

CHAPTER 12

Whither Confucius? Whither Philosophy?

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BERNARD WILLIAMS' *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* registers two important observations: first, that philosophy had better not aim to give an account of moral knowledge like that expected in scientific fields, since that would be futile and inappropriate; and second, that ethical philosophy is at best a particularly imprecise form of philosophizing. Moreover, as Otto Neurath noted, "we repair the ship while we are on the sea."¹ If these observations are true, as I believe they are, discussions about the current and possible future growth of Confucian studies, here and abroad, had better focus on the specifics of present-day practices and beliefs, leaving behind the antiquated and highly contentious notions of the Daotong 道統 ("Genealogy of the Way"). With this in mind, my chapter is divided into three parts: (1) a brief summary of observations made by others about contemporary life, which tend to highlight stark contrasts between contemporary life and life in the pre-industrial societies that gave rise to the early Confucian masters; (2) a summary of the values that we can *usefully* import from early Confucian teachings for adaptation to today's world, East or West, encapsulated in ten words; and (3) a brief consideration of motivation in light of a perceived need to make certain early Confucian teachings more appealing to those not conversant with traditions in early China (a group that would include many Chinese today). After all, the *Shiji* 史記 tells us that it was Mencius and Xunzi who once made Confucian teachings "sexy and appealing" (*runse* 潤色)² to the "talking heads" of the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., the implication being that it is hardly likely that Confucius would have become a household name or "icon" today had they not done so.

The present chapter, in short, attempts to consider this world, a world in

an admittedly perilous state, asking how we can move beyond the semi-fictive construct that we dub “Confucianism” and the scary calls for “harmony”³ to retain some of the best features of the Confucius that we find in the *Analects* and in the writings of his early followers.

Contemporary Life as Exceptional

A number of features sharply distinguish the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (“contemporary life”) from earlier, pre-industrial eras. Readers should note that I will not address many larger aspects of contemporary geopolitical life (e.g., proliferating nuclear arms and the resurgence of backward-looking binary models in politics) that philosophy can hardly hope to ameliorate.⁴ I confine my list below to the features of contemporary life that others have identified before me and that seem relevant to a discussion about ethics:

1. Contemporary life requires us, as a matter of course, to rely ever more substantially on relations and instruments of impersonal trust rather than those of personal trust (e.g., email, ATM machines, and Internet information).⁵
2. Contemporary life makes available to each educated person a radically expanded set of ethical beliefs, as compared with societies of even a century ago.⁶ Darwin may have sounded one of the first modernist voices when he wrote, “Let each man hope and believe what he can.” Certainly, I have read the complaints that students (especially those at elite universities) tend to be smart “sheep” lacking any moral compass,⁷ but I myself see more feasting at an ethical smorgasbord than “careerist zombies.” For example, I have Caucasian students who identify their “ultimate concern” as Israeli nationalism, Zen Buddhism, atheism, or Sufi-Catholicism.
3. Most of the technologies, slogans, and institutions of contemporary life promote isolation and competition between individual persons and groups. For instance, the destructive “clash of civilizations” rhetoric batters on ever-stronger ethnic and cultural identities, as well as deep divisions among sectarian religions. Meanwhile, physical isolation is ensured by a host of new technologies such as Facebook and headphones, and is then reinforced by the corporate calls for a more “self-reliant” and “flexible” globalized labor market—calls reiterated despite sharply *decreasing* socioeconomic mobility.⁸ In this our purportedly “ludic century,”⁹ in unwitting defiance of earlier sightings of *Homo ludens*, institutions of group solidarity seem to be fewer and weaker outside the far right, which likes megachurches and megastores. Union and professional memberships are sharply down, for instance. Up through the mid-twentieth century,

concern about neighbors' opinions exerted a strong influence on personal behavior, but there are growing indications that the "international elites" (a.k.a. the 1 percent, buttressed by the 10 percent who serve them) identify far more with the members of their own class than with compatriots living in close proximity.¹⁰

4. Apparently contemporary life is so sex-drenched that it curiously retains many of the anti-carnal sentiments inherited from Platonic idealism, Neoplatonism, and the Mediterranean monotheisms via Kantian and Marxist doctrines. What Roland Barthes, in reifying virtual life, called the new "civilization of the image"¹¹ fosters two sorts of conflicting conditions. The first can be called "carnal alienation," opposing the tactile experiences of love and friendship in-the-flesh, and the second an incapacity to enjoy being well and truly alone. For evidence of "being out of touch with the body," we have only to think of phone sex, pornography-as-substitute sex, computerized diagnosis and treatment of illnesses, or remote-controlled drone killings. With people never truly in the moment in time and space, "the touch screen replaces touch itself. The cosmos shrinks to a private monitor, each viewer a disembodied self unto itself."¹² At the same time, some experts (e.g., Sherry Turkle at MIT) trace the popularity of these demanding "always on, always on you" technologies directly to people's losing their capacity to be alone while increasing their desires for control.¹³ Certainly, I know people who cannot sit through a short meal without checking their iPhones repeatedly.
5. Ever faster computing is apparently changing the ways that people habitually interact with one another and analyze materials. As noted in Nicolas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, new scientific studies now suggest that heavy Internet usage actually reformats our neural pathways so as to decrease our attention spans. As of January 1, 2014, the average American attention span was eight seconds, or one second less than that of a goldfish.¹⁴ As a result, heavy Internet usage is correlated with a stronger desire for speedy results and efficient sound bites, which then work harder *against* our impulses to take the time we need for deep reflection or for rewarding long-term commitments.¹⁵ Authentic conversations and companionship (usually messy and invariably time-consuming) are the real losers in this race, as my undergraduates in a recent seminar on friendship remarked.¹⁶ One by-product of reduced social exchanges may be an increased risk of detaching ourselves from other people, and then regarding those outside our immediate circle "as less human."¹⁷
6. One early ethical concern was to ascertain the common good, and urge people to seek it.¹⁸ Contemporary life's turn to a relentless celebration of

“choice”—a concept mainly reduced to consumer choice—is misguided on at least two counts: it downplays the role of habit and unthinking responses in the construction of personal and social identities,¹⁹ and it also tends to reduce the exercise of personal freedom to consumer choice.²⁰ In addition, the well-known phenomenon called “hedonic adaptation” usually prevents consumer purchases from leading to feelings of long-term well-being.²¹ Therefore, the freedom to consume is not just partly to blame for the environmental degradation we see all around us; it may account as well for the growing dissatisfaction with the state of the world, a dissatisfaction steadily expressed via countless polls since the 1980s.²²

7. Nearly all philosophical thinking, in Euro-America and East Asia alike, is predicated on the pernicious fiction that people (i.e., people of privilege, those thought to truly “count”) are autonomous, rational individuals capable of identifying and reforming their own conditions by sheer acts of will (—the old Unmoved Mover resurfaces). The language of “human rights” consistently argues that all people and nations should aspire to realize this condition of legal autonomy,²³ despite the obvious fact that this construction ignores many, if not most, present-day realities. Neuroscientific findings on “free will”²⁴ problematize the very notion of “agency,”²⁵ for example. In addition, as Joseph E. Stiglitz has pointed out, “[Legal] justice has become a commodity, affordable only to the very few.”²⁶ For these and other reasons, more ethicists are turning to consider the roles played by the emotions, including self-regard, in shaping perceptions and modes of existence,²⁷ while querying the hard-and-fast dichotomies dividing the cognitive and evaluative impulses,²⁸ though their work seldom has an impact on the public discourse.

