

After Confucius: Psychology And Moral Power

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctorate
of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

According to everyday folk psychology, our deliberate goals and intentions, together with our character traits, explain much of our overt behavior. These ways of explaining behavior are pervasive. According to many social psychologists, they are also typically false. Instead, much human behavior is controlled by psychological processes prompted through external triggers that we do not recognize and over which we have little control. Once triggered, these processes shape our behavior in profound ways. Experiments demonstrating these effects are legion, suggesting that any number of elements can have determining sway on our behavior, whether it's a simple smile (which can make cooperation among players in strategic games more likely), or the chance finding of a dime in a payphone (which can temporarily increase the probability of the finder acting altruistically), or the presence of unappealing, half-eaten foodstuffs in an experimenter's room (which makes subjects behave moralistically when responding to unrelated experimental questions). Minor details can have major impact on our behavior, and our ignorance of this phenomenon should be of moral concern. This is the focus of my dissertation.

In particular, I argue that individuals can often agree or disagree on moral issues not because of the content of their respective beliefs, but rather because of their

unawareness of (and thus inattentiveness to) the subtle impact of their immediate environments—and their own mannerisms—on moral reasoning and conduct. The effects can be considerable: How long we are willing to engage in dialogue; the degree to which we find accommodation to others acceptable; the creativity we deploy in finding mutually agreeable outcomes to problems; the significance we *attach* to any problems we may have—each of these crucial factors in moral deliberation can be affected profoundly by minor variations in our conduct and our situations. Take any social encounter: Even before we share our opinions and engage in serious discussion, we are already signaling various attitudes and even content-rich information about ourselves through cues arising from our facial expressions, posture, tone of voice, forms of address, and other seemingly minor details of our comportment. These cues automatically bias how others interpret our subsequent behavior, and thereby influence how our interactions with others unfold. Attending to such minor details may seem antiquated—even priggish—from a modern perspective. Yet the influence they exert should caution us against discounting their importance.

So I throw my hat in with a philosopher who did not overlook the impact of these variables, and who viewed minding them as a vital source of moral power: Confucius (fl. ca. 6th century BCE). In the *Analects*, we find Confucius preoccupied by very minor details of one's mannerisms and their impact on others. This led Confucius

to motivate norms of conduct aimed at structuring social exchanges in ways conducive to achieving interpersonal agreement or accommodation. I argue that, for our purposes today, we can reduce his various norms to just two. The first is to ‘mind manners’—in other words, to be attentive to details of one’s own behavior out of consideration of its impact on others; the second is to ‘give the benefit of a doubt’—to discount the impact of negative first impressions in order to allow for healthy moral relationships to develop.

Abiding by these norms can foster a form of *ethical bootstrapping*—that is, lifting or prompting one another towards our joint moral ends. If the social psychological literature is true, then whether or not any individual will be able to meet her ethical aims on any particular occasion will hinge on the actions and manners of her immediate interlocutors, which in turn will hinge on her own. In being mindful of the interconnectedness of our behavior, we not only affect how others react to us, but we also thereby affect the kinds of reactions we face in turn. The bootstrapping is mutual.

The deep interconnectedness of our behavior as reflected in experimental social psychology should lead us away from thinking of individuals as trapped by aspects of their psychology and determined to act in fixed ways, come what may. Instead, individuals’ behavior is highly malleable; with the right prompts, even the most recalcitrant individuals can be moved in new directions. After all, people can have flourishing or accommodating moral relationships in spite of real differences in their

avowed moral commitments, and deleterious or rancorous moral relationships in spite of substantive agreement on big ticket moral items. In pluralistic societies where we *expect* clashes of norms to occur, it is vital to uncover the conditions propitious to agreement or accommodation not just at a theoretical level but a practical level as well. This begins with what we have most control over: our manners.

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Acknowledgments

It was during a graduate seminar in metaethics led by Ronnie de Sousa at the University of Toronto that I first began to think there was room for fruitful engagement between classical Confucian thought and contemporary moral psychology. In a very real sense, this project got off the ground during those weeks in the Spring of 2002. My thanks to Ronnie and also to Vincent Shen for encouraging me to pursue these interests.

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pluralistic methodology gave me a sense of philosophical friendship that I treasure to this day.

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1. Foreword – After Confucius

4.5 – The Master said, “All people desire wealth and honor, but I will not accept them unless they have been acquired in the right way.”¹

4.10 – The Master said, “The nobleman understands what is right (*yi* 義). The petty man, on the other hand, understands profit.”

15.24 – Zigong asked, “Is there one word that can serve as a guide for one’s entire life?” The Master replied, “Is it not reciprocity (*shu* 恕)? What you do not desire – do not impose it on others.”

These and hundreds of other passages from the *Analects* of Confucius (fl. ca. 6th century B.C.E.) are plainly concerned with morality, reflecting perennial topics of moral concern such as personal integrity, fairness and reciprocity. Much of the text is of obvious moral import. Yet alongside these passages are numerous others that seem void of any real moral content. Instead, they seem to describe cultural practices and other idiosyncrasies of Confucius’s contemporary society.

¹ All translations in this dissertation are my own, though I benefited from those of Ames and Rosemont (1998), Brooks and Brooks (1998), Lau (1992), and Slingerland (2003a). I used the Chinese text in Lau (1992).

7.18 - The Master used classical pronunciations when reciting the *Odes* or the *History*, or when conducting ritual ceremonies.”

Indeed, some of these passages seem largely autobiographical, reflecting Confucius’s style and giving us a portrait of the kind of person he was, but shedding little or no light on questions of morality.

10.4 - When entering the gate of his Duke, he would draw himself in, as if the gate were not large enough to admit him.

10.12 - He would not sit unless his mat was straight.

10.19 - When he was ill, and his lord visited, he would lay with his head to the east, draped in court robes, with ceremonial sash wrapped around him.

10.20 - When summoned by his lord, he would set off on foot, without waiting for his horses to be hitched to the carriage.

In this dissertation, I aim to show that passages such as these, which draw attention to minor details of individual comportment, were not only of paramount moral concern to Confucius and his followers, but should be of moral concern to us today. Minor details of comportment influence how individuals interpret and align themselves to one another, influencing the trajectory of their interactions. Attending to the signals that arise from small variations in tone of voice, choice of words, posture, facial expression, and other modes of expression can mean the difference between achieving agreement and accommodation on the one hand, and disagreement and intolerance on the other. We need to re-evaluate the role of such details—often relegated to the non-moral realm of etiquette, style, or social convention—in our moral theorizing.

It's not only philosophers who are uninterested in, unaware of, or otherwise unconcerned with the impact of minor details of ourselves and our environments on our interactions with others. Most of us, in our everyday lives, similarly overlook the impact of minor situational variables on our behavior, and seldom invoke them when explaining why our interactions with others proceed well or poorly. Instead, we typically believe that individuals' deliberate goals and intentions, together with their character traits, explain much of their overt behavior. These ways of explaining behavior are pervasive. They are also typically false. Instead, much human behavior is controlled by psychological processes prompted through external triggers that we do

not recognize and over which we have little control. Once triggered, these processes shape our behavior in profound ways. Experiments demonstrating these effects are legion, suggesting that any number of elements can have determining sway on our behavior, whether it's a simple smile (which can make cooperation among players in strategic games more likely), or the chance finding of a dime in a payphone (which can temporarily increase the probability of the finder acting altruistically), or the presence of unappealing, half-eaten foodstuffs in an experimenter's room (which makes subjects behave moralistically when responding to unrelated experimental questions). Minor details can have major impact on our behavior, and our ignorance of this phenomenon should be of moral concern.

Individuals can often agree or disagree on moral issues not because of the content of their respective beliefs, but rather because of their unawareness of (and thus inattentiveness to) the subtle impact of their immediate environments—and their own mannerisms—on moral reasoning and conduct. The effects can be considerable: How long we are willing to engage in dialogue; the degree to which we find accommodation to others acceptable; the creativity we deploy in finding mutually agreeable outcomes to problems; the significance we *attach* to any problems we may have—each of these crucial factors in moral deliberation can be affected profoundly by minor variations in our conduct and our situations. We ought to mind them.

Chapter two outlines the Confucian framework for this dissertation by exploring an old puzzle in the *Analects* concerning moral power (*de* 德). Exemplary moral individuals in the *Analects* are described as having an ability to influence and transform those around them through their mere presence. When an exemplary person interacts with others they bend or yield to him—regardless of their countervailing dispositions or desires. What explains this magical ability? I argue that a key to solving this puzzle is paying attention to traditionally overlooked passages in the *Analects* placing importance on matters seemingly trivial from the moral perspective, matters pertaining to attire, posture, facial countenance, verbal turns of phrase, and other details of interpersonal conduct. Discussing such matters might seem quaint or parochial by modern philosophical standards. But according to our best psychological science, such details can make all the difference in determining how our interactions proceed. The seemingly preternatural ability of charismatic individuals to navigate the social world and draw people to their moral ends stems, I argue, from their command of the various details of conduct and stimuli they introduce to their immediate environments.

In chapter three, I show that our sensitivity to immediate situational triggers has not escaped the notice of recent moral philosophers, who have discussed them as part of the situationist critique of virtue ethics. Indeed, some take this sensitivity as *debunking* the character ideals invoked in virtue ethics; if situational variables impact our behavior

far more than we realize, many prominent conceptions of virtue may be practically unrealizable (Doris 1998; Flanagan 1991; Harman 2000). Others have challenged these claims, either by questioning the interpretation of the data, or by denying its relevance to virtue theory (Annas 2003; Athanassoulis 2000; Kamtekar 2004; Sabini and Silver 2005; Sreenivasan 2002). Whichever way this debate plays out, questions remain as to how we ought to incorporate situationism into our normative theories. Here, philosophers on both sides of the character debate have proposed a seek/avoid strategy: if situations influence our behavior, then we ought to seek out situations enhancing moral behavior, and avoid those compromising it (Doris 2002; Harman 2003; Merritt 2000; Samuels and Casebeer 2005). This strategy has much to recommend itself, but is limited in application to those situations that admit of such straightforward predictions; alas, many of the situations we encounter elicit neither bad nor good behavior *simpliciter*. More importantly, the strategy accentuates a person/situation dichotomy that is untenable; we do not simply *react* to external situations, but we also *shape* our situational contexts through the triggers we ourselves introduce. Just as we can choose to be sensitive to the sorts of environments we enter, we can also choose to be sensitive to the sorts of variables we bring into our environments through our very persons. Thus, the strategy overlooks the deeper lesson to be learned from situationism—that our behavior is intimately interconnected to the actions of others in subtle yet powerful ways.

Take any social encounter: Even before we share our opinions and engage in serious discussion, we are already signaling various attitudes and even content-rich information about ourselves through cues arising from our facial expressions, posture, tone of voice, forms of address, and other seemingly minor details of our comportment. These cues automatically bias how individuals interpret our subsequent behavior, and thereby influence how our interactions with others unfold. Attending to such minor details may seem antiquated—even priggish—from a modern perspective. Yet the influence they exert should caution us against discounting their importance.

So I throw my hat in with a philosopher who did not overlook the impact of these variables, and who viewed minding them as a vital source of moral power: Confucius (fl. ca. 6th century BCE). In the *Analects*, we find Confucius preoccupied by very minor details of one's mannerisms and their impact on others. For him, the goal of a virtuous individual was not to develop character traits as a bulwark against external influence, but instead to find efficacy and harmonious expression within the web of influences that constitute social life. This led Confucius to motivate norms of conduct aimed at structuring social exchanges in ways conducive to achieving interpersonal agreement or accommodation. I argue that, for our purposes today, we can reduce his various norms to just two. The first is to 'mind manners'—in other words, to be attentive to details of one's own behavior out of consideration of its impact on others;

the second is to ‘give the benefit of a doubt’—to discount the impact of negative first impressions in order to allow for healthy moral relationships to develop. These two norms are the topics of chapter four and five, respectively.

Abiding by these norms can foster a form of *ethical bootstrapping*—that is, lifting or prompting one another towards our joint moral ends. If the social psychological literature is true, then whether or not any individual will be able to meet her ethical aims on any particular occasion will hinge on the actions and manners of her immediate interlocutors, which in turn will hinge on her own. In being mindful of the interconnectedness of our behavior, we not only affect how others react to us, but we also thereby affect the kinds of reactions we face in turn. The bootstrapping is mutual. The deep interconnectedness of our behavior as reflected in experimental social psychology should lead us away from thinking of individuals as trapped by aspects of their psychology and determined to act in fixed ways, come what may. Instead, individuals’ behavior is highly malleable; with the right prompts, even the most recalcitrant individuals can be moved in new directions. After all, people can have flourishing or accommodating moral relationships in spite of real differences in their avowed moral commitments, and deleterious or rancorous moral relationships in spite of substantive agreement on big ticket moral items. In pluralistic societies where we *expect* clashes of norms to occur, it is vital to uncover the conditions propitious to

agreement or accommodation not just at a theoretical level but a practical level as well.

This begins with what we have most control over: our manners.

1.1 A note on the *Analects* as a text

Throughout this dissertation I will be discussing and elaborating certain themes from the *Analects* of Confucius, so it is important to flag some issues concerning the nature of that text.

The *Analects* is, to the best of our knowledge, an accretional text—one that evolved and expanded over time at the hands of successive generations of disciples perhaps over a period as long as two or three centuries. Many texts from this epoch share the same characteristics; multi-authored textual accretion and compilation was commonplace during the Warring States period (ca. 463-222 BCE). Questions of scholarly interest therefore often hinge on just how much of a given text could be attributed to its purported author, which portions are clearly additions, and how long the accretional process took place. When it comes to the *Analects*, most scholars agree that of the twenty books of the *Analects*, the last five are of a later date. Beyond that, there is little by way of consensus.

Bruce and Taeko Brooks have given the most ambitious accretional theory of the *Analects*, dating individual passages to particular years in striking detail, given the

paucity of direct historical evidence (Brooks and Brooks 1998). (This is perhaps a nice way of saying their hypotheses are severely underdetermined by the available evidence.) Besides moving a few chapters around to reflect their probable historical order, Brooks and Brooks also believe the text evolved over some 230 years, beginning with the death of Confucius (ca. 479 BCE) to the fall of the state of Lu 魯 (ca. 249 BCE). For present purposes it isn't necessary to evaluate their specific claims. However, their work helps to remind us just how little we actually know about the history of Warring States texts, and how much we might unwittingly assume concerning their integrity.

In addition to being a *pastiche*, the *Analects* is also largely pre-theoretical. While it indicates a significant level of reflexivity both of its subject matter (ethics and government), and while there are obvious attempts to bring incomplete or inconsistent understandings of concepts into some coherent framework, the authors and compilers of the text were not interested in giving systematic, theoretical accounts of their subject matter.

Having mentioned these caveats, the text does present a coherent worldview in spite of internal tension and inconsistencies. After, all, it is the product of a group of individuals who shared certain values, aims and practices, and saw themselves as expanding and elaborating on the original teachings of the historical Confucius.

My references to Confucius throughout this dissertation should be understood as referring to the content of the *Analects* itself rather than the actual thoughts of any historical person

2. The Puzzle of Moral Power in the *Analects*

The concept of *de* is of central importance to the *Analects* of Confucius (fl. ca. 6th century BCE). *De* refers to one's ability to influence others through non-coercive means. In the words of A.C. Graham, it had traditionally represented "the power, whether benign or baleful, to move others without exerting physical force" (Graham 1989, 13). Since moving (or influencing) obstinate rulers to make social and political changes to restore social order was the *raison d'être* of Confucius and his disciples, cultivating *de* or 'moral power' was one of their chief aims.

The centrality of 'power' or 'power over others' in understanding *de* is recognized by nearly everyone. For example, Arthur Waley translates *de* as "moral force" (Waley 1938); Graham as "potency" (Graham 1989); Philip Ivanhoe as "moral charisma" (Ivanhoe 1999). In addition, many also agree that this power is the prerogative of morally upright individuals, lending them authority. Beyond this, however, there is little by way of consensus. Indeed, there is little at all. The opinion of Hall and Ames is representative:

The concept of *te* [*de*] is painfully recondite. Confucius states rather specifically that few are able to understand or realize it [in 15.4]. In fact, this concept, *te* [*de*], is an uncomfortable puzzle in the early texts in that many scholars have not really determined what to make of it, and as a consequence, give it short shrift.

(Hall and Ames 1989, 216)

This opinion is not uncommon. Making sense of *de* has been an interpretive challenge. But it is possible to explicate *de* in such a way as to make sense of the concept—recondite as it is—within the broader framework of Confucius’s teachings.

2.1 The concept of *de* in sources predating the Analects

The concept of *de* can be found in the earliest surviving writings in Chinese history. These include inscriptions made on the shoulder blades of cattle or the ventral shells of turtles (for purposes of divination), as well as carvings on bronze vessels, both traceable to the late 2nd millennium BCE. The concept is also found in the *Shijing* 詩經 or *Book of Odes*, the oldest extant collection of folk poetry and official hymns in Chinese history, dating from as early as the 10th century BCE. Elements of these early accounts of *de* persist to the time of Confucius, so we would do well to understand this background.

Donald Munro’s survey of *de* in the early literature remains the most thorough (Munro 1969). Drawing from several early sources, Munro characterizes *de* as connoting a person’s overall attitude toward prevailing socio-moral norms, as revealed through one’s comportment and behavior. This attitude could either be negative or positive, in favor of or against prevailing norms. (So, for example, someone might be described as having a *de* that was amicable or a *de* that was hostile.) In some instances, the concept

refers more narrowly to an idealized type of this attitude, exemplifying positive endorsement of prevailing norms and a disposition to follow them (100). One's *de* was thought to be heritable, passed along over successive generations of a family. Ultimately, it could be traced back to the tribe's ancestral progenitor, a kind of anthropomorphic ancestor god (101).

While these sources discuss different types of *de* (even the *de* of animals in some cases), most of the discussion is focused on the tribal leader or ruler, whose *de* was connected to how he treated his subjects. Specifically, the ruler could foster positive *de* by bestowing kindness on his subjects through concrete acts of benevolence. These beneficent actions had two paradigmatic effects. First, they would elicit fondness and obedience in his subjects, who would be thankful for the quality of life the ruler provided. Second, there was a general tendency for virtuous or kind individuals at the top of the socio-political ladder to be admired and mimicked, so a benevolent ruler would naturally become a role model for others.¹ Most classical Chinese philosophers shared this assumption—that people are spontaneously attracted to, trust in, emulate, and abide by virtuous or learned individuals. (This latter point is Munro's most important contribution to our understanding of *de*—his linking it to the more widespread notion of model emulation in early China.) Given the appreciation of his

¹ Munro notes that the character *de* frequently appears alongside characters connoting the idea of emulation, such as *xing* 刑 and *shuai* 衰 (Munro 1969, 99).

subjects, and their propensity to emulate him, the ruler would thereby have *de*—moral power—which allowed him to rule without resorting to coercion or force.

