

Early Confucian Moral Psychology¹

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In this essay, I discuss an aspect of early Confucian ethical thought that arguably is one of its more distinctive characteristics, namely, its emphasis on self-transformation. By self-transformation, I refer to the transformation of oneself that comes about as a result of one's own reflective efforts at self-improvement; the process that involves such efforts I will refer to as "self-cultivation". This aspect of Confucian thought is related to its distinctive nature as a kind of ethical thought. Suppose we use the term "ethics" broadly in the sense that an ethical concern has to do with a concern with how to live, or how one should live, where the scope of "one" is supposed to include most of those whom we nowadays would refer to as "human beings". This way of describing the scope of "one" is intended to accommodate the fact that the term *ren* 人 (human beings), which is the term closest to "human beings" in early Chinese, is not understood in biological terms in early China and, on some scholarly views, might have a more restricted scope than that of the contemporary term "human beings". While early Confucian thinkers did exhibit an ethical concern in this sense, the way they engage in ethical thinking and teaching is very different from the way this is done in a contemporary academic setting. Their primary concern is not with developing or transmitting a systematic general account of the ethical life, but is more immediately practical. Their attention is directly focused on the daily ethical experiences of themselves and of their associates, the concrete ethical challenges they confront, and the way for themselves and their associates to properly navigate the ethical complexities of the world. As we can see from the record of his sayings, *Confucius'* attention was directed primarily to providing concrete ethical guidance to specific individuals, including rulers and officials as well as his students and other close associates. Confucian thought did subsequently evolve in a more general direction, leading to more general and systematic discussions of such topics as human nature (*xing* 性). Still, even when expounding on the human condition in general terms, most major Confucian thinkers continue to direct attention to concrete situations involving specific individuals they encounter in their daily life, in a way often reflected in their more general discourse.

¹ This article is part of my work on a multivolume project on Confucian ethics, and it draws occasionally on ideas in previously published articles cited in the references.

Given the orientation of their ethical thinking, their attention is often focused on what we would now describe as the psychology of the individual person. In reflecting on concrete situations involving specific individuals with whom they are in interaction or in discourse, they see clearly that ethical problems generally have their source in the depths of the human psychology, and it is here that the fundamental ethical task resides. And while childhood upbringing is important, the task also involves a continuous self-reflective reshaping of oneself in adult life. “Self-cultivation” refers to this process, and “self-transformation” to the goal of this process.

In elaborating on this aspect of early Confucian thought, I will take as my primary sources Chinese texts up to the early *Han* that are usually classified as Confucian texts, including the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) of *Confucius*, the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), the *Xunzi* 荀子, the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*), and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality and Commonality*). The term usually translated as “Confucianism” or “Confucian thought” is *rujia* 儒家, or the school of *ru* 儒, and this term was introduced in early *Han* as part of a retrospective classification of the pre-*Han* intellectual scene. Although *ru* 儒 (Confucianism) was an identifiable social group of professional ritualists and educators at that time, the school of *ru* 儒 (Confucianism) was not a well defined movement before the *Han*. Still, the texts just referred to do share some commonalities that warrant our grouping them together, and when referring to early Confucian thought, I will be referring primarily to ideas in these texts. For convenience, when this will not lead to confusion, I might sometimes refer to these ideas simply as Confucian ideas, without specifying that they come from the early period.

So far, I have freely used the notion of self in discussing early Confucian thought. This notion requires explanation, and this will be the task of section 1. In sections 2 to 4, I discuss three aspects of the early Confucian ethical ideal related to, respectively, *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence), *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), and *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness), with a focus on how the self figures within this ethical ideal. I will show that there is a sense in which each of these three aspects of the Confucian ideal involves one’s moving away from a certain kind of self-centeredness, and these three sections together describe the kind of self-transformation advocated by the early Confucians. In section 5, I discuss the nature of the self-cultivation process involved in such a transformation, and in section 6, I discuss ways in which one’s ethical attention may be properly or improperly directed in such a process.

1. The Self

To explain the notion of self we will be ascribing to the early Confucians, let us begin with some of the terms that early Chinese thinkers use to talk about various features of a person (Shun 2004: 183-199). They use the term *ti* 體 (body), often translated as “body”, to talk about the person’s body, and there are also ways of referring to parts of the body, such as the four limbs (to which *ti* 體 also refers) and the senses. These parts of the body not only have certain capacities, such as the eyes’ capacity of sight, but they also exhibit certain characteristic tendencies, such as the way the eyes are drawn toward beautiful colors. These tendencies are referred to as *yu* 欲 (desires), a term often translated as “desires”. This term is used not just of parts of the body, but also of the person as a whole to describe how the person is drawn toward things like life and honor. That human beings have such tendencies as part of their basic constitution is regarded as a fact about them that is pervasive and difficult to alter, a fact that is referred to as the *qing* 情 (facts) of human beings. Later, *qing* 情 (emotions) comes to refer to what we would describe as emotions, including such things as joy, sorrow and anger, these also being regarded as part of the basic constitution of a person.

There is another aspect of the Chinese view of the person for which it is difficult to find a western counterpart. The body of a person is supposed to be filled with *qi* 氣 (the life forces), a kind of energy or force that flows freely in and gives life to the person. *Qi* 氣 (the life forces) is responsible for the operation of the senses, and it can be affected by what happens to the senses. It is linked to the emotions, and what we would describe as a person’s physical and psychological well-being is regarded as dependent on a proper balance of *qi* 氣 (the life forces). For example, both illness and such emotional responses as fear are explained in terms of the condition of *qi* 氣 (the life forces).

Among the different aspects of the person, early Confucians attach special significance to *xin* 心 (heart, mind), the organ of the heart which is viewed as the site of what we would describe as cognitive and affective activities. *Xin* 心 (heart, mind), a term often translated as “heart” or “mind”, can have desires (*yu* 欲) and emotions (*qing* 情), and can also deliberate and focus attention on things. It has the ability to set directions that guide one’s life and shape one’s person as a whole, and these directions of the heart/mind are referred to as *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind). *Zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) can refer to specific intentions or general goals, and it is something that can be set up, nourished, and attained. It can also be altered by oneself or swayed under others’ influence, and lost through insufficient persistence or

distraction by other things. *Zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) has to do with the heart/mind's focusing itself on and constantly bearing in mind certain courses of action or goals in life, in such a way that it will guide one's action or one's life unless it is changed by oneself or under others' influence, or unless one is led to deviate from it by other distractions.

Zhi 志 (directions of the heart/mind) differs from *yu* 欲 (desires) in that, while *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) pertains specifically to the heart/mind, *yu* 欲 (desires) can pertain to the heart/mind or to parts of the body such as the senses. Also, while *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) involves focusing the heart/mind in a way that guides one's actions or one's life in general, *yu* 欲 (desires) involves tendencies that one may choose to resist rather than act on. There is another term, *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations), often translated as "thought", which refers to tendencies that differ from both *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) and *yu* 欲 (desires). The term can refer to one's thoughts or opinions, or to one's inclinations, which involve one's wanting to see certain things happen, or one's thinking of bringing about certain things. Unlike *yu* 欲 (desires), which can involve tendencies (such as sensory desires) that just happen to obtain without one's having a reflective awareness of them, *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations) is more reflective in that its object is something one is aware of as part of one's thoughts, which pertain to the heart/mind. On the other hand, *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations) is in a less directed state than *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) in that, while *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations) can be just a thought in favor of something without one's actually having decided to act in that direction, *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) involves one's actually forming the intention or aim to so act.

With this account of the early Chinese view of the person as background, we can now turn to the notion of self that might be ascribed to the early Confucians. In using the notion, I have in mind three phenomena that can be found in early Confucian texts. First, as we just saw, we find a range of terms used in early Chinese texts to talk about the constitution of an individual person, including what we nowadays would describe as physical as well as psychological aspects of a person. Thus, in early China, there is a conception of the individual person as an identifiable entity distinct from other persons. The way some thinkers view what is distinctive of a human person might make reference to the way the individual person relates to other people. For example, both *Mozi* and *Xunzi* explicitly state that they view a person (*ren* 人) in social terms, namely, in terms of their capacity to draw and abide by social distinctions (*Mozi* 1948: 16/12/4-5; *Xunzi* 1965: 3.3b-4a, cf. 5.7b-8a). Nevertheless, while holding such views,

these thinkers still speak in a way that allows them to talk about the relation between the individual person and other people, showing that they still have a conception of the individual person as distinct from, though intimately related to, other people.

