I have described this Confucian project as a radical empiricism that is directed at achieving the highest integrated cultural, moral, and spiritual growth for the person-in-community. For Confucius, communal harmony begins here in indefatigable personal cultivation. And through growth in familial, communal, and natural relations, the aspirant to sagehood seeks ultimately to ascend to cosmic consequence in spiraling radial circles. The Confucian sages are no more than ordinary persons who, through their resolute commitment and

assiduous discipline in family and communal relations, learn to do the most ordinary of things in the most extraordinary of ways. As it states in the *Zhongyong*:

> The vision of the consummate life (*dao*) is not at all remote. If someone considers this consummate life to be something that is distant and inaccessible, they have taken a wrong turn.[100]

This idea that the inspired life is nothing more than the transformation of immediate human relations is a familiar theme in the Confucian canons:

> The Master said, "How could consummate conduct (*ren*) be at all remote? No sooner do I seek it than it has arrived."[101]

The Confucian claim that "everyone can become a sage" is often read essentialistically as an assertion that the sage is some universally given potential in human nature that if actualized provides a person with those extraordinary talents through which to shape the world in some incomparable way. Some interpreters in searching for democratic elements in classical Confucianism have latched on to this claim as a ground for an ostensive egalitarianism. We have seen that Tang's processual and provisional understanding of "human nature" precludes the possibility of such a familiar, default interpretation. Indeed, for him this same claim that "everyone can become a sage" is an assertion that the spontaneous emergence of real significance in the ordinary business of the day is itself the meaning and content of sagely virtuosity. Those ordinary persons who in their own lives achieve *real* significance in so doing are sages. And given our initial conditions and our cultural resources, all of us have the opportunity to live such significant lives. The potential for sagehood lies not *within* individuals exclusive of their worlds, but through a process of transformation that includes their worlds in the fullest sense. When sages do appear, they have emerged *pari passu* from their radically situated, collaborative, and transactional careers as human becomings.

Our Uncommon Assumptions

The *Mencius* has been definitive in the articulation of a distinctively Confucian conception of what it means to become a consummate

person. And Tang Junyi has provided us with a nuanced and unfamiliar understanding of "human nature" that requires us to look again at the prevailing interpretations of what in the *Mencius* has been conventionally translated as "human nature" (*renxing*). We should begin our investigation of Mencius by first registering the unadvertised presuppositions that we might inadvertently bring to this text in our best attempts to interpret it. Michael Sandel, in his *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, reflects on the variety of names we use to express our self-understanding, one of them being "human nature." He observes that:

> To speak of human nature is often to suggest a classical teleological conception, associated with the notion of a universal human essence, invariant in all times and places.[102]

John Stuart Mill is a fair example of such an assumption, insisting as he does that all social activity can be traced back to a fixed an invariant human nature:

> The laws of the phenomena of society are, and can be, nothing but the laws of the actions and passions of human beings united together in the social state. Men, however, in a state of society are still men; their actions and passions are obedient to the laws of individual human nature.[103]

The familiar vocabulary of our liberal self-understanding—individualism, autonomy, equality, and freedom—often entails the humanistic assumption that the liberating of ready-made and omnicompetent individuals from numbing political strictures to pursue their own self-interest will guarantee a functional democracy. Freedom from constraint will allow unencumbered individuals, if left alone in their untrammeled state of nature, to "manifest" themselves as full-blown participants in a healthy political life. The language of spontaneity, originality, and genius belongs to the belief that an unconstricted humanity has the inborn assets to flower of its own accord.

These assumptions have a long history. As the sometimes reluctant heirs to metaphysical realism as our shared common sense, we find that sedimented into our language is the unannounced and unremarkable notion of repeatable universals subsisting in particular things that individuate things as individual "members" of a kind. And our logic of knowing has been to identify and grasp the intelligible universal as it is

instantiated in the particular, and thus to be able to call the objects of knowledge by their own name: individually, specifically, and generically. While we seldom perform such an analysis self-consciously, we certainly entertain such assumptions as a matter of course in the way in which we operate in our ordinary experience. It is this long-established habit of thought that makes the quantitative "individuality" of human beings obvious and commonsensical.[104]

Persistent and powerful philosophical ideas promoted largely by classical liberal Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant, Locke, and Mill have become the common currency of political philosophy, and have influenced the way in which many sinologists, Chinese as well as Western, have come to their interpretation of the Mencian notion of *renxing*.

The *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子) and "Human Becomings"

Broadly speaking, in the current literature Mencius has come to be widely understood as forwarding an *a priori* conception of an abstract, innate, essential human nature, a given, inborn potential that is then actualized in the life experience.[105] As the interpretation in this literature stands, Mencius offers a clear explanation of what we are as "human *beings*."