Another prominent account of *de* can be found in the writings of David Nivison (Nivison 1996). Nivison understands *de* as referring to a ruler's 'psychic energy', referring to the "combined impact of awe, perceived prestige, fear, and gratitude" on those benefiting from the ruler's dominion (26). One way of eliciting such awe, prestige and gratitude would be through occasional displays of military power (sometimes along his territorial boundaries), keeping neighboring states free of any aggressive inclinations (26). Another stemmed from the ruler's role in carrying out important rituals and sacrifices to ancestral gods, who were thought capable of influencing worldly events. Efficient performance of these rituals ensured the ancestral gods would be favorable toward the current generation. Yet another stemmed from the ruler's willingness to submit to others' counsel in performing his duties. In each of these cases—displaying military power, performing certain rites, or accepting counsel—the ruler would be acting to secure benefits for others: his family, extended family, and ultimately all of his subjects. Nivison concludes that the primary sense of *de* was "generosity-gratitude", being appreciated as generous by others (Nivison 2002, 234). These feelings would subsequently be amplified by socialization forces in Chinese culture demanding that individuals display gratitude and respect whenever favors are bestowed upon them.

In these early inscriptions, then, *de* is linked to influence or power, and has certain ethical elements: not only must the ruler be willing to sacrifice and receive instruction or counsel (when appropriate) to foster his *de*, he must also fulfill the duties unique to his station and serve as a positive role model for others, lest he lose favor with the ancestral spirits. In the *Analects*, the heritable qualities of *de* would fade away while the ethical considerations rose to the forefront.

2.1.1 The *mana* thesis

Before moving on, a specific claim made by Nivison merits discussion. Nivison claims that *de* is “clearly some kind of inner mental entity” (29) and that it is a kind of “psychic energy in the king” (24). Benjamin Schwartz is also representative of this general line of interpretation. For example, he explicates *de* in the early literature as follows:

This term may have originally been associated with an inner spiritual-magical behavior of others, but in these works it already possesses an unmistakably ethical meaning. The message is already clear. The normative order can be maintained only by rulers who possess this spiritual-ethical power. (Schwartz 1985, 76)

Expanding his discussion from the *de* of rulers to the *de* of the ruling class generally, Schwartz continues to invoke spiritual magic in explaining *de*. “The exemplary family

relations of such a ruling class would simply radiate their magical *de* over the society as a whole" (Schwartz 1985, 102). For both Schwartz and Nivison, then, *de* is to be found in the minds rulers and those in the ruling class, and is seen as a power that can 'magically' transform distant others through psychic emanation.

Now, perhaps there were prevailing religious beliefs concerning *de* that linked it to 'psychic powers' heritable through the royal bloodline and enhanced by the intervention of ancestral gods as gratitude for fulfilling sacrificial rites. Such beliefs may have played into the practices of deferring and yielding to rulers, augmenting their *de* or power over others. I am happy to allow for such explanations. However, is it necessary to invoke them? Munro did not think so, and dubbed the idea that psychic powers emanating from the ruler caused others to admire and respect him as the "mana thesis".

According to the early Chinese assumptions about model emulation, two consequences automatically result from the presentation of a virtuous model to people: first, they seek to emulate his virtue; second, their loyalty and affection are focused on him. Neither of these attitudes is caused by any magical magnetic attraction. Instead, the effect of *te* [*de*]... on others can be explained in part as a natural response to philanthropic activity and compassion" (Munro 1969, 103).

There are good reasons motivating Munro's insistence that it is unnecessary to invoke magical powers to explain the effects of *de*. First, *de* was thought to be a property not only of rulers but of ordinary individuals who would obviously lack the unique connections to ancestral gods that the ruler enjoyed. Hence, it is important account for the power of *de* outside the royal domain. That is, we should be able to account for the power to influence others without resorting to coercion or force in a way that avoids adverting to unique properties of the ruler and his relationship to ancestral gods. (This is especially important in the *Analects*, where *de* is routinely depicted as something most anyone can cultivate, as opposed to a psychic power one can only receive from ancestral gods.) Second, we in the modern West have similar beliefs about the charismatic power of certain individuals, and routinely link such forms of charisma to ethical considerations, without ever adverting to magical powers.² If we can provide some explanation of the relevant concept in early China that also avoids invoking supernatural or magical phenomena, we might not only come up with an account that has greater explanatory power (capable of explicating both royal *de* and commoner *de*), but we might also thereby find in the *Analects* a source of reflection relevant to modern concerns.

² We may, of course, describe certain individuals as having magical charms, or being magnetic or highly charismatic, and we may also be unsure how to unpack their attractive qualities in commonsense terms, but this need not suggest that we are going beyond the metaphorical in describing such individuals as 'magnetic' or 'majestic'.

2.2 De in the Analects

Thus far I have discussed *de* as it appears in the pre-*Analects* literature. I now turn to discussion of *de* in the *Analects* itself. The representative passages fall into two broad types: 1) ruler or political *de*, and 2) individual or gentlemanly *de*.³ Both of these types of *de* go beyond what is found in earlier sources.

2.2.1 Ruler / political *de*

2.1 - The master said, “One who rules by *de* 德 is comparable to the Pole Star, which remains in its place and receives the homage of the myriad lesser stars.”

2.3 - The master said, “Guide them with governance (*zheng* 政), regulate them with punishments, and the people will evade these with no sense of shame. Guide them with *de* 德, regulate them through ritual propriety, and the people will have a sense of shame and be orderly.”

8.18 - The master said, “Majestic! Shun and Yu⁴ sustained the entire world without managing it.”

³ While the character *de* 德 does not appear in some of these passages, they have traditionally been thought to be intricately related to the concept.

⁴ Mythical heroes and sage-rulers of antiquity, venerated by the Confucian and Mohist schools.

13.6 – The master said, “When the ruler is straight (*zheng* 正), his will is practiced without issuing orders. When the ruler is not straight, none follow him even while he issues orders.”

15.5 – The master said, “Someone who ruled without acting (*wu-wei* 無爲) – was this not Shun? What did he do? He made himself reverent and took his proper position facing south – that is all!”

These passages reflect aspects of *de* found in earlier writings: the ruler governs through non-coercive means and occupies his station in proper fashion, and the people in turn respond by being orderly and compliant. Indeed, in the case of the ancient sage ruler Shun, he managed to rule the empire through the single act of sitting down reverentially!

These are some of the most fantastic and idealistic accounts of the power of *de*, and it isn't difficult to sympathize with those who claim there is something magical going on here, something superhuman or supernatural. As noted above, beliefs concerning the unique qualities of the royal bloodline were prevalent during this period, and something like the 'mana thesis' seems apt in understanding these passages. Nonetheless, competing hypotheses afford us greater explanatory purchase.

For example, several early commentators explicated the ability to rule 'effortlessly' as resulting from *much prior effort*, such as through the ruler's setting timely

policies and appointing capable officials. These functions are emphasized throughout the *Analects* itself (e.g. 1.5, 12.7, 13.2, 13.5, 15.10). In fact, one of the ruler's most important functions, emphasized by Confucian, Mohist and Legalist texts alike, was to attract worthy and capable individuals to fill administrative posts and properly manage the kingdom's affairs.⁵ The ruler's *de* (or moral power) would be important both in attracting such individuals and in maintaining their loyalty (as would his wisdom in distinguishing *truly* meritorious individuals from imposters), so one could hardly avoid mentioning his *de* when explaining the efficient running of an empire. However, this would not obviate the need to refer to the larger institutional structure the ruler was responsible for setting in place to explain how the ruler could come to rule 'effortlessly'—by just sitting on the throne (as it were). The actual smooth operation of the empire would stem from the larger meritocracy, and thus be attributable to the ruler's *de* only in an indirect, derivative sense.

Edward Slingerland calls this 'institutional *de*', yet rejects it as an explanation of royal *de* in a number of places (Slingerland 2003a, 8, 84, 175-6). Instead, he takes ruling by *de* as ruling by means of 'Virtue'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are few other details provided on how this actually works, besides referring to how the ruler's virtue would engender emulation in others. An institutional account, referring to the ruler's crucial

⁵ The belief that a ruler must attract worthy officials in order to rule effectively was widespread and can be found in numerous other texts of this period. For a discussion, see Nivison (2002).

role in structuring government, is not only consistent with the notion of model emulation that is a core feature of *de*, but also affirms the Confucian school's own beliefs concerning the importance of worthy individuals and their role in public life. Rejecting the institutional explanation obviates the need for worthy individuals to fill official posts, thereby undermining the importance or even the necessity of the scholarly class to which the Confucians themselves belonged. It seems unlikely, then, that the early Confucians subscribed to ruling merely by means of 'Virtue'. Attributing to Confucius the naïve belief that a ruler's psychic powers would spontaneously order the world seems uncharitable and unwarranted given the availability of explanations that refer to his pivotal functional role in government.

8.20 – Shun had five ministers and the world was well governed. King Wu said, "I have ten ministers in charge of establishing order." The Master commented, "It is said that talent is difficult to find – is it not the case?"

Even the incorruptible, wholly sagacious, and wholly virtuous Shun—one of the true heroes of the Confucian school—needed the help of ministers to govern the kingdom. Were his supernatural psychic powers deficient? Or was the ruler's *de* keyed to more than his personal moral virtue? Confucius's lament at the difficulty of finding talented individuals surely implies that he thought them requisite to the efficient workings of

government, and that anything resembling a ‘mana thesis’ of royal *de* would be at best a metaphorical assertion meant to capture a much broader institutional phenomenon.

I have belabored this point for a reason. By looking at these other considerations we get a better handle of the *de* of rulership, and can have a chance at understanding—perhaps even accepting—the seemingly incredible statements attributed to the power of *de* in the passages cited above; any account of the phenomenon would be incomplete without these considerations.⁶

2.2.2 Individual / nobleman’s *de*

The passages concerning royal or political *de* represent one particular conception of *de*. We should not expect each of the extensions of the concept to point to the same precise phenomenon, even if they all share some prototypical properties in common. The *de* of the ruler would naturally be different than the *de* of a gentleman, the *de* of a sage, the *de* of a beautiful woman and the *de* of a horse (cf. 14.33). Celestial bodies, movie stars and precious stones can all be described as ‘radiant’, but each admits of its own explanation.

In turning to the second type of *de* in the *Analects*—what I call individual or gentlemanly *de*—we must therefore look to features of the individual or gentleman that might account for his ability to influence others and hold sway over them. Consider, for

⁶ I hasten to mention the brute fact that the ruler *actually possessed enormous power* over others, as well as the ideology, pageantry and rituals to add to his awe. These would all certainly have to figure into an explanation of the ruler’s *de* as well.

example, the following three passages, which describe not the *de* of a ruler but rather the *de* of a cultivated moral individual.

4.24 – The master said, “*De* 德) is never solitary; it always has neighbors.”

9.14 – The master expressed a desire to go and live among the Nine Yi Barbarian tribes. Someone asked him, “How could you bear with their uncouthness?” The Master replied, “If a gentleman were to dwell among them, what uncouthness would there be?”

12.19 – The *de* 德 of a gentleman is like the wind, the *de* 德 of a petty person is like the grass—when the wind moves over the grass, the grass is sure to bend.⁷

These passages provide us a number of desiderata for a satisfactory explanation of individual *de*. Specifically, an explanation ought to shed light on the following points:

- *de* characterizes an ability to influence and persuade others
- *de* characterizes an ability to dispel uncouthness in one’s immediate environment

⁷ Nivison claims that this passage marks a shift in the concept of *de*: “One can speak of the *de* of kinds of persons, meaning not necessarily their power to affect others but their characteristic way of interacting with others” (Nivison 2002, 236). This might indeed mark some subtle shift. However, we should note that a) this passage clearly implies that the nobleman is affecting the petty person, and b) very few interactions leave individuals summarily unaffected. To interact with others is to affect them, whether intentionally or not.

- *de* works across cultural contexts (9.14)
- *de* need not rely upon feelings of reciprocation and indebtedness engendered from a prior history of generosity or beneficence. The effects seem more immediate; the nobleman dispels uncouthness through his mere presence in 9.14.

How to account for these effects? *De*'s most salient aspect in the *Analects*—besides its characteristic power—is its linkage to self-cultivation (*xiu* 修—e.g. 7.3, 12.10, 12.21, 16.1).⁸ Thus, examining the Confucian school's practices of self-cultivation can afford us some insight into the sources of the nobleman's *de*.

There are three possible sources for the nobleman's *de*: his judgments, his command of ritual propriety, and his attention to details of comportment. The division into three is somewhat artificial, as there is no indication that each was a distinct goal of self-cultivation. Nor are any specific practices linked to producing *de* as opposed to other virtues, such as humaneness (*ren* 仁) or appropriateness (*yi* 義). Thus, if *de* is cultivated, it is cultivated in much the same way as other virtues in the *Analects*—specifically, through learning (*xue* 學), thinking (*si* 思) and practice (*xi* 習). Nevertheless, I deploy the division to organize discussion.

⁸ A notable exception is 7.23, where Confucius attributes his *de* to heaven (*tian* 天). This can be understood as an expression of Confucius's faith in the merits of his mission as opposed to a descriptive account of the actual source of his particular *de*. In any event, the passage is anomalous in the text.

2.2.2.1 Correct judgments

Confucius's teachings were aimed at developing a skill to infer or intuit correct or appropriate (*yi* 義) judgments in various moral situations. If others yield to the nobleman's *de*, it might be because the nobleman is typically correct in his judgments. (After all, it is difficult to yield or defer to someone who is wrong all the time.)

Debating and reflecting on particular cases (both contemporary and historical) was seen as conducive to fostering appropriate judgments. By developing a practice of discussing particular actions in detail, one could build a case history of judgments and then analogically extend these judgments to new cases. Together with general knowledge of society, culture and politics (a liberal arts education, if you will), these case histories were vital to adduce correct judgments in many of life's variegated social situations.

Correct judgments *yi* 義 are appropriate or fitting to the situation at hand. Thus, the nobleman, "in making his way in the world, is neither bent on nor against anything; rather, he goes with what is appropriate (*yi* 義)" (4:10). Notwithstanding the nobleman's adherence to the ritual and social norms of the waning Zhou dynastic culture, there could be no way of delineating precisely what would be the right thing to do in a given situation prior to being in that situation. Any particular situation might fall under many numerous and often incompatible norms and rules. Which to follow? How to proceed? These crucial questions admit of no easy answers, yet the absence of prescribed rules

does not excuse the agent from virtuous conduct; rather, the agent must somehow act appropriately. *Yi*, then, denotes appropriate behavior in the vast array of unique life situations where there could be no simple application of a norm of conduct (Schwartz 1985, 79).

How *does* the virtuous agent act appropriately? Various answers have been proposed to this question, all of them indicative of an intuitive faculty. For example, Joel Kupperman believes Confucius requires the virtuous agent to “gravitate” to the appropriate action; “what he ‘feels like’ doing is what is right” (Kupperman 1968, 184). Philip Ivanhoe calls it an “intuitive sense of the Way” (Ivanhoe 2000, 1). In its mature instantiation, what the gentleman feels like doing ends up being correct or appropriate to the situation at hand. This is solidified in Confucius’s wonderfully terse autobiography:

2.4 - The master said: When I was fifteen I set my heart/mind on learning; at thirty I took my place in society; at forty I was no longer of confused; at fifty I knew Heaven’s command; at sixty my ear was attuned, at seventy I followed my heart’s desires without transgressing norms.

By knowing just the right thing to say or do, the virtuous individual could, like Confucius at seventy, negotiate normative space in a frictionless manner, and might therefore be considered authoritative or commanding—both salient aspects of *de*.

Virtuous individuals might also enjoy a certain amount of prominence or fame. These familiar notions would go some way towards explaining passages such as 12.19, where others—especially those lacking culture and refinement—‘yield’ to the consummately virtuous.

However, it is one thing to suggest that consummately virtuous individuals will routinely make authoritative judgments, it is quite another to suggest that others will routinely acquiesce to their judgments, and still another to suggest that they will command such authority wherever they may be, even in different cultures and societies (‘among the barbarians’). Moral diversity would seem to preclude such unproblematic and effortless efficacy. Often, the very fact that an individual comes from a foreign perspective or culture renders her judgments suspect (even if they might otherwise seem on balance to be reasonable). Put another way, simply being correct in one’s judgments will often be insufficient to enlist agreement from others who might be predisposed to suspicion and disagreement. Since the claims of the *Analects* concern actual moral practice, vindicating the ability of cultivated individuals to command normative space requires investigating how individuals could have others regularly yield to their judgments in practice, and this requires more than being correct. After all, it is hardly uncommon to *know* the right thing to do but *fail* to do it, or fail to convince others of the correctness of one’s own judgments or convictions. The separation of knowing what to do and actualizing it in a given context is a division invoked in the text itself:

15.33 – The master said, “If you realize it, but your humanity [*ren* 仁] can’t maintain it, even though you’ve got it, you’ll inevitably lose it. If you realize it, and if your humanity can maintain it, but you can’t make it manifest with dignity, people will not respect you [in turn]. If you realize it, if your humanity is able to maintain it, and if you manifest it with respect, but you still don’t adhere to norms of propriety, you’ll fail to perfect (*shan* 善) it.”

Here, we see a clear distinction between realizing or understanding something, and being able to put it into practice. The two can come apart. One can have the right realization of what to do, yet fail to protect it from competing thoughts and desires, and then fail to manifest it with dignity. Even if one is able to achieve all of these, failing to conform to norms of propriety could compromise one’s ability to elicit agreement from others. This seems to be in tension with the power of *de*. Thus, we need to look further.

2.2.2.2 The magic of ritual

De’s most salient feature is its ability to ‘magically’ gain the assent of others, and none have written so eloquently on the magical aspects of the *Analects* as Herbert Fingarette. In his *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, Fingarette highlighted the ‘magic’ that seems to accompany ritual performance in the *Analects* (Fingarette 1972). Particularly important

to the present context, Fingarette thought that ritual propriety (*li* 禮) helped to facilitate the effortless ease of social intercourse that is central to the notion of *de*.

The *li* (禮) included religious rites (e.g. ancestor worship), formal ceremonies (e.g. weddings, funerals), as well as the manners and customs, the strictures and prerogatives, the protocols and functions of each social, political and familial station.⁹ They constituted the core of Confucius's program of self-cultivation. The *li* would dictate, for example, appropriate dress for ceremonial occasions and appropriate forms of greeting as well as appropriate conduct for a father or a son. Confucius was clearly preoccupied with the *li*; indeed, with the exception of the overarching ideal of *ren* 仁 or humankindness, the *li* are mentioned more than any other concept in the text. Confucius frequently enjoins his students to revert to the *li* and to keep to the *li* in times of uncertainty (e.g. 12.1). More generally, the social sub-class to which the Confucians belonged, the scholarly *ru* 儒 class, were charged with the task of ritual expertise, and were called upon by rulers and administrators to advise those in power on how to carry out many of the rituals important to the ruler and the state. Mastery of the *li* lent this class of scholars a degree of authority and prestige, as others would consult with and yield to the judgments of the *ru* when it came to matters of ritual.

⁹ Of course, Confucius was not solely occupied with *li*. His curriculum also included the study of music, poetry, calligraphy and history – all considered important to cultivating virtue. Owing to restrictions in space, we shall concentrate on propriety, though. Observing propriety is distinguished from these other disciplines, however, insofar as it emphasized (among other things) social intercourse. Exposure to and focus on other humans was imperative, for Confucius believed virtue requires not only proper emotions and virtuous character, but also something akin to 'mind-reading' (discussed below).

For the Confucians, the *li* served as the main source of good behavior. However, strict compliance with the *li* was inadequate for a virtuous life. In fact, overly stringent attention to the rules of propriety could be offensive (3:18). Confucius recognized a wide gap between observing propriety and acting virtuously, the latter requiring, in addition to *formal* compliance with the *li*, the following qualifiers:

- a) The individual must observe propriety with appropriate dispositional attitudes; there must be an emotional 'presence' (3:12, 3:26). Emotional authenticity trumps procedural formality (3:4, 17:11).
- b) Propriety must be observed effortlessly, naturally, and spontaneously; the virtuous exemplar will not appear 'troubled' (9:28, 14:30).
- c) Finally, there is the matter of matching propriety to occasion, for which there is no algorithm.