Second, in classical Chinese, there are first personal pronouns, such as *wo* 我 (oneself) and *wu* 吾 (oneself), that can be used to refer to oneself. In addition to these first personal pronouns, the classical Chinese language also has two characters with the meaning of “oneself”; *zi* 自 and *ji* 己. The two characters differ in that the former emphasizes one’s relation to oneself, while the latter emphasizes oneself as contrasted with others (*ren* 人). These linguistic observations show that the early Chinese not only have a conception of an individual person as distinct from other people, but they also regard each individual person as having a conception of oneself as an identifiable entity distinct from other people, as well as a conception of the way one relates to oneself.

Third, in early Confucian texts, the characters just mentioned are often used to talk about one’s examining oneself and making improvements to oneself on the basis of such self-examination. This shows that early Confucian thinkers also work with a conception of one’s being related to oneself in a self-reflective manner, with the capacity to reflect on, examine, and bring about changes in oneself. They ascribe this capacity to the heart/mind, which plays a guiding role in one’s life. And, as we will discuss in greater detail later, the heart/mind also has the capacity to hold on to the directions it sets without being swayed by external forces, as well as the capacity to constantly step back from and reflect on its own activities and to reshape them in accordance with its conception of what is proper.

In speaking of the Confucian conception of the self, I have in mind these three aspects of the way the early Confucians view the individual person – that they have a conception of an individual person as distinct from (though also intimately related to) other people, that they see each such person as also having a conception of oneself as distinct from other people and of the way one relates to oneself, and that they regard each such person as having, through the capacity of the heart/mind, the capacity to constantly reflect on and bring about changes to oneself, including changes to the activities of the heart/mind itself. Throughout the paper, I will be using the notion of self in this minimal sense, without being committed to more substantive accounts of what constitutes the self, such as whether it is constituted by a stream of consciousness.

Having discussed the Confucian conception of the self, I turn now to the content of the Confucian ethical ideal. Throughout the history of Confucian thought, *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence), *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), and *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) continue to be three prominent concepts used in characterizing this ideal. I will consider these three aspects of the Confucian ideal in the next three sections, focusing on how the self figures in each. I will show that, in each case, there is a sense in which what is advocated involves one's moving away from a certain kind of self-centeredness. Together, these three aspects of the Confucian ideal point to a kind of self-transformation that involves properly situating the self in relation to others and in relation to certain ethical standards.

2. Concern for Others

Ren 仁 (humanity, benevolence) as part of the Confucian ethical ideal has to do with one's concern for the well-being of others. The way such concern is spelt out takes different forms in the history of Confucian thought, and *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) is also related to what some might call 'metaphysical' views, especially in later Confucian thought. In addition, there are different scholarly views on the earlier connotations of the term; for example, some believe the term carried in earlier times the connotation of fully embodying the distinctive characteristics of a human person, which accounts for the occasional translation of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) as "humanity". In my discussion, I will focus on that aspect of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) having to do with one's concern for the well-being of others, and set aside these other dimensions of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence). This aspect of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) has been discussed in the English language literature using various contemporary terms such as "love", "compassion", "empathy", "sympathy", or "benevolence". These terms, however, often carry certain specific connotations, especially in contemporary philosophical analysis of the phenomena they refer to, that might not be present in the Confucian understanding of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence). To avoid inadvertently ascribing these connotations to *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence), I will avoid the use of these terms, and instead speak of concern for the well-being of others, or simply concern for others, when referring to the relation between self and others that Confucian thinkers advocate in their discourses on *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence).

To be more specific, in speaking of concern for others, I am referring to the ways in which one's attention maybe focused directly on the well-being of others without mediation by other considerations, and in a positive manner in that one seeks to

promote the good of others and to alleviate their negative conditions. This way of characterizing concern for others is intended to exclude other ways in which one maybe related to the well-being of others, such as when one's attention is directed to the well-being of others as a way to accomplish other goals, or when one's attention is focused on others in a way that is conducive to their well-being though their well-being is not the object of one's attention. An example of the latter is the posture of *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), which I will discuss in the next section. Characterized in this manner, the notion of concern for others is specific enough to capture the aspect of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) under consideration, while also broad enough to accommodate the different ways in which this aspect of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) is spelt out in the history of Confucian thought. This characterization is also non-committal on questions such as whether such concern involves one's imaginatively placing oneself in the other's position, unlike contemporary terms such as "empathy". All Confucian thinkers regard such concern for others as part of the ethical ideal, and some, such as *Mencius* and later Confucian thinkers under his influence, believe it to be already to some extent part of the basic human constitution.

One's concern for others takes at least three distinct forms in the early Confucian discourse on *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence). First, I may have a concern for the well-being of a specific individual by virtue of some special situation she is in, or some situation in which she and I are involved in some special way. A number of such examples are presented in the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*). One passage observes how one would react with *ce yin* 惻隱 (commiseration) upon suddenly seeing a baby on the verge of falling into a well, and another observes how King *Xuan* of *Qi* (*Qi Xuan Wang* 齊宣王) reacted with *bu ren* 不忍 (unable to bear the suffering of others) upon seeing an ox being led to be killed as part of a sacrificial rite (*Mengzi* 1984: 1A:7, 2A:6). The reactions are presented as immediate responses of the heart/mind to some imminent negative condition of a living thing, responses that are felt with some degree of intensity and that move one to act in certain ways to alleviate or pre-empt the negative condition. These responses are not mediated by any kind of calculative attitude, though some kind of imaginative exercise might be involved – King *Xuan*'s response to the plight of the ox is described in terms of his viewing the ox as if it were an innocent person being led to the place of execution. Beyond these general observations about the responses, the textual evidence is not sufficient to enable us to draw further conclusions about whether these responses also carry more specific connotations that are highlighted in contemporary philosophical discussions of such phenomena as compassion, empathy, or sympathy.

There is another kind of response to a specific individual that involves a situation in which I am in a position to possibly treat the individual in a certain manner. The response is conveyed by the notion *shu* 恕 (reciprocity), a notion found in most of the early Confucian texts and explained in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) in terms of my not imposing on another what I would not wish to be imposed on myself (*Lunyu* 1980: 15.24, cf. 12.2). *shu* 恕 (reciprocity) has to do with potentially negative conditions of an individual in that the contemplated treatment from which I should refrain is either unwelcome to the individual or not in her interest. Though *shu* 恕 (reciprocity) is presented in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) as a more reflective kind of exercise, it is likely that ideally, for the Confucians, one should cultivate oneself to the point when one would so respond without engaging in such explicit reflection (Zhu 1986: 116, 358, 672; Zhu 1983-1986a: 3.4b-5a; Zhu 1983-1986b: 11.30a).

The second kind of concern for others involves a concern for the well-being of another individual on an ongoing basis, by virtue of some special relation I stand to that individual. This phenomenon is related to the Confucian advocacy of a gradation in one's concern for others depending on how one is related to them. This kind of concern differs from the first in a number of ways, as can be seen from the example of one's relation to one's parents. Although one would still respond to specific situations involving potentially negative conditions of one's parent, one's attention can be directed to her in a way that is not dependent on awareness of any such situations. Instead, one's concern for her is ongoing – for example, one continues to think of her while traveling afar, hopes that her aging does not impair her health, and is constantly on guard against doing anything that would bring her disgrace. Furthermore, unlike the first kind of concern, one's attention need not be restricted to negative or potentially negative conditions of hers. Instead, one actively seeks to promote her well-being such as by looking after her health, and to bring her joy in various ways. Indeed, the relation to one's parent is even more complex as it also involves another kind of attitude which is conveyed by the term *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) and which we will consider in the next section.