What is at issue here in saving Mencius from essentialism is the question: How do we define what it means to be human?—by a speculative and reductive assumption about innate, isolatable causes that locate persons outside of their roles and relations, or alternatively, by taking account of the initial conditions and context of persons, and then by assaying the full aggregation of consequent action? How do we explain growth?—by reduplicative causal accounts (the child is a ready-made adult), by teleological accounts (the child is simply preliminary to the actualization of the existing ideal), or by a contextual, narrative account available to us through a phenomenology of personal action? We must ask whether the metaphysical way of thinking about "human beings" is consistent with the Confucian project of becoming consummately human within a natural correlative cosmology, a project that seems to demand not only motivation and real effort, but also imagination and a creative responsiveness to ever changing

circumstances. If, as it is so often assumed, Mencius is proffering a superordinate and substantial conception of human nature, how do we square this assumption with his own minimalist claim that initially "what distinguishes people from the brutes is infinitesimal"?[106] And again, why would he use the minimalist metaphorical language of *duan* 端—the first inklings or signs, the tips, the sprouts—if he is indeed describing a substantial facticity?[107]

To make the case for a processual understanding of "human nature" (*renxing*), we might take one of these "beginnings" as an example: "achieved propriety in our roles and relationships" (*li*). On the side of the infant, born within the context of its familial life forms, there is certainly a predisposition and a propensity to develop over time into a responsive and thus responsible member of this social unit. But a distorting limitation in our thinking arises when we locate the discussion of *renxing* exclusively within the abstracted individual infant rather than within the inclusive and concrete web of family relations. Regardless of how we describe a human nativity and its initial responsiveness to the institutions and structures of communal living, it is the family as the articulated social and cultural locus of otherwise inchoate persons—an invested and meaningful concentration of beliefs, skills, interests, values, occupations, and so on—that is the predominant creative source out of which persons grow, and to which grown persons ultimately contribute their particular meanings.

Infants have a predisposition to communicate, but it is the world of cultural meanings into which they are born that provide them with the communicative resources necessary to participate effectively in their specific families and communities. If there is proof needed that the weight of "human nature" as defining of what it means to become distinctively human lies in the concrete social situation of which the individual is a part, rather than exclusively in inchoate individuals themselves, we have simply to reference the staggering diversity of ways of thinking and living within the vastly disparate human cultures. On the other hand, proof that the initial conditions are not the substance of what it means to become human might be the phenomenon of remarkably similar feral children who seem to be the ineluctable consequence of disconnected and dislocated "human beings" living out their animality without the resource of family life.

Indeed, I will argue in what follows that the *Mencius* is positing the notion of a relationally constituted "human becoming," a notion of person that requires an understanding fundamentally different from any retrospective, essentialistic conception of the human being. I am further persuaded that the recently recovered Confucian document, *Five Modes of Proper Conduct* (*Wuxingpian* 五行篇), resonates in many ways with the *Mencius* and corroborates this interpretation of the Mencian *renxing* as a prospective, processual, transactional, and radically contextual understanding of what it means to become human.

As I have argued elsewhere, a first step in understanding *renxing* 人性 in the *Mencius* is to distinguish it clearly from a second notion that also has an important role in the cluster of terms through which Mencius explicates the project of personal cultivation, that is, the "heartmind" (*xin* 心).[108] There has been a decided tendency on the part of scholars in interpreting Mencius to elide *xing* and *xin* without respecting their important differences. This confusion emerges because the *xing* as a creative process is rooted in the heartmind (*xin*), and human beings in general do have certain determinative propensities as a function of their initial natural conditions. But it is precisely over and against these determinate propensities that we are able to observe the creative process of change, growth, and refinement that constitutes *xing*.

We are told explicitly in the *Mencius* that persons all have heartminds (*xin*), and that these heartminds share a given incipient propensity for moral conduct that is metaphorically described as "the four inklings" (*siduan* 四端):

> The heartmind in feeling pity at suffering has the first inkling of consummate conduct; the heartmind in feeling shame at crudeness has the first inkling of appropriate conduct; the heartmind in feeling a sense of modesty and deference has the first inkling of propriety in conduct; the heartmind in feeling a sense of approval and disapproval has the first inkling of wise conduct. Persons having these four inklings (*siduan*) is like their having four limbs.... Now acknowledging these four inklings in me, the process of realizing the development and fruition of them all is like a fire beginning to burn or a spring of water beginning to break through. Persons who are able to bring them fully to fruition can sustain all within the four seas; persons unable to do so cannot even serve their own parents.[109]

This passage describes the initial conditions of the heartmind, but we have to remember that the graph for *xing* 性 is comprised of both "heartmind" (*xin*) and "to be born, to grow, to live" (*sheng* 生). Taking this verbal "growth" (*sheng* 生) complement to heartmind as an important further consideration, in the *Mencius* we are again told explicitly that:

> Consummatory conduct (*ren*), a sense of appropriateness (*yi*), an achieved propriety in roles and relations (*li*), and a capacity to live wisely (*zhi*) that exemplary persons engender and grow (*xing*) as their habits of conduct is rooted in their heartminds, and grows in their countenance. The luster of this conduct is manifest in their faces, is discernible in their posture, and extends throughout their bodies. They do not need to explain what they are doing to be understood by others.[110]

If we couple this passage with the analogical claim in the 2A6 passage cited above that "persons having these four inklings (*siduan*) is like their having four limbs," we can appreciate that the four inklings and the body are both incipient sites of growth.[111] Indeed, it is only through this assiduous process of cultivation that the *xing* can be fully developed:

> Those who exhaust their heartminds (*xin*) realize their *xing*, and to realize their *xing* is to realize *tian*. Preserving their *xin* and nurturing their *xing* is the way to serve *tian*.[112]