The latter qualifier seems to collapse into the 'correct judgments' discussed in the previous section. What does talk of ritual add? If we think of rituals as social scripts with predetermined sequences of actions, they would seem to have an efficacy of themselves, leading to automatic and therefore predictable reciprocation in others. According to Fingarette what is distinctive about ritual or ceremonial acts is the way they effortlessly steer social intercourse; in the appropriate setting, all that is needed is

an initial ritual gesture, and everything else 'just happens' afterwards (Fingarette 1972, 8). Given their mastery of ritual propriety, the *junzi* would be able to invoke these correct ritual gestures and avail themselves to the efficacy of ritual performance, setting off patterns of response and reciprocation. As A.C. Graham has noted, "The ritual act, influencing through interrelations which the agents do not analyse, does have an efficacy different in kind from the act calculated as means to an end. The man of Potency [*de*] who has, not an abstract knowledge of conventions, but an effortless skill and grace in operating with them, although 'doing nothing', does enhance the order around him" (Graham 1993, 25). Moreover, as masters of ritual, their observance of ritual propriety would be taken as authoritative.

Deploying the right rituals therefore helps us get a grip on the 'magical' ability of individual *de*. This would be true especially in cultures that shared broad social norms and conventions, where these 'scripts' would be internalized and automatically triggered in the correct settings. However, not all cultures have the same rituals or norms of propriety, and yet the telltale effects of *de* are not circumscribed by culture; the *junzi* would be able to effect harmony and dispel uncouthness even amongst the barbarians external to the Zhou customs and traditions. How? And what of those occasions that fall outside the scope of *li*? Any plausible answer, I believe, will have to look at pan-cultural elements concerning overall comportment, expressiveness and demeanor, as well as attentiveness to cues arising from the particular individuals with

whom one is interacting. Thus, we need to consider those passages in the *Analects* that emphasize the importance of minor details of personal conduct and the need to properly read those with whom one is interacting.

2.2.2.3 Comportment and expression

As noted above, one of the main goals of Confucius and his advisees was to persuade recalcitrant or obstinate rulers to enact benevolent policies beneficial to the common people. Invariably, what Confucius and his followers sought were positions of influence and the opportunity to meet those in power persuade them of the merits of their teachings.

This was no mean feat. Benevolent governance was not the norm during the late Spring and Autumn period in which they operated. The erosion of the power of the Zhou rulers created a power vacuum that many local feudal lords tried to fill. The period is characterized by attempts of local rulers to widen their power base, either through forging alliances with, or waging war on, neighboring states. Accordingly, government policies were focused on increasing the population, drafting men into military ranks, and increasing agricultural productivity to strengthen the state's coffers. Rulers were happy to entertain the counsel of learned men with ideas on how to further these goals. Those concerned with redirecting resources back to the population (such as the Confucian *ru*) were not, however, in favor. The welfare of the commoner was an afterthought.

These considerations were foremost in Confucius's thoughts. Success was imperative, and failure carried with it dire consequences; life was incredibly cheap during the late Spring and Autumn and Warring States period, and offending those in power could be met with punishments ranging from mutilation to execution. But so long as reform was possible, so long as the world had not fallen into complete disorder, the real litmus test, the real *telos* of the school, would be actual persuasion and reform. One's *de* could be a powerful tool in this regard, enabling one to negotiate with others cooperatively and in ways that would allow them to bend or yield without feeling resentful or manipulated. How to do so? Being correct in one's judgments would certainly help, as would having mastery over the rules and rites of propriety. But these could hardly be sufficient to elicit compliance from others—particularly those wielding power—with their own agendas orthogonal or antagonistic to those of the reforming *ru*.

Confucius was aware of the influence that subtle situational variables could have on such precarious matters. The signals a *ru* would give off in his presentation would therefore be crucial. The wrong first moves could be disastrous. To properly understand the 'moral power' or 'charisma' of exemplary individuals, then, we need consider the subtle details of their conduct.

Indeed, the text as a whole seems especially concerned with relatively minute matters of behavior, such as posture, tone of voice, turns of phrase, and ceremonial attire. In fact an entire book of the *Analects* is devoted to detailed observations of Confucius's

overt behavioral mannerisms. In 10:1 Confucius is described as deferential in his home village (“as though at a loss for words”) and yet articulate in the ancestral temple (“though with restraint”),¹⁰ and in 10:4 we are told that, “When entering the gateway of the Duke’s court, he would bow forward, as though the gateway were not high enough.” I wish to emphasize one such passage in particular:

10.15 – When making inquiries of someone in another state, he bowed to the ground twice before sending off the messenger.

Of interest here is the fact that the recipient in the other state is not present to witness Confucius’s deferential behavior. Why engage in it, then? And why make a note of this mannerism at all? My own interpretation is that Confucius was aware that the person receiving the message might inquire as to what sort of a person Confucius was, in what manner the messenger was treated, and what sort of attitude he exemplified in his conduct. He was also aware of the fact that one should never take liberties when making impositions on others, regardless of the worth of one’s mission. Whereas a less conscientious and less virtuous individual might not attend to such details, Confucius

¹⁰ In the home village, this would be a sign of respect for one’s elders; at the temples (where government affairs were decided), this would signal a willingness to deliberate and discuss issues at length. See (Slingerland 2003a), p.98.

understood their real importance in moral practice. In practice, such minor details can exercise great influence over the behaviors of all individuals involved.

Confucius appealed directly to such detailed considerations while exhorting his students. The virtuous individual should be capable of triggering the right sequence of behaviors on any particular occasion by making the right 'first moves,' broadly construed.

5.16 - The Master said of Zichan, "He had four aspects of the gentleman's *dao*: in the way he conducted himself, he displayed reverence; in the way he served his superiors, he displayed respect; in the way he cared for the common people, he displayed benevolence, and in the way he employed the people, he displayed rightness."

5.25 - The Master said, "Clever words, an ingratiating countenance, and perfunctory gestures of respect are all things that Zuoqiu Ming considered shameful, as do I. Concealing one's resentment and feigning friendship towards others are things that Zuoqiu Ming considered shameful, as do I."

15.6 - Zichan asked about getting by in the world [*xing* 行]. The Master said, "In speech, be dutiful and trustworthy. In your conduct, be sincere and respectful. In this way, you will always get by in the world, even if you find yourself in

some barbarian state. If your words aren't dutiful and trustworthy, if your conduct isn't sincere and respectful, how can you possibly get along in the world, even in your own region? When standing, visualize these principles ahead of you..."

Master Zeng exemplifies this on his deathbed:

8.4 - There are three things in our *dao* that a gentleman values most: by altering his demeanor he avoids violence and arrogance; by rectifying his countenance he welcomes trustworthiness; through his words and tone of voice he avoids vulgarity and impropriety.

Reflecting on these passages, it seemed there was more to being authoritative or commanding than simply knowing the 'correct' moral values or principles, or internalizing widespread social and ritual norms. It also involved paying attention to minor details about oneself, one's style of speech and one's conduct—the very ways one's person might be interpreted or perceived by others.¹¹

Conversely, there are many passages which reflect a need to attend to the particular moods, expressions, and demeanor of one's interlocutors. This only seems

¹¹ Of course, we might include all of these minor details in what it means to do the 'correct' thing, but this would overlook the important performative aspect of virtue, and my own focus is on these details above and beyond any reference to the inner psychic life of the cultivated individual.

right: if one is to modify one's appearance and comportment, choice of words and mannerisms, then this should obviously not be a blind process, but sensitive to the situation and persons at hand.

2.10 - The Master said, "Look at the means a man employs, observe the basis from which he acts, and discover where it is that he feels at ease. Where can he hide? Where can he hide?"

12.20 - "Someone who is accomplished is upright in his native substance and fond of acting appropriately (*yi* 義). He examines others's words, keenly observes their demeanor, and always takes the interests of his inferiors into account when considering something—no matter whether serving the state or a noble family."

16.6 - Confucius said, "When attending a *junzi*, there are three types of errors one may commit. To speak when it is not yet time to speak—this is called being rash. To not speak when it is time to speak—this is called being secretive. To speak without taking into account the countenance of one's lord—this is called being blind."

16.10 - Confucius said, "The gentleman focuses on nine things: when looking, he focuses on seeing clearly; when listening, he focuses on being discerning; in his

expression, he focuses on being amiable; in his demeanor, he focuses on being reverent; in his speech, he focuses on being dutiful; in his actions, he focuses on being respectful; when in doubt, he focuses on asking questions; when angry, he focuses on thinking about the potential negative consequences of his anger; and when seeing gain, he focuses upon what is right.”

Such attention to detail was especially important when one needed to convey a delicate message without causing offense.

17.9 – The Master said, “Why is it none of you, my young friends, study the *Odes*? An apt quotation from the *Odes* may stimulate the imagination, endow one with breeding, enable one to live in communion with others and give expression to grievances.”

17.20 – Ru Bei [dispatched a messenger to convey that he] wanted to see Confucius. Confucius declined, on grounds of being ill. When the messenger had stepped out the door, Confucius took his lute and sang, making sure that the messenger heard it.

The first passage emphasizes the utility of having a storehouse of literary allusions and metaphors from which to cull amiable ways of conveying delicate points. This would allow one to further one’s relationship with another or extend discussion where less

delicate turns of phrase might prove injurious. The second passage similarly shows how one can convey a message in an indirect—though unambiguous—way.¹² For Confucius, this was the stuff of moral life.

Attention to detail might seem priggish to the modern interpreter, and with the revival of virtue ethics it's easy to focus on character talk in the *Analects* as being the locus of the school's attention. But the passages concerned with detail are pervasive and ought to be taken into account in any project aiming to describe the efficacy or influential power associated with cultivated individuals. Attention to these details would make it far more likely that efforts at moral persuasion be successful, that entreaties to practice benevolent government be implemented. What more important moral goals could there be?

I close with perhaps the simplest expression of this overall concern with comportment and mannerisms.

1.10 – Ziqin asked Zigong, “When the master arrives in a state, he invariably finds out about its government. Does he seek out [this information]? Is it offered to him?” Zigong replied, “The master obtains it through being cordial, well-behaved, respectful, restrained and deferential. This way of seeking it is entirely different from other people’s way of seeking it, is it not?”

¹² It is unclear why Confucius would not entertain Ru Bei, with explanations ranging from his seeking an audience inappropriately to his being involved in criminal activities. See Slingerland (2003a, 208-9).

The message is simple. If you want to enlist others' cooperation, if you wish to be accepted and taken seriously in a new and unfamiliar context, it's best to mind your overt manners. Otherwise, people might tend to withhold information. In fact, the explanation might be so simple that it is easy to understand why some would seek deeper meaning to this passage. Consider the following interpretation by Edward Slingerland.

In any case, the point seems to be that Confucius "sought it in himself, not in others" (15.21), or that (as Lu Longqi puts it) "the sage seeks things by means of virtue unlike ordinary people who seek things with their minds." That is, while ordinary people consciously and deliberately pursue external goals, the sage focuses his attention upon his own inner virtue and allows external things to come to him naturally. Confucius does not actively pry or seek out information, but is so perfected in virtue that what he seeks comes to him unbidden, in a *wuwei* fashion. (Slingerland 2003a, 5)

The metaphor of the inner is misleading here, as is the notion that Confucius did not actively seek out information. Zigong is plainly describing Confucius's *overt* behavior. Moreover, it seems clear that Confucius traveled to other states not for leisurely pursuits

but to try to gain employment and make inroads into officialdom. How is this not 'pursuing external goals'? It seems strange to say that Confucius would spend all his time reflecting on 'his own inner virtue' and wander around in the hopes of chancing upon the relevant information, or in the belief that the information would naturally present itself. The information needed to be sought out in careful and cautious ways, with detailed attention to one's appearance and comportment. One might here insist that knowing just how to phrase things, knowing just how to express and carry oneself, knowing just what to wear, when to laugh, when to keep distance and when to be familiar are all behaviors subsumed under one virtue or another. Perhaps virtue is a distant or ultimate causal factor motivating attention to such details, but the details themselves are doing a lot of work and ought to be highlighted.

2.3 Conclusion

The exemplary person of the *Analects* has a kind of cultivated authoritative power that lends him the ability to persuade or move others and achieve his moral ends in a frictionless manner. We can understand this power as arising from the exemplary person's judgments, command of propriety, and, most importantly, from his attention to minor details of his comportment.

The latter is a central theme of this dissertation: the impact that minor details can have on how our interactions with others unfold. If my reading of the *Analects* is correct,

Confucius and his followers incorporated into their teachings a powerful insight into human psychology that only recently has been systematically explored in the West—the automatic impact of minor situational variables on human behavior. A large body of empirical evidence from experimental social psychology has shown how pervasive the impact of these variables can be, and how blind many of us are to their influence—whether it be how willing we are to cooperate with others, how much energy and imagination we have in doing so, and to what extent we consider others to be objects of our moral concern. I turn to this literature presently.

3. Persons, Situations, and the Interconnectedness of Moral Behavior

Throughout the 1980s, pharmaceutical companies bestowed lavish gifts on health care practitioners, including free travel, equipment, and accommodation. The size and frequency of these gifts raised concerns that the medical profession's integrity was being compromised. As a result, voluntary guidelines were introduced in 1991 limiting their value to \$100 or less. It was thought that smaller gifts such as pens, pads, calendars, and samples of drugs would pose no threat. This line of thinking was false. Several studies now confirm that even minor gifts of this sort can lead to major changes in physicians' practices, including rising volumes of prescriptions, erratic prescribing patterns, preferences for new drugs with unproven benefits, and increased prescription spending overall.¹ Despite the substantial evidence demonstrating these effects, physicians regularly *deny* that small gifts alter their practices, and if not for the work of social scientists many outside the profession would probably agree. After all, how could these intelligent, highly trained, and rational individuals be swayed by so little? Such sensible thoughts would have been radically misguided. Minor trinkets yield major payoffs for pharmaceutical companies.

¹ For a review, see Katz et al (2003).

In this chapter, I argue that something similar holds true in the realm of interpersonal morality. Our interactions with others are also shaped by small details of our manners and comportment, and the effects can be just as considerable: How long we are willing to engage in dialogue, the degree to which we find accommodation to others acceptable, the creativity and imagination we deploy in finding agreeable outcomes to our mutual problems, the significance we *attach* to our problems—each of these crucial factors in moral life can be affected profoundly by minor details of our persons and situations. And just as physicians deny that small gifts can alter their practices, so too do we often deny that minor gestures can lead to major payoffs in moral life. Yet they can. We ought to mind them.

Our acute sensitivity to minor external prompts has not escaped the notice of many recent moral philosophers, who have explored the issue in the form of situationist social psychology, or situationism.² I begin by reviewing this situationist literature, and then proceed to outline my own response to it. In the end, I argue that although situationism has often been depicted as a source of moral concern, it is better seen as an opportunity for moral progress.

²The literature on situationism is sizable and growing. See, for example, Annas (2003), Athanassoulis (2000), Doris (1998; 2002; 2005), Flanagan (1991), Harman (1999; 2000; 2003), Kamtekar (2004), Merritt (2000), Miller (2003); Nelkin (2005) Prinz (forthcoming), Sabini & Silber (2005), Sreenivasan (2002), Vranas (2005), and Webber (2006).

3.1 Situationism and moral philosophy

In psychology departments, talk of character or personality has been on the decline for some time. Research continues, but at an attenuated level and with far less institutional support. This trend began in the mid 60s, when a number of important experiments seemed to demonstrate, in alarming fashion, how greatly individuals are influenced by their immediate situational contexts. In Stanley Milgram's infamous obedience studies, every one of his subjects were willing to administer shocks of dangerous intensity to others screaming in pain and begging for relief, all at the gentle prodding of the experimenter (Milgram 1963). During Philip Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment, the mock prison guards' treatment of the mock prisoners (who were fellow volunteers) rapidly devolved into extreme sadism, forcing the study to shut down just days into its original two-week schedule (Zimbardo et al. 1973). These experiments involved protracted interactions between individuals in highly controlled (and highly contrived) experimental settings, yet others demonstrated how behavior in everyday, routine circumstances can be also be influenced by seemingly insignificant variables.

For example, in another famous experiment, Darley and Batson (1973) found that whether or not seminary students were willing to help a needy bystander on their way to a lecture hinged greatly on how pressed they were for time (in spite of the fact that many of them were on their way to lecture on the parable of the Good Samaritan!). One of the most well known cases in the literature is the dime helping experiments of Isen

and Levine (1972). Participants were ordinary individuals making phone calls at a public payphone. When exiting the payphone, confederates of the experimenter bumped into these individuals while holding a stack of papers. The bump caused the papers to scatter. The key manipulation was whether the individuals had found a dime in the return slot of the payphone immediately prior to this incident. Those who found a dime were fourteen times more likely to help than those who did not. Could the finding of a dime be the difference between helping someone or not? It seems hard to believe. Such minor, contingent, and insignificant factors seem insufficient to impact our behavior in such manifest ways. Yet they do.

Consider the following experiment by Simone Schnall and colleagues (Schnall et al. 2004), which shows the effects of environmental cues to our practice of moral judgment. Participants were asked to respond to a number of scenarios calling for moral judgment, including violations of certain moral and conventional rules. The key variable was the condition of the desk at which they were filling out the questionnaire. Some of the participants were placed at a neat and tidy desk, while others were placed at a desk with visible stains, chewed up pencils, and a trash receptacle nearby overflowing with used pizza boxes and dirty-looking tissues. Participants seated at dirty desks were more likely to describe the violations in the vignettes as being 'wrong' than those in the control condition. Unhygienic conditions therefore led to more severe moral judgments in a way that few would expect or be able to account for.

It seems hard to believe that finding a dime, being slightly pressed for time, or being seated at a dirty desk could really impact behavior in such manifest ways. We normally think that if people behave charitably or deplorably it's because of who they are, the kinds of values they embrace, or the kind of character they possess. But such notions about the efficacy of character traits were rendered severely problematic by compelling experimental data throughout the 70s and 80s. This led to a strong swing towards *situationism*. Situationism claims that morally significant behavior is influenced by external, situational factors to a far greater extent than we normally suppose. Think of the physicians discussed above: notwithstanding their commitment to practicing medicine impartially, their actual behavior was influenced by the small gifts they received from pharmaceutical companies. Personality psychology continues, but situationism has changed the way we view the motivations of human behavior irrevocably.³

³ In a 2001 survey article for the *Annual Review of Psychology*, David Funder, a prominent personality psychologist, notes the lasting effects of this critique: "Someday a comprehensive history will be written of the permanent damage to the infrastructure of personality psychology wreaked by the person-situation debate of the 1970s and 1980s. Even as enthusiasm for the substance of personality research has revived, the institutional consequences continue. Indeed, one reason for the trend... for so much personality research being done by investigators not affiliated with formal programs in personality may be that there are so few formal programs to be affiliated with. The graduate programs in personality psychology that were shrunken beyond recognition or even abolished during the 1970s and 1980s have not been revived." (Funder 2001, 213)

3.1.1 Character and behavior

While trait talk was losing steam in psychology, it was gaining momentum in philosophy as part of the revival of virtue ethics. For many philosophers, what motivated this revival during the last half of the 20th century was the psychological implausibility of agents using general purpose moral rules, such as Kant's categorical imperative or Mill's principle of utility, as guides to action. A major advantage of virtue theory was that it seemed to echo ordinary conceptions of moral conduct as stemming from character traits exemplifying virtues (e.g. kindness) or vices (e.g. vanity). Instead of reflecting on rules or principles to navigate through moral conundrums, virtue ethicists underscored the importance of character to structure one's conduct, guide behavior on particular occasions, and ultimately lead to a flourishing life.⁴ Yet such strong views concerning the efficacy of character were already being denounced as "fundamental errors" in experimental psychology.

