

The Ethics of Self: Another Version of Confucian Ethics

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My basic contention in this essay is that the proper characterization of Confucian ethics is not role-based ethics, rule-based ethics, or virtue ethics, but an ethics of the self or a self-based ethics. In essence, Confucian ethics is about how to realize a self in line with inner sagehood and outer kingdom (内圣外王); it is about how to realize a self as fully self-conscious being-for-itself of definite character, substance, and personality. Confucian ethics does not start with the assumption that there is a given self that should be made virtuous, rule-abiding, or dutiful, but starts from the assumption that a self needs to be created, developed, and realized in the ethical life while the potentiality of building a self is given.

Debates over the nature of Confucian ethics turned heated recently in the field of studying Chinese philosophies. This is good. The stock values of these debates are increased in the context in which the compatibility between Confucian ethics and those ideas of our time including the idea of basic human rights is passionately discussed. That being said, a recalibration of approach to Confucian ethics is still needed here. The three main views of Confucian ethics in the present discourse of Confucian ethics—that is, Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics, Confucian ethics as a rule-based ethics, and Confucian ethics as a role-based ethics—contain insights, but also are flawed and counter some insurmountable difficulties.

The view of Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics suffers on several fronts. First, it cannot see that the focus of Confucian ethics is not on developing this or that virtue, but on developing a self that should be virtuous. In Confucian ethics, the purpose of cultivating virtues is a self's self-realization (安身立命 *an shen li ming*), not for the sake of a virtue itself. Second, this view cannot see that a Confucian self has a strong personal character, subjectivity, and individuality and has a personal *zhixiang* (focal and committed ethical aspiration and ideal), which is its hallmark that differs it from a Taoist self. Such a self is capable of living not upon others' opinions. Confucius's motto for the relation of such a self to others and society is '*junzi* (an authentically ethical person) is in harmony with others but does not lose himself/herself in others while a *xiao ren* (an unethical person) loses himself or herself in others but is not in

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harmony with others (君子和而不同, 小人同而不和 *junzi he er bu tong, xiao ren tong er bu he*)' (Confucius, 1996, 13.23). Third, this view cannot see that an authentic Confucian ethical self is necessarily happy; in Confucian ethics, being a self is both a necessary and a sufficient condition to be happy for an ethical person. Conceiving Confucian ethics either as a rule-based ethics or a role-based ethics does not fare any better. Both views of Confucian ethics suffer one fatal defect—that is, not seeing that Confucian ethics teaches a person to be, in the Sartrean idiom, a being-for-itself or a self-conscious self, not a being-in-itself. In Confucian ethics, following rules is not the purpose of a person's ethical life, but a path of a person's self-realization. In Confucian ethics, one's social roles are one's social stations, not one's home either. Confucian emphasis on social role is the insistence that in the ethical life, a self's social and practical identity is, and ought to be, the most important reason for one to perform or abstain from certain actions, and part of the motivating force. Equally crucial, while virtues, rules, and roles are all emphasized in Confucian ethics, to conceive Confucian ethics to be a virtue ethics, a rule-based ethics, or a role based ethics will privilege one and marginalize the other two unjustifiably.

Therefore, I would like to propose here another concept of Confucian ethics—that is, Confucian ethics as a self-based ethics. My contention is that the footing of Confucian ethics is not on virtues, rules, or social roles, but on the self and its realization; the central Confucian ethical concern is building of a Confucian self and self-realization to which virtues, rules, and social roles are necessary resources; the self is both the subject and object of ethical cultivation; self-realization is the motivating force in ethical life; whether or not a given ethical plan, choice, or action contributes to self-realization is an important criteria for it to be praiseworthy or blameworthy. The concept of Confucian ethics as a self-based ethics explains better what is the motivating force for an agent to practice virtues and to honor his/her social roles and what are the initially reasons for agents to have virtues, abide by rules and honor social roles. It explains why Confucian ethics emphasizes virtues, rules, and roles altogether. It is consistent with the program of ethical cultivation, which is outlined in *The Great Learning* in details, but also suggested in other three Confucian classics—the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *The Doctrine of Mean*.

Proposing the concept that Confucian ethics is a self-based ethics, my underlying purpose is also to correct three erroneous concepts of Confucian ethics: (1) the concept that happiness is marginal in Confucian ethics or even not part of the Confucian ethical vocabulary; (2) the concept of the Confucian mentality as a so-called duty-centered mentality; and (3) the concept that authenticity is marginal in Confucian ethics or not even a part of Confucian ethical vocabulary. I would like also to clarify at the outset that a self-based ethics is not identical to an individualistic or egoistic ethics. Also, a self-based ethics does not make two claims that characterize ethical subjectivism: (1) a denial of objective ethical truth, value, and meaning; (2) a denial of the distinction between true happiness and untrue 'happiness'. Thus, a self-based ethics does not reject ethical realism. It simply puts the debate between ethical realism and subjectivism aside. It simply contends that a self understands virtues, rules, and social roles within the self's horizon and this is the reason why Confucian

ethics puts so much emphasis on the value of a self's constant expansion of its horizon. Now, allow me to present my case as follows.