The third kind of concern has to do with individuals who might not be related to one in any special way. It is directed not to a specific individual, but to living things, or human beings, or a sub-class of human beings, in general. Such attitude is portrayed from time to time in early texts in connection with those who have people under their care, and is sometimes put in terms of one's forming one body (*ti* 體) with those under one's care. For example, the ideal ruler is described as someone who regards the common people as part of his body or who forms one body with the common

people (e.g., *Liji* 1965: 17.16a; *Guanzi* 1965: 10.18a). The best illustration of this kind of attitude is probably the story of Yu's (*Da Yu* 大禹) efforts to channel the flood that had caused immense suffering to the people; he was so devoted to alleviating the plight of the people that he three times passed the door of his own household without entering (*Mengzi* 1984:4B:29). The way a caring ruler or official feels for the people is also sometimes portrayed using the relation between parents and children as analogy – the ruler or official is like the parents (*fu mu* 父母) of the common people, whom they look after as if caring for a new born infant (*chi zi* 赤子) (e.g., *Mengzi* 1984:3A:5). This kind of concern differs from the first in that one's concern is directed not to any specific individual but to people generally, and it can be directed not just to alleviating their suffering but also to positively promoting their well-being.

While the three kinds of concern just described differ in important ways, they share the common underlying idea that, ideally, one's attention should be directed to, and one should be sensitive to, the well-being of others in certain appropriate ways. Falling short of this ideal involves one's being overly focused on one's own interests and well-being, and as a result being insufficiently attentive and sensitive to the interests and well-being of others. Put differently, self and others should ideally be connected in certain appropriate ways, and it is a kind of self-centeredness that separates one from others. Part of the self-transformation that the early Confucians advocate involves one's moving away from this kind of self-centeredness, properly situating the self in relation to others. This aspect of the early Confucian ideal is later taken up by Sung-Ming Confucians and developed into the idea of 'one body'. Each individual person ideally forms one body with all living things in that one is sensitive and responsive to the conditions of all living things, and it is through self-centeredness (*si* 私) that one separates oneself from others (Shun 2005: 1-9).

3. Lowering Oneself and Elevating Others

Let us turn next to a cluster of attitudes related to *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), a term often translated as "rites". *Li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) originally referred to rites of sacrifices, but later came to be used of rules of conduct governing ceremonial behavior in various recurring social contexts. Subsequently, its scope broadened even further to include rules governing behavior appropriate to one's social position, though it continued to be used frequently in connection with ceremonial behavior. From a contemporary western perspective, in which there is not one single term whose scope even approximates that of *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), it might seem puzzling how this variety of rules can be subsumed under a

single term. What gives unity to the rules of *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) is the spirit behind *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), which is presented in early texts as *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), a term often translated as “respect”. *Li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) is also related to other attitudes, such as *rang* 讓 (letting others have what is good or honorable), and *Mencius* describes *gong jing* 恭敬 (treat respectfully and with specific postures in being respectful)

and *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable) as the basis for *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) (*Mengzi* 1984:2A:6, 6A:6). While these attitudes are directed toward others, they are unlike the kind of concern for others considered in the previous section, which involves one’s attending directly to the well-being of others.

Jing 敬 (treat respectfully), though often directed toward deities or persons, can also be directed toward things and affairs, such as *de* 德 (virtue) or one’s official responsibilities. In early texts, it is often paired with *shen* 慎 (a cautious and attentive attitude), and with *jie* 戒 (an attitude of being on guard). It likely involves devotion, focus of mental attention, caution, and being on guard against things going wrong. It is occasionally used in early texts such as the *Yijing* 易經 (*The book of Changes*) to refer to a posture that is not directed to any specific object, and this usage is highlighted by later Confucians to refer to a posture of seriousness that is part of the self-cultivation process. But more often, it is used in early texts to refer to an attitude directed toward deities, persons, or affairs to which one should be devoted, such as one’s official responsibilities (for further elaboration on *jing* 敬, see Shun 1997: 52-54).

To see how *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) differs from the kind of concern for others considered in the previous section, let us consider one’s relation to one’s parents. Imagine, for example, that one is serving a meal to an elderly parent who cannot take care of herself (cf. *Lunyu* 1980: 2.7; *Mengzi* 1984: 4A:19, 7A:37). In being concerned for her well-being, one would ensure that she is well-nourished and that the kind of food served is pleasing to her. But one could have done something similar for an animal one is keeping as a pet. *Jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) toward the parent involves an attitude that goes beyond just attending directly to her well-being. It involves a certain posture toward the parent that is displayed in the way one serves the food – one’s demeanor in passing the food, one’s attentiveness to her reactions, the words one uses when speaking to her, one’s not being distracted by non-urgent business when serving her, etc. The attentiveness and seriousness one displays, though pleasing to her, are not themselves focused directly on her material needs or on what

she finds pleasing. Instead, they are focused directly on her as a person whom one should treat seriously and with attention. If we are to find a western equivalent, the posture involved is probably close to that of treating someone respectfully – while the person one treats in this manner will be pleased by such treatment, one’s attention in treating the person respectfully is not directed to seeking ways to please her.

When directed to persons, *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) may have to do with certain specific qualities that pertain to its objects. For example, it may be directed to superiors in government or to elders; in these cases, it is by virtue of certain qualities that these individuals have – their superior position in government or their age – that one treats them with *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully). And because *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is often translated as “respect”, comparison with contemporary western discussions of respect for persons might lead one to draw the inference that, when Confucian thinkers advocate *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) toward people in general, *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is also a response to a certain intrinsic quality shared by all human beings. Such a quality maybe labeled variously as “human worth” or “human dignity”, and treating human beings with *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) maybe regarded as a matter of according them ‘due regard’ in the sense that *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is a response called for by such an intrinsic quality that all human beings share (for an excellent discussion that takes this direction, see Chan 2006: 229-252. Though my interpretation of *jing* is different, my thoughts on the subject has been stimulated by Chan’s discussion.).

It is unclear that there is textual evidence in support of such an understanding of *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully). While Confucian thinkers do advocate *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), as well as other kinds of attitudes, toward special classes of people, or people in general, whether they regard these attitudes as responses called for by certain intrinsic qualities of their objects will depend on how they explain their advocacy. For example, while early Confucians advocate love toward one’s parents, it does not follow that they regard such love as a response to certain intrinsic qualities pertaining to one’s parents. Instead, they might explain it in terms of the past relationship between parents and children, such as how parents have cared for their children when the latter were young (e.g. *Lunyu* 1980: 17.21). Similarly, in urging that we treat people generally with *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), it does not follow from such advocacy by itself that Confucian thinkers regard *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) as a response to certain intrinsic qualities that all people share.

As far as I can tell, there is no evidence that early Confucians subscribe to the

contemporary idea of intrinsic human worth or view *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) in a way close to the contemporary understanding of respect for persons. As mentioned earlier, if we are to find some western equivalent to *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), the attitude involved in *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is probably closer to ‘treat respectfully’ than to ‘respect’, and the idea that we should treat people respectfully does not carry the kind of connotations that are often associated with the idea of respect for persons. That the way *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is used in early texts is unlike the way “respect” is used nowadays can be seen from other considerations. For example, while we might come to respect someone on learning about some special accomplishment of the person, I am not aware of any instance in which *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is similarly used in early texts. Also, in early texts, attitudes related to *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) are at times presented in such a way that it involves one’s viewing people as if one were dealing with them in certain contexts that did not actually obtain. For example, in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*), officials are urged to deal with people one encounters in one’s travels as if one were receiving important guests, and to employ the common people as if one were conducting an important sacrifice (*Lunyu* 1980: 12.2). A contemporary example of a similar nature would be for senior scholars to be urged to speak with junior colleagues at professional conferences as if they were accomplished scholars. In these examples, what one is invited to do is to engage in an imaginary exercise that makes it easier for one to adopt a posture of a certain kind when dealing with others, rather than to respond to a certain intrinsic quality that exist in those whom one deals with. The translation “treat respectfully” better conveys this connotation of *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), and helps us avoid the misleading connotations potentially generated by the translation “respect”.