Owen Flanagan addressed this gap between philosophical psychology and experimental psychology in his seminal *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (1991).

The rhetoric in much contemporary virtue theory is of a decidedly, possibly excessively, confident and unqualified trait cast. Persons are courageous or just

⁴ A collection of seminal articles can be found in Crisp and Slote (1997).

or temperate. She who possesses the virtue in question displays the right sort of response toward the right person at the time and in the right way. The vagaries of actual human psychology can easily disappear from view once this rarefied, unrealistic, and excessively flattering characterization is on center stage. (Flanagan 1991, 281)

In the years since Flanagan brought the vagaries of actual human psychology to the attention of moral philosophers, many others have joined the fray, pressing the need for conceptual and practical revision. For example, in a number of provocatively titled articles (such as “No Character Or Personality” and “The Non Existence Of Character Traits”) Gilbert Harman has argued that there is no good reason to think that people have any of the sorts of character traits we normally think they do (Harman 1999; 2000; 2003). John Doris and Stephen Stich, while abstaining from such categorical statements and admitting that no amount of empirical evidence could secure such a strong result, nonetheless maintain that, given the enormous situational variability of our behavior, virtue theory may be fundamentally misguided, robust virtue traits may not be in the offing for nearly all of us, and so programs aimed at inculcating virtue may very well be futile (Doris and Stich 2005, 120).⁵

⁵ More recently, situationism has been seen as problematic for certain conceptions of free will (Nahmias ms; Nelkin 2005), and to the more basic notion of what it means to be a person (Doris forthcoming).

However, a number of philosophers have claimed that the relevant psychological studies have no bearing on the substantive project of virtue ethics, because the stereotypical responses measured in these studies, and the character traits they are supposed to track, are not the ones virtue theorists are interested in. Virtue theory outlines a superior conception of virtue, one that arises out of a particular form of habituation, and one that enables the possessor of the virtues to lead a flourishing, eudaimonistic life. Hence, the fact that most individuals do not act in stereotypical ways in certain experimental conditions not only fails to test for the relevant virtues in the strong, Aristotelian sense, but also fails to consider the holistic effect that having the virtues is supposed to have on an individual. The social psychological studies, while revealing much valuable information on how *ordinary* individuals are affected by their situational environments, leave the project of virtue ethics largely unaffected. In sum, the situationist challenge is irrelevant to virtue theory. This line of response can be found in Kamtekar (2004), Sreenivasan (2002), and Annas (2003).

This response has considerable merit. First, the experimental results cannot rule out the possibility of their being global traits. Indeed, all of the experiments include sizable minorities who seem to be unaffected by the same situational factors that affect others, and none in the situationist camp claim that the evidence tells decisively against the existence or the possibility of the types of characters that would vindicate Aristotelian virtue theory. Two prominent critics of virtue theory, John Doris and

Stephen Stich, concede the point: “the empirical evidence cannot show that the instantiation of virtue in actual human psychologies is impossible; no empirical evidence could secure so strong a result” (Doris and Stich 2005, 120).

Second, most theories of virtue do not maintain that virtue ‘just happens’ as part of any person’s developmental history; instead, they emphasize the importance of certain forms of habituation and programs self-cultivation that foster the development of the relevant virtues, and there is little reason to expect that most persons’ *actual* course of development would resemble or reflect the kind of development thought by virtue theorists as requisite to the development of virtues. According to Rosalind Hursthouse, virtue theorists agree “that it would be reckless in the extreme to ascribe a demanding virtue such as charity to people of whom they know no more than that they have exhibited conventional decency; this would indeed be ‘a fundamental attribution error’” (Hursthouse 2007). So, difficult though it may be, there is yet the real possibility of virtue theory to be vindicated by experimental literature. Once again, Doris and Stich concede that drawing “general conclusions from the experiments might be prohibited by limited samples; in particular, there appears to be a dearth of longitudinal behavioural studies that would help assess the role of character traits ‘over the long haul’” (Doris and Stich 2005, 123).

Of course, there are logistical barriers impeding the smooth implementation of such studies. Some of these are *practical* (it is expensive to organize and operationalize

such studies over the long haul), others *methodological* (it is difficult to control for numerous other causal factors that might influence one's behavior and dispositions over long periods of time).⁶ Moreover, to really test the viability of cultivating virtuous traits, one would ideally want a group of individuals pursuing a particular program of virtue cultivation or habituation. Be that as it may, the general point is an important one: making an inference *from* a lack of psychological evidence in support of robust dispositions *to* the non-existence or impossibility of such dispositions is fallacious. Nevertheless, critics maintain (in strong terms) that the prospects of virtue ethics remain dim.

To put the ethical implications of this a bit aggressively, it looks as though attribution of robust traits like virtues may very well be unwarranted in most instances, programmes of moral education aimed at inculcating virtues may very well be futile, and modes of ethical reflection focusing moral aspirations on the cultivation of virtue may very well be misguided... If virtue is *expected* to be rare, it is not obvious what role virtue theory could have in a (generally applicable) programme of moral education" (Doris and Stich 2005, 119-21, emphasis added).

⁶ For further discussion, see Sreenivasan (forthcoming)

Virtue theorists would rightly want to press for the right interpretation of *expect* here. It is consistent for a virtue theorist to admit that we should not expect (i.e. anticipate or predict) that robust virtues will be rare among those not pursuing a particular program of virtue cultivation or developing in environments at odds with the development of virtue, while nevertheless maintaining that they expect (i.e. look for with reason) that specific forms of habituation or programs of cultivation can foster robust virtues. Compare: 'If physical fitness is expected to be rare, it is not obvious what role exercise could have in a (generally applicable) program of physical education'. But that surely doesn't work. What is required to vindicate this claim about physical fitness is evidence showing that *exercise*—and not whatever physical activities most people happen to engage in—does not promote fitness. Of course, there is good evidence linking exercise to physical fitness, which is why we can expect (i.e. look forward with reason) that exercise will lead to physical fitness if undertaken. Similarly, virtue theorists can press that the prospects of virtue theory hinge on evidence of whether virtuous habituation or programs of self-cultivation can promote virtue. Thus, the viability of virtue ethics really hinges not on what obtains in the general population but on what can result from a certain type of deliberate, reflexive upbringing or habituation. We may lack a large body of evidence relevant to this latter claim, but there seems no reason to rule out the possibility that such evidence can be produced. The jury's still out.

In summary, the focus of concern thus far has thus been to evaluate the empirical adequacy of various substantive theories of character. Yet the situationist literature is of concern beyond its implications for philosophical conceptions of character. No matter how the character debate turns out, it seems genuinely troubling that one's own behavior could be shaped so decisively by situational factors, that the likelihood of meeting one's goals or instantiating one's values could hinge on the presence of dimes, the absence of time, or the gentle prodding of experimenters, and there is a pressing need to account for such facts about our psychology in our normative theories.

3.2 Beware situational influence!

If our behavior is captive to situational influence, what should we do about it? Many philosophers with varying agendas have all endorsed what I call a *seek/avoid* strategy. These philosophers recognize that situational influence is pervasive and weighty. However, they argue that it remains possible, when one is not caught up in novel or unusual situations, to *choose* the general types of situations one wants to encounter and structure one's life accordingly. Individuals should seek situations that strengthen or support virtuous behavior, and avoid situations that tend toward vice or moral failure. In choosing *situations*, one chooses to embrace the *behavioral tendencies* they elicit.

For example, Maria Merritt suggests that we recognize the "sustaining social contribution" of situations to moral behavior as evidenced in the situationist literature and incorporate it into our moral theorizing (Merritt 2000). Her general line of

argument is as follows: The fixation on character traits in the situationist literature has overlooked virtue theory's greatest asset—its emphasis on living a flourishing life. If it is possible to live a flourishing life, then virtue ethics remains a viable ethical ideal. The question is: How can one live a flourishing life? For Merritt, “motivational self-sufficiency of character”—the ability to make choices and judgments wholly unaffected by external circumstances—is not necessary. First, it seems strange to want to have independence or shield oneself from one's *positive* social environments. Why work against the very resources, situations and relationships that contribute to one's flourishing? Instead of eschewing or fighting against external impacts on our behavior, we should simply be more sensitive to the environments we enter and the relationships we forge.⁷ Merritt argues that the virtues we exemplify in such supportive environments and relationships should be considered no less virtuous for being socially sustained as opposed to issuing from firm and unchanging self-sufficient character traits. Second, if such self-sufficient traits are rare or unrealistic, then it is at least an open question whether one should pursue them, and Merritt believes that there is every reason to adopt her alternative 'socially sustained' model of virtue instead. Put another

⁷ Some may wonder whether it is possible to exercise this kind of second order control over one's choice of activities. This concern has some bite. But the plausibility of the seek/avoid strategy cannot be ruled out *a priori*. See Merritt (2000), p.372. More importantly, most of us are quite adept at choosing our situations anyway. That is, most of us naturally select for situations reflective of our values and beliefs. See Ross and Nisbett (1991), chapter 6.

way, if stability is the main goal of virtue, then it seems unwise to do away with supporting structures conducive to this goal.⁸

Similar ideas have been expressed by Steven Samuels and William Casebeer (2005), who see situationism as highlighting the importance of proper training environments for moral education.

In order to develop virtue, one must be given a chance to practice being virtuous. This means cultivating a milieu where the environmental factors that influence human behaviour make virtuous behaviour the norm rather than the exception. Attention to how you react in these environments is important. People should be aware of the personality/environment interaction, for only then can they modulate their behaviour accordingly so as to boost the likelihood that they will take virtuous action. (Samuels and Casebeer 2005, 77)

Virtue takes time. A person seeking virtue should have the wherewithal to avoid negative situations and the wisdom to enter environments in which her virtues might flourish. By practicing virtue in selective environments, one might hope to develop more robust virtue traits over the long haul. In other words, Samuels and Casebeer

⁸ She finds precedence for this model in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*.

argue that, so long as we can choose the sorts of situations we encounter, we are responsible for the sorts of character we have.

These philosophers have been interested in defending certain forms of virtue ethics by incorporating insights from situationism, yet the strategy they motivate is also embraced by critics of virtue theory. For example, John Doris has parlayed his skepticism of character into some sound advice: Don't overestimate your virtues; you'll disappoint yourself. Imagine that a colleague, with whom you've had a long flirtation, invites you to dinner to 'keep you company' while your spouse is out of town. Imagine, further, that you value fidelity and believe yourself not prone to vice. Do you accept the invitation? Not if you take situationism seriously. Instead, "you avoid the dinner like the plague, because you know that you are not able to confidently predict your behavior in a problematic situation on the basis of your antecedent values" (Doris 2002, 147). Better to avoid the situation altogether rather than rely on your character to resist temptation once candles have been lit and wine poured. Gilbert Harman, an entrenched virtue skeptic, agrees that this is the right way to go, and provides a situationist slogan.

If you are trying not to give into temptation to drink alcohol, to smoke, or to eat caloric food, the best advice is not to try to develop "will-power" or "self-control". Instead, it is best to head [*sic*] the situationist slogan, "People! Places! Things!" Don't go to places where people drink! Do not carry cigarettes or a

lighter and avoid people who smoke! Stay out of the kitchen! (Harman 2003, 91)⁹

Avoiding situations that elicit bad behavior seems sensible indeed, and keeping company with the virtuous is a sure way to be virtuous. The strategy has much to lend itself. But it has limitations. First, in order to avoid a certain type of situation, one needs be aware of its eliciting a particular pattern of behavior. This can be relatively straightforward for a narrow range of cases (such as those adduced by Harman above), yet many situations do not elicit behavior that is good or bad *simpliciter*. The same basic situation type might elicit good behavior from me on one occasion, bad on another, and neither good nor bad on still another. Second, certain relationships or situations, even if known to elicit undesirable behavior, may nonetheless be practically unavoidable. I may regularly grow irritable around my in-laws, but it may be impossible, given family politics and the desires of those I love, to steer clear of them for the rest of my life (no matter what benefits might accrue by doing so). Similarly, I may find myself becoming argumentative and impatient during faculty meetings, but unless I am prepared to radically alter some of my core motivational aims and ways of life, it may be too costly for me to change professions. Finally, while it is never a good idea to enter

⁹ Of course, one might wonder how avoiding bars and kitchens, and foregoing cigarettes and smokers, does not involve “will-power” and “self-control” (as Harman implies).

compromising situations blindly, one's ethical commitments may require exposing oneself to less than ideal situations and less than virtuous persons. Not all threats can be avoided. Indeed, many important virtues—such as courage or patience—name abilities to act rightly *in the face of* circumstances that tend to trigger undesirable conduct.

But notice that there may be even a deeper problem here. According to the situationists, one insignificant variable will often be enough to change a situation and thereby significantly affect the behavior of the individual involved. Situations are thus individuated along impossibly fine lines—being just a minute or two late, having just found a dime, the presence or absence of an individual or two, the hygienic state of one's desk, or any number of similarly trivial variables are enough to individuate one situation type from another and nudge one's behavior in one direction or another. Given how finely situations are individuated, how can one discriminate or discern precisely which situations are the ones to seek or avoid? The very lesson of situationism seems to be that such minor differences are routinely *beyond* our awareness. So, on the face of it, if the seek/avoid strategy advocates discriminating amongst situations, we are left wondering how this can be done on a practical level.¹⁰ Doris himself puts the matter into sharp relief:

¹⁰ Sabini & Silver make a different though related point: "We believe that the advice the situationist gives—be sensitive to situational features that may affect your behavior in subtle ways—is in this regard useless, for the same reason that warnings about heightened terrorism threats are useless: they are unfocused; they warn people to be suspicious of everything! One can't be suspicious of everything!" (Sabini and Silver 2005, 561).

It is difficult to say precisely how pervasive such “sneaky” stimuli are, but the exact extent of the phenomena needn’t be decided for us to feel real concern, for there is no easy way to rule out their presence. Why was I so curt? Perhaps because the salesperson was inattentive. Or perhaps it’s that I’m standing on a wool carpet, or that the ambient temperature is 67.2 degrees... If situationism is right, we can play this game with every action. Worse, why should we be confident we’ve played it well? If we survey 1,000 situational factors, how can we be sure that number 1,001 wasn’t doing the work? Our grip on our motivational universe appears alarmingly frail; we may quite frequently be in the dark or dead wrong about why we do what we do. (Doris 2002, 139)

Whether we can identify the situational influences on our behavior is, of course, an empirical question. Some situation types might be simple enough to be remembered or kept in mind, whereas others can be so finely individuated that it may be impossible to identify them in a practical fashion, and implementing the seek / avoid strategy may thus be more difficult than may seem first pass.

Some may find these to be minor (or exaggerated) quibbles, and with increased attention we may become more adept at identifying the impacts situations have on our behavior—perhaps even the impacts of very specific variables. Nonetheless, the

restrictions for someone interested in maintaining virtue by selecting situations are considerable.

But this is not where to press the issue. There is a more important limitation in this line of response.

3.3 Persons and situations, again

Recall that the seek/avoid strategy is animated by the thought that our behavior is tightly keyed to our situations—oftentimes, to the behavior of others in our situations. The strategy therefore emphasizes one path of influence: from situations to persons. It highlights how situations may be partly—perhaps greatly—responsible for how we behave. This is undoubtedly important. But a shift in perspective reveals that not only do situations affect our own behavior, but we too return the favor. In other words, situations are not static entities unaffected by our presence; instead, we influence the situations we find ourselves in as much as they influence us. And just as we should mind how others are partly responsible for our own behavior, so too should we be mindful of how we are partly responsible for the behavior of others.

To see the contrast between these approaches, let's review a telling description of the seek/avoid strategy:

I'm urging a certain redirection of our ethical attention. Rather than striving to develop characters that will determine our behavior in ways substantially

independent of circumstance, we should invest more of our energies in attending to the features of our environment that influence behavioral outcomes. (Doris 2002, 146)

I, too, am urging a certain redirection of our ethical attention. But the details I emphasize are not details of external situations, but rather details of ourselves that we *introduce* to our situations. In other words, “attending to the features of our environment that influence behavioral outcomes” can just as well be understood as attending to our own persons. We are, after all, important features of our own situations, tied up inexorably with the actions of others. Paul Wachtel has stated this succinctly:

The understanding of any one person's behavior in an interpersonal situation solely in terms of the stimuli presented to him gives only a partial and misleading picture. For to a very large extent, these stimuli are created by him. They are responses to his own behavior, events he has played a role in bringing about, rather than occurrences independent of who he is and over which he has no control. ... (Wachtel 1973, 330)

Situational influence can be responsible for our behavior, but our own behavior impacts how our situations unfold. We are inextricably involved in the process.¹¹

For example, the way we frame sites of potential conflict can influence whether or not others will end up acting in cooperative ways. In a study by Scharlemann et al (2001), participants were first rated by their peers (fellow dorm residents) on how cooperative or uncooperative they were, and then asked to play a prisoners dilemma type coordination game requiring cooperation among players in order to maximize payoff. They found that previous reputation had little predictive power on whether or not individuals would cooperate. What *did* have great influence was whether they named the game the “Wall Street” game or the “Community” game.

- 2/3 cooperated in the Community Game
- 1/3 cooperated in the Wall Street Game

The name of the game exerted tremendous influence on the players’ behavior in a way that, again, few would expect or be able to account for if they were simply given character descriptions of the individuals involved.

We can influence others even in the absence of verbal communication. Consider the following experiment, one that is of special interest given the discussion of *de* in the

¹¹ The general neglect of such considerations in the existing philosophical literature might be attributed to the way the issue has been framed: situations are often *contrasted* with persons, and the seek/avoid strategy depicts situations as separate entities which individuals ‘enter’ or ‘evade’.

previous chapter. The “Affective Communication Test” was developed by Howard Friedman and colleagues to measure the overall expressiveness – or “charisma” – of individuals (Friedman et al. 1980). The test asks participants to rate themselves on a scale of 1-9 as to how much they agreed with statements such as the following:

“When I hear good dance music, I can hardly keep still.”

“I can easily express emotion over the telephone.”

“I often touch friends during conversations.”

“I am shy among strangers.”

“I am terrible at pantomime as in games like charades.”

“I show that I like someone by hugging or touching that person.”

Friedman and Riggio (1981) administered this test of overall expressiveness to participants and assigned them scores based on their answers. They then placed one *high-scoring* participant in a room with two *low-scoring* participants, ostensibly to wait for the ‘real’ experiment to follow; in fact, the short waiting phase *was* the experiment. These three individuals were asked not to speak one another. Nonetheless, self-report measures of mood recorded before and after this brief session indicated that the two low-scoring (i.e. unexpressive) individuals were influenced by the presence of the single high-scoring (i.e. expressive) individual, picking up her mood. (The effect didn’t run the

other way). This transfer of mood was accomplished without any verbal communication; it was as though the expressive individual could, through her *mere presence*, directly affect the mood and behavior of those in her immediate surroundings (a very *de*-like quality).