As one example of this problem of conflating *xin* and *xing*, Zhang Dainian suggests that "since the sage is also a man, the *xing* that the sage has is the *xing* that all people have."[113] On a careful reading of the *Mencius*, Zhang could certainly assert that the sage has a *xin* that is similar to that of all people. In fact, the *Mencius* describes the *xin* as an organ (*guan* 官) on a plane with the organs of sight and hearing.[114] But Zhang's assumption would seem to be that *xing* like *xin* is a given potential shared by all, and the sage is simply the one who successfully actualizes it. However, as Tang Junyi has argued, the possibility of *xing* does not lie within *xing* itself; *xing* is a creative collaboration between something and its various environments. Being a person does not make one a sage; becoming a sage makes one most fully a person. There is an important difference between saying that everyone has the nature of a sage and saying that everyone who conducts themselves as a sage

is a sage. The potential for becoming a sage emerges *pari passu* in the transactional events that constitute the substance of a human life. Mencius makes this point explicitly:

> Cao Jiao inquired: "Is it the case that we can all become Yaos and Shuns?"
>
> Mencius replied: "... The way of Yao and Shun is nothing but family reverence and fraternal deference. If you wear Yao's clothes, speak his words, and do what he does, then you *are* a Yao."[115]

The passage that is generally cited from the *Mencius* as defining of his understanding that human nature is essentially good (*xingshan* 性善) is the following:

> As respects one's actual circumstances that one can act efficaciously is what is meant by *shan*. As respects one acting ineptly, this is not the fault of one's native ability. All people have a heartmind that feels pity at suffering, that feels shame at crudeness, that feels a sense of modesty and deference, and that feels a sense of approval and disapproval. The feeling of pity at suffering leads to consummate conduct; the feeling of shame at crudeness leads to appropriate conduct; the feeling of a sense of modesty and deference leads to propriety in conduct; the feeling of sense of approval and disapproval leads to wisdom in conduct. These four inklings in conduct do not illuminate me from without. They are tendencies that I have but have simply failed to acknowledge. It is for this reason that it is said: "If you seek it you will get it; if you don't you will lose it." That some people are twice, five times, and indeed infinitely better than others is because there are those who fail to make the most of their native ability.[116]

I would argue that the basic misreading of this passage arises from interpreting the distinction between inside and outside as exclusive and essential rather than as correlative, experiential, and a function of circumstances. It is the same misreading that is possible when Yan Hui's definition of *ren* as "self-loving" (*ziai* 自愛) is understood to be exclusive of others rather than relational. The point is that these inclinations in conduct locate relationally constituted persons within experience in which their subjective dispositions as well as their objective behavior must both be acknowledged. Moral conduct is a collaboration between persons and their worlds rather than being a pattern of behavior derived solely from the outside, or solely from the inside.

Perhaps the key to understanding this passage is defining efficacy (*shan*) as something we are inclined to do rather than something that we essentially are: *keyi weishanyi* 可以為善矣 ("one can act/become/do *shan*)." This active understanding of *shan* suggests that efficacy is a quality of activity that one is disposed to achieve by virtue of one's situation, rather than as the expression of some innate quality of character irrespective of one's circumstances.[117]

That efficacy (*shan*) is an inclination that must be developed and brought to fruition is made clear in a more careful reading of another frequently cited passage that D. C. Lau has translated as:

> It is certainly the case ... that water does not show any preference for either east or west, but does it show the same indifference to high and low? Human nature is good just as water seeks low ground. There is no man who is not good; there is no water that does not flow downwards.[118]

The problem with this translation is that in saying that "human nature *is* good, just as water *seeks* low ground," it fails to respect the symmetry of the sentence. Observing the parallel structure, we might translate it as:

> Water certainly has no inclination to flow eastward as opposed to westward, but does the same hold true in its flowing downwards or upwards? Human *xing* seeks efficacy (*shan*) just as water seeks to flow downwards. There is no person who does not seek efficacy; there is no water that does not flow downwards.

Important here is that the text is saying that *xing* entails an inclination in personal growth in which one *seeks to* become *shan*, not that *xing* in itself "is" *shan*.

A second important consideration is the difference that human effort makes in the cultivation of one's native tendencies—native inclinations that if not acted upon can even be lost utterly. That some people become so much better than others speaks to the vital role that disciplined, habituated conduct has in growing what, after all, are only one's initial conditions. Mencius reiterates the point that the initial conditions can only become productive if they are actively engaged, and that it is this deliberate conduct itself that makes all the difference—indeed, a quantum difference—in the quality of one's person:

> Gongduzi asked Mencius: "Since they are equally human, how is it that some persons become exemplary while others are wholly deficient?"
>
> "Those who follow their superior parts (*dati* 大體) become superior; those who follow their inferior parts (*xiaoti* 小體) become inferior," replied Mencius.
>
> "Since they are equally human, how is it that some would follow their superior parts while others would follow their inferior parts?" he asked.
>
> "Our physical senses such as sight and hearing are not reflective, and can be deceived by external things. When one thing is engaged by another, it is simply distracted by it. The function of the heartmind on the other hand is thinking, but it will only accomplish something if it actually thinks. We have been given this as our native ability. If one begins by attending to the superior parts, the inferior parts will not be able to take their place. This is how one becomes a superior person."[119]

The *Mencius* allows that certain tendencies are native to us by virtue of our initial circumstances. Mencius however wants to reserve the category of *xing* to include only those among such tendencies that when fully cultivated make us distinctively human. While we have bodily senses such as taste, sight, hearing, and smell—a physical sensorium, as it were—these senses are not exclusively human, and so Mencius chooses to call them basic conditions (*ming* 命) rather than natural tendencies (*xing*):