Turning to some of the other attitudes associated with *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) is often paired with *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) though the two differ in their emphases. Whereas *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is an attitude of caution, seriousness, and mental attention that can be directed toward people and affairs, *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) is a more specific attitude having to do with attention to one’s appearance, posture, manners, and manner when dealing with others. Both *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) and *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) have to do with the way one’s attention is directed, and *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) is not a mere matter of outward appearance. Still, in *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful), one’s attention is directed primarily to externals of the kind just described. As for *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or

honorable), *ci* 辭 involves politely declining, and *rang* 讓 letting others have, something good or of honor to oneself. An example of *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable) is to politely declare one's incompetence to address a question put to one by an elder before responding to the question, rather than immediately proffering an answer (*Liji* 1965: 1.3b). By so doing, one conveys that one sees the opportunity to respond to the question as an honor, something that one does not necessarily deserve (For further elaboration on *gong* 恭 and *cirang* 辭讓, see Shun 1997: 54-55).

Although *gong jing* 恭敬 (treat respectfully and with specific postures in being respectful) and *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable) differ in the manner described, they probably refer to different aspects of a more general attitude that Confucians believe underlies *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites). *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) involves taking the other person seriously, focusing one's attention on and treating the other person with caution. *Gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) involves attending to one's outward presentation of oneself in dealing with the other person, including one's appearance, posture, manners, and demeanor. Together, *gong jing* 恭敬 (treat respectfully and with specific postures in being respectful) demonstrates a serious regard for the other person, in a way that would have been appropriate to someone of higher status than oneself, such as deities, superiors, or elders. *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable), on the other hand, involves a posture that focuses on declaring one's being in some sense 'lower' than the other, such as being less deserving of an honor that has been offered. This does not mean that one literally has a low opinion of oneself or lacks awareness of good qualities that one might have. Rather, it is a matter of not having oneself at the forefront of one's thinking when interacting with others – one does not display oneself nor seek attention or admiration. Together, *gong jing* 恭敬 (treat respectfully and with specific postures in being respectful) and *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable) are two sides of a more general attitude that underlies *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), an attitude that is described in the *Liji* 禮記 (The Book of Rites) as “lowering oneself and elevating others” (*zi bei er zun ren* 自卑而尊人) (*Liji* 1965: 1.3a).

The nature of this attitude can be brought out further by comparing *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) with *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites). *Ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) has to do with a view of human beings as beings that have material needs, are vulnerable to pleasure and pain, etc. By contrast, *li* 禮 (propriety,

observance of the rites) has to do with a view of human beings as beings that have a sense of dignity and sensitivity to the way they are treated. This aspect of human beings requires a degree of self-awareness that is not shared by other animals. For example, while non-human animals may accept food given in whatever manner when hungry, a person would have reluctance accepting food given in an abusive manner even when starving (e.g., *Mengzi* 1984: 6A:10). *Li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), as a set of rules governing behavior in recurring social contexts, is a codification of our acknowledgement of this aspect of humans, and helps build and reinforce our conception of human beings as distinct from other animals in the manner just described. And for people standing in special social relations, such as rulers and subordinates, or parents and children, *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) further codifies the acknowledgement of the special status of people in certain social positions. Human beings naturally tend to put more weight than appropriate on their own interests and well-being, and *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) helps to steer us away from such a tendency so that we also attend in appropriate ways to the interests and well-being of others. Likewise, human beings naturally tend to over-emphasize their own importance, and *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) helps to steer us away from such a tendency so that we also pay appropriate attention to others in our interactions with them. The idea of ‘lowering oneself and elevating others’ (*zi bei er zun ren* 自卑而尊人) used in the *Liji* 禮記 (The Book of Rites) to characterize the attitude behind *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) is not a matter of our believing ourselves to be literally in a lower position. Rather, it is a matter of our shifting our attention away from ourselves toward others, in a way that is akin to one’s attitude when interacting with people in a higher position. Such redirection of attention is particularly important for those actually in a higher social position, as it is particularly tempting for them to treat those in a lower social position in a disrespectful manner. The remark in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) about dealing with people one encounters as if one were receiving important guests, and employing the common people as if one were conducting an important sacrifice, is directed to those in office vulnerable to this tempting tendency (*Lunyu* 1980: 12.2).

Thus, as part of the Confucian ethical ideal, *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) steers one away from another form of self-centeredness, different from that discussed in the previous section in connection with *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence). The latter involves a move away from an undue emphasis on one’s own interests and well-being that might result in insufficient attention and sensitivity to the interests and well-being of others. The former, on the other hand, involves a move away from attaching an undue importance to oneself that might result in one’s not treating other people with

sufficient seriousness and attentiveness. In both cases, the emphasis is on how the self should be properly situated in relation to others. In the next section, we will consider the kind of attitude associated with *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness). While this attitude also involves a move away from a kind of self-centeredness, the emphasis in this case is on the submission of the self to certain ethical standards.

4. The Self and Ethical Standards

In early texts, *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) is often related to *ru* 辱 (disgrace), or disgrace – to be subject to disgrace is to be lacking in *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness). Likely, the earlier meaning of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) has to do with a sense of honor and an absence of disgrace; it is a matter of self-regard, not allowing oneself to be subject to disgraceful treatment. One possible attitude toward disgrace (*ru* 辱) is *wu* 惡 (dislike, aversion), and early thinkers regarded the desire for honor (*rong* 榮) and aversion to disgrace (*ru* 辱) as part of the fundamental constitution of human beings. But *wu* 惡 (dislike) can be directed at anything that one dislikes, such as death, unpleasant sights and sounds, or insecurity. Although all these things relate to oneself – it is one’s own death or insecurity, and it is the unpleasant sights or sounds that one experiences, that one dislikes – *ru* 辱 (disgrace) is related to oneself in a more intimate manner. The *ru* 辱 (disgrace) one suffers is not just something that one dislikes; it reflects adversely on oneself and results in a lowering of one’s standing. One’s attitude toward *ru* 辱 (disgrace) can therefore take on a special form, which is referred to as *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful), a term often translated as “shame” or “regard as shameful”. Unlike *wu* 惡 (dislike), *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) focuses on *ru* 辱 (disgrace) as something that is beneath oneself or lowers one’s standing. Thus, *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) involves a more reflective concern with the self, having to do with thoughts about the effect on oneself of certain occurrences. Though often translated as “shame” or “regard as shameful”, *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) differs from contemporary western notions of shame in important respects. *Chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) can be directed toward something contemplated as well as toward what has already come about. It is not associated with the thought of being seen or the urge to hide oneself. Instead, it is associated with the thought of being tainted and the urge to cleanse oneself of what is tainting; the idea of cleansing oneself is conveyed by the expression *xue chi* 雪恥 (cleanse the tainted). *Chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) is linked to a resolution to either remedy the disgraceful situation if it has already obtained, or to distance oneself from or pre-empt a potentially disgraceful situation if it has not yet come about (for further elaboration on *chi* 恥, see Shun 1997: 58-61).

Now, in early China, what is regarded as disgraceful is often treatment that is insulting by public standards, such as being beaten in public, being stared in the eyes, or being treated in violation of certain accepted protocols of conduct that include *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites). “Insulting” is used here as a translation of the character *wu* 侮 (insult), a character that refers to the kind of treatment just described, treatment that is inappropriate by certain generally accepted public standards. It differs from *ru* 辱 (disgrace) in that while *wu* 侮 (insult) is a matter of how certain forms of treatment measure against generally accepted public standards, *ru* 辱 (disgrace) focuses on the viewpoint of someone who is subject to such treatment, involving a perception of the treatment as somehow diminishing oneself. *Ru* 辱 (disgrace) is closely identified with *wu* 侮 (insult) in early China – that is, what one regards as diminishing oneself is usually treatment that is insulting by generally accepted public standards. As a result, insulting treatment is viewed with *chi* 恥 (regard as shameful), which is often associated with anger at a situation and the urge to fight back to avenge the situation (the discussion that follows draws on my forthcoming paper “On Anger: An Experimental Essay in Confucian Moral Psychology”. See also Shun 1997: 61-63.).