These and other studies in the situationist literature (broadly construed) show in marked fashion how susceptible others behavior is to subtle differences in the cues they receive, highlighting the importance of being mindful of the sorts of cues we introduce. Given the right cues, the probabilities of certain outcomes emerging will be enhanced. In other words, even if it is often not possible for us to predict how other actors in our environments will behave—something along the lines of ‘P will do *x*’—we oftentimes *do* have recourse to a particular kind of *conditional* prediction of the form ‘P will do *x* if I do *y*’ (Morton 2003). Our own actions, the particular moves we make and the particular variables we introduce to others can render them more-or-less predictable, both over shorter and longer periods of time.

When stated in such terms, this might seem unobjectionable, even obvious. Of course our own behavior will impact how others behave. However, many prevalent lay and philosophical theories of agency tend to vastly underestimate just how closely our behaviors are interconnected and mutually sustaining. We tend to think that

individuals act autonomously, according to their intentions, desires, and characters.¹² Situationism renders such notions untenable; whatever individualistic ideals we hold, we are not immune from external influence. This is the problem of situationism. Yet the promise of situationism lies in the very same fact: We are not immune from one another, and slight alterations in our own behavior can have real effects on others. Such thoughts may be overlooked in our own individualistic traditions, but there are traditions of thought—both lay and philosophical—that have long recognized the interconnectedness of social behavior.

For example, a significant amount of social psychological research has uncovered pervasive differences between how Westerners and East Asians conceptualize and understand the world. Nisbett et al. (2001) reviews this evidence and argues that whereas Westerners tend to think in more analytic terms, classifying objects in distinct, separate categories, East Asians tend to think more holistically, attending to how objects relate to one another, situating them within broader contexts and trends. Of particular relevance are cultural differences in how people tend to think about individuality, agency, and entativity (i.e. where we draw boundaries between individuals). In line with the views of Nisbett et al., Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that East Asians' concept of individuality is relational and context-dependent, emphasizing the

¹² In psychology, this is often referred to as the 'correspondence bias' or the 'fundamental attribution error'. For a review, see Gilbert & Malone (1985).

fundamental ties between individuals. Westerners, by contrast, do not assume such connectedness, and instead value independence from others.

We see similar differences in philosophical conceptions of individuality. Following Roger Ames (1994), let's distinguish two senses of 'individual'. On the one hand, 'individual' can refer to a single, indivisible, separate entity that is a member of a larger class or group by virtue of its having some essential property (or properties). Notions such as autonomy, independence, equality, privacy, will, and freedom are often associated with this particular conception of individuality, prevalent in Western (and especially American) culture. In other words, in Western culture, the individual is seen as a discrete entity circumscribed at the epidermal level with certain properties that afford her membership in a larger unit. This picture of a self-contained individual seems in tension with the situational sensitivity demonstrated in experimental social psychology. On the other hand, 'individual' can also be understood contextually, as a locus or focal point within a web of social relations. On this relational view, an individual, while unique, remains nested in and significantly determined by larger group structures, while also (and simultaneously) affecting the dynamics of these structures in turn. The relationship is reflexive. Indeed, one achieves a higher degree of individuality here not by *separating* from the group, but rather by becoming

distinguished *within* it.¹³ This notion, prevalent in East Asian (and especially Confucian) culture, is quite different from the idea of a private, individual, inscrutable “will” as a ground for action.

These differences help explain why the findings of situationist psychology have been so remarkable and counterintuitive to philosophers steeped in the Western tradition. If our lay and philosophical theories depict us as free, private, and autonomous agents, it should not be surprising that situationism has been seen as a threat, and that the response thus far has been rather self-centered, focused on the possible negative effects of situationism on one’s own behavior (as opposed to the effects of oneself on others). However, the deeper lesson of situationism lies not in showing how our behavior is *shaped by* external situations, but in showing how our behavior *shapes* our situations. While this idea might be underemphasized in Western conceptions of individuality and agency, it can be found in many other traditions, particularly East Asian traditions of thought.

I suggest that Confucius’s own preoccupation with details of comportment reflects his awareness of how our presence impacts others. Attending to such details can be seen as an opportunity to really affect our situations and shape the trajectory of our

¹³ For a further elaboration of the kind of personhood operative in this paper, see Wong (2006), who discusses how Confucian notions may be compatible with a certain understanding of autonomy, while being free of questionable assumptions about the exemption of individuals from the laws of nature.

moral lives. The Confucian tradition can therefore serve as a fertile resource for theorizing about how we might further our own responses to the facts of situationism.

3.3 Conclusion

The core of situationism is correct—people are not trapped by aspects of their personalities, doomed to behave according to recalcitrant character traits, come what may. Instead, individuals are highly malleable. In different situations with subtly different prompts, we can expect individuals to behave in very different ways. Minor acts can have great effects. If we mind them, we can foster a form of *ethical bootstrapping*—that is, we can prompt or lift one another toward our joint moral ends. If situationism is true, then whether any individual will be able to meet her ethical aims on any particular occasion will hinge on the actions and manners of others in her presence, which in turn will hinge on her own. In being mindful of the interconnectedness of our behavior, we not only affect how others react to us, but also thereby affect the kinds of reactions we face with in turn. The bootstrapping is mutual.

So the promise of situationism is that we do, indeed, have the power to shape our relationships with others in positive ways. After all, people can have flourishing or accommodating moral relationships in spite of real differences in their avowed moral commitments, and deleterious or rancorous moral relationships in spite of substantive agreement on big ticket moral items. In pluralistic societies such as ours, where we *expect* clashes of norms to occur, it is vital to uncover the conditions propitious to

agreement or accommodation not just at a theoretical level but a practical level as well. This should begin with what we have most control over: our manners.

For the remainder of this dissertation, I expand on this idea, and motivate two practical norms that might enlist the phenomenon of the interconnectedness of behavior in ways that make it more likely for pluralistic individuals to realize certain jointly desirable moral ends, such as reaching agreement, achieving harmony, and promoting accommodation. As with all prescriptions of any substance, these norms demand some alteration of how we view ourselves and how we approach our moral lives. But I hope to show that heeding the two norms can yield benefits that outweigh any potential costs in adopting them. The first, discussed in the next chapter, is to mind one's manners. The second, discussed in the fifth chapter, is to give others the benefit of a doubt.

4. Manners, Manipulation, and Moral Style

In Chapter One, I analyzed the Confucian virtue of *de* 德, referring to an individual's potency or efficacy. I argued that this power was importantly tied to the careful attention the nobleman paid to his appearance and presentation, to his words and speech, to his facial expressions and bodily gestures, and to the careful attention he paid to the details of those he encountered.

In Chapter Two, I showed how the impact of such minor variables on human behavior has been the focus of intense philosophical scrutiny of late, as part of the debate concerning situationism and character. The current debate has been characterized by a kind of self-centeredness, emphasizing the impact situational variables can have on one's own behavior, instead of noting the other path of influence—from oneself to others. The real lesson of situationism consists in its highlighting the interconnectedness of human behavior, how we can treat one another quite differently given different prompts and inputs.

The interconnectedness of human behavior helps us understand the model of moral agency in the *Analects*, and the *Analects* can thus serve as a rich resource for us to reflect on the implications of this model of agency for normative ethics. Here and in the next chapter I work back and forth, between empirical psychology and the *Analects* to outline an ethical theory of my own with two main injunctions: a) mind your manners, and b) give others the benefit of a doubt. I explore each injunction in turn.

4.1 Sweating the small stuff

Before you begin writing, bear in mind a number of things. I can only evaluate what is written on the paper, not what is happening in your head. All the research you undertake, all the pondering and reflection you put into the issues, all this comes to nothing if you cannot convey your ideas to your audience—the reader. Be aware of how you organize your paper. Are you presenting your ideas in a way that others can discern and comprehend? Is your message clear?

- Any teacher before handing out an essay assignment

Much of the *Analects* is focused on proper conduct in *microethical situations*, which are frequently occurring (and recurring) situations in everyday life, in which the stakes are seemingly low but in which there are nonetheless potential conflicts of interest between the individuals involved.¹ Microethical situations are often strategic in nature—that is, the outcomes for each person involved depends on the actions of the others. Think about finding a parking spot, or waiting in line at the bank, or accidentally bumping into a distant acquaintance at a local store, or deciding how to divide up menial tasks at the workplace: these are all mundane sites of potential conflict. It's likely that when

¹ The term *microethics* is used in professional ethics to refer to the ethical responsibilities of the individual practitioner, as opposed to *macroethics*, which concerns the social and ethical status of the profession within society. My usage here is different, and is indebted to Adam Morton (2003).

philosophers think of morality and ethics, they do not often think of these kinds of situations, which do not seem to reflect morality's importance and seriousness. For Confucius, though, these situations are the very basic and essential stuff of moral life. It is one's conduct in close contact with particular people in everyday situations that is of paramount importance to constructing a thriving society where individuals and their interests are fulfilled in effortless fashion.

Why, then, does Confucius find these local sites of low-stakes interaction so important? I believe the answer is that the outcomes of such small, trivial, microethical situations can oftentimes lead to *self-fulfilling prophecies*. In any social exchange, even before we begin to communicate with one another and share our normative commitments and judgments, we are already signaling to one another (often surreptitiously) various attitudes and even content-rich information about ourselves, signals which serve to bias certain types of behavior, either through triggering certain *emotional reactions*, or through triggering systems of beliefs (also called *schemas*). (Biasing here is equivalent to making more likely.) Once such emotions or schemas are activated, they guide the processing of new information, influencing how we perceive and interpret later signals and cues (especially ambiguous ones), such that we interpret further behavior in ways that conform to the initial impressions.² If these are favorable,

² In the psychological literature, the importance of 'first moves' or 'first impressions' is sometimes linked with the *perseverance effect*, whereby an initial belief endures in an agent despite subsequent evidence to the contrary, and the *halo effect*, a cognitive bias in which one's assessment of an individual along one axis (say,

then we will tend to interpret subsequent behavior along positive lines; if they are unfavorable, we can interpret subsequent behavior along negative lines. Hence, the first moves we make can often turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. Opportunities for cooperation, for engaging in mutually beneficial practices, for enlarging the scope of one's care and ethical concern, are often tied in precarious fashion to such microethical factors. The impact of our conduct in such situations will tend to color or bias all subsequent ones, exercising weighty influence on the eventual course our interactions with others take. Much of what determines whether an individual is willing to be cooperative, accommodating, or otherwise disposed to expend energy in forging relations with others will hinge on these first moves. Favorable first interactions are conducive to forging productive relationships, and vice-versa. By failing to be mindful of one's comportment and its effects on others, the possibility for reaching agreeable outcomes with others can be excluded from the outset.

Such *automatic processes* are effortless and are initiated spontaneously and inescapably upon the individual's encountering appropriate stimulus conditions. It does not matter where an individual's current focus of attention is, what the individual was recently thinking, or what her current intentions or goals are. Because perceptual activity is largely automatic and *not* under conscious or intentional control (i.e. you can't

their appearance or their occupation) influence and bias other, unrelated assessments (such as their character or their intelligence). I have much more to say about the impact of first impressions in the next chapter.

will it that you don't perceive the young child running in the street, or the frat boy's pile of puke on the ground from last night's revelry), perception is the route by which the environment *directly causes* mental activity. This has been called the *perception-behavior* link (Bargh and Chartrand 1999). While these cues may stem from one's environment (such as the dirty desk in Schnall et. al's experiment), many of them come from the *individuals* themselves. After all, if situationism is true, and if *we* are a part of our situations, then our appearance, speech and behavior serve as prompts for others (perhaps the most important ones).

By signals, then, I mean personal cues arising from our speech, bodies, mannerisms, appearance, smell, or whatever. And a great deal of these signals are candidates for modification (our posture, locutions, appearance, etc.), even while some will not modification—at least beyond any reasonable demand (e.g. our sex, race, height, etc.). This, in effect, means that we have control over the triggers and prompts that serve to partly determine the behavior of others and, in turn, of ourselves in particular situations. Strategically, what I do will almost always be entirely inseparable from what you do, and vice-versa. Assuming that we want our interactions with others to go well, that we would not like our interactions with others to be subject to *arbitrary* influence (influence itself is inescapable), then we ought to mind the prompts we do introduce to our environments, the prompts that just *will* influence our interpersonal interactions.

We regularly implore our students to write clearly, to remove ambiguities from their presentation and render their prose transparent. We advise them against leaving it up to the reader to fill in the blanks and make assumptions. All that we have to go on, after all, is the essay in front of us. I believe the implicit Confucian thought is: Should we do any less for our own persons? Should we not be concerned with the way we carry ourselves, how we comport with others, and the signals and impressions these can engender? In the end, all that others have to judge is the material person which confronts them.

4.2 The aesthetics of virtue

The *Analects* is thoroughly concerned with such microethics. It recommends paying attention to one's overt behavior, one's scrutable self. Consider the very basic term referring to practices of cultivation: *xiu* 修. The character is composed of the phonetic element *you* 攸 and the semantic element *shan* 彡 which, according to the earliest dictionary (the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字) represents lines drawn with brushes made of hair. The *Shuowen* commentary glosses the character *xiu* as 'adorning', 'brushing', 'sweeping', and 'cleaning', each of which signifies a strong aesthetic element (Slingerland 2003b, 296, n15). The compound term *xiushen* 修身 refers, then, to an act of sweeping, cleaning, brushing, and adorning one's person. It refers to this kind of overall care and conscientiousness, and not simply to cultivating one's inner dispositions.

Indeed, the highest ethical ideal in the *Analects*—humaneness (*ren* 仁)—originally referred to the *appearance* of a noble or aristocratic gentleman, as can be seen in several instances in the *Odes* (see, e.g., Graham 1989; Schwartz 1985; Shun 1993; Waley 1938). It originally meant something like ‘manly’, ‘handsome’, or ‘virile’. In the *Analects* it still carries these connotations. Probably such appearance was thought to be the mark of a truly cultivated individual; the nobleman is often described as being ‘upright’ (*zhi* 直), which can refer both to his character and to his posture.

From a contemporary perspective, this attention to one’s own appearance and presentation might seem incredibly vain. At best, we might excuse it as a relic of the noble class to which Confucius belonged. At worst, it might connote a noxious linkage of virtue with physical attractiveness that we would (rightly) find morally repugnant.³ At the very least, from the perspective of moral philosophy, it all seems besides the point. Not only does individual style of this sort have next to nothing to do with morality, but we might tend to also think that one’s style is, at a more fundamental level, not an appropriate site of moral blame; it is not something we often voluntarily choose, and may instead be the by-product of the attitudes that we affirm, which *express* themselves through what we would call individual style.⁴ One of the main themes of this dissertation is that style counts, that any attempt to understand the ethics of the

³ That the later Daoist thinker Zhuangzi so consistently ridicules this association of morality with refined or noble appearance hints at how much the Confucians might have emphasized it. (My thanks to Eric Schwitzgebel for conveying this thought.)

⁴ I borrow these thoughts from Kupperman (2002, 48)

Analects is incomplete if it puts aside these aesthetic considerations to focus only on characterological issues. Attending to one's *style* or *how* one acts and expresses himself should, insofar as it has impact on others, be as much within the purview of our moral concern as what we do.⁵

The difficulty in appreciating the ethical importance of style is hardly accidental: style, after all, is by definition what tends to get left out of the most prosaic, all-purpose summary of what was said or done. An ethics that centers on morality and also on the law is especially prone to disregard style... and our moral condemnation of actions will focus on broad categories like murder, rape, and theft, and at most peripherally on how they are done. Morality and the law are both blunt instruments... Style has at most a marginal role in them, and someone who thinks of morality as virtually the whole of ethics will have little interest in style. (Kupperman 2002, 48)

But this need not be so (as is Kupperman's point). As we saw in Chapter One, much of the self-scrutiny in the *Analects* is linked to a concern of the impact one's own comportment on others and their behavior.

⁵ My contrasting what one does with how one does it is similar, in these respects, to Robert Audi's distinction between *duties of matter* and *duties of manner*. See Audi (2004, 178-181)

12.20 - "Someone who is accomplished is upright in his native substance and fond of acting appropriately (*yi* 義). He examines others's words, keenly observes their demeanor, and always takes the interests of his inferiors into account when considering something - no matter whether serving the state or a noble family."

14.42 - Zilu asked about the nobleman. The Master said, "He cultivates [*xiu* 修] himself in order to be respectful" "Is that all?" "He cultivates himself in order to comfort others." "Is that all?" "He cultivates himself in order to comfort all people."

16.10 - Confucius said, "The gentleman focuses on nine things: when looking, he focuses on seeing clearly; when listening, he focuses on being discerning; in his expression, he focuses on being amiable; in his demeanor, he focuses on being reverent; in his speech, he focuses on being dutiful; in his actions, he focuses on being respectful; when in doubt, he focuses on asking questions; when angry, he focuses on thinking about the potential negative consequences of his anger; and when seeing gain, he focuses upon what is right."

The early Confucians were aware that it was possible to change the course of one's interactions with others (at the limit, to *change* others) through being mindful of

one's own behavior and comportment. Their emphasis on ritual propriety—the public store of signals meant to facilitate the communication of attitudes and values—can be seen as an extension of this more basic preoccupation with influence or power.

4.3 Rituals and moral power

That most of the Kashrut [i.e. kosher] laws are divine ordinances without reason given is 100 per cent to the point. It is very easy not to murder people. Very easy. It is a little bit harder not to steal because one is tempted occasionally. So that is not great proof that I believe in God or am fulfilling His will. But, if He tells me not to have a cup of coffee with milk in it with my mincemeat and peas at lunchtime, that is a test. The only reason I am doing that is because I have been told to do so. It is doing something difficult.

(A rabbi, quoted in Dawkins 2003, 22)

Confucius was a real stickler for details and oftentimes these were details of ritual propriety. There can be no misinterpreting the message of the following passage:

12.1 – Yan Yuan asked about humaneness [*ren* 仁]. The Master said, “Discipline yourself and turn to the rites [*li* 禮]—this is being humane. If, for one day, you discipline yourself and turn to the rites, the world would be humane in turn. Humaneness is in *you*—how could it come from others?” Yan Yuan asked, “I beg

you for some details.” The Master said, “If it’s improper – don’t look at it. If it’s improper – don’t listen to it. If it’s improper – don’t speak of it. If it’s improper – don’t act on it.”⁶

Ritual propriety has been given passing treatment thus far. Yet the *Analects* gives ritual pride of place among its practices. Why?

The *li* cover a broad and diverse range of activities, with sacred religious rites (such as weddings and funerals) at one end, and general norms of propriety and etiquette (such as forms of address and greeting) on the other. Participating in sacred rites and ceremonies is considered to have transformative effects on the participants. By engaging in formal rites linked to significant life moments (such as mourning rites, wedding rites, and sacrifices to one’s ancestors) one can develop emotional deep connections with other individuals and foster a feeling of reverence for the spiritual dimension of human existence.

This aspect is given pride of place in Bryan Van Norden’s recent work (Van Norden 2007). Van Norden defines ritual as “learned human activities that is regarded as sacred”. Following Emile Durkheim, he notes that an important aspect of such sacred rituals is their independent authority or force.

⁶ Brooks and Brooks point out that this passage is trivialized in the Three Monkeys of later art (i.e. ‘See no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil’) (Brooks and Brooks 1998, 89).