I. Self and Confucian Ethical Aspiration

We will start with an examination of the Confucian concept of self. To a great extent, the views of Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics, as a rule-based ethics, and as a role-based ethics are grounded in three flawed concepts of Confucian self, respectively: The virtue-ethics concept trades on the concept of Confucian self as a room where virtues dwell; the rule-based concept trades on the concept of Confucian self as a functional enactor of rules; and the role-based concept trades on the concept of Confucian self as an aggregation of social roles. Meanwhile, Weiming Tu, William T. de Bary, Roger. T. Ames, Kwong-Loi Shun, Robert C. Neville, and other celebrated scholars have led us to recognize the centrality of the concept of self in Confucian ethics, but their concepts of Confucian self lead them to advocate different views of Confucian ethics.

A. T. Nuyen indicates, 'Confucian ethics is best understood as neither a virtue ethics nor a rule-based ethics but as an ethics in which virtues and rules drive from an understanding of the self as constituted by roles that are determined by the relationships in which a person stands' (Nuyen, 2007, p. 316). Nuyen's view is suggestive but also defective. His view properly sees that in Confucian ethics, 'virtues and rules derive from an understanding of the self'. This is, for example, exhibited in the Confucian emphasis on the feeling of shame and dislike. The feeling of shame is a rise of a sense of the self, e.g., a sense of its dignity, its standard of being, and its sentiment of being, and the like. Nuyen's view is defective because it sees a Confucian self to be merely an aggregation of social roles. But in Confucian ethics, an authentic Confucian self is one of strong subjectivity and individuality and, equally crucial, is self-conscious of his/ her purpose, destiny of existence. An authentic self always has a personal *zhi-xiang*, or in Sartrean terms, an overarching goal and direction of personal existence. An authentic Confucian self is thus not a Sartrean being-in-itself.

Starting from *I Jing* (易经), *The Book of Change*, the concepts of the direction of the self (志向 *zhi xiang*), self-improvement and renovation (自強 *zi qian*), self-standing (自立 *zi li*), self-respect (自重 *zi zhong*), no self-deception (不自欺 *bu zi qi*), and the feeling of shame and dislike become core ones in Confucian ethics. These concepts are all about having a substantial and characteristic self, preserving a true self, cultivating a meaningful self. They are about having a self that is distinctive in itself and contributive to community and the world at large. In Confucian ethics, these concepts go hand in hand with teaching of virtues, as well as teachings of ethical rules—in particular humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust—and social roles.

The focus on the self in Confucian ethics is epitomized beautifully in the Confucian motto in *I Jing*, 'Heaven moves healthily, an authentically ethical person self-strengths ceaselessly (天行健，君子自强不息 *Tian xing jian, junzi zi qian bu xi*)' (Fang, 1999,

p. 4). According to *I Jing*, the focal task of an authentically ethical person in the ethical life is self-defining, self-renovating, and self-development (*zi qian bu xi*). Equally crucial, according to *I Jing*, that a person should have a direction of the self or a personal ethical direction called *zhixiang* (志向)—literarily meaning ‘the direction of the will’. *I Jing* reads:

Confucius said: ‘An authentically ethical person is outstanding in character and substance ... s/he will not bend her/his *zhi* (purpose, aspiration, intention, and commitment in life) before the pressure of social prejudice ... S/he is determined to realize his/her *zhi*, not violating her/his *zhi*’. (Fang, 1999, 12)

Noteworthy, *zhixiang* is a rise of self-consciousness. To establish a *zhixiang* is to establish a self’s subjectivity, individuality, and autonomy.

In turn, *zhixiang* is the footing for a self to understand social roles—voluntary or involuntary roles alike, virtues that a self is to embody, and rules that a self is to abide by. And Confucian ethics emphasizes utmost one’s steadfastness to one’s *zhixiang*. In Confucian ethics, the ability to be steadfast to its *zhixiang* is a crucial benchmark of an authentic self. Thus, for example, *I Jing* reads: ‘A *junzi* (an ethically authentic person) ... preserves her/his integrity in adverse circumstances. To realize his/her *zhixiang*, she or he transcends others’ opinions; ‘Poverty cannot dissuade an ethically authentic person to deviate from his or her *zhixiang*. Instead, an ethically authentic person devotes his/her life to realize his/her *zhixiang*’ (Fang, 1999, pp. 190, 311). What transpires from these statements is the Confucian focal concern of a self, e.g., its authenticity, integrity, and ethical substance, and ethical purpose of being.

In *the Analects*, Confucius emphasized explicitly that a person of humanity had a distinctive self, e.g., having a personal purpose of existence, unbending personal strength, and sense of authenticity, knowing his or her ethical fate, being reflective of his or her life, and the like. He claimed, ‘The commanders of the three armies can be given away, but not a person’s *zhixiang*’ (Confucius, 1996, 9.26). An army should not be without a commander. However, if the choice is giving away the commander of an army or giving away a person’s *zhixiang*, the answer is to give away the commander of an army. This emphasis underscores Confucius’s view of the indispensability of *zhixiang* to a person’s ethical existence and the ethical life. It underscores Confucius’s emphasis on the self as the footing in the ethical life and as the center of one’s horizon of ethical understanding. By this token, in *the Analects*, Confucius insisted, ‘A *junzi* (an authentically ethical person) is not a vessel’ (Confucius, 1996, 2.12). In *the Analects*, a *junzi* is the kind of ethical self that Confucius and Confucian masters want us to become in the ethical life. For Confucius, a *junzi* is self-conscious and a being-for-itself, while a vessel has no self-consciousness and is a thing or a being-in-itself. For this reason, Confucius was quite critical of his disciple Zilu despite Zilu’s talent in political leadership and even refused to consider him to be a person of humanity (仁 *ren*). For Confucius, Zilu had no sense of the self and was thus a vessel-type person.