> The mouth's propensity for tastes, the eye's for colors, the ear's for sounds, the nose's for smells, and the four limbs' for comfort—these are native tendencies (*xing*), and yet because basic conditions (*ming*) also have a role in these capacities, exemplary persons are not given to referring to them as *xing*. A propensity for consummate conduct in the father-son relation, for appropriateness in the ruler-subject relation, for ritual propriety in the guest-host relation, for wisdom on the part of superior persons, and to have sages for the way of *tian*, are basic conditions (*ming*), yet because *xing* also has a role in these capacities, exemplary persons are not given to referring to them as basic conditions.[120]

We as persons are born into a manifold of family and community roles and relations, and by virtue of these thick initial conditions, we have feelings of pity at suffering, feelings of modesty and deference, a sense

of propriety and a sense of approval and disapproval—indeed, an ethical sensorium. The ethical sensorium is rooted in the heartmind (*xin* 心) as a generalization of the conditions which obtain when a person is born, and it is this sensorium that is then articulated across the particular narrative of a distinctively human life as a collaboration between person and world to become one's *xing* 性. Mencius says that:

> Context alters one's vital energies just as what one eats alters one's body. Huge indeed is the function of context. Would we not otherwise just be anybody's son?[121]

It is in this sense that we might claim that relatively speaking, persons are less importantly similar and more importantly distinctive and unique cultural achievements, and that what it means to become human is a generalization made from the collective history of our narratives and our accomplishments. It is for this reason that Mencius claims "the various doctrines on *xing* that have been discussed in the world are all nothing but a matter of invoking historical precedents."[122]

The *Five Modes of Proper Conduct* (*Wuxingpian* 五行篇)[123] as a Window on the *Mencius*

I will use the *Wuxingpian* document recently recovered in archaeological finds first at Mawangdui near Changsha in Hunan province (1973) and then more recently at Guodian near Jingmen in Hubei (1993) to affirm that the Mencian "four inklings" (*siduan* 四端) are certainly the initial conditions for becoming human, and to agree that in this sense they are native. Yet at the same time I will use this same text to argue that these "four inklings," like the first four modes of proper conduct (*sixing* 四行) described in the *Wuxingpian,* are informed by the primarily acquired conditions of radically contextualized, relational, and emergent persons where most of the active force and meaning of this conduct in the first years of life derives not from the "person" exclusive of family relations, but on the contrary, from the already matured family-side of one's collateral roles and relationships. I will thus be arguing for a genealogical and historical understanding of the Mencian notion of human inclinations rather than for one based upon metaphysical speculation.

By collateral roles and relationships that define persons, I mean that generally speaking there are no children without mothers, no brothers without siblings, and certainly no viable babies born without a family circle that, in loving them, enables them to survive and to thrive. Indeed, the acquired habits of the family are primary in preserving and educating the life of the infant, and the native conditions of the infant are secondary as largely dependent upon the stimulation and interpretation of the family. The "four inklings" of *renxing* are anchored deeply in family relations, and initially the growth in meaning and value of these relationships derives largely from family intimates as their immediate source. It is such relations that are the entry point for humans to develop and to become distinctive as individuals, and in the fullness of time, to become distinctively human.

The always-unique persons in this collateral sense—this daughter to this mother—do not "have" relationships, or "come into" relationships, but rather are constituted as irreducibly relational by those bonds that locate them as foci within the field of the big family. They begin as "we" rather than "I." As Mencius claims, "all things are here in me," and most immediately and importantly among all things are one's family relations.[124] Indeed, any putative "individuality" must be understood as either an abstraction from these concrete, native, and primarily acquired conditions, or an achieved distinctiveness cultivated in one's relations with others that makes one an identifiable object of deference.[125] Similarly, any notion of "family" is an abstraction from these specific, particular persons who collectively and organically constitute a human nexus. Both particular persons and particular families are concrete configurations of particular relationships, and stand in a dynamic focus-field relationship with one another.

From its content we might surmise that the document entitled *Wuxingpian* preceded the *Mencius* chronologically, and has identifiable resonances with the *Mencius* that might bespeak of some influence, direct or otherwise, upon the content of this later text.[126] *Wuxingpian* describes how "five modes of proper conduct" (*wuxing* 五行)—that is, "conducting oneself consummately" (*ren* 仁), "acting with optimal appropriateness" (*yi* 義), "achieving propriety in one's roles and relations" (*li* 禮), "acting wisely" (*zhi* 知), and "behaving sagaciously" (*sheng* 聖)—aggregate over time to become a unified excellence that informs future action. These

are five acquired habits that need to be cultivated for interacting most productively in family and community. Importantly, there is an explicit connection between both the specific order and the substance of these "five modes of proper conduct" and the Mencian notion of the "four inklings" (*siduan*) as the positive initial conditions of the human heartmind (*xin* 心) that prompt and inform our growth (*xing* 性) to emerge as fully moral humans.[127] How do we put these two lists of desired conduct together?

A major contribution of the *Wuxingpian* from its opening paragraph lies in pressing the idea that it is compounding proper conduct itself that is the primary source and substance of our moral habits. In large measure, we become what we do. Mencius's conception of "natural tendencies" (*renxing*) likewise is best understood as a process of moral growth that begins with initial conditions within the context of family, and results in a dynamic pattern of always-contextualized and evolving moral habits. That is, *this* family is the point of entry and initial source that makes the cultivation of *this* distinguished person possible, and it is the emergence of *this* distinguished person that in turn enhances the meaning of *this* family.