Because ritual is seen as sacred, it is regarded as having an authority that is not reducible to that of human individuals. This raises the question of what it is for something to be “sacred.” To regard something as sacred is to think that the proper attitude toward it is awe or reverence. (Van Norden 2007, 102)

Rituals are supposed to be approached with a feeling of reverence, and this reverence in turn *imbues* the ritual with authority. In submitting to this authoritative ritual order, one turns away from selfish or partisan desires and gains feelings of humility and deference. Rituals require coordination and cooperation amongst individuals, thereby fostering feelings of co-dependence. It is the authority of ritual—this transcendence—that allows rituals to maintain and strengthen ties within a community (2007, 112).

... as we participate in an external order maintained by human agency yet characterized by sacrality, we internalize values expressed by that order. This is, I take it, part of the force of Kongzi’s [Confucius’s] comment that, “To overcome oneself and to turn toward the rites is to become humane” (12.1). In other words, humans are originally resistant to ritual, so one must “overcome” one’s original self and “turn” around, turn toward ritual. (2007, 111-112)

This is indeed a major aspect of the *li* for early Confucians. The *li* are revered and held in wonder, and deviations from the *li* are routinely denounced. Something about their particular form was thought to be incredibly important. What's more, the linkage between ritual and cultivating emotions such as humility and deference in the text is patent and undeniable. This aspect of ritual persists today. We may, each of us, perform a number of rituals and other such formal ceremonies within our communities, and we may revere them with the same degree of holiness that Van Norden notes as characteristic of early Confucian attitudes.

It is part of Van Norden's analysis that rituals must be regarded as sacred. But consider, for example, a handshake. This is certainly a kind of ritual, and was offered by Herbert Finarette as a modern analogue to ritual propriety, something similar to bowing which, in Confucius's time, would certainly count as *li* behavior. Yet Van Norden thinks that "shaking hands is not a ritual action since it is not regarded as sacred" (2007, 110n77). Van Norden makes a helpful distinction between holy rite and social convention, and is perhaps correct in claiming that Herbert Fingarette's excellent *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* makes too much of the conventional aspects of ritual and not enough about religious rites and the emotions they cultivate (2007, 111). But given his definition of ritual and his insistence that rituals be regarded as holy, certain aspects of *li* are left out of Van Norden's analysis.

These non-sacred, mundane, conventional aspects of *li* are precisely the concern of this dissertation. In pluralistic communities such as our own, it is these more conventional aspects that are most important.⁷ And I find it implausible that such conventions (such as shaking hands, holding doors, saying ‘you’re welcome’) hold power over us because we regard them as sacred and authoritative. In fact, it is their very conventionality that affords them their efficaciousness.

When we submit to conventional norms of propriety, we do so out of a desire to signal to others that they are within the scope of our moral concern. A commitment to self-regulation, when noticed by others, signals a commitment to consideration. This evokes the notion of care. To regulate one’s behavior in response to the presence of others signals that one cares. Refusing to do so—because one has no obligation to do so, or because one has a right to do otherwise—or neglecting to do so—because one is negligent or can’t be bothered—signals the opposite, that is, a lack of care or consideration, that others are not worthy of one’s moral attention. Signaling such an attitude is ethically undesirable.

Indeed, the very conventionality of social rituals is what affords them their power to signal values and attitudes to others. One is voluntarily abiding by some

⁷ Of course, many of us do participate in holy rites in our own religious communities, and no doubt approach them with the sort of reverence that Van Norden finds characteristic of the early Confucians. However, these are essentially private matters that do not seem to play a role in a secular ethics that can have broad application in pluralistic societies such as our own. Instead, the norms and expectations attached to social behavior and regulating the interactions of citizens outside of formal, ceremonial settings, play a much broader role.

clearly artificial rules because one wants to signal or convey something to another person. Ishani Maitra captures this aspect of conventional rituals in the following passage.

The final feature of rules of etiquette to which I want to draw attention is their perceived *arbitrariness*... The very fact of an agent's abiding by the relevant rules, whatever they may be, can be taken as *an indication of his willingness to cooperate with others in his community*. On this view, then, the characteristic end of the practice of etiquette is the promotion of social cohesiveness...⁸ If this hypothesis is correct, then in order to realize the characteristic end of etiquette, there must be in place rules of etiquette governing a range of social interactions. But notice that, to realize this end, what is needed is some set of rules or other. Social cohesiveness would be equally well served by any number of alternate sets of rules (perhaps within some limits). In this sense, rules of etiquette are arbitrary. Moreover, *they are generally perceived as such*. Insofar as we participate in the practice *because we value the end of social cohesiveness*, this perceived arbitrariness need not undermine our willingness to abide by these rules. (Maitra 2004, emphases added)

⁸ This is strikingly similar to Confucius's statement that "The greatest function of observing ritual propriety is its fostering social harmony" (1.12).

This is put into sharpest relief when the conventional norms one abides by are those of another cultural group, whose own conventions and forms of propriety are routinely seen by outsiders as conventional, perhaps even trite or silly. Yet an effort made to conform one's behavior according to other norms and customs is one of the most direct and effective ways of signaling cooperative and conscientious attitudes, and they are often met with appreciation.⁹ This is often most vivid when traveling abroad, where small efforts to learn local customs, basic words such as 'please' and 'thanks', are often met with delighted faces and a willingness to be helpful and considerate to visitors who will likely never be in a position to fully reciprocate any kindness given.¹⁰ On this view, there is nothing 'sacred' at all with many of the social rituals we observe. What's more, we *know* this. We're aware that the little things we do because of convention are just that—convention.

The rabbi quoted in the passage above is surely correct in his first point: most of us don't find ourselves regularly fighting urges to kill or maim or harm (even if we might entertain such thoughts in moments of anger or frustration). Yet we are perfectly capable of being rude, demeaning, unhelpful, boorish, and insulting. These are the

⁹ Van Norden is certainly aware of this dimension: "when ritual functions properly, it calls for a response from others. Because of this evocative aspect of ritual, and because it is seen as having authority that transcends the individual, ritual helps maintain and strengthen communities" (2007, 112).

¹⁰ The phenomenon of the 'Ugly American' tourist represents the opposite extreme—refusing to conform at all to the norms of other cultures when in other parts of the world.

types of interactions—failing to help others, disregarding others feelings, breaking promises, causing others psychological distress—that we can stand to most improve on, and where in our lives we can make the most impact—whether negative or positive. To paraphrase the rabbi, ‘it is very easy to avoid heinous moral crimes, so that is not a great proof that I am a morally laudable person. But if propriety demands that I watch my manners, mind my words, and otherwise modify my behavior to conform to norms of conduct that are merely conventional, that is a test. The only reason I am doing that is because I want to signal respect. It is doing something difficult.’ I can scarcely improve on Joel Kupperman’s own remarks concerning these matters.

In the flow of personal relationships, however, between the big moral moments that occasionally may occur, style counts enormously. What is said or done sends messages that influence people’s attitudes to each other and their feelings about life; how it is said or done sends messages, and often may have a deeper influence... In any event, the style with which people behave can energize and encourage those who are nearest and dearest, or discourage them and make them feel helpless. These are major consequences, and should be part of the concern of ethics... Any adequate account of what contributes to a good life must include the causal role played by the style of parents, teachers, friends, and partners. (Kupperman 2002, 48-49)

Of course it is sometimes difficult to be courteous, conscientious and sensitive (just ask Larry David), and it is no accident that acting appropriately is oftentimes linked in the text with metaphors of restraint (e.g. 6.27, 8.2, 9.11, 12.1, 12.15). Some people have thick skins and can appreciate a minor snub, whereas others can be devastated. Moreover, there can seem to be countless demands on our time, energy, and patience: a troublesome student needing guidance, a charitable organization needing help, a fellow shopper needing a boost for her car. One must, at times, pick and choose from among the possible entanglements to which one can commit. But the immediacy with which one can make an impact, with which one can act in a humane fashion and change the trajectory of one's interactions with others also shows that being humane may not be so difficult after all. Such efforts may not always be recognized or requited, and one may not always find them to be warranted. What's more, imbalances in power structures and social roles may limit the forms of ritual propriety that any particular individual can invoke. One might not always be in a position to avail oneself of such norms and the responses they are meant to elicit, and one might further be ignorant of what norms of propriety will be appropriate for any given situation. There's no denying that propriety has its limits. While recognizing such limitations, the importance of having norms of propriety at our disposal to signal values and attitudes is of immense utility, and the

lessons of the *Analects* in this regard are as applicable today as they were in the late Zhou period.

4.4 Objection I – Manners and glibness

Behind all of this talk of charisma, power and influence lurk concerns about those who wield such power, and I believe we find such concerns (quite naturally) in the *Analects* itself. They are perhaps most salient in the text's preoccupation with glibness and eloquent charm. After all, why is it that out of all the vices that ethicists can target in their crosshairs, such as meanness, greed, licentiousness, hatred, and selfishness, the authors of the *Analects* are so concerned with glibness?

1.3 – The Master said, “Wily words and an ingratiating appearance—these are seldom indicative of humankindness (*ren* 仁).”¹¹

5.5 – Someone said, “Zhongong is humane (*ren* 仁) but not eloquent (*ning* 佞).” The Master said, “What need is there for ‘eloquence’? Respond with a clever tongue and you will frequently be resented. I don’t know of Zhongong’s humaneness (*ren* 仁), but what need is there for ‘eloquence’?”

¹¹ Translating *ren* as ‘humankindness’ was first suggested to me by Richard Guisso. It captures both the meaning of connotation of being what exemplifies our species (humankind-ness) and also the sense of sympathetic concern for others (human-kindness).

16.4 - Kongzi [Confucius] said, “Beneficial friendships number three, and harmful friendships also number three. The straight, honorable, and learned—these are the beneficial friends. Flatterers, skilled gratifiers, and glib slicksters—these are the harmful friends.”

These and similar passages (e.g. 6.16, 11.25, 15.11) all target the same sort of individuals—those who use clever or wily words, who put on airs and ingratiate others. Why the derision of such individuals over others? Why do they occupy such a position of scorn in the text?

4.4.1 Interpretation I – The glib are not good

The most obvious way of understanding these passages is to see them as critical of superficial individuals. By absorbing oneself in high culture and observing the outward practices dictated by convention, these individuals are able to attain a measure of social and political success, fooling others into thinking them to be real *junzi* 君子 or noblemen. However, they lack any real commitment to the Confucian *dao*, any real ethical motivations, and are instead motivated by a desire to gain office, accumulate wealth, and gain a reputation. Confucius registers a lament that in earlier periods, scholars “learned for themselves”, seeking to improve their conduct and reflect the highest ethical ideals, yet nowadays they “learn for others”, seeking to improve themselves out of a desire to impress those in power and rise up the socio-political ladder. Indeed, this

is the most common way of understanding these passages (see, e.g., Schwartz 1985; Slingerland 2003a; Slingerland 2003b; Van Norden 2007).

Schwartz, for example, believes that the repeated attacks on clever talk and glibness stems from their power to disguise; they afford individuals “that fatal capacity for disguising real feelings and embellishing ulterior motives by the abuse of words” (Schwartz 1985, 93). This image of a person attaining some position but all the while being hollow inside is best captured in Confucius’s comment that “The ‘village worthies’ are thieves of *de*” (17.3).¹² By putting on airs and beguiling others through flash over substance, such individuals were perhaps able to secure personal success and achieve fame and repute. But lacking a true commitment to the Confucian *dao*, they could not be trusted to work for the benefit of others or the restoration of social order, except perhaps as by-products of their own personal success, or when such acts would be instrumentally beneficial to them. They illegitimately appropriate the manners and authority of noble individuals, and thus are called ‘thieves’.

4.4.2 Interpretation II – Internal worries of the Confucian *dao*

Perhaps this preoccupation with the vice of glibness arises from *within* the perspective of the Confucian *dao* itself, and the dangers that might await those who adopt its precepts and practices into their own lives. In other words, there is good reason to believe that

¹² There is a discussion of this *Analects* passage in the *Mencius*, Book 7B, chapter 37.

the very norms of conduct and disciplines of study advocated by Confucius could, in practice, tend toward arrogance and glibness.

What were these disciplines and norms? Among them, mastery of the minutia of ritual propriety was paramount, but there was also the mastery (and memorization) of classical poetry, music and literature, a detailed knowledge of history, and devotion to the high culture of the waning Zhou dynasty. Lacking such mastery of high culture was tantamount to being useless. Consider the following comment about the need to study the *Odes*:

17.10 - The Master said to Boyu, "Have you mastered the 'Zhou South' and 'Shao South' [sections of the *Odes*]? And if you haven't mastered the 'Zhou South' and 'Shao South' – wouldn't that be like standing and facing a wall?"

Placing importance on these activities and mastering these skills can quickly make one appear pedantic, narrow-minded, or arcane. Even while I've argued that we can see the attention to such details in a positive light, reflecting care, consideration and conscientiousness, and even though Confucius himself was at pains to emphasize that one err on the side of modesty, humility, and restraint, it is not difficult to imagine how they can lead one astray. Advanced practitioners, carried away by their own learning, virtuosity and command of high culture, can become arrogant, self-obsessed, and *glib*. Confucius voices such worries at places in the text.

3.18 – The Master said, “If in serving your lord you observe every detail of ritual propriety *li* 禮, people will think you obsequious.”

5.22 – When the Master was in Chen, he said, “Oh, let’s go home! Let’s go home! Our young followers are wild and ambitious—they put on a great show of brilliant cultural achievement, but they lack the intelligence to prune and shape it.

Indeed, we even see Confucius himself accused of being glib by an otherwise unknown Weisheng Mou.

14.32 – Weisheng Mou said to Kongzi [Confucius], “Qiu¹³—what’s with all this flitting about? Is it not merely to show off your glibness?” Confucius replied, “I would not dare deem myself glib; I’m just stubborn.”¹⁴

If the very practices of self-cultivation advocated by the *Analects* should lend themselves toward glibness, arrogance and putting on airs, then it is no surprise that these qualities are singled out among many others for denunciation in the text. There would be a

¹³ Note that “Qiu” was Confucius’s personal name, so Weisheng Mou was either Confucius’s elder by many years, or was being insulting.

¹⁴ I must admit that Confucius’s response has always seemed to me to be something of a non-sequitur. The most plausible interpretation is that Confucius is conveying his stubborn devotion to the high culture of the Zhou dynasty.

pressing need to distinguish those who *appeared* noble from those who really *were* noble. Virtuous or preachy, learned or pedantic, detailed or priggish—the line between is thin.¹⁵ And nothing could jeopardize an upstart reformer’s path quite so readily as being preachy, pedantic and priggish.¹⁶ There are few things in social life more noxious than someone putting on airs, elevating himself above others, or engaging in overt attempts to court favor by shows of erudition or sophistication. Confucius was, of course, against all this. His devotion to culture was motivated by its ability to cultivate and broaden one’s ethical imagination.

17.9 – The Master said, “Why is it none of you, my young friends, study the *Odes*? An apt quotation from the *Odes* may stimulate the imagination, endow one with breeding, enable one to live in communion with others and give expression to grievances.”

Yes, this is all true. But it’s perhaps equally likely that such shows of eloquence will seem like showing off. It would be very easy for a person committed to the Confucian *dao* to risk becoming a “village worthy”.

¹⁵ 12.23 – Zigong asked about friendship. The Master said, “Reproach your friends when considerations of duty call for it – but guide them gently. If your words are unacceptable to them then desist. Don’t incur insult.”

¹⁶ My thanks to David Wong for reminding me that this is how Confucius is often portrayed in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.

There is certainly a touch of resentment toward the village worthies. If they are successful in influencing others or getting others to believe in their virtue and thereby reap benefits from it, we might understand why the Confucians would resent their success. But notice that the village worthies *are* successful. They steal *de*—power. They are influential. They are able to get others to yield to them, to recognize their authority and bend to their wishes. They are admired and imitated. The problem thus lies in their *efficacy*, that they are able to *manipulate*. This is perhaps best seen in 12.20, where Confucius distinguishes being renowned from being accomplished:

12.20 - Someone who is accomplished is upright in his native substance and fond of acting appropriately. He examines other people's words, keenly observes their demeanor, and always takes the interests of his inferiors into account when considering something—no matter whether serving the state or a noble family. Someone who is renowned, on the other hand, adopts the appearance of being humane but violates it in his actual conduct, all the while *never doubting that he deserves to be called humane*. Thus, *he is sure to be renowned*—whether serving the state or a noble family.

This brings us to a final worry concerning a *dao* of moral power—namely, ambition.

4.4.3 Interpretation III – Power and the political

A Confucian gentleman's goal, I maintain, was to wield power, to influence others and have real impact over social policies and practices. Wielding power was the ever present yet practically difficult goal. "In general, the noble man assumes office only when he can hope to influence the rulers. To accept office with an unsavory ruler whom one cannot possibly influence to the good is to justify the suspicion that one is motivated by a desire for emoluments and fame and not by the ideal of service.... [Yet] is it not the duty of the *shih* [scholar-official] to *attempt* to influence them?" (Schwartz 1985, 112). The ideal is *not* the preservation of one's own moral purity, but rather attainment of a position of power and influence; while the former is nice, it falls way short of the goal.¹⁷

Seeking such moral power could easily make one a tool for those in power, serving individuals with questionable or even immoral ends.¹⁸ Confucius did not

¹⁷ Many of Confucius's disciples had more conventional goals in mind as well, such as securing an official salary. As Wong and Loy note, "For the most part... the motivation revolves around achieving political office and its conventional rewards, aims that are sometimes at odds with the higher educational ideals of Confucius" (Wong and Loy 2001, 220).

¹⁸ The strongest statement witnessing this effect—namely, that moral reformers were all too willing to go into the service of anyone—occurs in the writings of the Primitivist (ca. 3rd century BCE), an unattested thinker whose writings were anonymously assimilated into the heterogeneous *Zhuangzi*: "The man who steals a buckle is put to death; the man who steals a state becomes a lord. And at the gates of a lord you'll find the humane and the righteous" (Graham 1981, 20, slightly modified). Earlier in this essay, the Primitivist notes how the Tian family, longtime ministers in the state of Qi, had usurped the throne by murdering the royal family. Not long thereafter, the Tian family created what was arguably the closest thing to a think-tank in early China, the so-called Jixia Academy, where they lavished intellectuals with stipends and attendants to allow them the freedom to debate matters of state and rulership. (Mencius and Xunzi, among others, spent time at Jixia.) It's likely that the Tian family's generosity was less than noble, and that their primary motivation was to come up with some justification for their bloody usurpation of the throne. Here was an academy full of tools to justify an overt power grab. So one can be sympathetic to the vitriolic Primitivist, who saw the Confucians and Mohists as serving to legitimate (v.) authority and justify

hesitate to demean his own advisees in this regard, denigrating the politically motivated Zilu and Ran Qiu for being, literally, tools.

11.24 - Ji Ziran asked, "Zilu and Ran Qiu—can they be considered great ministers?" The Master replied, "I thought you were going to ask about people of note; instead, you always ask about Zilu and Ran Qiu! We deem 'great ministers' those who serve their lords according to our *dao*. If this isn't possible, they resign. Now, as for Zilu and Ran Qiu, they can be deemed 'tool ministers'." "So, they do what they're told to do." "Well, I suppose if they were told to murder their fathers or lords, even *they* wouldn't go through with it."