Taken together, such “acids of modernity” are having a predictably corrosive effect on human relations.²⁹ Amelioration may be possible, but what forms should it take? Many used to the daily specters, if not the actual experience of violence,³⁰ suspect that the highest present good may simply be to be left alone, in the company of family and friends, to live at peace.³¹ But the documentary film *Citizen Four* should remind us that we are not left alone; privacy is dead. And what is it about contemporary life that has left us begging for a mere non-aggression pact when humanity as *Homo faber* is capable of so much more?³²

These are ethical questions not amenable to quick or certain solutions. There are precedents, however, as Bernard Williams remarked, for treating a philosophical account “as a destination not a route.”³³ We might benefit from a few signposts rather than the imposition of extra rules, since all of us are finite, embodied, and historically situated agents, whose rational faculties employed in cost-benefit analyses seldom offer much guidance, given how frequently we

act on auto-pilot, operate purely by habit, and try to maneuver through a web of obligations ringed round with emotions. I will argue below that the Ancients have provided us with a series of signposts in the form of “practical wisdom.”

The Utility of the Ancients

For some time now, I have been thoroughly convinced that the Ancients have things to teach about what it means to be human, in large part because they inhabited a world that was less ruled by arid abstractions and also more cognizant of the need to depend upon long-term personal exchanges and commitments. They “saw things differently than we do—or rather, they *saw different things*,” as one historian of early Rome put it.³⁴ I like to cite Bernard Williams’ *Shame and Necessity* in this connection, where Williams is talking of the Ancient Greeks instead of the early Chinese thinkers:

The ethical thought...[of these early thinkers discussed here] was not only different from most modern thought, particularly modern thought influenced by Christianity; it was also *in much better shape*...since this system of ideas basically lacks the concept of morality altogether, in the sense of *a class of reasons or demands which are vitally different from other kinds of reason or demand*.... Relatedly,...the questions of how one’s relations to others are to be regulated, both in the context of society and more privately, are not detached from questions about the kind of life it is worth living....³⁵

Needless to say, the erection of strict barriers between moral and practical reasons in contemporary discourse, far from elevating the work of universities and ethicists, has made it that much easier to dismiss careful investigation into the human condition as either hopelessly “reality-based” (and hence lacking in moral fire or political swagger)³⁶ or the sorry product of “ivory tower” idealists who couldn’t think their way out of a paper bag in real life. When citing Williams, I often recall Herbert Fingarette’s first paragraph in his classic *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*:

Increasingly, I have become convinced that Confucius can be a teacher to us today—a major teacher, not one who merely gives us a slightly exotic perspective on the ideas already current. He tells us things not being said elsewhere; things needing to be said. He has a new lesson to teach.³⁷

History and philosophy should let the dead live again on their own terms, as much as possible, so that we moderns may benefit from better acquaintance

with unfamiliar thoughts.³⁸ But there are major flaws with Greek thought and its Western successors, especially those of the Kantian and neo-Kantian sort. Doubtless we can all name features of earlier societies that we would prefer not to emulate: the enslavement of human beings, the casual oppression of women and homosexuals, the resort to superstition, and so on.³⁹ More subtle is the propensity of Greek and later Western thought to be “incurably egoistic” (i.e., narrowly preoccupied with the inner life of the presumed self).⁴⁰ Furthermore, most Western philosophy identifies two main motivations for action (the pursuit of pleasure and the grim acceptance of duty), in the rather naive belief that moving beyond perceived self-interest will make it much easier to reconcile self and society.⁴¹ A close comparison of early Greek with early Chinese thought illustrates the virtues of the Chinese thinkers: they are not “incurably egoistic”; they stipulate far less about the world and its inhabitants, they are inclined to distrust arid abstractions claiming universal applicability,⁴² and ultimately, in elevating the Middle Way, they require less of the person while nonetheless upholding strict standards for “civilized” conduct. If philosophy is the therapeutic examination of belief and action (in the old sense),⁴³ then greater resort to early Chinese modes of thinking may well be a salutary exercise for all of us.

Please understand: I am no wild-eyed romantic railing against a loss of community or tradition, content to shill for Confucian learning in the hopes that blind adherence to older forms will miraculously usher in a “return” to an idealized past that never existed.⁴⁴ Rather I am a hardheaded historian who is acutely aware of the dangerous propensity to retroject anachronisms into presentist readings of history.⁴⁵ But I confess that cataloging a huge range of invented traditions has led me to wonder whether contemporary life might not profit from the selective reinvention of a few traditions designed to counter the motley (when not positively murderous) traditions we have inherited. Are we not enjoined, as ethical people of some imagination, to “warm up the old” (*wen gu* 溫故)? Our job is to ask not only “How are we to live?” (that being, of course, the question posed by Socrates and Confucius), but also “How are we to live so as to be more alive?”⁴⁶ Like the Ancients whom I study, I seek a design of life (not wholly “rational”) that would reduce the power of fortune and fate through maximal appreciation for hard work in service of communal goods, the sort of life that would help myself and others from being “enslaved by things.”⁴⁷

Older wisdom texts are in general agreement that an ethical life begins with moving beyond narrow self-interest. As one contemporary thinker summarizes it:

Imagine that each of us lives at the center of a set of concentric circles, the nearest being our own self, the furthest being the entire universe of living creatures. The task of our moral development is to move the circles pro-

gressively closer to the center, so that we regard our parents and children like ourselves, our other relatives like our parents, and strangers like our relatives.⁴⁸

Noting that “we are least like anything else in the world when we do not treat each other like physical objects, as animals, or even as sub-human creatures to be driven, threatened, forced, maneuvered,” Fingarette skillfully argues that we are conversely most sublimely and supremely human whenever we fuse personal presence to “(learned) ceremonial skill,” making ceremonial acts “the primary, irreducible events” constituting our memorable experiences.