No wonder, in *The Analects*, when he was asked what was the criterion for an ethically authentic person, Confucius answered: ‘Being able to regulate oneself by the feeling of shame’ (Confucius, 1996, 13.20). In Confucian ethics, the feeling of shame

is the sense of living up to the self and a rise of a self's consciousness of its dignity and standard of being. The idea that the feeling of shame is the motivating force in the ethical life is that the concept of self—for example, self-identity, the ideal of the self, the dignity of the self, and the standard of the self—is the motivating force in the ethical life. In *The Analects*, Confucius also insisted that an authentically ethical person would not be unhappy because others do not recognize him/her; instead, he or she would be happy by being himself or herself.

Mencius entertained the same sentiment of the ethical self and advocated the ethics of self as Confucius did. In 6A and 6B of *Mencius*, Mencius drew a distinction between the important and the unimportant, insisting that paying attention to the moral development of the self is paying attention to the important. For Mencius, a person's sense of the self ought to be so strong that 'he is ready to die in a desert spot to preserve and realize his self' (Mencius, 1996, 3B1). Mencius also insisted that an authentic person should be firm in being the self to the extent that 'wealth and fame cannot adulterate his or her *zhixiang*. Poverty and adverse circumstance cannot shake his or her *zhixiang*. External force cannot force him/her to change the *zhixiang*' (Mencius, 1996, 3B2). For him, to pay attention to the self is (1) to nurture the self's *zhixiang* and (2) to be steadfast to it. While ethics is about happiness and a worthy spent life, Mencius claimed, 'No happiness is greater than the experience that after examining my life, I find that I am myself' (Mencius, 1996, 7A4).

With a focus on cultivation of the self, Mencius argued that a person should have a sense of shame. He said: 'An individual must have a feeling of shame'; '[G]reat is that the feeling of shame matters to a person ... If persons do not feel ashamed of themselves when they are inferior to others, how can we expect them to catch up and surpass others?' (Mencius, 1996, 7A6, 7A8). The feeling of shame in the Menciusian sense is the feeling that a person must not be or live below the standard of the self. The Chinese word for shame is '*hiu wu*'. Kwong-loi Shun tells us, '*Hsiu* ... is focused on the badness or the low standing of oneself as reflected in, or as likely to ensue from, thing that occasions *hsiu* ... To *wu* something is to dislike it' (Shun, 1997, pp. 59–60). Moreover, for Mencius, ethical cultivation should be devoted also to nurturing a self's noble, righteous spiritual energies (浩然之气 *hao ren zhi qi*).

Neo-Confucian philosophers Zhou Dunyi, Zhangzhai, Cheng I, Cheng Hao, Lu Xiangshan, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yangming all insist on a recovery of a sense of the self. They address the issue of taking hold and preserving the self in the ethical life. They advocate the kind of ethical person having at least following qualities: *zi li* (自立 self-standing), *bu zhi bao* (不自暴 not doing violence to the self), *bu zi qi* (不自弃 not self-abandoning), and *bu zi qi* (不自欺 not self-deceiving). Let us here consider Lu Xiangshan.

Lu's philosophy is often labeled as subjective idealism as Wang's is. Indeed, in Confucian ethics, there is the so-called 'the Lu-Wang tradition or school'. Unfortunate as the term 'subjective idealism' is, this wrong label brings to light something illuminating here: that is, the concept of the self and the idea of ethical-moral subjectivity are central to Lu's philosophy; the idea of the self is the starting

point and also the focus of his ethical philosophy. The teaching of cultivating an authentic subjectivity is one of the most original teachings of Lu.

In 'the Recorded Words,' Lu insisted that in the ethical life, one should focus on self-cultivation (自修 *zi chiu*), no self-deception (不自欺 *bu zi qi*), fulfilling a self's aspiration and purpose (逐我之志 *zhu WO zhi zhi*), self-discipline (自克 *zhi ke*), self-confidence (自信 *zi xin*), self-respect (自重 *zi zhong*), and being reflective of the self (自省察 *zi shen cha*). Thus, Lu stressed that a person should 'self-empower (自德 [得] *zi de*), self-realize (自成 *zi cheng*), and self-develop his/her way (自道 *zi dao*), and be mind-independent of his or her teacher, friend, and book'; and that a person should 'not duplicate others' (Lu, 1968, vol. 35). Here, Lu emphasized not only that an ethical self is one of distinctive, strong, and committed subjectivity, but also that as Confucius put it, an authentically ethical person is in harmony with others but does not lose his/her self in others. Therefore, for Lu, ethical cultivation must start from establishing a self's *zhixiang*.