It's very revealing that Ji Ziran keeps asking about these two. Why does he not ask about Confucius's other students, the better students, those interested in Confucius's higher ideals? Well, it seems that many of the better students were decidedly apolitical, such as Min Ziqian and Ran Boniu. Others, such as Zhong Gong, never rise to political prominence. Even Yan Hui, Confucius's much admired star pupil, the one who other disciples didn't dare compare themselves to (5.9), the one held up for greatest esteem owing to his natural talents and his indefatigable desire to learn, can be seen as falling short of the mark owing to his extreme, austere asceticism and lack of worldly ambition.

usurpation. For an engaging (if superficial) treatment of the perils that attended intellectuals who have entered public service (including Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, and Walter Benjamin), see Mark Lilla's *The Reckless Mind* (2001).

11.19 - The Master said, “Hui—he was so close! And yet, he was perpetually poor. Si [aka Zigong] won’t accept such a fate, and so speculates in business. What’s more, his speculations are right on the money.”¹⁹

Slingerland takes this as yet another passage where Yan Hui is singled out for praise (2003a, 118-119). Whereas Zigong can do for some improvement by redirecting his energies from business to moral perfection, Yan Hui is summarily uninterested in such externalities, and therefore came “so close” to realizing the highest moral ideals. I admit that it seems hard to be critical of Yan Hui. Even while Confucius’s own comment is likely entirely positive, Hui’s dogged pursuit of learning and asceticism can also be seen a fault from within the Confucian perspective itself, making him less than what he could be were he to devote himself, instead, to public service and moral reform.

The problem of wanting to serve and fulfill one’s ethical obligation, but only when one could have some real expectation of exerting influence, and only in a way that would preserve one’s own integrity, would haunt Confucian philosophy from the *Analects* onwards. It is perhaps for these reasons that throughout the *Analects* there is an

¹⁹ I follow Slingerland (2003a) in translating *huozhi* 貨殖 (literally, ‘increasing [his] goods’) as ‘speculating in business’, mostly to parallel the statement that follows.

insistence that it's okay to be a political loser (so to speak) so long as one maintains one's integrity (e.g. 1.1, 1.16, 4.5, 4.14, 11.19, 14.30, 15.19).²⁰

The preceding discussion should perhaps caution us today about the troubles that might attend scrupulous awareness of, and attention to, one's presentation and mannerisms, especially if part of the rationale for such attention and devotion is the knowledge that one can hold sway over others. Glibness was not just a worry for Confucius's time, and one must always walk a fine line between being ambitious and maintaining integrity, or wishing to impress and manipulating.

But this dissertation does not recommend that one immerse oneself in high culture in order to gain moral power, or to pay such scrupulous attention to the color of one's robes or the ability to quote from the classics. Such matters may have been important to the nobleman, keys to their efficacy. But we travel in very different circles than Confucius did. Ultimately, for us, moral power must boil down to being sensitive and conscientious, and being able to signal these attitudes to others. The quality of one's moral life will be tightly keyed to these visible expressions of one's motives and values.

²⁰ There is the separate question of whether the fact that most of Confucius's disciples failed to become nobleman impugns Confucius's teachings. Indeed, Confucius himself was a failure in this regard, and at times appears to admit that his work is doomed (5.27, 14.38). Elsewhere, he expresses doubts as to whether Heaven has abandoned him and his mission (9.9, 11.9), and is subject to mocking by his contemporaries (3.18, 14.32). The issue of his disciples' failures has received comparatively little scholarly attention, but is given excellent treatment in Wong and Loy (2001)

4.5 Objection II – Whose manners? Which propriety?

Reader: "What am I supposed to say when I am introduced to a homosexual 'couple'?"

Miss Manners: "Gentle Reader: 'How do you do?' 'How do you do?'"

Judith Martin (1979, 360-1)

All indications are that Confucius was not a pluralist concerning ritual and norms of propriety. He was an unabashed apologist for the ritual propriety of the waning Zhou dynasty, finding them to be especially potent and powerful.²¹ Confucius does, at times, allow for divergence from the Zhou, such as in the much discussed 9.3.

9.3 – The Master said, "Ritual requires a cap made of hemp, but these days silk is less expensive, so I follow the majority. Ritual requires bowing *before* ascending [the stairs]. These days people bow *after*, which is arrogant. I continue to bow before, even though it goes against the majority."

Tellingly, the relevant criterion here is signaling. The first change, from hemp to silk, is merely practical and doesn't impact the message of the ritual. The latter change, from

²¹ Perhaps Confucius believed that, having followed the Xia and Shang dynasties, the Zhou was well positioned to maintain rituals that were time-tested and especially efficacious. More likely, as Schwartz notes, Confucius "would not have found anywhere in the known world of his time anything equivalent to the model of the Chou [Zhou] dynasty. Its very uniqueness may have established its universality as the true order of civilization as well as its cosmic relation to Heaven" (Schwartz 1985, 65).

bowing below to bowing above, signals very different values and attitudes. In the apt word of Brooks and Brooks, “the ‘below’ option implies *asking* permission to ascend; the ‘above’ option *presumes* it” (Brooks and Brooks 1998, 51).²²

Nonetheless, it is worth considering whether Confucius was on to something in emphasizing the need to adhere to a single set of stable rituals. After all, if individuals subscribe to different ritual practices, then it seems inevitable that the signaling function of ritual will lose its efficacy, thus rendering the communication of values and other orientations difficult. While we may not share Confucius’s particular allegiance to the ritual norms of the Zhou dynasty, we might still wonder whether such allegiance would be functionally imperative.

Indeed, because I am suggesting that an ethics informed by this attention to manifest signals is important to us today, that we ought to pay closer attention to our scrutable selves, the real variability of ritual gestures across cultural groups in pluralistic societies such as our own seems to be an especially daunting problem. We not only live in multicultural societies, but we also uphold as some of our core values those of tolerance to and respect of divergent cultural norms and practices. We *embrace* diversity.

²² One might wonder why using cheaper material is not seen here as signaling a change in attitude toward the ritual in question. After all, if the ritual is important, shouldn’t we expect this to be reflected by choosing similarly important and valuable materials? In other words, wouldn’t we expect one to signal his commitment to ritual by spending more on the hemp? This certainly seems like a plausible response. However, Confucius’s approval of the more frugal option is in line with his repeated injunctions throughout the text to favor the modest and simple over the ornate and luxurious (e.g. 3.4, 11.1). Ostentation and showiness were among his chief irritants, and it is likely that in most cases adhering to the ritual itself (such as bowing before ascending) was thought to be of greater importance than the materials involved.

If my normative commitment to 'mind manners' is to have traction it would seem to require a uniformity of norms of propriety that neither exists nor is thought desirable in modern liberal democracies. Particular locutions and gestures, the tone of one's voice, the use of humor or levity—these vary greatly from one group to another, and can be easily misinterpreted. And even in multicultural societies, where people are in regular contact with members of diverse cultural groups, people regularly associate with like-minded, like-mannered others, and avoid or eschew interactions with people from alien groups or cultures. Accordingly, whether through accident or design, individuals in one group can be unfamiliar with, and therefore unpracticed in, the norms of other groups. In such contexts, whose propriety counts? Which manners? Must minority cultures conform to the majority? If so, is this acceptable? If not, how do we proceed? Do all systems of propriety count equally? If so, is being unfamiliar with other customs and manners morally blameworthy? Put differently, if 'minding one's manners' means adhering to a particular code of conduct, it seems as though we won't be able to agree on one. If it doesn't mean adhering to a particular code of conduct, then how is my norm action-guiding?

First, let me admit that my definition of minding manners does impose certain burdens of familiarity with a diverse array of culture-bound modes of propriety. I have throughout used manners in a normative fashion—modifying one's own behavior out of consideration of others. If one adopts mannerisms that offend others, one is not, on this

view, minding one's manners (or, at least, doing so successfully). The relevant norms are keyed to the individuals involved, and people are morally blameworthy to the extent that they remain indifferent towards the norms and customs of pluralistic others with whom they are in regular contact. For example, a person from a majority culture is not excused from particularizing her behavior relative to minority individuals simply owing to greater number. Rather, if she is regularly in contact with individuals with diverse norms of propriety, then she ought to become familiarized with them and be conscientious about any relevant cues. (In fact, I believe this happens quite naturally, as I argue below.) Failure to do so is morally blameworthy. Blame might be mitigated for someone who comes from a relatively isolated and homogenous community, who has not interacted with pluralistic others and does not expect to interact with them, and is therefore unfamiliar with their norms and practices. Even so, failure to learn about their norms and practices in anticipation of future interactions (i.e. moving into a more pluralistic setting) might, however, still represent a moral failure.

I do not deny that in pluralistic societies it may be difficult, in practice, to be sure of what is appropriate. But this is true even *within* particular cultures or traditions. It is commonplace to be unsure of how to behave—whether one's joke may be inappropriate, one's choice of words repellent, one's table manners unacceptable. How much formality is called for on certain occasions, whether levity or gravity is the best response to an

awkward moment—these are matters for which there are no fine-grained rules of application.

More importantly, it is an empirical question whether and to what extent there may be convergence in the meanings or values attached in certain behaviors. And we might note that it is not very difficult to convey an amiable attitude if one wishes to do so, and if one is taught to do so. We are fortunate, in this regard, that Mother Nature has instilled in us some modes of expression that appear to be widely discernable. For example, Paul Ekman's pioneering line of research into emotional expression in the human face demonstrates that all humans possess a shared set of basic emotional expressions, such as fear, anger, surprise, happiness, sadness, and disgust/contempt (Ekman 2002). Ekman's findings (first published in the early 70's) have renewed interest in positing a universal human nature, and have been incorporated into recent biological approaches to ethics (Flanagan 2003). Ekman's research reveals that humans are capable of *discerning* these core emotions in others across cultural boundaries.²³ In other words, humans seem to have some innate ability to correctly perceive emotional expression in others. Ekman has thus provided a biological basis to substantiate the phenomenon of mindreading which (I argued in chapter one) is crucial to the practice of morality and, indeed, to social intercourse more generally. Moreover, Ekman's research suggests that

²³ I leave aside the separate question of whether such *expressions* really do map on to the same underlying *emotions*, a point of much contention.

conveying a positive or friendly attitude is not constrained by cultural boundaries, and that such paradigmatic expressions as smiles or frowns will be able to convey (as well as elicit) their emotional content in others. If this is so, focusing on core emotional expression can be particularly efficacious in pluralistic settings, where other conventional details might not dovetail so nicely.

Finally, it merits mentioning that in pluralistic Western democracies such as our own, it is not uncommon for cultures to align their norms to one another, sometimes within a generation or two. Minority cultural groups are frequently imagined as abject and passive subjects of their cultures of origin, preserving distinctive practices in the face of change (Bhabha 1999). For many minority cultures this is patently false. In Russell Jacoby's words, "little suggests that any group except the most marginal and inflexible can maintain, or even wants to maintain, a distinct culture within American society" (Jacoby 1999, 54). The mass media, popular culture and shared educational curriculums often shape values to a greater degree than anything in the ethnic milieu. Certain cultural groups *may* perpetuate distinctive norms of behavior in tension with the majority. Nonetheless, preserving minority cultural practices may be a losing battle, and resisting forces of cultural change can be regularly unsuccessful. Of course, many of us value the unique contributions of various cultural groups, and actively support their preservation by promoting multiculturalism. However, as Joseph Raz has pointed out, it is a mistake to think that multicultural measures can counteract the tendencies toward

assimilation and mutual influence and change (Raz 1999).²⁴ Multiculturalism is a *product* of assimilation, signaling the waning of distinctive cultural practices as opposed to their persistence or resilience (Jacoby 1999, 49). Cultural groups, both major and minor, often influence and blend into one another, leading to increased cohesiveness of norms and practices.²⁵

In short, objections adverting to a lack of common or shared norms of propriety are mitigated both by shared forms of expression (especially facial expression) across our species and by the undeniable tendency toward assimilation in pluralistic societies such as our own. It's not that all differences between groups are eradicated or wholly insignificant, but rather that we can vastly overestimate both the degree of difference that exists between cultural groups and the desire of these groups to perpetuate their practices and beliefs against those of their neighboring citizens. We should not expect people from different cultural backgrounds to be so dogged as to reject any change whatsoever, to refuse to adapt to (or even adopt) the practices of their neighbors, nor should we be confident of their abilities to do so if they so desire.

²⁴ The exceptions to this rule are certain religious groups. "Groups such as Protestant Fundamentalists have schools and preschools, camps, social activities, and churches that allow them to partly shield their families from the mainstream society, allowing them to engage in considerable gender discrimination. Immigrants, on the other hand, have comparatively few institutions to shield themselves from the liberalizing effects of the larger society" (Spinner-Halev 2001, 90-91).

²⁵ These statements may be more representative of the United States and less true of other liberal democracies, such as Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands, where the tendency to assimilate is comparatively weak, and where even those who have assimilated often feel as though they are not recognized as full-fledged citizens. This might fuel the resistance to assimilation; there is no point if one continues to be excluded. My thanks to David Wong for raising these points.

Finally, it would do well to not focus too much on norms of etiquette. Microethical situations are not distinguished by having particular, conventional forms attached to them. Instead, they involve seemingly small efforts to modify or regulate one's behavior out of consideration of others, and not simply to abide by certain conventional rules. Gestures can be conventional, but they need not be. And oftentimes the minor actions that we take toward others have no obvious relation to any particular formal rules of behavior.

4.6 Conclusion

The two of us might be involved in an ethical encounter that could proceed to an agreeable outcome or degenerate into an ethical standoff harmful to us both. How our interaction unfolds will depend greatly on the first moves we make. You might not know what type of person I am or how I might act. But you will automatically and effortlessly begin to interpret my actions and infer my character and motives out of cues arising from my person. If we are mindful of these cues, we might nudge each other along to an agreeable outcome.

So style does not come after. It comes first—both descriptively and normatively. Confucius' greatest anxieties arose from his observation that social rituals were on the decline, performed rarely and with neither the correct form nor the appropriate spirit. This perennial lament can be found in most any society. Yet if we are to take the role of automaticity seriously in the conduct of life, then we might wonder, along with

Confucius, how likely it is to effect social harmony in their absence. To many, the ritual minutiae that comprise most of Book 10 of the *Analects* will seem quaint at best, priggish at worst. Many of the things which Confucius saw as ethically significant tend to be viewed by modern people as matters of taste or style (Ivanhoe 2000). This is true. But there is more at stake here than taste. For if the richness of our moral lives is—at least in part—a reflection of the richness of the rituals we engage in, maybe he wasn't such a prig after all. Maybe Confucius was really on to something: that the magical realm of human intercourse is steadily eroded when we fail to observe our rituals. We hardly notice it, but oftentimes a kind smile from a friend, a playful wink from a stranger, or a meaningful handshake from a supportive colleague can completely change our attitudes.²⁶ Rituals connect us emotionally, and impoverished emotional repertoires can only hinder social contact and bleed our worlds of meaning.

Finally, these positive effects of can also extend beyond the individuals involved. The greater societal impact of moral exemplars (or even individual instances of morally exemplary action) can lead to *indirect reciprocity*, where those who receive beneficial treatment reciprocate 'or pay forward' to other unrelated individuals down the line.

²⁶ One of the most poignant examples comes from the story of John Kevin Hines, one of only 28 individuals to have survived a suicidal jump off of the Golden Gate bridge since its completion in 1937. (Over 1300 are known to have perished.) Hines said in a subsequent interview that "if someone had smiled and said, 'Are you okay?' I know I would have begged them to help me... [A] smile would have most definitely helped in my case. If the smile is genuine and caring, and it looks like the person is approachable, that person could have such an impact on a suicidal person at the moment of desperation. They could well save a life." Yet no one did, and Hines jumped. See Simon (2007).

Through initiating acts of kindness, they are able to start chains of reciprocation and well meaning that spread to the wider social world.²⁷

In this chapter, I've outlined the importance of the first imperative that results from reflecting on the interconnectedness of human behavior—minding manners. In the next, I look at the second imperative—give others the benefit of a doubt.

²⁷ This is the impetus of the 'Random Acts of Kindness' association, which believes in the power of acts of kindness to effect positive social change. It is also the premise for the book *Pay It Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde (later adapted to film).

5. Moral Epistemology and the Benefit of a Doubt

The *Analects* emphasizes the interconnectedness of human behavior; how any person acts in any interpersonal encounter hinges greatly on the behavior of the other individuals at hand. Given this general view, whenever one wishes to explain another's behavior in an interpersonal situation, it would be important to look beyond factors internal to the person (such as character or motivation) and examine what other factors may have influenced the behavior. For example, who else was present? What was said and done? How were the individuals related to one another? What roles were the individuals occupying? Who had seniority? Behavior is interconnected, and seldom would it be appropriate to discount or overlook factors stemming from the person's interlocutors and environment in accounting for their behavior. Such factors can carry great explanatory weight.

Since the *Analects* is centrally occupied with cultivating one's own moral influence on others (one's *de*), monitoring one's comportment and its impact on others is an ongoing site of scrutiny in the text. In accounting for the behavior of others, one's own behavior would be part of the explanatory account. Searching for explanations without accounting for one's own influence would be incomplete at best, wholly misguided at worst.

And so a main talking point of the *Analects*' concerns how one ought to react when interactions with others are less than optimal. Typically, one is directed to look at oneself first when trying to explain such failures.

1.4 - Master Zeng said, "Every day I examine myself on three counts: in my dealings with others, have I in any way failed to be dutiful? In my interactions with friends and associates, have I in any way failed to be trustworthy? Finally, have I in any way failed to repeatedly put into practice what I teach?"

Master Zeng is concerned to become a nobleman, an exemplary person. When he inspects his behavior, he does not simply compare it to ideal ritual forms or proscribed rules of conduct. Rather, he attends to his actual impact in numerous diverse relationships. For Master Zeng, moral failure consists not in failing to mimic formal ritual ideals but rather in failing to successfully instantiate harmony and cooperation in a social world of competing demands and expectations. Focusing on others to explain one's own shortcomings would not only be inaccurate and incomplete but also unproductive.

15.20 - The nobleman is distressed by his own inability, rather than the failure of others to recognize him.

4.14 - The Master said, "Do not be concerned that you lack an official position, but rather concern yourself with the means by which you might become established. Do not be concerned that no one has heard of you, but rather strive to become a person worthy of being known." (cf. 14.30)

Since individuals are loci of influence affecting those with whom they interact, working on *oneself* is a way to influence how *others* behave.

12.21 - Attacking your own bad qualities, not those of others – is this not the way to redress badness?

4.17 - The Master said, "When you see someone who is worthy, concentrate upon becoming his equal; when you see someone who is unworthy, use this as an opportunity to look within."

There is a distinct pattern in these passages that concern how the nobleman is supposed to react when dealing with or encountering recalcitrant, disagreeable, or otherwise bad individuals, and the pattern is one of caution and restraint.

14.29 - Zigong was given to criticizing others. The Master said [sarcastically], "How worthy he is! As for myself, I hardly devote enough time to this."

17.24 – Zigong asked, “Does the nobleman despise anyone?” The Master replied, “Yes. He despises those who pronounce the bad points of others.”¹

Voicing criticisms and negative evaluations of others is almost always frowned upon, and associated with a lack of moral maturity. Consider the following commentary from the *Record of the Three Kingdoms* on this general theme in the text.

Criticism and praise are the source of hatred and love, and the turning point of disaster and prosperity. Therefore the sage is very careful about them... Even with the *de* of a sage, Confucius was reluctant to criticize others—how reluctant should someone of moderate *de* be to carelessly criticize and praise? (Slingerland 2003a, 166)

Besides reflecting a kind of moral hubris (after all, we are all flawed creatures) and causing psychological duress in others, focusing on others’ bad qualities shields one from the more important task of self-scrutiny. Blaming others and holding them up to ridicule is easy; admitting one’s own deficiencies is difficult. So long as one is preoccupied with pointing out the flaws in others, one avoids this more arduous task.