In that spirit, I volunteer two early slogans as signposts for contemporary life, slogans associated with the early Confucian teachings and with the *Zhuangzi*, a work in critical engagement with those same teachings. The two signposts are “Know what is enough” (*zhi zu* 知足) and “Treat [others] as honored guests” (*ru jian da bin* 如見大賓). The first slogan is typically (mis)labeled as Daoist, since it occurs in both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*; however, the *Xunzi*, the *Zhouli*, and the *Kongcongzi* use the exact same phrase in the same way, so this two-character phrase in classical Chinese is better characterized as prevailing “wisdom talk.”⁴⁹ Likewise, the second slogan, best known from *Analects* 12.2, does not belong solely to any particular group. In several pre-Han and Han texts, including the *Lunheng* 論衡, exemplary figures are said to epitomize this or closely allied notions, this being the best possible way to “pay due heed to and communicate with others” (*jing tong ren* 敬通人), based on their knowledge of past and present social practices.⁵⁰ Helpfully, the second slogan is paired with a parallel injunction in the same *Analects* passage; the injunction equally enjoins members of the governing elite to demonstrate their care for “those below”: “Employ the people [as carefully] as if officiating at a solemn sacrifice” (*shi min ru cheng da ji* 使民如承大祭).⁵¹ Rough equivalents for these slogans could be found, no doubt, in many different parts of the world in their distinctive “wisdom books,” suggesting that they can shed a kind of “global radiance,” provoking deeper reflection,⁵² without getting hopelessly mired in arguments over the so-called “universal principles” masking neoliberal and statist agendas.

“Learning by subtraction” (as in “Know what is enough”) can serve citizens of postmodern societies touting “choice” as the highest freedom.⁵³ For if “it is the vice of the vulgar mind to be thrilled by bigness,” contemporary society is stupendously vulgar. Whether we would address environmental degradation and global warming or protest the serene self-righteousness displayed by our most flagrantly corrupt organizations and leaders,⁵⁴ the mere repetition of this mantra may create a distaste for “more is better” and “shop ’til you drop.” The same phrase, meanwhile, undercuts the emerging world of virtual reality “rife with delusions of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence,”⁵⁵ insofar as it

reminds us to identify our real needs as human beings, among them the need to be loved and physically touched and to maintain a measure of dignity.

As the advantages of “Know what is enough” seem unmistakable, let me tarry a bit longer on the second slogan, which urges us to treat others as honored guests, a slogan redolent with antique notions of hospitality and sanctuary. One line after another of the *Analects* reiterates some variation on this set of injunctions, which leads me to see this extension of exquisite courtesies to the lowly among us as the central task for any would-be Confucian,⁵⁶ then or now. We have all heard of the Golden Rule, but Confucius asks both less and more of us here.⁵⁷ On the one hand, we are not expected to love others as ourselves (something that may be quite impossible for those not graced with special gifts). On the other, we are enjoined to consider what words and gestures we find humiliating, demeaning, and condescending, and then avoid using those words and gestures with others. More pro-actively, we are instructed to treat others with the same exquisite courtesy we would render recognized dignitaries. This standard asks us not only to meet, but also to anticipate the needs of others, as we would happily do for important guests due to visit. It requires recurrently asking others what they would prefer, rather than presuming what they deserve and merit. When successful, this highly ritualized performance conveys via complex gestures a temporary self-effacement meant to honor the engrossing importance of another; thus it balances an acute awareness of one’s own person in relation to the visitor(s) with a willing displacement of conscious focus on oneself.⁵⁸ It moreover asks us to regard those who are in our power as if they were a higher power, without conceding to worldly powers any power to harm ourselves or others.

But let us not ignore the flipside: to receive a dignitary well places the host in the gratifying role of the person conferring hospitality. The miracle is that somehow the great dignity residing in the one can be shared with another, with no diminution to either party. For hospitality given and acknowledged valorizes both sides’ implicit claims to worth.⁵⁹

Unless the host is blessed with stupendous luck, however, easy and affable treatment of the guest presupposes the host’s prior acculturation to a range of enlivening sociable exchanges. Long before the guest arrives, she must, *as if by instinct*, have learned the art of “reading” people, even strangers. And there is more: she must evince a readiness to change course when advisable, in a kind of free-form, improvisational fugue or dance.⁶⁰ As with any art form, the course of training for a virtuoso performance is long and arduous; after all, by the moral mandate, the host does nothing less than open herself to fully experiencing the presence of another person (followed by another and another), equipped with the social insights and practices culled over time.⁶¹ The ultimate goal: a kind of fluency that lends the mundane a sort of magic, thereby reacquainting us

with the ordinary mysteries of life. Yet no part of this set of injunctions dictates a particular religious, philosophical, or patriotic creed about this life or the next; every part of it hearkens to local practices and individual idiosyncrasies.⁶² Even to pose the question “what is enough?” is, like acting hospitably, to firmly refuse to subscribe to one or more universal rules, in that suitable adjustments will continually have to be made to assess “what is enough” and “goodly” under changing circumstances. Most importantly, perhaps, learning to aim for this set of injunctions moves us firmly away from the “main aspects of modern identity—that is, liberty, autonomy, . . . and . . . the subject’s self-positioning or rational self-determination.”⁶³

There is no reliable way to calculate the long-term consequences of our actions, however well intended, nor can reason, custom, or experience resolve many puzzles of human existence.⁶⁴ I am willing to live with the Mystery.⁶⁵ Yet it is best to be as precise as possible when we talk, and speaking of “dignity” rather than “justice” seems a vast improvement, since no two figures in my readings in philosophy and history have ever arrived at a shared notion of justice. Some equate “justice” with utilitarianism and others with communitarianism, libertarianism, or God’s will.⁶⁶ As one smart philosopher put it: “Justice is inescapably judgmental . . . an open invitation to narrow, intolerant moralisms.”⁶⁷ By contrast, we all have a fairly good sense of what constitutes the sort of treatment we would accord dignitaries, those deemed to have dignity. Dignity is hard to make into an abstract quality, and therein lies its attraction for me as a grounding for life. I note in this connection that Wittgenstein’s description of the ethical/religious is “a sense that we are absolutely safe.”⁶⁸ Having members of a community preserve our human dignity—that’s as close to paradise on earth as we are likely to get.

The legends about Confucius would have us understand that Confucius goes to his death believing himself a miserable failure, but ultimately he is hailed as an uncrowned king (and in some texts a virtual god), for his remarkable ability to turn personal misfortunes into blessings for others. If the main thrust of the Confucian *Analects* throughout remains the human imperative to accord others the same dose of dignity that we would gladly impart to an honored guest, the life of Confucius suggests that we may sometimes have to set aside our physical comforts and our most cherished mental constructs in order to clear a space wherein we may better observe the needs of others. As the *Analects* makes plain, we must not only adopt this way of operating in the world but make it a habit before we can possibly see any benefits accruing from this ritualized mode of operation. We must try it as an act of faith, in other words. The promise is that we are then likely to learn to feel at home in our own skins in our daily rounds. We may then derive pleasure (*le 樂*) from living in the simplest circumstances (*Analects* 6.11, 7.16), from seeking wisdom and acting compassionately (6.23),

and from visits paid by friends and peers (1.1), all in the serene confidence that “to find it [this way] a pleasure is better than to know it or prefer it” (6.20), since secure “pleasure need not be licentious or [to] go to excess” (3.20). The early Confucian masters assure us that greater human happiness is to be found in connecting, communicating, and sharing than in gaining or asserting power over others. In doing so, they supply models for continual engagement with the world, rather than urging a hasty retreat from it.