Admittedly, in Confucian ethics, to recover a sense of the self is not to adopt an anti-society attitude and to pull back from the society. On the contrary, an ethical person must engage the world actively, creatively, and purposively. In Confucian ethics, one becomes ethical by having a distinct, valuable self and becoming valuable a part of the world. Tu observes, '[For Confucians] to live a full life requires the willingness and the courage to transform the limited and limiting structure of the ego into an ever deepening and broadening self' (Tu, 1989a, p. 77). Confucianism rejects any assumptions of a necessary antagonism between the self and community, as well as between self-realization and engagement with the world. It rejects the idea that community is nothing but a source of alienation for a self. Instead, in Confucianism, community is where one extends his/her ethical existence and realizes himself/herself. According to Confucianism, one can only realize oneself through active, creative engagement with the world. In Confucian ethics, one's path to the true self is a reciprocal process, which is to create the true self by creatively engaging with the world and to contribute to creating a better world by creatively developing a distinct, valuable self in the world.

It is worth mentioning that the concept of Confucian self as 'selfless self', which advocates of Confucian ethics as role ethics often evoke, is seriously flawed. At least, the concept of selfless self does not properly express the Confucian view of the self. The so-called selfless self is a self that is not a substance or entity, having no individuality and subjectivity. This concept obviously cannot be consistent with the Confucian view of an authentic self. An authentic Confucian self is one of distinctive substance and unbending strength of personal character. It is a self living an examined life and having its *zhi xiang*—high purpose, commitment, and central theme—of being. Granted, a true Confucian self is not egoistic and selfish. However, to say that a true Confucian self is not an egoistic, selfish self is one thing, and to say that a true Confucian self has no individuality and subjectivity is quite another. In a final analysis, as I will understand it, a selfless self as understood above is not a Confucian self, but a Taoist self.

The concept of selfless self also does not do justice to the Confucian emphasis on the concept of *cheng* (诚sincerity, subjective authenticity) in the ethical life. The concept of *cheng* presupposes the idea of subjectivity and in content, implies making the will sincere and rectifying the mind. It may not make much sense in talking about making the will of a selfless self sincere and rectifying the mind of a selfless self. All the same, in essence, *cheng* is the *cheng* of a self's subjectivity. *Cheng* is being sincere and truthful to the self, which presupposes a consciousness of a self that is not lost in the presence of others and in community or society. Thus, Tu indicates, "To learn to become an authentic person in the Confucian sense is certainly to be honest with oneself" (Tu, 1989a, p. 52). Meanwhile, it should strike us as self-evident that an authentic Confucian self is not an aimless self either. This is exhibited most obviously in the emphasis on having a *zhixiang* and being steadfast to one's *zhi xiang* in Confucian ethics. *Zhixiang* establishes a self's purpose, destiny, aim, and commitment of being.

Henry Rosemont argues that 'the classical Confucians did not focus on the individualism of human beings' (Rosemont, 2004, p. 59). If by individualism is meant egoism or the doctrine that an individual is an isolated, atomic being that owes society nothing but contempt, and then Rosemont is right to the mark. If by individualism is meant the doctrine that emphasizes individuality, self-consciousness, and self-realization, I think that both classical and neo-Confucian ethics emphasize a kind of Confucian individualism. From Confucian point of view, there can be compatibility between emphasis on individuality and self-consciousness and emphases on virtues, rules, and social roles.

In sum, Confucian self is a distinctive subjectivity with a high *zhixiang*, a purpose of existence, and an unbending personal strength. It is defined importantly by its social being including its role being, but not reduced to the latter or a thing-like aggregation of roles and social relations. Confucian self is not a thing that merely exists or a merely a receiver of things akin to a camera, but a self-conscious builder, constructor, and creator. It is a self capable of not living on the opinion of others, but can be happy by simply being his/her self.

II. The Footing and Center of Confucian Ethical Cultivation

The matter in dispute here can be further clarified and sorted out by having a close examination of the content, focus, and scope of Confucian program of ethical cultivation. Confucian ethical cultivation is all about the self—starting from the self, focusing on the self, and completing with the self.

The Analects does not outline systematically a Confucian program of ethical cultivation. However, Confucius did recommend a strategy of ethical cultivation. This strategy includes setting one's mind on practicing the *dao*, housing oneself in humanity, imbibing oneself in the words of the sages, being inspired by poetry, being harmonized by music, traveling in the realm of art, and living an examined life. Confucius called this strategy of ethical cultivation the way of a *junzi*, an authentically

ethical person. At the core of this is ‘taking the realization of humanity as the self’s task and mission (仁为己任 *ren wei ji ren*)’ (Confucius, 1996, 8.7). This means setting one’s *zhixiang* on realizing *ren* in oneself and in the world (Confucius, 1996, 4.4). In short, the Confucius-recommended ethical cultivation is footing on the self and focuses on the self. Thus, in *The Analects*, Confucius emphasized that ethical learning and cultivation is for one’s self, not for others or something else, criticizing those who thought otherwise (Confucius, 1996, 14.24). He further observed:

If one loves *ren* (仁 humanity), but not focus on the growth of the self (学 *xue*), one will be duped. If one loves knowledge (知 *zhi*) but does not focus on the growth of the self, one will be self-indulged and careless (放荡 *fangdang*). If one values trustworthiness (信 *xin*) but does not focus on the growth of the self, one will become crooked (贼 *zei*). If one loves being straight forward (直 *zhi*) but does not focus on the growth of the self, one will be intolerant. If one loves courage but does not focus on the growth of the self, one will be rebellious. If one loves being firm (刚 *gang*) but does not focus on the growth of the self, one will be rash (狂 *kuang*). (Confucius, 1996, 17.8)