The *Wuxingpian*'s description of the "five modes of proper conduct" as "moral excellences" (*de* 德) rather than as the "four inklings" (*siduan*) of our "natural tendencies" (*xing* 性) is significant in this argument. As the *Wuxingpian* explains from the opening passage, the five moral excellences (*de* 德) are something acquired (*de* 得) and harmonized (*he* 和) through an ongoing process of habituation:

> Consummatory conduct (*ren* 仁) taking shape within is called acting upon excellent habits (*de* 德); where it does not take shape within, it is called merely doing what is deemed consummate. Appropriate acting (*yi* 義) taking shape within is called acting upon excellent habits (*de*); where it does not take shape within, it is called merely doing what is deemed appropriate. A sense of ritual propriety (*li* 禮) taking shape within is called acting upon excellent habits (*de*); where it does not take shape within, it is called merely doing what is deemed proper.[128] Acting wisely (*zhi* 智) taking shape within is called acting on excellent habits (*de*); where it does not take shape within, it is called merely doing what is deemed wise. Acting in a sagely way (*sheng* 聖) taking shape within is called acting upon excellent habits (*de*); where it does not take shape within, it is called merely doing what is deemed sagacious.[129]

> When harmony (*he*) is achieved among these five modes of proper conduct, it is called moral excellence (*de*). Achieving harmony among the first four of these modes of proper conduct is called efficacy (*shan* 善). Efficacy is the human way (*rendao* 人道); moral excellence is the way of *tian* (*tiandao* 天道).[130]

This first passage of the *Wuxingpian,* with its emphasis on the nurturing of our moral excellences, might be associated with a similar distinction between the habituation of moral excellence in conduct and mere conduct that is made in *Mencius* 4B19:

> Mencius said, "What distinguishes people from the brutes is ever so slight, and where the common run of people are apt to lose this quality, exemplary persons dwell on it and preserve it. Shun was wise to the way of all things and had real insight into human roles and relationships. He acted upon his moral habits to be consummatory and appropriate in his conduct rather than merely doing what is deemed consummatory and appropriate."[131]

The last two lines of this *Wuxingpian* passage that distinguish between the way of human beings and the way of *tian* further suggest a collaborative rather than an exclusive understanding of the relationship between *tian* and human beings. After all, this is not a theism wherein an independent creator deity unilaterally endows human beings with an essential nature. The *Analects* 7.23 passage observes: "*Tian* has given life to and nourished moral excellence in me,"[132] a phrase that has its counterpart in *Mencius* 6A15 cited previously: "The function of the heartmind on the other hand is thinking, but it will only accomplish something if it actually thinks. We have been given this as our native ability."[133] If in our interpretation of these passages we consider the symbiotic and interdependent relationship assumed to obtain between *tian* and *ren*—that is, between the natural and cultural context and the human—we might read it as saying that *tian* provides not only the initial conditions, but also a legacy and the context in which the project of personal cultivation can take place efficaciously (*shan* 善). But importantly, it is the human habituation of moral excellence (*de*) in conduct that extends and gives articulation to the way of *tian* (*tiandao* 天道). For *ren* 人 and *tian* 天, we know them collaterally by what they mean for each other as the ultimate source of aggregating

meaning and as the meaningful context that facilitates continuing human growth.

The Pragmatic Notion of Relational Person: An Associative and Contrastive Analogy

In the introductory chapter, I argued that analogy is not only crucial to cultural translation, but unavoidable. Further, I maintained that these selected correlations can serve understanding as either associative or contrastive analogies, and that in pursuing these connections, we need to think retail rather than wholesale. In thinking through and seeking to clarify the Confucian notion of the radically embedded, relationally constituted, and always-emergent person, we might take John Dewey's notion of "individuality" as a potentially productive example of an associative analogy. Indeed, Dewey's individuality can perhaps serve as both an associative and a contrastive analogy in bringing this Confucian version of relationally constituted person into clearer resolution. Dewey, in his phenomenology of human conduct, combines the process psychology of William James and the social psychology of George Herbert Mead to locate persons within their natural and social relations. As Mead insists, "self" is coterminous with the world:

> The self cannot arise in experience except as there are others there. The child experiences sounds, etc., before it has experience of its own body; there is nothing in the child that arises as his own experience and then is referred to the outside things.... Only a superficial philosophy demands the old view that we start with ourselves.... There is no self before there is a world, and no world before the self. The process of the formation of the self is social.[134]

These pragmatists are revolutionary within the Western narrative in dispensing with the "old psychology" that begins from assumptions about a superordinate and discrete *psyche*. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey echoes many of the ideas proffered by Tang Junyi on "human nature" that were cited above, with both philosophers calling into question the separation of "human nature" and "conduct" by disputing the very distinction between them. Indeed, both Tang and Dewey shave with Ockham's razor by dispensing with the superordinate "person, soul,

self" and insisting that cultivated moral dispositions as habits of conduct are themselves the substance of what it means to become a consummate person. There is no need felt to appeal to some reduplicative notion of a discrete "agent" or "character" that would isolate and locate persons as a motive force outside of the pattern of their social and natural relations.