I was deeply moved when reading one op-ed writer’s recent summation of her “thought processes” in her younger days:

You do things you regret or don’t understand and then you make other choices because life keeps going forward. Or you do something out of love and then, through biology or accident, it goes inexplicably wrong, and you do what you can to cope. Or you do whatever you do, however you do it, for whatever reasons, because that’s your experience.⁶⁹

Doubtless, some people will deplore the lack of self-knowledge expressed here, but to me, at any rate, this looks a lot like life, and not even a particularly bad or unreflective sort of life. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf commented: “Life for both sexes... is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle”; “it calls for gigantic courage and strength,” yet we usually go around “snubbed, slapped, lectured, and exhorted.” To maintain courage in the face of this muddle, the key thing may be just to keep the image of our common (if failed) humanity front and center before us, refusing to go to a place where we grow numb.⁷⁰ To that end, I read and reread this set of questions posed in early China:

In our world, is there such a thing as supreme pleasure or is there not? Is there something that may be used to make ourselves more alive or not?⁷¹ In the present times, how are we to act? How are we to make a basis? ... What are we to take pleasure in and what are we to deplore?⁷²

This set of questions reminds us that a good life must bespeak plenitude (a “richness”), that boils down less to material resources and more to a life open to encounter new experiences every single day, thanks to a more capacious regard for the world.

Moral philosophy invites a second look at the early Chinese thinkers, who go beyond a few guideposts to speak of the sorts of human institutions that promote the “most alive” forms of being and acting, producing pleasures great and small. If we are looking for something that may help us find our way around, everyday experience usually suffices to reveal a startling amount of information that we need to know about ourselves and the world we inhabit, if we are to

act wisely and well, even if that information is not liable to objective proof.⁷³ And, as a recent psychology experiment has shown, the only sure indicator of what we ourselves will end up doing in a particular moral dilemma is what we presume others in our community would do in precisely the same situation.⁷⁴ In short, if I wish to act well, I must conceive of the possibility that others will act well and then act upon that conception. (This is precisely what one Chinese Classic, the *Shujing* 書經 or *Documents*, advises.) But that is not all: I must know the members of my community well enough to be able to visualize what actions others might take in similar situations. Should I manage that, it should be less difficult to conceive of the potential benefits—intangible and unseen, as well as tangible—of cooperating with others, while conceding, too, that occasional feeling of being deceived or disappointed in others. That concession may be reckoned a small price to pay for the possibility of transfiguration, a sort of “rent” for living fully,⁷⁵ so that one is primed (“heartened” if you will) to embrace the rigors of contemporary life.

Confucian Teachings and Their Appeal

Confidence in our ability to improve contemporary conditions is half the battle. But, as Bernard Williams notes, “Confidence [in an ethical decision]... is basically a social phenomenon.” He means, in general, that confidence relies on social confirmation; a society’s support for a person’s attitude tends to make him or her more conscious of holding certain convictions. Williams continues:

Philosophy cannot tell us how to bring it [confidence in an ethical conviction] about. It is a social and psychological question what kinds of institutions, upbringing, and public discourse help to foster it.⁷⁶

Williams may be right, but he then concludes—quite wrongly, I feel—that the business of philosophy is not to consider social and psychological questions, and hence not to think further about institutions. Apparently, he wishes for philosophy today to preserve or even harden its current conventional academic boundaries. I dearly wish, in return, to ask him why, for it seems to me that philosophy has been proposing social and psychological institutions for millennia now, at least since Plato and Confucius. How could an abnegation of our responsibility to plan for our own and future generations possibly lead to better philosophy? Surely the job of philosophy is to map, then ruminate upon, the many ways that human beings have sought to be human.

So, *pace* Williams, I feel we should be asking, “What mix of motives, instrumental and non-instrumental, is most likely to propel people to perform their tasks constructively and well, without summoning inadvertent disasters?”

A recent set of studies suggests that efforts to promote constructive activities should focus on the meaning and potential impact of these initiatives, rather than on their connection with conventional markers of “success,” if we are to ensure good and lasting outcomes.⁷⁷ Xunzi made the same point centuries ago, in the essay “On Ritual,”⁷⁸ where he insisted that ritual shapes and channels people’s disparate longings within a larger symbolic system that creates meaning. Yet too many self-styled Confucians today have forgotten what both Mencius and Xunzi knew: that people living on the margin of subsistence cannot be expected to be good candidates for moral development, and people rightly seek satisfaction in their social relations and in their work.

Were I in a position of power, such attention to economic and environmental conditions would require me to consider giving out cash grants to the poor, so as to ensure their minimum standard of living. Certainly this would be cheaper than our current patchwork of “social safety nets”—and nineteen major studies agree: only a very small proportion of the poor will waste the money (especially if women are the targeted recipients). If we let the poor “eat cash,” then alcohol and tobacco consumption falls or stays the same, while drug counseling and anger management programs fare better. Why? People need food security if they are to feel that they merit other people’s warm regard.⁷⁹ And, as Mencius bluntly puts it, “It is not worth the trouble talking to a man who has no respect for himself...or confidence in himself” (4A1).⁸⁰

Mencius and Xunzi made Confucian teachings more glossy and appealing to a wide range of thinkers in a second way: both of these thinkers went far beyond the earlier teachings ascribed to Confucius to elaborate the pleasures that rest upon establishing a secure place in close communities. Book 1 of the *Mencius* details the conversation between Mencius and King Hui of Liang, where the King is asked to conceive of the pleasures that will accrue once he rests secure in the allegiance of his own subjects. A lesser moralist might have been inclined to score points by labeling the desires of this powerful man as flaws, faults, weaknesses, and shortcomings (*ji* 疾). Mencius tries quite another tactic: he focuses upon the common human desire to be held in high esteem, insisting that “all people share the same desire to be exalted,” to be held in high regard in one’s own estimation and in that of others. Nonetheless people often fail to appreciate the fact that every person has the wherewithal within the self to be exalted (6A17).⁸¹ But so long as the person believes himself to be capable of acting morally, Mencius says, this basic compulsion to be admired can motivate constructive social action. So whenever power-holders seem unaware of their potential to become authoritative figures, they are to be given better teachers (6A9).⁸² Reasoning in much the same way, Xunzi famously articulates the view that the fundamental human desires are not obstructions to morality, but rather the bedrock of morality.⁸³ Far from endorsing the popular slogans

“reduce desires” (*shao yu* 少欲) or “eliminate desires” (*wu yu* 無欲), Xunzi argues that (a) desires are what people have, (b) desires make the world go around, and (c) wise policy-makers use these two facts to devise better institutions of governance and compelling models of cultivation (i.e., self-governance). These, in turn, ultimately promote the satisfaction of all bodies (and so the body politic itself), with the result that the imperial subjects eagerly learn to “manage their lives and their means of living” (*zhi sheng chan* 治生產).⁸⁴