Fighting of this kind was so pervasive in early China that it led one early thinker to propose that, if one stops seeing what is insulting as a disgrace, such fighting would stop (See the presentation of Songzi’s position in *Xunzi* 1965: 12.11a-11b). *Xunzi* took note of this view, but disagreed on the ground that whether people fight depends on what they dislike, and as long as they dislike insulting treatment, the fighting will not stop regardless of whether one regards such treatment as a disgrace. Contrary to *Xunzi*, though, this thinker has probably made a valid point – in not regarding the insulting treatment as disgraceful, one no longer sees it as a personal affront even if one still dislikes it, and it is seeing something as a personal affront that leads to the kind of fierce fighting that has become problematic. In any instance, *Xunzi*’s own position shares something in common with that of the other early thinker in that he also advocates a fundamental change in what one regards as truly disgraceful. According to him, what we regard as disgraceful should not be tied to the way others view or treat us, but should be a matter of our own ethical conduct, which also includes the way we respond to others’ treatment of ourselves (*Xunzi* 1965: 12.12b).

This view is shared by practically all Confucian thinkers. Several passages in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) also make the point that what one regards as shameful, that is, the proper object of *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful), should be a matter of one’s

own qualities and actions rather than the way one is viewed or treated by others. In the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), we find a contrast between the ranks of Heaven (*tian* 天) and the ranks of human beings, and between what is truly worthy of esteem and esteem that is conferred by humans; the contrast is between the ethical attributes and official ranks in government (*Mengzi* 1984:6A:16, cf. 6A:17). In addition, Mencius also advocates a higher form of courage over a lower form of courage. The latter has to do with fighting in response to insulting treatment; the former, by contrast, has to do with the resolve to correct situations that one regards as ethically problematic (*Mengzi* 1984:1B:3, 2A:2). Thus, while Mencius continues to relate *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) to *chi* 恥 (regard as shameful), he also holds the view that the kind of situations to which *chi* 恥 (regard as shameful) should be directed are situations that are disgraceful by ethical standards. It follows from the early Confucian way of viewing the proper object of *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) that *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) is no longer linked to the thought of avenging oneself, as its object is no longer the way one is treated by others. Instead, *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) has more to do with the resolve to distance oneself from certain situations that can be ethically tainting on oneself, and to correct such situations should they arise.

What is innovative about the early Confucian position is a different way of viewing the proper object of *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful), while still retaining the linkage between *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) and *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful). It continues to regard a person of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) as a person with a sense of self-regard, someone with the resolve to distance oneself from disgraceful situations that are tainting on oneself. But it views what is truly disgraceful in ethical terms: what is tainting on one is for one to be ethically inferior or to conduct oneself unethically. One implication of this view is a move away from a certain kind of focus on oneself. Even when I have been treated inappropriately by others, my focus is not on the situation viewed as a personal affront to myself. Instead, I view it as an ethical situation, and my focus is on how I could respond in an ethically appropriate manner to the situation. Thus, though there is still a sense of proper self-regard, this sense of self-regard is focused on my not responding in an ethically problematic manner to the situation, rather than on my not being treated in a certain manner. Having decoupled *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) from the perspective of seeing something as a personal affront, and having linked it to one's own ethical conduct, *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) can now be a response to a situation in which others are treated inappropriately. An example is that of King *Wu* (*Wu Wang* 武王), who upon seeing a tyrant heaping miseries on the people, viewed

with *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) the prospect of his not doing something to correct the situation (*Mengzi* 1984:1B:3). The kind of self-regard highlighted in this Confucian view is different not just from the view that focuses on one's not being treated in an insulting manner, but also from the views of self-respect presented in certain contemporary philosophical discussions. On certain philosophical accounts, self-respect has to do either with a certain assessment of oneself, related to the worth of oneself or excellences that one possesses, or with protecting one's rights to or claims on not being treated in certain ways (Darwall 1977: 47-49). By contrast, the kind of self-regard highlighted in the Confucian view focuses on the idea of not falling below certain ethical standards in one's own behavior, involving the viewpoint that it is tainting on oneself to fall below such standards.

In this way, though the Confucian understanding of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) is still related to self-regard, the focus is now on properly subordinating the self to certain ethical standards. These standards are regarded as something that the heart/mind can grasp in a process that is akin to perception. On a number of occasions, *Mencius* compares the heart/mind to the senses. Just as the senses are drawn toward and take pleasure in certain sensory objects, the heart/mind is drawn toward and takes pleasure in *liyi* 理義 (morality) (*Mengzi* 1984: 6A:7). The relation between the heart/mind and *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) is described in terms of *si* 思 (focusing or directing the attention of the heart/mind) ; when the heart/mind *si* 思 (focusing or directing the attention of the heart/mind), it will attain *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) (*Mengzi* 1984: 6A:15). *Si* 思 in early Chinese texts has the connotation of focusing or directing the attention of the heart/mind, just as one focuses or directs the attention of the ears or eyes when one listens or looks (Shun 1997: 149-153). This perceptual metaphor for describing the operation of the heart/mind is also found in the *Xunzi* 荀子. While *Xunzi* uses *zhi* 知 (know, understand), a term often translated as “know” or “understand”, to describe the relation of the heart/mind to *dao* 道 (Way) or *li* 理 (pattern), *zhi* 知 (know, understand) is itself presented in terms of a perceptual metaphor. The *zhi* 知 (know, understand) of the heart/mind can be *ming* 明 (bright), or bright (e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 1.1a), where *ming* 明 (bright) is illustrated by the brightness of fire or of the sun and moon (e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 11.13a).

Thus, for both *Mencius* and *Xunzi*, the kind of ethical standards to which one should subordinate oneself are something that the heart/mind can ‘perceive’ and to which we should respond. Furthermore, for both, there should be a firm commitment to these standards of such a kind that it can override personal interests of the most pressing kind, including one's own life. That the individual can exhibit such firmness of

commitment is because *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) is independent of external control in that the heart/mind has the capacity to hold on to the directions it sets without being swayed by external forces. For example, while both the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) and the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) emphasize the guiding role of *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind), comparing it to the commander of an army, the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) notes one point of dissimilarity -- while an army can be deprived of its commander, even a common person cannot be deprived of the directions (*zhi* 志) set by the heart/mind (*Lunyu* 1980:9.26; *Mengzi*:1984:2A2). Such directions can, of course, be influenced by outside factors, but the point is that the heart/mind has the capacity to resist such influences and, for the Confucian thinkers, one should ideally cultivate oneself to attain such a steadfastness of purpose after having set the heart/mind in the proper directions. This independence of the heart/mind from external control is also emphasized by *Xunzi*, who compares the heart/mind to the position of the ruler and the senses to the offices of government; like the ruler, the heart/mind issues order but does not take order from anything (*Xunzi* 1965: 11.10a-10b, 15.5b-6a). To ensure that *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) is not swayed by external influences, we need also to cultivate *qi* 氣 (the life forces), which support *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind). The *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) talks about nourishing the flood-like *qi* 氣 (the life forces), acknowledging that without adequate support from a cultivated *qi* 氣 (the life forces), *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) can collapse and the heart/mind can be moved (*Mengzi* 1984:2A:2). *Xunzi* likewise emphasizes that self-cultivation involves giving order to *qi* 氣 (the life forces) and nourishing the heart/mind (*zhi qi yang xin* 治氣養心), again giving recognition to the complementary roles of *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) and *qi* 氣 (the life forces) in this steadfastness of purpose (e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 1.9a).

So far, we have discussed in connection with the Confucian conception of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) the shift of attention away from the way we are treated by others to our conforming to certain ethical standards. For the early Confucians, this shift of attention to the ethical should also happen in other areas of life, including adverse circumstances of life of all kinds. This position is conveyed using the term *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree), a term sometimes paired with *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) in early texts. *Ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree), often translated as “destiny”, “fate”, or “decree”, is used in early Confucian texts to convey a certain attitude toward adverse external conditions of life, which include not just the way we are viewed and treated by others, but also things like sickness or death. These conditions do matter to the Confucians. For example, in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*), we see *Confucius* lamenting the lack of appreciation by others (*Lunyu* 1980:14.35), as

well as expressing sorrow at the death of his favorite disciple YAN Hui 顏回 (*Lunyu* 1980:11.9, 11.10). At the same time, from the Confucian perspective, even though these things do matter, they pale in significance compared to our own ethical qualities. When we do not fare well in relation to the former, at least the latter is something within our control and something we can fall back on and take consolation in. This contrast between what is of true significance and within our control, and what is of comparatively lesser significance and not entirely within our control, is highlighted in a passage in the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), which characterizes the latter in terms of *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree) (*Mengzi* 1984:7A:3).