While Tang focuses on an always-situated and contextual meaning of *xing* in the transactional and collateral nature of human conduct, Dewey must struggle to overcome the default assumptions that have become entrenched within his own tradition:

> The doctrine of a single, simple and indissoluble soul was the cause and the effect of failure to recognize that concrete habits are the means of knowledge and thought. Many who think themselves scientifically emancipated and who freely advertise the soul for a superstition, perpetuate a false notion of what knows, that is, of a separate knower.[135]

Instead, Dewey, in a different language but still analogous in many ways to the Confucian notion of a relationally constituted person, arrives at an understanding of the human being as a dynamic combination of habit and impulse:

> Now it is dogmatically stated that no such conceptions of the seat, agent or vehicle will go psychologically at the present time. Concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done. "Consciousness," whether as a stream or as special sensations and images, expresses the functions of habits, phenomena of their formation, operation, their interruption and reorganization.... A certain delicate combination of habit and impulse is requisite for observation, memory and judgment.[136]

Dewey further insists that, whatever we have as the initial conditions situating us within community, these conditions must be attended by a substantial process of nurturance and growth: "We are born organic beings associated with others, but we are not born members of a community."[137] For Dewey, "individuality" is not quantitative: it is neither a pre-social potential nor a kind of isolating discreteness. Rather, it is qualitative, arising through distinctive service to one's community. Individuality is "the realization of what we specifically are as distinct from others,"[138] a realization that can only take place within the context

of a flourishing communal life. "Individuality cannot be opposed to association," says Dewey. "It is through association that man has acquired his individuality, and it is through association that he exercises it."[139] An individual so construed is not a "thing" but a "patterned event," describable in the language of uniqueness, integrity, social activity, relationality, and qualitative achievement.

We might appeal to some Deweyan observations on habits of personal growth as an alternative vocabulary that provides us with an associative analogy for this Confucian relational, situational, and transactional notion of personal conduct. First, Dewey is critical of the hypostatization of conduct as a notion of a discrete agency that locates instincts within isolated individuals:

> A combination of traditional individualism with the recent interest in progress explains why the discovery of the scope and force of instincts has led many psychologists to think of them as the fountain head of all conduct, as occupying a place before instead of after that of habits. The orthodox tradition in psychology is built upon isolation of individuals from their surroundings. The soul or mind or consciousness was thought of as self-contained and self-enclosed.[140]

Dewey appeals to the actual situated human experience as we live it in rejecting the priority of an ostensive autonomous "self" over that of an organic configuration of relations, and in questioning the priority of instincts to shared cultural life forms. He argues that any infant isolated from its dependent relations would quickly become a dead infant; that is, infants left to their own devices without access to or intervention by culturally informed relations could not survive for a single day. Even the meaning of the actions and gestures of infants is derived from the mature communal context within which they reside:

> The inchoate and scattered impulses of an infant do not coordinate into serviceable powers except through social dependencies and companionships. His impulses are merely starting points for assimilation of the knowledge and skill of the more matured beings upon whom he depends. They are tentacles sent out to gather that nutrition from customs which will in time render the infant capable of independent action. They are agencies for transfer of existing social power into personal ability; they are means of reconstructive growth.[141]

Dewey is, in his own tradition, a flat-out revolutionary in insisting upon the primacy of the relationally constituted, concrete situation as the garden of social intelligence and the locus for the pursuit of the consummate life. The optimally appropriate response to our ever-present uncertainties and any confident resolution of these uncertainties can only be negotiated within the actual circumstances themselves, with individual agency itself being an abstraction from them:

> The primary significance of the unique and morally ultimate character of the concrete situation is to transfer the weight and burden of morality to intelligence. It does not destroy responsibility; it only locates it. A moral situation is one in which judgment and choice are required antecedently to overt action. The practical meaning of the situation ... the action needed to satisfy it—is not self-evident. It has to be searched for.[142]

Dewey is radical in this social construction of the person. He certainly rejects the idea that the human being is in any way complete outside of the association one has with other people. Indeed, he would claim that "apart from the ties which bind him [the human being] to others, he is nothing."[143] As James Campbell observes, this passage is easily and often misunderstood as a negation of the individual.[144] But as we have seen with Dewey's notion of emergent "individuality," to say that persons are irreducibly social is not to deny the integrity, uniqueness, and diversity of human beings; on the contrary, it is precisely to affirm these conditions.

In commenting on Dewey and the social processes in which persons are created, Campbell avers Aristotle's vocabulary of "potential" and "actual":

> Dewey's point is not just that what was potential becomes actual when provided with the proper conditions, as, for example, the growth of a seed into a plant is sometimes understood (Cf. LW 9:195-96). His point is rather that persons are incomplete without a social component and develop into what they are—individual members of groups, socially grounded selves—in the ongoing process of living in a social environment.[145]

Similarly, we can argue that the Mencian "inklings" (*siduan*) of the heartmind are not inborn and essential qualities that in and of themselves make us human "beings." These "inklings" are certainly native

and incipient as the initial relational conditions that bind us into our families. But they are only the largely dependent beginnings of a process of growth in associated living that need to be nourished to make us full, active participants in family and community. The *siduan* describe the particular ethical, aesthetic, cognitive, and religious beginnings whence human beings emerge. The Confucian project, then, is to incorporate inchoate yet organically interdependent persons within the family nexus and to transform them into eager participants in a flourishing and thus spiritual community.

Dewey invests enormously in the centrality of language and other modes of communicative discourse (including signs, symbols, gestures, and social institutions) in explaining how the community grows its persons:

> Through speech a person dramatically identifies himself with potential acts and deeds; he plays many roles, not in successive stages of life but in a contemporaneously enacted drama. Thus mind emerges.[146]

For Dewey, mind is "an added property assumed by a feeling creature, when it reaches that organized interaction with other living creatures which is language, communication."[147] For Dewey, then, what we might call "heartmind" is created in the process of realizing a world. Heartmind, like world, is *becoming* rather than *being*, and the question is how productive and enjoyable are we able to make this creative process. The way in which heartmind and world are changed is not simply in terms of human attitude, but in real growth and productivity, and in the efficiency and pleasure that attends this process. The alternative—for a community to fail to communicate effectively—is for the community to wither, leaving it vulnerable to the "mindless" violence and "heartless" atrocities of creatures that have failed to become human.