In the expansive view informed by Mencius and Xunzi, good governments utilize any and all methods that make it markedly easier to rule well—wanting good governance to be as easy as the proverbial “reeling in like skeins of silk,” as natural as “the spokes of a wheel hub converging on the hub.” The writings ascribed to Mencius and Xunzi, not coincidentally, share an unrelenting focus on institutional matters, with both thinkers assuming that personal morality, with rare exceptions, can never be sustained for long in the absence of institutional props. Sumptuary regulations and regular community rituals (e.g., community banquets and well-defined marriage and mourning practices) are but two of the institutions they pushed to encourage the development of the basic sociable habits upon which super-civilization is to be built. I doubt that the United States will ever establish anything like sumptuary regulations, but that kind of willingness to countenance powerful destructive behavior may feed the Gordon Gekkos of this world.⁸⁵ So it is well worth asking, “What features of our current tax code truly benefit society by inducing real contributions to it?”⁸⁶ Put another way, what message does it send to society-at-large when Scientology, Princeton University, and charities set up for cats all get equal tax deductions under our code?

The early classicists and Confucians in China showed exceptional clarity in three areas: they insisted that economic security is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for building good character;⁸⁷ they carefully delineated the pleasures to be had from living in more secure communities, and they urged reward structures to be put in place so as to encourage people to make more constructive contributions to their neighbors and peers, not to mention future generations. If the early Chinese thinkers exhibited such practical wisdom millennia ago, then one may well ask, “Why is it that Chinese thought and Chinese institutions have received such unrelentingly bad press in modern times?” Anthropologist Jack Goody offers a forceful analysis in his recent book *The Theft of History*.⁸⁸ According to Goody, long ago, in colonial days, Northern Europe and the United States gained the upper hand in discussions about human development, thanks to the master narrative of “Western civilization” (a shape-shifting siren, if ever there was one), so much so that, regardless of whether the discourse is Orientalizing or self-Orientalizing,⁸⁹ Euro-America is now credited with playing the central role in the evolution of all manner of desirable goods, ranging

from “democracy” and “humanism” to, most astonishingly, “antiquity” itself. Consequently there is little left for China to claim but perceived “lacks” or “failures.” Then, too, the spectacularly bad behavior of certain Chinese elites may have deterred those unfamiliar with Confucian ideas from undertaking quiet study of the good advice proffered by wise men long ago in China. That said, no time or place is ever free of cheats and sycophants and connivers.

In any case, that would be a discussion for another day. I cannot do better than end on a poem by a Han dynasty poet, Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (77–142 C.E.), that encapsulates some of the foregoing themes in a supremely artful way:

One must not speak of others' faults,
 Nor of one's own strengths.
 If you offer someone something, forget it later on.
 If someone offers you something, never forget it!
 A reputation is not worth envying in another.
 Only *ren* (humankindness) should become your rule and frame,
 Keep your person in the shadows, and then act.
 Then how can slander and talk ever really harm you? ...
 So long as all your actions be as constant as the day is long,
 You will find yourself forever sweetly perfumed.

無道人之短。無說己之長
 施人慎勿念。受施慎勿忘
 世譽不足慕。唯仁為紀綱。
 隱身而後動。謗議庸何傷？...
 行之苟有恆。久久自芬芳。

Notes

This chapter is dedicated to Henry Rosemont, Jr., who can say everything better.

1. Otto Neurath, cited in Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 113.

2. *Shiji* 121.3116.

3. Repeated calls for “harmony” in today’s world often mean little more than “forced ethnic assimilation” and “obedience to the powers-that-be.” An early Qing dynasty exchange suggests that this (mis)use of “harmony” is long-standing. Dorgon in 1645 defined “harmony” as “acting in concert to serve the ruling house and country (*guojia* 國家) and the people,” as against “acting in concert to serve themselves, their families, or their selfish desires,” which is said to be “conspiring.” See Harry Miller, *State versus Gentry in Early Qing Dynasty China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 25. Rosemont and Ames have insisted, quite rightly, on the importance of remonstrance functions in the early Confucian classics, including the *Xiaojing*.

4. A reduction of potential outcomes seems to be on offer with respect to the systems for contemporary politics and economics. In politics, for example, there have been put forward two main models for future emulation: (a) the Northern European “world of postmodern statehood,” where roughly equal partners tend to tend their own gardens in considerable smugness, and (b) the model which says that only worlds dominated by a single superpower can ever enforce the peace. As Robert Kagan’s 2000 essay “Power and Weakness” suggests, these two views have prestigious pedigrees, as they hearken back to Immanuel Kant and Thomas Hobbes. Incredibly, to my mind, the Northern European powers are increasingly adopting the American model in their cultural and political institutions.

5. For this distinction, see Steven Johnstone, *A History of Trust in Ancient Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

6. Stephen Angle, *Human Rights and Chinese Thought: A Cross-cultural Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

7. William Deresiewicz, *The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Free Press, 2014) (see *New York Times*, September 20, Book Review, p. C1, for a review of this book). Deresiewicz describes the students he knew at Yale as trapped “in a bubble of privilege, heading meekly in the same direction, great at what they’re doing but with no idea why they’re doing it” (p. 3).

8. For the corporate origins of the “self-reliance” movements, designed to absolve corporations from many responsibilities toward their employees, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009). “Flexible” globalized markets are but another name for outsourcing and downsizing, which increase anxiety among most workers.

9. Eric Zimmerman of New York University has called this “the ludic century” (Eric Zimmerman, “Manifesto for a Ludic Century,” online at http://ericzimmerman.com/files/texts/Manifesto_for_a_Ludic_Century.pdf). See Chris Suellentrop, “Can Video Games Survive?” *New York Times*, October 26, 2014, Sunday Review, p. 1. For *Homo ludens*, see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949).

10. The first time I saw this “unmooring” discussed was in 1990, in Anthony D. King’s *Global Cities: Post-imperialism and the Internationalization of London* (London: Routledge, 1990). Counter-evidence may come from Erez Yoeli, Moshe Hoffman, and David Rand, “How to Prevent Summer Blackouts,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2014, Opinion Pages, p. A19, which concludes, “Humans have faced public-good quandaries since the dawn of time, and we’ve developed since the dawn of time, and we’ve developed a powerful force to deal with them: our reputation in society.”

11. See Barthes’ essay in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980).

12. Richard Kearney (Boston College), “Losing Our Touch,” in *New York Times*, “Opinionator,” August 30, 2014.

13. Sherry Turkle (interview), “The Networked Primate,” in “Special Evolution Issue: Humanity’s Journey,” *Scientific American* 311, no. 4 (September 2014): 82–85. This past summer’s comedy hit titled “Her” (director Spike Jonze) plays with such fears, insofar as it depicts a man falling in love with his own operating system, which he nicknames “Saman-

tha”; before long, however, the male lead becomes insanely jealous because he discovers that his virtual lover is flirting with tens of thousands of other subscribers. Susannah Elm, my colleague at Berkeley, clearly struck a nerve in Germany when she remarked that master-slave relations in the Roman empire were perhaps more positive than her relation with her iPhone (she was interviewed by *Frankfurter Allgemeine* and four other newspapers).