Despite its usual translation as “destiny” or “fate”, *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree) is not used by early Confucians to express beliefs about pre-determination of things or about historical forces at work that cannot be resisted. Instead, it is used to convey an attitude that might be described as one of willing acceptance (*Mengzi* 1984: 7A:2). This is not a general attitude directed toward external occurrences in general, but a posture one takes up in response to specific adverse conditions of life that one actually encounters. It might be an undesirable condition that is literally not within one’s control, such as the death of a beloved one. Or it might be a condition that one can still alter but only by improper means, such as avoiding one’s own death by succumbing to evil. One can still be emotionally affected by these adverse conditions of life and wish things could be otherwise – one would still grieve at the death of beloved ones, be disappointed by the lack of appreciation by others, and lament the corruption that prevails. However, one would not direct one’s emotional energy to blaming others or complaining about the outcome, nor become bitter and resentful (*Lunyu* 1980: 14.35). It does not mean that one is resigned to the situation in the sense that one becomes totally passive, a kind of fatalistic surrender to one’s environment. Nor is it a matter of submission to the environment, as when a slave ‘accepts’ being enslaved, or a matter of inertia, as when one lets things proceed without bothering. Instead, there is an element of activism in the Confucian attitude. One would still await and welcome the possibility of change, and even when such opportunities do not arise, one would redirect one’s energy in a positive direction, just as *Confucius* redirected his energy to teaching after having come to a realization of the futility of his political endeavors. And accompanying this acceptance of the adverse external conditions of life is a positive affirmation of the ethical values that one stands by and in which one takes consolation.

From the preceding discussion of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) and *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree), we see that early Confucian thinkers advocate a submission of

the self to certain ethical standards that the heart/mind can grasp. They advocate a total submission of the self to such standards, even at the expense of grave consequences for oneself. This firm ethical commitment involves a move away from attaching undue significance to the interests of oneself understood in ordinary terms. Such interests include not just the way one is treated or viewed by others, but also other adverse conditions of life of all kinds. It is one's ethical qualities that are of fundamental importance, and anchoring the self in such ethical standards enables one to respond to all kinds of adverse circumstances of life without being emotionally perturbed (an idea conveyed in *Mengzi* 1984:2A:2 in terms of the heart/mind's being 'unmoved'). Thus, this aspect of the Confucian ideal also involves a move away from a kind of self-centeredness that focuses on one's interest understood in more ordinary terms, to a perspective that anchors the self in the ethical standards to which one should conform.

5. Self-Cultivation

We see from the above discussion that early Confucians advocate a fundamental transformation of the self that involves properly situating the self in relation to others and in relation to certain ethical standards. On the one hand, one submits oneself to certain ethical standards and focuses one's attention on living up to such standards rather than on how one is treated by others or on the external conditions of life. On the other hand, one attaches proper significance to the interests and well-being of others and interacts with them with proper attentiveness and seriousness. Such transformation involves a move away from certain tempting kinds of self-centeredness – an undue focus on one's own interests and well-being, on one's own importance, or on the external conditions of life to which one attaches importance. That the fundamental ethical task has to do with a move away from certain kinds of self-centeredness is hinted at in early Confucian texts, such as the observation in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) about how attaining the ethical ideal involves “overcoming the self” (*ke ji* 克己) (*Lunyu* 1980:12.1). This idea is taken up and highlighted in later Confucian thought, which ascribes ethical failure primarily to certain forms of self-centeredness and regards the move away from self-centeredness (*si* 私) as the fundamental ethical task (for a discussion of ZHU Xi's 朱熹 elaboration on this idea, see Shun 2005:1-9).

Attaining a proper positioning of the self in one's perspective takes effort, and while Confucian thinkers also emphasize proper childhood upbringing, what is distinctive of Confucian ethical thought is its emphasis on the self-reflective ethical efforts that one

undertakes as an adult. I will use “self-cultivation” to refer to the self-reflective process that one undertakes to attain such transformation of the self. The idea of a process of this kind is conveyed in the notion *xiushen* 修身 (self-cultivation), a term that occurs three times in the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), is the title of a chapter in the *Xunzi* 荀子, and is used to refer to one of the eight items of adult learning in the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*).

Regarding the content of this process, it is spelt out in different ways and with different emphases in the history of Confucian thought. Since part of the transformation has to do with submitting the self to ethical standards that the heart/mind can grasp, learning is needed for us to properly grasp such standards. The Chinese term usually translated as “learning”, *xue* 學 (learning), has the connotation not just of learning in the contemporary sense, but also of drawing moral lessons from and embodying in one’s daily life what one has learnt. For the Confucians, its object includes all aspects of the cultural heritage, including such items as poetry, history, rites (*li* 禮), music, and archery. The notion is particularly highlighted in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) and the *Xunzi* 荀子, the latter having a whole chapter devoted to the subject. The importance of learning is emphasized by *Confucius* in his own autobiographical statement that he set his heart on learning at the age of fifteen (*Lunyu* 1980: 2.4). And, as presented in the *Xunzi* 荀子, what one has learnt from *li* 禮 (rites) and from other items of the cultural heritage will permeate the whole person, and their accumulated effects will totally reshape the person in an ethical direction (e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 1.4b).

Learning by itself is not sufficient. Having ensured that the directions of one’s heart/mind, or *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind), is properly directed, one still need to cultivate one’s *qi* 氣 (the life forces) to give it support to ensure that one maintains the kind of steadfastness of purpose described earlier. More importantly, there are all kinds of forces at work within oneself that can lead one astray, and so it is also important to work on one’s own heart/mind to ensure its proper ethical orientation. One might work on the heart/mind to ensure that it performs its guiding and regulatory roles in relation to others forces at work within oneself, or to ensure that its own operations is properly oriented. I will consider these two kinds of exercises in turn.

The guiding role of the heart/mind in relation to the senses is highlighted in a variety of early texts. The *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) presents the senses as potentially problematic if not regulated by the heart/mind (*Mengzi* 1984:6A:15), and the

Huainanzi 淮南子 likewise observes how sensory objects can distort the operation of the senses and how it is only under the heart/mind's regulation that the senses attain their proper place (*Huainanzi* 1965: 7.3a, 14.7b). The *Guanzi* 管子 observes how external things can distort the operation of the senses, which in turn can distort the operation of the heart/mind (*Guanzi* 1965: 13.6a, 16.3a). The text compares the position of the heart/mind to that of the ruler; when the heart/mind is in order, the senses will also be in order (*Guanzi* 1965: 13.1a, 16.3b). The governing role of the heart/mind over the senses is also emphasized in the *Xunzi* 荀子 (*Xunzi* 1965: 11.10a-10b). The *Xunzi* 荀子 in addition emphasizes the importance of the heart/mind's role in regulating desires (*yu* 欲); if unregulated, chaos will result from people's pursuing without constraint the fulfillment of their desires (e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 13.1a). The "Yueji" chapter 樂記 of the *Liji* 禮記 (The Book of Rites) makes a similar point. It observes how, when human beings come into contact with external things, likes and dislikes arise. Humans are affected by things without limit, and if their likes and dislikes are not regulated, human beings would be moved to exhaust their human desires (*ren yu* 人欲) and things become problematic (*Liji* 1965: 11.8b-9a). Thus, for early Confucians, an important part of self-cultivation is to train the heart/mind to properly guide and regulate all kinds of human desires.