In Confucianism, as in Deweyan pragmatism, the process of personal and communal development is driven by effective communication. To cite Dewey:

> Everything which is distinctively human is learned, not native, even though it could not be learned without native structures which mark man off from other animals. To learn in a human way and to human effect is not just to acquire added skill through refinement of original capacities. To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an

> effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community; one who understands its beliefs, desires, and methods, and who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values.[148]

Dewey's position expressed here might on the surface seem to contradict that voiced in the *Mencius* when the latter claims:

> The capacities that people have without having learned them are the root of their capacities; the wisdom that people have without having reflected upon it is the root of their wisdom. There are no young children who do not know to love their parents, and on coming of age, there are none who do not know to respect their elders. Loving one's parents is being consummate; respecting one's elders is being appropriate. There is no other reason that these habits can prevail in the world.[149]

But neither Dewey nor Mencius would dispute the fact that all activity is a collaboration between persons and their environments, and this being so, that persons bring significant capacities with them in their various activities that are a function of their initial conditions. Dewey is focusing on the transactional nature of all human conduct that invariably entails a "doing and an undergoing," while Mencius is insisting that all action invariably has a subjective dimension to it, and that becoming moral is not entirely derived from some external source. The key lies in understanding that when Mencius rejects the claim that virtuosic conduct is derived from something "external" (*wai* 外), he is not alternatively claiming that such conduct is entirely a matter of actualizing and manifesting some internal nature independent of the external circumstances of one's roles and relations.[150] Rather, he is asserting, like Dewey after him, that person and personal growth are both a collaboration between an emerging subject and a more-or-less objective world.

Dewey is helpful in providing insight into the inseparability of person and context, but in spite of the development of his relationally constituted person as a radical departure from an entrenched foundational individualism, in spite of his sustained commitment to the ultimacy and the complexity of the concrete situation in his rejection of an abstract moral idealism, and most importantly, in spite of his awareness of the vital role of early childhood education and his own intense personal experience

as a much-engaged parent, he still does not develop the seemingly obvious implication that the generalizable site of associated growth for most people is going to be their families. Indeed, the uniquely Confucian perception of how we become persons departs fundamentally from the Deweyan conception of personal cultivation in its stress upon our immediate family roles and relations as the entry point and the ground for acquiring moral competence.[151]

Where Confucian role ethics departs from and stands in plain contrast to the pragmatists is in requiring that certain basic moral considerations be located within the arena of family life. For example, while the pragmatists within their own tradition have to develop a revised understanding of the familiar liberal vocabulary of freedom, equality, and justice, these terms do not appear in the Confucian texts because such abstractions, along with the notions of moral principles, values, and virtues, are located in and derived from actual life experience within one's specific roles and relations in family and community.

As noted above, if we rehearse the important contributions of what are acknowledged to be the most prominent Western philosophers across the centuries, with few exceptions we are hard-pressed to find any significant thinker who invokes family as a productive model for organizing and optimizing the human experience. Plato's rejection of the family in the *Republic* and Aristotle's denigration of the "household" (*oikis*) as a source of privation are fairly representative.[152] Even John Dewey, whose relational cosmology and emphasis on the great community offers frequent analogy with Confucian assumptions, is true to the mainstream of his own tradition, opining that China has to get beyond its traditional family system as a precondition for democratization.[153]

Undoubtedly this persisting indifference to the importance of the perceived "partial" relations that emerge from family feeling is closely aligned with the assumed centrality of impartiality as a necessary condition for ethical conduct pervasive among those philosophers who would look to universal principles, objective procedures, impersonal teleological uniformities, and moral reasoning as the ultimate source of and warrant for moral order. Such a disinterest in family as a measure of moral order in the Western philosophical narrative contrasts starkly with the Confucian worldview in which family is *the* governing metaphor, and in which in fact *all* relationships are familial.[154] It is the uniqueness

of this Confucian moral sensibility that has led Henry Rosemont and me to describe it as "Confucian role ethics" in an effort to distinguish it from other more familiar ethical theories.[155] The signature of Confucian role ethics that will be further developed in the next chapter is that immediate family feeling is not only the entry point for an educated moral competence, but is also an inspiration and model for optimizing order in all of the dimensions of human life. Indeed, family feeling is the foundational moral epistemology of Confucian philosophy. We know each other primarily through our empathetic feelings for each other.

Making Better Sense of the Notions of "Root," "Source," "Potential," and "Cause"

In the *Mencius* and other canonical Confucian texts, the familiar appeal to the horticultural and husbanding metaphors—knowing the "root," for example—is often construed as reinforcing the idea that specific plants and animals grow to become what they essentially are: They simply actualize their inherent potential. But in fact what makes horticulture and husbanding apposite analogies for relationally constituted "human becomings" is the acute dependence that farming and raising animals has upon a contrived environment and upon concentrated human effort. Without sustained intervention, most seeds, far from becoming what they "are," become anything and everything else. Without the benefit of intensive intervention and cultivation on behalf of what we think they will "naturally" become, most acorns become squirrels, most corn becomes cows, and most eggs become omelets. The "root" or "seed" of anything and what it will become is as much a function of the contingencies of circumstances as it is of the initial conditions from which it "begins."