14. See the National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine, report of January 1, 2014, which also reports a sharp decrease from the year 2000 (from an average of twelve seconds to eight). “Attention span” is the amount of time concentrated on a task without becoming distracted. Most educators and psychologists agree that the ability to focus attention on a task is crucial for the achievement of one’s goals. Nicholas Carr, in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), speaks of the Internet “remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory,” destroying our powers of concentration. “We don’t see the forest when we search the Web,” he writes. “We don’t even see the trees. We see twigs and leaves” (p. 91). A 2008 study, reviewing 34 million academic articles published between 1945 and 2005, concluded that while the digitization of journals made it far easier to find this information, it produced a narrowing of citations, with scholars relying much more heavily on recent publications.

15. Carr, *The Shallows*, *passim*.

16. Evolutionarily, *Homo sapiens*, we are told, developed a competitive advantage due to its special capacity for engaging in the figurative “mind reading” of another person’s thoughts and engagement in shared tasks, where the engagements required memory, touch, speech, and sight. See Gary Stix, “The ‘It’ Factor,” in “Special Evolution Issue: Humanity’s Journey,” *Scientific American* 311, no. 4 (September 2014): 72–79.

17. Aaron Ben-Ze’ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 259–260.

18. See Hans Sluga, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

19. Xunzi was a genius at explaining this role, but so is Herbert Fingarette in his *Self-Deception* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969, 2000); cf. Anaïs Nin, “We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are” (*Seduction of the Minotaur* [Chicago: Swallow Press, 1961], p. 124), and Epictetus, “People are not moved by things, but the views which they take of them.”

20. I recommend Adam Phillips, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013). A review of that book by Sheila Heti (*New York Times*, January 20, 2103, Book Review, p. 12) says this: “We live in an age in which many of us no longer feel rooted in traditional systems of belief[, and] we know we are nothing special—‘on a par with ants and daffodils’—and so seek our satisfaction in the perpetual present of consumer capitalism, in which ‘knowing ourselves’ means ‘simply knowing what we have to have.’”

21. Generally speaking, hedonic adaptation involves a happiness “set point,” whereby humans maintain a constant level of happiness throughout their lives, despite events that occur in their environment. The process of hedonic adaptation is often conceptualized as a treadmill or thermostat, since one must consciously or mechanically work to maintain a certain level of happiness beyond a certain “set point.”

22. “[T]he pursuit of happiness of modern (consumer) society is [one where]... the Utopian project is reduced in scale to the *individual*, into a modern mode of self-building aiming at completion within the boundaries of one’s own self and one’s own life,” with “[consumer] goods as the building bricks” (Pasi Falk, *The Consuming Body* [London: Sage, 1994], p. 30). Some have called this contemporary Utopian project “consumutopia.” See, e.g., Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Brian J. McVeigh, “‘Consumutopia’ versus ‘Control’ in Japan,” *Journal of Material Culture* 5, no. 2 (1990): 225–245.

23. Henry Rosemont, Jr., has led the way here in consideration of the enormous gap between the discourse of rights in China and in Euro-America. See, e.g., “Human Rights: A Bill of Worries,” in *Confucianism and Human Rights*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). See his recent monograph, *Against Individualism: A Confucian Rethinking of Morality, Politics, Family, and Religion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

24. E.g., Michael Gazzaniga (University of California–Santa Barbara) argues, “Social constructs like good judgment and free will are even further removed, and trying to define them in terms of biological processes is, in the end, a fool’s game.” See “Decoding the Brain’s Cacophony,” *New York Times*, November 3, 2011; John Tierney, “Do You Have Free Will? It’s the Only Choice,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2011; Kerri Smith, “Neuroscience vs. Philosophy: Taking Aim at Free Will,” *Nature* 477 (August 2011): 23–25.

25. Apparently, we smell differently and appreciate smells differently, depending upon our political orientations. See Arthur C. Brooks, “Smelling Liberal, Thinking Conservative,” *New York Times*, October 5, 2014, Sunday Review, p. 5.

26. Joseph E. Stiglitz, “Is Inequality Inevitable?” *New York Times*, June 29, 2014, Sunday Review, p. 7; also Martha Bergmark (Executive Director, Voices for Civil Justice), *New York Times*, July 4, 2014, Opinion Pages response.

27. As Western society becomes more individualistic, a successful life has come to be equated with having high self-esteem, but paradoxically, people with high self-esteem tend to be less effective as social agents, since people don’t really like self-enhancers very much (Steven J. Heine et al., “Is There a Universal Need for Positive Self-regard,” *Psychological Review* 106, no. 4 [October 1991]: 766–794).

28. Memory does not correspond to a single brain site or function; it is a complex group of learning systems. For a review of such ideas, one may consult Ben-Ze’ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions*, esp. chaps. 2, 3, 6 (the last on “rationality” vs. “functionality”). Martha Nussbaum, among others, has been arguing for the inseparability of the emotions from reasoning. See, for example, her *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), which argues for the complex intelligence of emotions.

29. The phrase was originally that of Walter Lippmann, but it has been widely adopted in theological studies, including *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 8, *World Christianities c. 1815–c. 1914*, and vol. 9, *World Christianities c. 1914–c. 2000*.

30. See, e.g., <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/pi/advocacy/2008/kunkel-tv.aspx>, for the assertion that watching violence on TV, at the movies, or in video games affects us as deeply as violence in the flesh.

31. One woman explained to Sherry Turkle (Turkle, "The Networked Primate," p. 84) why she preferred a robot boyfriend to a real one: "Look, I just want civility in the house. I just want something that will make me feel not alone."

32. For *Homo faber*, see Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures, and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), which is part of a larger project.

33. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 55. Cf. Iris Murdoch, in her 1967 lecture "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts": "Ethics should not be merely an analysis of ordinary mediocre conduct; it should be a hypothesis about good conduct and about how this can be achieved," in Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 1970, 1971), p. 76.

34. Daryn Lehoux, *What Did the Romans Know? An Inquiry into Science and World-making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 8.

35. Adapted from Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 20, 251 (italics mine). Williams speaks of the Ancient Greeks; I of those thinkers (nearly all of whom were policy advisors at court) writing in classical Chinese.

36. The sneering quotation condemning the Third Estate as a "reality-based community" (now widely attributed to Karl Rove) first appeared in an October 17, 2004 issue of the *New York Times*. The quotation juxtaposed people who rely upon faith, assumption, or ideology and those who naively "believe that solutions emerge from judicious study of discernible reality." Bush (or Rove?) reportedly continued, "That's not the way the world really works anymore.... We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality."

37. Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper/Torchbooks, 1972), p. vii.

38. Samuel Moyn speaks of the "ethical value of the past," and also of "an ethical command to respect its alterity.... The past is not simply a mirror for our own self-regard" (Samuel Moyn, *Human Rights and the Uses of History* [London: Verso, 2014], p. xii). Arnaldo Momigliano posited another distinction, whereby the antiquarian gathers details to accumulate a store of facts, whereas the historian looks for patterns. By his definition, I would prefer to be a historian than an antiquarian. See his "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, no. 3/4 (1950): 285–315.

39. Williams' *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* shows that a position is idealist if what is ontologically primary in the position is something abstract. As a trained historian, I am more accustomed to the idea that truth is contingent and change constant. From the outside, philosophy seems much more stable in its objects of contemplation and models of inquiry. I have argued at some length elsewhere that the charge that "Confucians oppressed women" is muddle-headed.

40. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, pp. 15, 49. These broad generalizations ignore the huge gaps between Plato and Aristotle, just to name two classical Greek philosophers, which Williams and other classicists acknowledge. See Kearney, "Losing Our Touch," for a listing of some of these gaps.

41. One of the strengths of Kongzi in the *Analects* is that he allows that this is so only in some cases, not all.

42. Here I part company with Hans-Georg Moeller, whose book *The Moral Fool: A*

Case for Amorality (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), passim, enjoins us to eschew universal injunctions universally, which is a logical contradiction in terms.

43. Leroy S. Rouser, ed., *The Longing for Home* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), p. 5. Cf. Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

44. Sarah Hoagland says that “care ethicists” tend to underplay self-regard, thereby helping to maintain the existence of oppressive institutions; and besides, the reciprocity they ascribe to warm social relations is much overrated. See Sarah Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics* (Palo Alto, CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988) and “Some Thoughts about Caring,” in *Feminist Ethics*, ed. Claudia Card (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991). What I am discussing is not exactly “reciprocity,” but rather what actions may lead to a better outcome.

45. Cited in Moyn, *Human Rights and the Uses of History*, p. xi.

46. See the opening lines of the “Zhi le” 至樂 chapter in the *Zhuangzi*.

47. On enslavement by things, no reading can surpass that of the *Xunzi* or chapter 129 of the *Shiji*. Sima Qian is particularly clear on the subject of “wage slavery,” and the early Chinese thinkers generally regard “enslavement by things” to be harmful to a person’s health and community. That hard work is “the epicenter of a good life” is suggested by the University of Michigan’s Panel Study of Income Dynamics, which polls thousands of American families. See Arthur C. Brooks, “The Father’s Example,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2014, Opinion Pages, p. A25.

48. Ben-Ze’ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions*, p. 261. Note, too, that the foregoing ideal does not map neatly onto the “cascading logic of human rights” outlined by Lynn Hunt in her book *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2007).

49. See *Xunzi*, chapter 18, “Zhenglun” 正論; *Kongcongzi*, chapter 7, “Juwei” 居衛; and *Zhouli*, chapter 2, “Da Situ” 大司徒. Cf. *Laozi*, sections 33, 44, 46, and *Zhuangzi*, chapter 18, “Rang Wang” 讓王.

50. See *Lunheng*, pian 38, “Bie Tong” 別通; please note that I translate *jing* as “pay due heed to,” following the Han dynasty *Shangshu* commentaries. Cf. *Hanshu* 47, where a successful Overseer of the Han Capital invites potential candidates to office, treating them with the same ceremony accorded dignitaries (*jin jian ru bin li* 進見如賓禮). *Zuozhuan*, “Lord Xi,” year 33, defines “respect” and “due attention” (*jing* 敬) as *xiang dai ru bin* 相待如賓, as does the *Guoyu*, “Jin Yu,” 4.53. This line is very much paired with *shi min ru da ji* 使民如大祭.

51. *Huainanzi* 19, “Xiuwu Xun” 脩務訓, has the sage-ruler Yao “employing the people as if they were sons and disciples” (much the same idea); *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 8.1 has the Ancients employing the people as if they were “on loan.”

52. Here I am mindful of Arthur Waley’s remark that the Confucius of the *Analects* “contrived to endow compromise [i.e., the Middle Way] with an emotional glamour.” See Arthur Waley, trans. and annot., *The Analects of Confucius* (London: George Allen and Unwin; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, n.d.), p. 37. I wonder if these two slogans do not have the same potential. On the propensity for major thinkers to be radical, however, see Lee Yearley, “The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-tzu,” in *Experimental Essays*

on *Chuang-tzu*, ed. Victor H. Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983), pp. 126–147.

53. The phrase is that of François Jullien, and it is cited by Martin Verhoeven in his article “Buddhism and Science: Probing the Boundaries of Faith and Reason,” *Religion East and West* 1 (June 2001): 77–97.

54. We should not look to our leaders to offer profiles in courage. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, American presidents, both Democrat and Republican, have repeatedly launched wars simply “to avoid appearing to be a coward,” though their declarations of war have spouted high-minded principles. See the 2009 documentary *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*, directed by Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith (shown on PBS).

55. Verhoeven, “Buddhism and Science.”

56. Cf. *Analects* 9.22: “Respect the young. How do you know that they will not be all that you are now?” or *Analects* 5.26: “In dealing with the aged, comfort them; with friends, be trustworthy; and with the young, cherish them.”

57. Those who know their *Analects* well will have noticed that I do not suggest that we impose on others the much stricter standard of altruistic behavior found in *Analects* 14.45, where Zilu asks about the qualities of the noble person: “The person cultivates his or her person by comforting others.” “Is that all?” “To cultivate one’s person by comforting everyone else is something that even Yao and Shun found difficult.”

58. Simone Weil wrote that beauty requires us “to give up our imaginary position as the center.... A transformation then takes place, at the very roots of our sensibility, in our immediate reception of sense impressions and psychological impressions.” See her “Love of the Order of the World,” in *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 159. Iris Murdoch, in “The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts,” says: “The Sovereignty of Good makes beauty the single best or most obvious thing in our surroundings which is an occasion for ‘unselfing.’” By this Murdoch does not mean “self-forgetting,” but something more interesting: that all the space typically devoted to protecting or promoting the self or its prestige seems now freed to be in the service of something else.

59. Ben-Ze’ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions*, p. 170, usefully distinguishes the function of the emotions from the functions of reflexes and physiological drives: reflexes allow human beings to interact with their environments in highly stereotyped ways (which often come at a high cost), and physiological drives serve a particular homeostatic need. Emotions differ from both reflexes and drives in “flexibility, variability, richness, and dependence upon the mental.” Imagination allows us to refer to what is not actually present to the senses.