The focus of ethical cultivation of virtues is not on those virtues themselves, but on the growth of the self (学 *xue*). As Tu insists, in Confucian ethics, ethical learning and cultivation is ‘learning for the sake of the self’ (Tu, 1989a, p. 51). ‘This dimension of learning is not reducible to [merely learning of] any particular virtue’ (Tu, 1989a, p. 52). Roger T. Ames points out, ‘Confucius... in *the Analects* takes *xue* 学 to mean not just “learning,” but more importantly, “learning as personal growth”’ (Ames, 2011, p. 162). Ames also indicates:

The Confucian moral vision is fundamentally one of personal growth: that is, becoming a consummate person (*ren* 仁), becoming a great person (*daren* 大人), becoming an efficacious person (*shanren* 善人), becoming a mature and complete person (*chengren* 成人), becoming an exemplary person (*junzi* 君子). (Ames, 2011, p. 176)

Both Tu and Ames correctly see that Confucian ethics is about making of a person, that is, making of a self. On this point, ‘the primary concern of Confucian learning is a character formation defined in ethical terms’ (Tu, 1989a, p. 52). I would like merely to add here that in *the Analects*, Confucius conceived *xue* as ‘the growth of the self’ and thus the concept of *xue* 学 in *the Analects* and in *The Great Learning* are the same.

Mencius indicated that in ethical cultivation, one should ‘extend one’s mind, then know one’s [human] nature, and therefore know the mandate of Heaven’ (Mencius, 1996, 7A1). Accordingly, in terms of objectives, the Menciusian program of ethical cultivation aim at several objectives: (1) expanding the horizon of one’s mind to the extent that the whole world is within the embrace of one’s mind; (2) nurturing one’s noble, righteous, spiritual energies (浩然之气 *hao ran zhi qi*) in line with humanity and righteousness, nurturing the four innate ethical-moral sensibilities; and (3) living up to the standards of truth, beauty, and good (Mencius, 1996, 7A1, 7A4, 2A6, 6A6, 2A2, 7B25). With regard to the steps to be taken, Mencius insisted that first of all, persons must establish their *zhixiang* and live an examined life, e.g., question about

the purposes, meanings, and values of their lives; they should examine their beliefs and ideas of values. Of the ethical life as an examined life, Mencius criticized that ‘many individuals do not think about what they do in their lives. They do not question about the purpose of what they repeatedly do in daily life. They do not reflect their experiences throughout their lives’ (Mencius, 1996, 7A5). All the same, like Confucius’s strategy of ethical cultivation, Mencius’s is also centered on the self—that is, cultivation of the self.

The program of ethical cultivation outlined in *The Great Learning* epitomizes the Confucian ethical orientation. The Confucian classic outlines three objectives and eight steps of Confucian ethical cultivation. The three objectives are ‘to embody the brightest virtue and make them shine, to renovate oneself and therefore renovate the people, and to be united with the ultimate good’ (Zeng, 1996, *Jing part*). The objectives point to three integral dimensions of self-cultivation: virtue, creativity, and good. That is, self-cultivation aims at achieving a virtuous, creative, and good self.

Correspondingly, the eight steps of ethical cultivation in the program outlined in *The Great Learning* is all about making, expanding, developing, and realizing a self. Moreover, the first five steps of the program of ethical cultivation can be put under the rubric of ‘making of the self’ and the last three steps can be put under the rubric of ‘social realization of the self’. In the program, cultivation of virtues is indicated as part of cultivating a self. Social roles are indicated as social stations for a self’s realization. Meanwhile, rules are emphasized as an important resource for rectifying the mind, cultivating the self, and playing one’s social roles and as part of the necessity to the making of a self. *The Great Learning* asserts: ‘In the pursuit of learning, an authentically ethical person deepen and deepen their understanding like they refine works of art. In self-cultivation, they constantly refine and refine them-selves like they constantly polish pieces of jade’ (Zeng, 1996). To cultivate constantly one’s self akin to constantly refine works of art, this is the trademark teaching of the Confucian ethics.

In *The Doctrine of Mean* (Zi, 1996), the focus of ethical cultivation is the cultivation of a self’s sincerity or authenticity (诚 *cheng*). In turn, the focus on *cheng* underscores the centrality of the concept of self in Confucian ethics. In Confucian ethics, sincerity, understood as subjective authenticity and being true to the self, is emphasized as the foundation of the ethical life. In *The Analects*, Confucius said, ‘*Junzi* ... realizes his/her substances in genuineness’ (Confucius, 1996, 15.18). The notion that authentic persons realize their substances in genuineness is the idea that persons become real in substances when they are genuine. In *The Doctrine of Mean* (Zi, 1996), the concept of *cheng* includes those core Confucian qualities of a true self such as a sincere will, a rectified mind, a unity of the self, a unity of words and deeds, and a unity of belief and being, and the like. Not surprisingly, the idea of *cheng* implies living up to the self and becoming completely the self. The idea is not that genuineness is the last thing that substance must include. Instead, the idea is that one cannot be oneself in substances if one is not genuine in the first place. Genuineness signifies a true and complete substantialization of the self in being. Thus, Tu says: ‘The person who embodies *cheng* to the utmost is also a most genuine human being. It is in this sense

that he completely realizes his nature. The person who realizes his nature to the full becomes a paradigm of authentic humanity' (Tu, 1989b, p. 77).