Turning to the notion of "source," *dao* 道 is often described as a "source" and might shed light on how "source" is to be understood when ascribed to "human nature." The conventional understanding of "source" is that it is the point of origin exclusive of what is derived from that point. Geographically, the source of the Yangtze river is the Himalayas. When we introduce the idea of efficient cause, the source becomes something analytically independent of the product that it causes, creates, initiates. It is the maker from which whatever is made is derived. Such

notions of "source" have no relevance to *dao*. *Dao*, far from standing independent of the world we experience, is in fact the unsummed totality of all that is happening. *Dao* is the process of the world in its entirety.

To understand the notion of *dao* as "source" we might cite the *Daodejing* that states "*dao* emulates what is spontaneously so of itself."[156] The energy of growth and transformation resides within the world itself, wherein the entire field of what is happening is implicated in each relationally constituted event.

Bringing this rather abstract reflection to bear on how we are to understand "human nature" as the "source" of what we become as humans, we would have to allow that human nature is a provisional generalization made with respect to the totality of human lives as they have been lived within their natural and social relations. The contingency in the ongoing process of what humans have become is no less relevant to this notion of source than where they have come from so far. The source is the collaborative, open-ended nature of human relations themselves *and* what is produced in this collaboration. In becoming human, as in making friends, there is no separation between maker and made, between means and end, between cause and effect, between source and product.

Further, we might clarify the notion of "potential" to underscore the inseparability of person and context in this Confucian conception of persons. The "potential" for becoming human is not simply the first inklings, something inborn "within" the person that is exclusive of family relations. In the first place, there is no such person. Since persons are constituted by their relations, the "potential" of a person in fact emerges from the specific, contingent transactions that, in the fullness of time, eventuate in this particular person in this particular family. Thus, the best sense we can make of "potential" here is that rather than being antecedent and ready-made, it evolves *pari passu* with the ever-changing circumstances; rather than being generic or universal, it is always unique to the career of the relational person; and rather than existing as an inherent and defining endowment, it can only be known *post hoc* after the unfolding of the particular narrative.[157] The argument, then, is that the preponderance of the content of "human nature" (*renxing* 人性) as it is expressed in the habitude of "consummatory conduct" (*ren* 仁),

"acting optimally appropriate in meaningful relations" (*yi*), "achieving propriety in roles and relations" (*li* 禮), and "acting with intelligence and wisdom" (*zhi* 智) is acquired. "Natural tendencies" (*xing* 性) are no more an essential and inborn given than is "consummatory conduct" (*ren*). Both are a source and a product. That is, they are the articulation of tentative native conditions in the consequent process of habituation. "Acting with wisdom" is not applying an antecedent wisdom to a situation, but an informed quality of acting that arises with the efficacy of one's actions.

What makes "human nature" most profoundly variable is the quality of the families and cultures into which we are born. If the family is a morally strong and thriving association of significant persons within a mature culture, much is available for investment in and growth for the incipient person. If the family is barren and troubled within only a thinly cultured environment, it is a more difficult road for the emerging person. But even when the legendary Shun is born into the family of the morally deficient Blind Man, the model of Emperor Yao is still available as part of a rich cultural resource that enables Shun, through the assiduous cultivation of habits of conduct, to become a sage himself. Shun's circumstances are a fair demonstration that there are cultural assets available for everyone to draw upon in aspiring to become sagely in their conduct.

The basic significance of the mantra, "the continuity between the natural and cultural context, and the human experience" (*tianren heyi* 天人合一) that is invoked to describe the Confucian religious sensibility is making this same point about potential. It is the person nourished by culture who becomes consummately human, and it is the life of the consummate human who contributes to the cultural resources that make a consummate humanity possible. Potentiality emerges in these collaborations between aspiring persons and an inspired world.

Turning to causality then, given the constitutive nature of relations, causality is not some agency outside and prior to the perceived configuration of things happening—it is not some independent "first cause"—but rather is a function of the creative and thus causal nature of the relations themselves. The originally militarist notion of causality captured in the term *shi* 勢 comes immediately to mind. *Shi* describes the always-particular and inclusive manifold of spatial, temporal, and

existential factors as they unfold in an emerging situation. *Shi* is a calculus of differentials in configuration, momentum, timing, terrain, morale, equipment, logistics, and so on, that constitute the propensity of circumstances, and that can be calibrated and adjusted to produce welcome outcomes.

There is a fallacy in taking human nature as causal in the sense that it reduplicates itself in action—that is, the idea that our conduct is *ren* because we are potentially *ren.* Rather, habits of moral conduct and native conditions should be understood as symbiotic and mutually determining. When we ask "Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?" we have to allow that they come together or not at all. From the perspective of classical Western metaphysics, we might say that Chinese cosmology shaves with Ockham's razor not once, but twice. Chinese cosmology does not appeal to the notion of a transcendent and independent God as the independent causal source of the world, but begins from what is happening in the autogenerative world itself (*ziran* 自然). And Chinese cosmology does not appeal to an independent nature or soul as the source of human conduct, but begins from a phenomenology of what unfolds and aggregates as moral habits within human conduct itself. It is with this understanding of the Confucian relationally constituted person as a "human becoming" that we now turn to Confucian role ethics as concrete familial and communal guidelines for achieving consummatory habits of conduct, and to the alternative understanding of religiousness that emerges from them.