60. Here I think of the arguments put forward by Maurice Hamington, in his *Embodied Care: Jane Addams, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Feminist Ethics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004). I do not argue that the development of caring habits is instinctual; rather it demands a great deal of attention; still the bodies that human beings inhabit give everyone the potential to develop habits of imaginative care that integrate the epistemic and the ethical. Hamington writes, “Habits of care ‘hold’ knowledge of what it is to care, but the imagination is also present, because knowledge must be applied to new and unknown situations” (p. 66).

61. It is this way of conducting oneself that represents “full humanity”—the ability,

as Shakespeare said, “to feel what wretches feel” and also what artists, cooks, and massage therapists feel. Alexander Pope once said, “Drop into thyself, and be a fool!” See the last line of his philosophical poem “An Essay on Man” (ca. 1733).

62. Why would these slogans have a prayer of working, when so many pieces of antique “common sense” have failed? Perhaps because they do not particularly reflect any single tradition’s assessment of the human condition and its relation to the extra-social world. Xunzi made this point when he argued ritual theory: the priority should be on inducing constructive behavior, not orthodox thinking, as did Rosemont and Ames, in their discussions of “role ethics” in their various publications on this topic. In life, Confucius or Zhuangzi may be a better model than Socrates, who was purportedly certain of a rash of highly questionable propositions, for example that deep reflection invariably leads to firm knowledge, and so on.

63. Monique Canto-Sperber, *Moral Disquiet and Human Life*, trans. Sylvia Pavel (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 45.

64. *Analects* 13.24; 17.13; cf. *Nichomachean Ethics* I, 2, 1094b–1095a: “We do not seek or expect the same degree of exactness in all sorts of arguments...and because this is the nature of our premises, we must be satisfied [when discussing ethics or political science] with probabilistic conclusions of the same sort.” It does not help us one bit to equate settled conventions or local norms with profound moral insights. See *Analects* 13.24. We routinely (mis)read recommendations and endorsements about the world as empirical statements about the world that are verifiable (thinking ethics to be a science).

65. John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971) would demonstrate, if proof were needed, that no way exists to construct a theory of human morality with the certitude demanded in the evaluation of scientific theories.

66. Utilitarianism: minimize social harm; libertarianism: maximize personal freedom; communitarianism: cultivate civic virtue.

67. Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), p. 261. I am not convinced by the arguments lodged by Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch that say an experience of beauty prepares us to receive a sense of justice. They were responding, of course, to aesthetic theories that put the sublime above the beautiful—a silly dichotomy. See above for citations.

68. Ludwig Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” part I of “Wittgenstein’s Lecture on Ethics,” *Philosophical Review* 74, no. 1 (1965): 3–12, at p. 8.

69. Merritt Tierce, “This Is What an Abortion Looks Like,” *New York Times*, September 13, 2014, Opinion Pages, p. A19.

70. Dina Kraft, “By Talking, Inmates and Victims Make Things More Right,” *New York Times*, Sunday, July 6, 2014, p. 13, on the “restorative justice” movement, where victims and offenders discuss how their lives were affected by crimes. One speaker, a longtime community activist, said that “Holding you in your humanity—it’s how we hold each other accountable.”

71. As Zhuangzi says, this means there are principles whereby one can attain happiness and keep oneself alive, but he doesn’t know about others’ propensity to choose or reject them.

72. This is the opening of the “Supreme Pleasure” (“Zhile” 至樂) chapter in the *Zhuangzi*.

73. One obvious candidate here is *bao* 報 (requit, return). While one is not invariably repaid for good deeds or bad in kind, more often than not there is a return.

74. Nicholas Epley and David Dunning, "Feeling 'Holier than Thou': Are Self-serving Assessments Produced by Errors in Self- or Social Prediction?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79, no. 6 (December 2000): 861–875. Four studies cited here suggest that people hold overly charitable views of themselves and accurate impressions of their peers. Participants consistently overestimated the likelihood that they would act in generous or selfless ways, whereas their predictions of others were considerably more accurate (and the best indicator of what they would do themselves in the same situation). This work builds upon Anatol Rapoport's "Tit-For-Tat," where an account of this code appears in Rapoport's book, *General System Theory: Essential Concepts and Applications* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: Abacus, 1986).

75. Here, Confucius comes close to E. M. Forster's "Only Connect" in *Howard's End*: the Schlegel sisters call this "small price" a form of "rent" that must be paid, if one is not to descend into cynicism or paranoia.

76. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 189.

77. "The Secret of Effective Motivation," in "Gray Matter," by Boaz Keysar and Albert Costa, *New York Times*, July 6, 2014. In 2009, researchers from the University of Rochester conducted a study tracking 147 recent graduates in reaching their stated goals; those with "intrinsic" goals (e.g., the aim is for enduring relations or satisfying work) fared much better on the "happiness scale" than those with "extrinsic" goals (e.g., to get ahead); the latter experienced much higher levels of shame, fear, and dissatisfaction.

78. I have in mind the lines where Xunzi says, not far into his essay "On Ritual" ("Lilun" 禮論): "Let the [would-be candidates for office] know..."

79. Christopher Blattman, "Let Them Eat Cash!" *New York Times*, June 30, 2014, p. A19, reporting on nineteen recent studies conducted by the World Bank economists tracking money grants given to countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

80. I do not mean to imply that this idea is exclusively Confucian. The *Guanzi* "Mu Min" 牧民 chapter argues that "The granaries must be full first, before people can have an understanding of ritual principles, and clothes and food must be sufficient before people can develop a sense of shame."

81. All references in the text to the *Mencius* use the standard book, part, and chapter designations (e.g., "4A1," "6A17," 6A9," etc.).

82. This tactic works, as Mencius says, because "if one does not give one's whole mind to it, one will never master it" (D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* [London and New York: Penguin, 1970], p. 165). Conversely, if one devotes one's whole effort to something, one will master it.

83. In other words, Mencius and Xunzi see no necessary conflict between the "want" self and the "should" self, contra the Harvard Business School analysis offered by Ann E. Tenbrunsel, Kristina A. Diekmann, Kimberly A. Wade-Benzoni, and Max H. Bazerman, in their 2012 working paper "The Ethical Mirage."

84. *Shiji* 129.3259; the phrase is ascribed to Bo Gui. The phrase "managing their lives" occurs in *SJ* 129.3259, the story of Fan Li 范蠡.

85. Of course, this is the fictional character in the movie *Wall Street* who pronounces the slogan "Greed is good."

86. See Jane Mayer's article "Covert Operations" in the *New Yorker*, August 30, 2010, which argues that corporations are moving swiftly to the right, seeing regulation not as something that may "save" capitalism but as something that destroys their productivity.

87. Although David Brooks, columnist in the *New York Times*, usually enrages me, I agree with his basic analysis about character formation on the op-ed page of July 31, 2014, which associated character with four factors: habits, opportunities, exemplary models, and societal standards. The devil is in the details, of course.

88. Jack Goody, *The Theft of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

89. Here the Confucius Institutes have played a big role in "essentializing" Chinese culture, reducing its marvelous complexity to politically safe topics.