Ethical problems can also arise from within the heart/mind. As we have seen, early Confucians advocate self-transformation of a kind that moves us away from certain forms of self-centeredness that are themselves common and tempting human tendencies. The subtle workings of the heart/mind can reflect such tendencies and pose obstacles. As part of the self-cultivation process, one also needs to work on the subtle activities of the heart/mind to ensure that they are properly oriented. One illustration of this idea is the idea in the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) and *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality and Commonality*) that the heart/mind should cautiously watch over its own activities to ensure that all of its activities, however minute or subtle, are completely oriented in an ethical direction. This idea is presented in terms of one's cautiously watching over *du* 獨 (what one alone can access), where *du* 獨 (what one alone can access) likely refers to the minute and subtle workings of the heart/mind that are not yet manifested outwardly and to which one alone has access (Zhu 1983-1986d *Daxue* chapter 6; Zhu 1983-1986c *Zhongyong* chapter 1) (for a more elaborate discussion of the idea of watching over *du*, see Shun 2008: 262-266.). In the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*), this idea is related to the idea of *cheng yi* 誠意 (to make one's thoughts fully oriented in an ethical direction), which is a process of making one's *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations) fully oriented in an ethical direction. *Yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations), as we saw earlier, has to do with the more

reflective inclinations of the heart/mind, unlike *yu* 欲 (desires) which can be pre-reflective. Thus, this aspect of self-cultivation is concerned with the activities of the heart/mind itself, not just with the pre-reflective desires that need to be guided and regulated by the heart/mind. This aspect of Confucian thought shows that the Confucians ascribe to the heart/mind a self-reflexiveness -- for any of its own activities, however minute and subtle, it has the capacity to reflect on and reshape such activities to ensure their orientation in an ethical direction. And this self-reflexiveness is related to the independence of the heart/mind from external control -- even though its activities can be influenced by external circumstances, the heart/mind has the capacity to constantly step back and reshape its own activities under the conception of what is proper that it forms on the basis of its own reflections (the discussion of this and the next paragraph draws on Shun 2004: 188-190).

We have so far focused on the heart/mind in our discussion of self-cultivation – how the heart/mind can grasp certain ethical standards through learning, how it can guide and regulate our feelings and desires, and how it can monitor and reshape its own operations. While the heart/mind does play a key role in self-cultivation, it is important to note, though, that the effect of self-cultivation does not stop with the heart/mind. For the early Confucians, the heart/mind and other aspects of the person are mutually interacting. In early Chinese texts, we see mention of how the life forces (*qi* 氣) that fill the body can be affected by what happens to the body, such as the tastes that the mouth takes in and the sounds that the ear hears; conversely, the life forces can generate speech in the mouth and sight in the eyes. Also, the directions (*zhi* 志) of the heart/mind can guide and shape the life forces (*qi* 氣) while depending on the life forces for their execution; conversely, the directions of the heart/mind can be swayed if the life forces are not adequately nourished. It follows from the intimate link between the heart/mind and the life forces, and between the life forces and the body, that the heart/mind is also intimately linked to the body. For the early Confucians, the condition of the heart/mind will inevitably be manifested in the body and in one's outward behavior and demeanor, and be perceivable by others. In emphasizing the need to be watchful over *du* 獨 (what one alone can access), both the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality and Commonality*) also point out that, although the minute and subtle tendencies of the heart/mind are initially known to oneself alone and not yet perceived by others, they will eventually become manifest (Zhu 1983-1986d *Daxue* chapter 6; Zhu 1983-1986c *Zhongyong* chapter 1). The *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) speaks of how the condition of the heart/mind is also manifested in the body, not just in action and speech, but also in the face, the look of the eyes, the four limbs, and in one's physical bearing in general;

indeed, according to *Mencius*, it is only through self-cultivation that one can give complete fulfilment to the body (*Mengzi* 1984:4A:15, 7A:21, 7A:38). Likewise, the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) speaks of how virtue (*de* 德) adorns the body just as riches adorn a house, and how when the heart/mind is expanded the body is also at ease (Zhu 1983-1986d *Daxue* chapter 6). Thus, for the early Confucians, the effect of self-cultivation does not stop with the heart/mind, but affects the person as a whole.

Indeed, for them, the effect of self-cultivation does not even stop with the individual person, but also extends to others. Early Confucian texts emphasize how self-cultivation has a transformative power on others, a power that the Confucians regard as the ideal basis for government. For example, for both *Confucius* and *Mencius*, the goal of government is to transform people's character, and the way to accomplish this is to first cultivate oneself and to let the transformative power of one's cultivated character take effect (*Lunyu*:1980: 2.1, 2.3, 12.19, 13.4, 13.13, 15.5; *Mengzi*:1984: 4A:20, 7A:19). This does not mean that governmental policies are not important, but proper policies are themselves a manifestation of the cultivated character of those in power, and properly carrying out policies transmitted from the past also requires a cultivated character (*Mengzi*:1984:2A:6, 4A:1; cf. 7B:5). So, the ultimate basis for order in society lies with cultivating oneself, an idea that the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) expresses by describing self-cultivation as the basis for regulating the family, giving order to the state, and ultimately bring peace to the whole Empire (Zhu 1983-1986d *Daxue* text; *Mengzi* 1984:4A:5, 4A:12, 7B:32). A similar point is also presented in terms of *cheng* 誠 (complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind), which is used in early Confucian texts to refer to the complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind. The notion is highlighted in the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*), the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality and Commonality*), and also occurs in parts of the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) and the *Xunzi* 荀子. *Cheng* 誠 (complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind) has the connotation of being real and complete, and it refers to a state in which one embodies the ethical attributes to the fullest extent. The most elaborate presentation of this state is in the second half of the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality and Commonality*), in which *cheng* 誠 (complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind) is presented as the basis for social and political order. A *cheng* 誠 (complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind) person will have a transformative effect on others' character and, when in government, will also ensure that the ten thousand things take their proper places. Since the transformative effect on others is itself a natural outgrowth of one's own self-transformation, it follows that, for the early Confucians, there is no clear line between self-transformation and the transformation of others.

6. Attending to the Self

I have in the paper highlighted self-transformation as a distinctive feature of Confucian thought, and have discussed in some detail the nature of the self-cultivation process. The transformation involved affects the whole person in fundamental ways. The proper situating of the self in relation to others involves a fundamental reshaping of one's outlook on life, including the way one assesses one's own interests and well-being, as well as one's sense of one's own importance. It involves overcoming natural tendencies to place oneself at the center of things, and requires constant vigilant attention to the subtle activities of the heart/mind. The firm commitment to the ethical is particularly demanding as it involves a steadfastness of purpose that could incur grave personal sacrifices, including giving up one's own life. These dimensions of Confucian thought provide a sense in which it can also be described as a kind of spiritual thought, if the spiritual is understood in a way that is divorced from pietistic and devotional practices. This Confucian concern with self-transformation, however, might itself raise a potential worry, namely, that it might itself exhibit a problematic form of self-centeredness that involves a misdirection of one's ethical attention. In this concluding section, I will discuss some possible forms that this worry can take. I will discuss two kinds of concern that the early Confucian thinkers themselves have raised and cautioned their audience against, and then move on to two other kinds of concern that might potentially be directed against the Confucian thinkers themselves.

As we have discussed in the previous section, self-transformation is viewed by Confucian thinkers as the basis for the social and political order. This idea is built into the early Chinese notion *de* 德 (virtue, power), a term often translated as “virtue” and sometimes as “power”. In its earliest use, *de* 德 (virtue, power) probably carried primarily religious connotations, referring to an attitude of the king that enabled his communion with Heaven (*tian* 天). It eventually came to refer in addition to qualities such as generosity, humility, and receptiveness to instruction, as well as to certain powers associated with these qualities, including a compulsion to respond on the part of the recipients of generous or sacrificial acts and a non-coercive power on others of attraction and transformation. Early Confucian thinkers continued this tradition, and regarded the power associated with *de* 德 (virtue, power) as the ideal basis for government – it is *de* 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness), that enables one to become a true king (*wang* 王). At the same time, they also noted the associated potential for a misdirection of attention that results

from one's aiming at 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) primarily for its perceived political advantages. *Mencius* draws a number of distinctions in this connection: between those who truly act out of *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) and those who enact *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) for political advantages, between those who rely on *de* 德 (virtue, power) to practice *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) and those who rely on force to make use of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence), and between those who use goodness to nourish the people and those who make use of goodness to gain people's allegiance (*Mengzi* 1984:2A:3, 4B:16, 4B:19). The point is to warn rulers against misdirecting their attention to the political advantages of 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) – someone so motivated would not truly attain 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness), and would therefore not attain the desired goals. A similar misdirection of attention can happen among officials, who cultivate themselves for the purpose of being appreciated by others thereby attaining employment or high rank in government. In this connection, *Mencius* again draws a distinction between the honors of Heaven (*tian* 天), which have to do with the ethical attributes, and the honors of humans, which have to do with high ranks in government, lamenting the fact that people during his times would aim at the former for the sake of the latter (*Mengzi*:1984:6A:16). *Confucius* makes a similar point by saying that learning should be for the self and not for others; it should be directed at one's own character and ability as such and not at appreciation by others and the resulting employability (*Lunyu*:1980:14.24, cf. 1.1, 1.16, 4.14, 14.30, 15.19).