The Confucian idea of *cheng* in *The Doctrine of Mean* (Zi, 1996) indicates the view that a person always lives in a possibility to be either in truth or in untruth. Chenyang Li correctly suggests: 'The very notion of self-realization and self-cultivation implies that one is not yet fully *cheng* and that there are both truth and untruth' (Li, 1998, p. 53). Constant self-cultivation and renovation is constantly to choose to live in truth and to discard the untruth. In Confucian ethics, to cultivation of a self is necessary to bring truth and substance to the self. The purpose of cultivation of a self is to have a self that has truth, that lives in truth, and that continues to develop truth, substance, value, and meaning to its being. With regard to ethical cultivation, culture can be a two-edged sword. Ethical cultivation involves cultural cultivation of a self. But culture can also be a source of inauthenticity. No wonder, in Confucian ethics, the call for self-cultivation goes hand in hand with an insistence on living an examined life. Confucius characterized the way to be a self of full humanity as thinking over what is near at hand (Confucius, 1996, 19.6). The neo-Confucian masters Zhu Xi and Li Zhuqian entitled their book on the Confucian way as *The Collected Words of Reflecting What Is Near at Hand* (《近思录》).

Neo-Confucian ethics fully advocates the program of ethical cultivation outlined in *The Great Learning*, but with two distinctive emphases: (1) the objective of ethical cultivation is to turn one into a person of 'inner sagehood and outer kingship (内圣外王 *nei sheng wai wang*)'; and (2) living an examined life is at the core of an ethical life. The first emphasis is about what kind of self that ethical cultivation is to build. The concept of a person of inner sagehood and outer kingship is to a great extent a concept of sagely *junzi*. A self of inner sagehood and outer kingship is a kind of *junzi*-self that is outstanding in nurturing the human nature—including the innate moral consciousness—and empowered by knowledge of human affairs and principles of the universe at large. Moreover, such a neo-Confucian self lives an examined life. In neo-Confucian ethics, the ethical is the critical. Indeed, in neo-Confucianism, living in truth and not self-deceiving (真实无妄 *zhen shi wu wan*) are among constituents of an ethical person. At the end of the day, in neo-Confucian ethics, a self must be self-conscious, self-reflective, and self-consistent.

Noteworthy is that how the discussion of the ethical life starts in each of the four Confucian classics—the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of Mean*—is also suggestive, illuminating, and of great symbolic value. *The Analects* starts with the questions of what is happiness and what is a *junzi* (an authentically ethical person). *Mencius* starts with the concept that humanity is the safe home and righteousness is the correct path of an ethical person, a ruler or an ordinary person alike. *The Great Learning* starts with the question of what one ought to do if one is to become a certain kind of ethical person. *The Doctrine of Mean* (Zi, 1996) goes straight to the theme of *cheng* (诚) as the foundation of an ethical person. In short, all four Confucian classics start with questions that concern about the self. All four Confucian classics are devoted to developing a Confucian program of ethical cultivation from which a Confucian self can be created and developed. All four Confucian classics take

the self as not only the starting point, but also the focal and standing point and as the center of background of ethical interpretation and understanding, in which it is not the self that should be understood in the light of virtues or rules or roles, instead it is virtues, rules, and roles that should be understood in the light of the self. No wonder, Confucius asked, 'If it not for the sake of becoming a person of humanity, what is the point for a person to observe the rules and rites of propriety?'

III. To Be is to Be a *Junzi*

Our horizon can be clarified further by recalling the concept Confucian *junzi* (an authentically ethical person), which Confucian ethics teaches us to arrive at. In Confucian ethics, becoming a *junzi* of 'inner sagehood and outer kingship' is the goal of ethical cultivation. Accordingly, the distinction between a *junzi* and a *xiao ren* (a pretty person, an unethical person) is the most important distinction. Indeed, the distinction between a *junzi* and a *xiao ren* is the synonym of the distinction between an ethical person and an unethical person or between the ethical and the unethical.

The Confucian ethical ideal is that one should become a person of full humanity and, as *The Great Learning* indicates, a person of full humanity is one who embodies the brightest virtues in the universe, is creative and constantly renovates himself/herself and others, and is united with the ultimate good. The question now is what kind of person can be a person of full humanity? In Confucian ethics, there can be two kinds of person of full humanity: a sage and a *junzi*. Becoming a sage is not an objective that many of us can achieve in the ethical life and thus the idea of sage more or less functions as a regulative ideal, though the Confucian ethical motto is 'inner sagehood and outer kingship' (内圣外王 *nei sheng wai wang*). In comparison, in the ethical life, everyone can, and ought to, become a *junzi*. Equally crucial, becoming a *junzi* is becoming a distinctive self, which realizes itself crucially in its role existence, embodies human virtues, and is rule-abiding.

In *the Analects*, a *junzi* is a kind of ethical self of authenticity, personal character, substance, and integrity. Such a self is not only an antithesis to a *xiao ren* (petty person), but also superior to the self of a good person. *The Analects* reads: 'A *junzi* thinks of virtues while a *xiao ren* (an unethical person) thinks of possessions. A *junzi* thinks of abiding by laws, while a *xiao ren* thinks of personal gain'; 'A *junzi* understands righteousness, while a *xiao ren* understands only profit'; 'If a man can be entrusted with an orphan child, if he can be delegated with the authority over the affair of the whole state, if his integrity would not lose even in front of death-threatening danger, is he a *junzi*? He is, indeed, a *junzi*' (Confucius, 1996, 4.11, 4.16, 8.6). Xunzi also indicated, 'A *junzi* is a self with integrity' (Xunzi, 1996, p. 279). He further said: 'Persons can be divided into five kinds: persons of commonplace (庸人 *yong ren*); persons of worldly knowledge (士人 *shi ren*); persons of integrity (君子 *junzi*); good persons (贤人 *xian ren*), and sages (圣人) ... A *junzi* keeps to his words and is loyal, trustworthy and reliable' (Xunzi, 1996, 397). In Confucian ethics, of persons of five categories, only *junzi* and sage can be persons of full humanity.

In Confucian ethics, as a self of substance and self-consciousness, a *junzi* takes hold of his/her existence. Thus, *The Analects* claims: 'A *junzi* is not a vessel' (Confucius, 1996, 2.12). A *junzi* is not a vessel in two senses. First, a *junzi* is a self with his/her purpose of existence, belief, dignity, and *zhixiang*. Second, a *junzi* is a subject, not merely an object or tool to be used. Seeking virtues, a *junzi* is the subject to embody virtues, and virtues are his/her attributes. Following rules, a *junzi* is a subject consciously acting on rules, turning righteousness and propriety into his/her substance. Playing his/her social roles, a *junzi* is the subject that makes social roles his/her stations of his/her social realization.

In sum, while becoming a *junzi* is the objective and ethical motivation for a person in the ethical life, a *junzi* is a self of integrity, substance, and character and self-consciousness. In the ethical life, having virtues, abiding by rules, and playing one's social roles all are necessary conditions for one to become a *junzi*. Meanwhile, each of these three conditions in itself is not sufficient to make one a *junzi* and is not the highest good in the ethical life.

IV. The Essential of Confucian Ethical Reasoning

If one characterizes Confucian ethics as a virtue-based ethics, or a rule-based ethics or a role-based ethics, the price to be paid would be too high. One would not be able to account for the characteristic of the Confucian way of ethical reasoning. One would not be able to account adequately for the source of the normative force and motivating force of virtues, rules, and social roles. One would not be able to explain why in Confucian ethics, the five norms of humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust and the feeling of shame are particularly emphasized and privileged.

The concept of Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics, a rule-based ethics, or a role-based ethics cannot account for the Confucian way of ethical reasoning. The Confucian way is called the way of 'reasoning from the self into others (推己及人 *tui ji ji ren*)' (Tang & Zhang, 1999, p. 62). As Kailing Tang and Huaicheng Zhang indicate, this Confucian way of ethical reasoning consists of three core elements: (1) altruism (忠恕之道 *zhong shu zhi dao*); (2) working for and from the innate consciousness of the self (致良知 *zhi liang zhi*); and (3) reasoning from one's feeling into others (以情絜情 *yi qing jie qing*) (Tang & Zhang, 1999, pp. 62–72). As its name indicates, the way of 'reasoning from the self into others' is self-based, though not egoistic or subjectivist. Confucian way is not to do away with subjectivity. Instead, it is to extend one's subjectivity to be in harmony with the consciousness of Heaven and Earth (天地之心 *tian di zhi xin*). The views of Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics, as a rule-based ethics, and as a role-based ethics cannot account for this Confucian way of ethical reasoning.

Moreover, the three concepts of Confucian ethics above may convey an incorrect message that in the ethical life Confucian ethics turns a person into a being-in-itself, not a being-for-itself; or in Confucian ethics, an ethical person is a being-in-itself, not a being-for itself. All three concepts have one wrong assumption: a total identity of a

self with its thinghood. In the view of Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics, an ethical self is merely an embodiment of virtues or aggregation of virtues. By this token, a self is akin to a room that offers space and capacity for virtues to dwell. Equally crucial, this view implies a total identity of a self with the aggregation of virtues. In the view of Confucian ethics as a rule-based ethics, an ethical self is akin to a vessel or machine operating in accordance with rules without its own purpose and self-consciousness. This image contradicts Confucius's explicit emphasis that an authentically ethical person is not a vessel. Equally crucial, this view indicates that a self can be totally identified with its presence as an enactor of rules. In the view of Confucian ethics as role-based ethics, an ethical self is merely an aggregation of social roles. It is again akin merely to a space that is occupied by social roles. Anything else, this image of Confucian ethics subverts the relationship between a self and its social roles. In Confucian ethics, social roles are social stations for a self's self-realization. It is a self who occupies social roles, not the opposite.

The three concepts of Confucian ethics above cannot account for the motivating force of virtues, rules, and social roles in Confucian ethics. As Alasdair MacIntyre suggests, we too ask here: What reasons do agents initially have to acquire virtues, abide by rules, and to honor their social roles? Whence do they derive those motivating reasons (MacIntyre, 2004)? As MacIntyre indicates, 'their reasons cannot be derived from those virtues, for they do not as yet possess them' (MacIntyre, 2004). Their reasons cannot be derived from those rules either, for they are yet to learn (学 *xue*) about rules and their relations to those rules. Their reasons cannot be derived from roles either, for one is yet to learn (学 *xue*) about roles and their relations to themselves. In a final analysis, in Confucian ethics, the initially motivating force of an agent to be ethical is the concept of self, which in turn increases the role of shame and dislike in Confucian ethics.