A second kind of misdirection of attention that early Confucian thinkers criticize has to do with a focus on external perception that is guided by a concern with one's reputation rather than by political ambitions. This is the situation of the village worthy, who is concerned primarily with the reputation of being good, without a genuine concern for its substance (*Lunyu* 1980:13.21, 17.13, 17.18, cf. 13.24; *Mengzi* 1984:7B:37). This individual's way of life is entirely geared to social opinion, and since he adjusts his way of life to seek the approval of others, it is difficult to find fault with him. His way of life appears good, everyone approves of him, and he regards himself as living properly. And yet he has no genuine commitment to goodness, as can be seen from the fact that he would adjust his words and deeds to what he perceives as the expectations of others. Whatever qualities he has would change in response to the changing expectations of others, and so would lack the stability that morally good traits are often expected to have. Thus, he is not truly virtuous though he resembles someone who is and is mistakenly taken by people to be

virtuous; in this sense, he ‘steals’ the name of 德 (virtuous) and so is a “thief of *de*”(de zhi zei 德之賊).

Both *Confucius* and *Mencius* condemn such an individual, and there is something about the village worthy that is deeply disturbing. He exhibits a high level of self-awareness. He is aware that he is being judged, and wishes himself to be seen to have certain qualities; so he is not just reflecting on his own inner states, but also reflecting on how others would perceive his inner states. In his motives, he is subtly deceptive in a way that those who aim at being good for the resulting political advantages need not be. As can be seen from some of *Mencius*’ dialogues with the rulers of states, the latter can, at least, be somewhat explicit about their true motives. The former, however, would hide his true motive, which is to please others, as part of his pretence; he would do that as long as he is aware that his audience would not think well of his true motives. In this regard, he is like the type of moral hypocrite who has contrary values and qualities that others would not approve of and who, in seeking the approval of others, has to hide these values and qualities. But unlike this other type of moral hypocrite, the village worthy does not even have contrary values and qualities, as his sole preoccupation is to be seen as good. As a result, unlike this other type of moral hypocrite, he is less likely to betray himself in inattentive moments, and thus more likely to succeed in his deception. Through such deception, he is blurring the distinction between genuine goodness and semblances of the kind that he exhibits, thereby undermining his audience’s understanding of what genuine goodness is, and hence undermining the very conception of that to which he makes a false claim (see Kittay 1982 and McKinnon 1991 for a discussion of the other type of moral hypocrite and for an elaboration on the last point about what is problematic about the pretence involved).

What we have considered are two kinds of misdirection of ethical attention that are in a sense too externally directed – one’s ultimate goal is to attain certain political advantages in the first case or to acquire a certain reputation in the second. Ultimately, though, one’s attention is also self-directed in a problematic way – it is after all one’s own political advantages or one’s own reputation that one aims at. The issue still comes down to problematic forms of self-centeredness, and the early Confucians are vividly aware of such dangers and speak vehemently against them. An interesting question, though, is whether the Confucians are themselves, in their own focus on self-cultivation, vulnerable to a similar criticism that they are themselves overly self-centered. In the remainder of this section, I will consider two forms such criticism can take, and the potential responses that can be given on behalf of the Confucians

(the discussion that follows draws on Shun 2001: 229-244).

One form that such criticism can take is that, even on the Confucians' own position, the concern with cultivating 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) in oneself can still involve an excessive concern with others' opinion of oneself, even if one's attention is not directed explicitly to the opinion of others in the way that the attention of the village worthy is. The reason is that terms like 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) are terms that typically occur in third-person descriptions of the good person rather than in the content of the first personal deliberation of the truly good person – to use a contemporary parallel, the truly benevolent person would typically not be thinking of herself as benevolent or her actions as benevolent acts. Thus, it appears, the first-personal exercise of cultivating these qualities in oneself involves one's being concerned primarily with the way others would describe oneself. To aim at 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) is to aim at one's being describable by others in a certain way, and this kind of concern seems misdirected in a disturbing way, just like the village worthy's concern with pleasing others.

On behalf of the Confucians, one might note that even though they talk in general terms about 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness), self-cultivation for them typically would not involve thinking in these terms. Instead, one's attention in self-cultivation is more often directed to something more specific than these general qualities, as can be seen from our discussion of the idea of being watchful over *du* 獨 (what one alone can access). Still, this response would not suffice as the Confucians do from time to time advocate in more general terms a concern with the overall quality of one's character, conveyed in terms of 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness). To supplement this initial response, we may add that while 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) is typically a third person description, someone engaged in self-cultivation may be using it as a description of others by oneself, rather than of oneself by others. That is, in being concerned with 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness), one's concern need not be with being describable by others in these terms, but may instead be with one's becoming like the kind of person that one would oneself describe in this manner. In having this concern, one's attention is directed not to the description itself, but to one's having a certain quality which, as it happens, can be described in this way.

Another possible criticism of the Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation is that, even

if one is not concerned with others' description of oneself, one's attention may still be too self-directed. One may be making one's own character ethically the most important thing, more important than other-regarding considerations. In fact, *Mencius* was himself occasionally accused of this kind of self-centeredness. The *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) contains several examples of his refusing to see a ruler because he had not been summoned or treated in accordance with certain rules of propriety appropriate to his position. His critics made the point that, if only he had been willing to 'bend' himself a little and have audience with the ruler, he might have been able to accomplish desirable political changes and thereby help the people (*Mengzi* 1984:3B:1, 5A:7, cf. 4A:17). His self-righteousness, it seems, had come at the expense of missing the opportunity to help others.

Put in general terms, the Confucian response would refer to both the content of the ethical ideal they advocate and the effect of one's attaining this ideal. The content involves proper attention and sensitivity to the well-being of others as well as due acknowledgement of their importance, and the effect of self-cultivation also extends to the transformation of others' character. Accordingly, there cannot be a divergence between one's own self-cultivation on the one hand, and the well-being or the transformation of others' on the other. *Mencius*' response to his critics draws on this idea. According to him, what he sought to accomplish in the political realm was to 'straighten' those in power, and 'straightening' others depends on one's being 'straight' oneself; there has never been a case of one's 'bending' oneself and yet succeeding in 'straightening' others (*Mengzi*:1984:3B:1, 5A:7; cf. *Lunyu* 12.22, 13.13). So, to the extent that the well-being of the people depends on a reform of the political order, there cannot be a conflict between a concern for one's character and a concern for the well-being of others. And given that the transformative effect on others' character is a natural outgrowth of one's cultivating one's own character, there also cannot be a conflict between a concern for one's character and a concern for others' character.

This Confucian response draws on an optimistic belief about the transformative power of a cultivated character. While we do see repeated statements of this belief in early Confucian texts, we also get the sense that the early Confucians were not unaware that this belief could be overly optimistic and might not match the practical political realities of the times. Consider, for example, the fact that the attitude of acceptance that we discussed earlier in connection with the notion *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree) is sometimes also directed to a failure to bring about desired political changes. In *Confucius*' words, whether the Way prevails or falls into disuse is itself a matter of

ming 命 (destiny, fate, decree) (*Lunyu* 1980:14.36). Now, if one's own ethical qualities are within one's control as the Confucians think, and if one's own self-cultivation will lead naturally to the transformation of others, especially those in power, then the prevailing of the Way should have been something that one can bring about. Thus, statements like *Confucius'* are implicit acknowledgements that perhaps the belief about the transformative power of a cultivated character is itself overly optimistic. So, while there is a Confucian response to the kind of criticism directed against *Mencius*, perhaps that response is itself potentially undermined by this tension between the early Confucians' belief in the transformative power of a cultivated character and their own political failure and the resulting frustration with the political realities of their times.

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