Notwithstanding, in order to view Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics, a rule-based ethics, or a role-based ethics, one will marginalize a set of core Confucian ethical vocabularies including the concepts of *zhixiang*, thinking (思 *si*), *junzi*, ethical destiny (fate), mission (使命 *shi ming*), extending one's mind (尽心 *jinx in*), knowing one's nature (知性 *zhi xing*), making the will sincere, rectifying the mind, happiness, rectifying the self (正己 *zheng ji*), self-cultivation, no self-deception, self-understanding, self-realization, self-overcome, holding to the self, the horizon of the mind (胸怀 *xiong huai*), the horizon of feeling (情怀 *qing huai*), and the like. These concepts concern a self of distinctive subjectivity. They are about creating, building and realizing a self.

Viewing Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics, a rule-based ethics or a role-based ethics, one will have difficulty in explaining the normative force of the five core Confucian ethical norms—humanity, righteousness propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness, and the core Confucian feelings of shame and dislike. The virtue ethics version may argue for the normative force of these ethical norms in terms of human nature and virtue as an intrinsic good. Yet, it cannot explain adequately why these particular five norms are privileged in Confucian ethics. It cannot explain why the feeling of shame and dislike is privileged in Confucian ethics. The view of Confucian

ethics as a rule-based ethics does not fare better in its account of the privilege of the five core Confucian norms and the feeling of shame or their normative force than the view of Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics does. It does not do well in explaining whence the privilege of such norms and the feeling of shame and dislike come from. The trouble of the view of Confucian ethics as a rule-based ethics goes deep when one recalls Confucius's famous motto: 'it is persons who can expand the *dao*, not that the *dao* that expands persons (人能弘道,非道弘人 *ren neng hong dao, fei dao hong ren*)' (Confucius, 1996, 15.29). This motto of Confucius indicates the primacy of person or self over rules.

The view of Confucian ethics as a role-based ethics attempts to explain the normative force and privilege of the five Confucian ethical norms above and the feeling of shame in terms of social roles. However, the five norms and the feeling of shame are more about the self than about social roles. In Confucian ethics, the norms of humanity and wisdoms are not emphasized as norms pertaining to social roles; for example, they are not norms attached to any particular social roles or governing any particular ethical relations. While the norm of righteousness governs the role-relation between a ruler and his ministers, it is also a norm applicable to a scope far beyond the relation between a ruler and his ministers. Meanwhile, the norm of propriety is applicable not only to the spousal relation and roles, but also to other roles and social relations. The norm of trust is emphasized in a relation between friends. But friends are not social roles. That is, they are not the kind of institutional and institutionalized roles, which the concept of social role connotes. Moreover, the norm of trust is also applicable to a wide range of social roles and relations, for example, government should be trustworthy. In short, the concept of role contributes very little, if anything at all, to explain the normative force and privilege of the five core ethical norms in Confucian ethics. The concept of role does not contribute much to explain the feeling of shame and dislike in Confucian ethics either.

To defend his concept of Confucian ethics as role-based ethics, Nuyen reduces all ethical rules to be role-based. Referring to Dorothy Emmet, he argues, 'Rules in general, and moral rules in particular, are based on social roles, which in turn are defined by social relations' (Nuyen, 2007, p. 323). Nuyen's argument cannot stand. There are rules that are not role-based, for example, those universal moral rules. Consider Kant's two categorical imperatives: the universality principle and the humanity principle. They are not role-based. Kantian humanity principle is evidentially consistent with Confucian ethics. Consider the norm of serving justice. It is not a rise of social roles. Even in Confucian ethics, the concept of role cannot give an adequate account of the normative force and privilege of the ethical norms of humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness and the feeling of shame.

Not surprisingly, in Confucian ethics, so far as the mutual relations of virtues, rules, and roles are concerned, none of them has ethical priority over others. They are all necessary to the creation and cultivation of a Confucian self. If we label Confucian ethics as virtue ethics, rule-based ethics, or role-based ethics, we do injustice to the other two dimensions of concern and emphasis of Confucian ethics.

V. Toward a True Confucian Self

In conclusion, the starting point, basis, and the focus of Confucian ethics, are the concept of self—it is the cultivation and realization of a Confucian self. Cultivation and realization of a Confucian self is first of all making and creating a Confucian selfhood—desirably, a *junzihood*, not merely to avail the self with virtues, to educate the self about rule-abiding, or nurturing the self with a sense of roles and obligation. To create and cultivate a Confucian selfhood or *junzihood*, one must investigate things, extend knowledge, make the will sincere, and rectify the mind. Above all, one must have a *zhixiang*, the overall ethical aspiration and commitment to be a given kind of self—that is, a given kind of Confucian *junzi* or *junzi*-self. One must have the *zhixiang* to become a person of full humanity. All the same, what is most unique of Confucian ethics is that it is a self-based ethics. And the most proper name for Confucian ethics is the ethics of the self or the ethics of sagely *junzi*-self.

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