¹ The passage continues: “...he despises those who remain below while criticizing those above; he despises those who are bold but lack courtesy, daring yet violent.”

It's as though we have natural tendencies that blind us to our own causal role in influencing unfavorable outcomes, and compel us to pin the blame on others and their shortcomings. This finds poignant expression in the commentary by Wu Kangzhai, who emphasizes that "if I focus my attention on criticizing others, then my efforts with regard to examining myself will be lax. One cannot but be on guard against this fault!" (Slingerland 2003a, 166).

In this final chapter, I focus on these and related passages, which represent one of the *Analects'* most important contributions to moral psychology. What's most remarkable about these injunctions to resist the impulse to blame others and instead look at other variables (including oneself) in coming to a deeper understanding of what motivates human behavior is that it goes against a well documented tendency to the contrary, one that has been investigated for decades in experimental psychology.

When we observe others engaging in bad or socially undesirable behavior, we have a strong tendency to explain the behavior as reflecting something significant about the person's character and motivations. We tend to assume that if people act poorly, it is because of who they are, what values they hold, and what motivations they have. Rarely do we consider that there may be contingent or situational factors influencing the behavior in question, let alone whether we ourselves might have played a role in causing the behavior in question. This general tendency renders us vulnerable to drawing assessments of others that may be inapt or unwarranted. This tendency to

blame, criticize, and otherwise pin bad behavior on others seems to be the target of Confucius's repeated injunctions to resist making such attributions and instead look more broadly—to the immediate situation and one's role in it—in accounting for the behavior in question. Confucius repeatedly enjoins us to correct for this erroneous tendency to overly blame others.

In the psychological literature, this tendency is known as the actor/observer asymmetry.

5.1 Actor / Observer asymmetries

The actor/observer asymmetry has long enjoyed status as one of the bedrock findings of social psychology, revealing something deep about our ways of explaining social behavior. As its name implies, the actor/observer asymmetry posits a difference between how actors explain their behavior and how others explain the same behavior. The tendency is for actors to invoke *situational* or *external* characteristics, whereas observers invoke *personal* or *internal* characteristics.

One way to capture the difference between these types of explanation is to consider the following sets of questions one might ask to explain the behavior in question (adapted from Malle 2006, 896):

Personal or Internal questions (asked when observers explain others' behavior)

A person's personality, character, attitude, mood, style, intentions, thoughts, desires, and so on—how important were these in causing the behavior in question? To what extent can the behavior be attributed to the person's abilities, intentions and effort?

Situational or External questions (asked when actors explain their own behavior)

Situational context, the impact of other persons, the nature of the task at hand, the demands of one's position, environmental factors—how important were these in causing the behavior in question? To what extent can the behavior be attributed to situational variables and dumb luck?

On the face of it, the asymmetry seems plausible. After all, why shouldn't we expect actors and observers to explain things differently? Yet a recent meta-analysis by Bertram Malle has revealed very little support for the asymmetry as a *general* pattern of explanation (Malle 2006). Indeed, it only emerges when a handful of variables are in play.

The strongest among these is when the behavior has a certain obvious *valence*—i.e. whether it is seen as generally positive (successes; skilled activity; generosity; other socially desirable behaviors) or generally negative (failures; mishaps; aggression; other

socially undesirable behaviors).² In short, we explain others' *negative* behavior as arising from *personal* or *internal* variables, and others' *positive* behavior as resulting from *situational* or *external* variables. However, when we explain our own behavior, this pattern is reversed.

	Positive Behavior	Negative Behavior
Actor's explanation	<i>Personal or Internal</i>	Situational or External
Observer's explanation	Situational or External	<i>Personal or Internal</i>

The asymmetry is obviously *self-serving*. We disown our own failures, yet refuse to allow others to do so. We take credit for our successes, yet pin those of others on things external to them. Could this, in fact, be an accurate assessment of what causes good and bad behavior? On the face of it, the self-serving nature of this tendency should provide us some *prima facie* reason to doubt the veracity of our negative assessments of others. Nonetheless, there have been attempts in the literature to account for the asymmetry in ways that might vindicate it. I examine two below.

² In much of what follows, I focus on the moral dimension.

Explanation I

- Perhaps we believe that morally upright individuals won't do immoral things—even, say, for personal advantage. Thus, if we encounter someone doing something morally bad, we might assume that the person must be bad as well; after all, good people don't do bad things.
- However, the converse is not true. Bad people *will* do good things on occasion, for example, to court favor with others, to make material gains, or for any number of instrumental reasons.
- Therefore, good actions do not tell us much about what kind of person we're dealing with; they can be performed by both bad and good individuals. Bad actions, on the other hand, are much more revealing, as they only issue forth from bad motivations or intentions.
- Bad actions, then, provide more information about a person than good actions do; they have greater diagnostic power. When encountering someone doing something negative, then, we have greater reason to assume the behavior representative of their motivations, values and character.

Explanation II

- Bad behavior is counter-normative—that is, it often goes against widely shared norms of conduct.
- Whenever one transgresses widely shared norms of conduct, one risks incurring the anger of one’s peers or community. This is undesirable.
- Hence, individuals will seldom if ever violate such norms thoughtlessly. Rather, they will do so intentionally, willingly accepting the costs to be born for the transgression.³
- Therefore, bad actions are done willingly. People transgress norms because a) they are comfortable taking the costs or b) don’t care about them. Either way, we now have telling information about their character and motivations—namely, that they are bad.

Both these explanations are unconvincing. It’s simply not the case that otherwise good individuals will never do bad things from time to time (whether willfully or not) or that individuals only transgress norms knowingly. Many instances of norm transgression might be accidental. More importantly, moral life is not free of conflict.

³ C.f. Edouard Machery (2008), who argues that folk understandings of intentionality are keyed to cost-benefit analysis.

Otherwise good people will often have to choose between acting on several competing moral demands, each of which may be compelling on its own, but when taken together cannot all be practically met. Failing to meet all one's moral demands may, therefore, lead to norm violation, yet it would be unfair (to say the least) to conclude that the person has a bad character or acted from bad motives. Rather, one ought to take into account the situational constraints that may be impinging on the behavior in question.⁴ These problems are compounded when judging those we are not familiar with—when we take their poor behavior on any particular occasion as indicative of their character or their motivations more generally, especially since we tend to overlook situational or external explanations. As argued in Chapter Two, people act quite differently given different prompts and within different contexts.⁵

Unfortunately, it is in our interactions with those we do not know well that we are particularly vulnerable to making and maintaining such negative evaluations.

⁴ For further discussion of how competing moral demands, as well as the agent's attitude toward any transgression she may have to commit in choosing between such demands, are taken into account in our folk psychology, see Phelan and Sarkissian (forthcoming) and Guglielmo and Malle (2008).

⁵ Some might agree with this bit of reasoning, yet draw the line when it comes to people we know well. Invoking character explanations for the bad behavior of strangers may be unwarranted, but greater familiarity should bring with it greater confidence in such explanations. Indeed, the second most important variable driving the actor/observer asymmetry is one's familiarity with the observed person, for example if they were family members, close friends, or romantic partners (Malle 2006). That is, we have a general tendency to explain the behavior of intimates by citing personal or internal factors to a greater extent than situational or external factors—whether the behavior is good or bad. And indeed there should be reason for increased confidence in these assessments, as familiarity with individuals and their behavioral tendencies can facilitate greater accuracy in assessing their dispositions to act. So we may be best positioned to invoke personal or internal characteristics when explaining the actions of intimates. Yet when explaining the behavior of strangers or casual acquaintances, we should exercise epistemic humility, and withhold making such ascriptions. Unfortunately, as I shall argue in the next section, this is where we are most prone to error.

5.2 First impression asymmetry and self-fulfilling prophecies

The human understanding, when it has once adopted an opinion, draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects and despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects, in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusion may remain inviolate.

–Francis Bacon

What motivates the *Analects* preoccupation with manners is their ability to influence others, to subtly yet significantly affect how interactions unfold. Forms of greeting and address, preliminary comments, and other first moves and signals have disproportionately strong influence on our cognitions of one another. In layman’s terms this is captured by the phrase “first impressions count”.

When we meet others we form impressions of them, and they tend to stick. This can be thought of as a “straight-line primacy effect”, whereby the net influence of any particular evaluation or assessment of a person decreases linearly according to its ordinal position in a series; first evaluations are remembered best, whereas those that come later are dropped from memory (Anderson 1965). This tendency for first impressions to dominate motivates numerous social practices, such as grooming before

a first date or rehearsing before an important presentation. It can be unfair, of course, to judge or evaluate persons based on their behavior on any one particular occasion, as the behavior may not be representative. Nonetheless, first impressions are easy to form and difficult to overcome.⁶

Once more, there is a pronounced asymmetry between the impact of negative impressions and positive ones (Fiske 1980). We are quicker to both form and recall negative impressions, and are also more likely to do so. We also tend to be more confident about our negative assessments of others (Carlston 1980), take less time to arrive at them (Lingle and Ostrom 1979), and require less information to be convinced of them (Yzerbyt and Leyens 1991) relative to positive impressions. Finally (and most troubling of all), once a negative character evaluation is made, we tend to seal it away from revision or interference. Crucially, we avoid searching for alternative, rational explanations of negative behavior—especially any situational or external explanations—once we've arrived at character explanations (Ybarra 2001). Character evaluations are a

⁶ Indeed, first impressions are remarkable predictors of the overall trajectory of interpersonal relationships. A recent study by Sunnafrank and Ramirez suggests that we decide within minutes what sort of relationship we'll come to have with others (Sunnafrank and Ramirez 2004). For the study, participants (college freshmen) were paired on the first day of class with another student of the same sex, whom they didn't know. They were told to introduce themselves and talk for either three, six or ten minutes, after which they completed a questionnaire asking a) to mention the things they had in common, and b) to assess the overall quality of their interaction and gauge what sort of relationship was likely to develop according to the following scale: nodding acquaintance; casual acquaintance; acquaintance; close acquaintance; friend; close friend. After nine weeks, they were contacted and asked to describe their current relationship with these partners. The best predictor of relationship status turned out to be how positive the initial interaction was all considered, which turned out to be far more important than common interests or likeability in determining the relationship's trajectory.

priority whenever we come upon unfamiliar individuals; when first encounters are bad, we take note.

Of course, even granting such general tendencies, some particular individuals may be extremely adept at forming accurate impressions of others, and find that their impressions are routinely confirmed by subsequent data: the initially cold and distant colleague turns out to be just as cold and distant in the end, and those they warm up to tend not to disappoint. If the claim here is that asymmetrical weighting of impressions should cause us to be wary of our negative impressions, it may nevertheless be *unnecessary* to overcome them, even if they are based on a small sample size.

Such thoughts can be deceptive. There are at least two psychological phenomena that should make us wary of being confident in our virtues at judging others. The first, commonly known as the *confirmation bias*, is our general tendency to *seek* or *interpret* evidence in ways that confirm our previously held hypotheses (Nickerson 1998). Bad first impressions tend to dominate good ones and thus render individuals more susceptible to noticing bad subsequent behavior; good behavior, by contrast, is overlooked or discounted. This bias can make us believe (inaccurately) that evidence abounds confirming our initial impressions, when in fact we simply have a tendency to notice such evidence to a greater extent.

The second phenomenon is often called *behavioral confirmation* or *self-fulfilling prophecies*, and occurs when we treat others in ways reflective of our preexisting beliefs

about them. By treating a person as though our beliefs about her were true, we can cause the person to act in ways that conform to our preexisting beliefs.⁷ For example, we might think someone rude, and then treat her accordingly. The target individual picks up on this, feels resentful, and reciprocates in kind, thus confirming our initial hypothesis. Yet the initial hypothesis might have been based on inaccurate stereotypes, hearsay, or perhaps a single previous observation. What's more, we are often ignorant of our own causal role in this process.

This is reflected in striking fashion in the following experiment by John Bargh and colleagues (Bargh et al. 1996). At the outset of the experiment, participants were asked to perform a rote task on a computer. During this task, a visual image of either a young African-American male or a young Caucasian male was subliminally flashed on the display at an interval too quick to register in one's conscious awareness. At the end of this rote task the computer displayed a message claiming that an error prevented the participant's input from being recorded. Based on previous studies, they expected those who had been exposed to the African-American image to react with greater hostility to a request by the experimenter to repeat the task in light of the computer error. This prediction proved correct. Mere unconscious exposure to the visual cue had altered the participant's behavior to align with stereotypes associated with the image.

⁷ For an overview, see Chen and Bargh (1997).

For present purposes, the interesting manipulation came at the end of the second phase of the experiment, where the same participants were made to interact with one another on a one-on-one basis. There was a significant difference in the behavior of those interacting with participants exposed to the African-American image as opposed to the Caucasian one. Outside observers (blind to the hypothesis being tested) found those *interacting with* the participants exposed to the African-American image to be more hostile and less cooperative. (The participants' own ratings were the same.) The hypothesis is that once the stereotype is primed it will:

- have an impact on the individual's behavior, causing the person to act in ways consistent with the stereotype (in this case, being hostile and aggressive)
- the stereotype will 'leak out' in the person's demeanor—that is, it will show up subtly in the person's facial expressions and tone of voice
- those interacting with the individuals primed by the stereotype will pick up on this and mimic the behavior in kind
- the primed participant notices the stereotypic behavior in question, yet remains unaware of her own contributing role in producing it

Hamilton and Troler, while discussing the impact of stereotypes on our interpretations of others, put the matter into sharp relief: "Given the perceiver's awareness of the

confirmatory nature of the target's behavior and lack of awareness of his or her own role in producing it, it would seem particularly difficult to convince the perceiver that his or her stereotypic beliefs are wrong'' (Hamilton et al. 1985, 150).

It's hard to get one's head around the idea that we may actively *produce* the evidence to *confirm* our initial impressions of others. Nonetheless, expectations that a certain individual will be a certain way (whether because of stereotype or hearsay) can both cause us to be more sensitive to confirming evidence (the confirmation bias) and might also engender the behavior itself (behavioral confirmation). Put succinctly, our initial impressions might be inapt *in spite of the fact that they turn out to be true*. Given these tendencies, it isn't difficult to see how attempts to ameliorate or mitigate bad first impressions may often be futile.

None of this denies that we *can* discount the impact of negative impressions—say, through rational reflection—especially if we are prompted or demanded to do so. But any effort along these lines will run against the robust psychological tendencies just noted: we tend to close off situational explanations once we've concluded that the person has a bad character, and will be regularly biased into noticing—or even producing—evidence supporting these conclusions.

And here's the asymmetrical rub: even though we are often blind as observers to the situational variables affecting others' behavior, we are highly motivated as actors to root them out for ourselves, to advert to them in explaining our own miscues. From our

own perspective, we desire (if not expect) others to discount our transgressions and remain open to disconfirming evidence, and when they fail to do so we grow resentful. Because external or situational variables are more available to us as actors, we come to resent others for not taking them into account, even though this is precisely what we do when roles are reversed. This leads us to feel bitter toward those who fail to properly contextualize their judgments of us (Bradley 1978).

5.3 The epistemological status of negative character assessments

Given the asymmetrical tendencies noted above, we have reason to suspect the veracity of our immediate negative assessments of others. The suggestion here is not that we should always suspect them, or that all of our assessments are equally susceptible to bias in every instance. Nonetheless, owing to the tendency of negative information to be weighed more heavily, to persevere longer, to be taken as more representative, and to be shielded from disconfirmation, we have some reason to *doubt* the negative assessments we make of others.

The doubt in fact has two inter-related components. The first stems from the factors just mentioned—the asymmetrical weighting, perseverance, representativeness, and obstinacy of negative assessments versus positive ones. The second stems from our failure to search for situational or external explanations and instead favor internal or personal ones. We may not be in error to *include* internal or personal explanations in our

causal story, yet we will often be in error if we take them to be the whole story. A more accurate assessment would have to search out for external or situational explanations. Instead, we should try to expand our perspectives as observers to explain others' behavior as we would explain our own—namely, from the actor's own perspective.

In other words, we should attempt to understand the behavior of others in ways that are not markedly different from our own, an injunction that is given famous formulation in the following central passage of the *Analects*.

15.24 - Zizhang asked "Is there a single word that might serve a guide for one's entire life?" The Master said, "Wouldn't that be 'understanding' [*shu* 恕]? What you do not desire, do not impose on others." (c.f. 5.12, 6.30)

The character *shu* 恕 is composed of the elements *ru* 如 on top, meaning 'compare' or 'liken', and *xin* 心 at the bottom, referring to the organ of cognition and emotion. *Shu* thus refers to an ability to see the similarities between individuals, to view others as one would view oneself, to extend to others a sympathetic understanding that one naturally has toward oneself. In 6.30, Zigong asks Confucius about what humane individuals are like, and in answering this question Confucius says that the humane take "what is near at hand" as an analogy when thinking of others. The humane person orients himself toward others by seeing them as not unlike themselves, influenced not only by their

characters and motivations but also from demands of social position, the influence of other persons, and other external or situational factors.

When we find ourselves thinking badly of others, we should reflect on the possibility that we might be falling victim to a psychological tendency that prevents us from seeing their behavior in a more complete and accurate light. In doing so, we can leave open possibilities for constructive engagement and cooperation where they would otherwise be cut off.

5.4 An analogue from game theory

5.23 – The Master said, “Bo Yi and Shu Qi did not bear in mind former wrongs, and so few resented them.”

In Axelrod’s famous prisoner’s dilemma tournament, a very simple strategy called ‘tit for tat’ emerged victorious in the face of other, far more sophisticated ones. The strategy had just two rules:

- When you first meet another player, co-operate.
- Thereafter, choose the response that the other player chose when last encountered.

This strategy proved remarkably effective. However, it had a significant flaw; it had no tolerance for noise or error. Such noise may come in one of two forms—the wrong signal might be sent (also known as misimplementation or ‘trembling hand’) or the right signal is sent but is misinterpreted by the other player (misperception or ‘noisy channels’). “Faulty transmission of strategy choices (noise) severely undercuts the effectiveness of reciprocating strategies” (Axelrod and Dion 1988, 1387). In one and the same tournament, tit-for-tat can drop from the winning strategy to sixth place if strategies are randomly set to misfire ten percent of the time (i.e. defecting where it would otherwise cooperate, and vice-versa).

The reason why is easy enough to grasp: upon encountering a defector, a tit for tat strategy can lead to an extended series of mutual obstructions (where both players defect) because tit-for-tat strategies rely on the co-player to initiate a cooperative move; without such initiative from the co-player, the tit for tat player will continue to defect indefinitely, even if the original defection of the co-player was the result of noise. Indeed, tit-for-tat is particularly vulnerable against *itself* in noisy environments, as a single miscue can lead to an extended mutual obstruction, with only another miscue capable of triggering a new series of cooperation.

The obvious way to break up the vicious cycle of retaliation (resulting from noisy interactions) is to requite defection with cooperation from time to time—to let bygones be bygones, as it were. Such strategies can come in numerous variations, but are

generally known as 'generous tit for tat'. Consider, for example, one variant called 'tit for two tats' or 'forgiving tit for tat'. Such strategies will wait for two defections in a row before retaliating with defections. In other words, such strategies postpone defection until the initial defection of the opposing player is confirmed in the next round, and will therefore avoid slipping into mutual obstructions by retaliating with defection only after two successive defections of the co-player.

In a mixed environment, where there are many strategies at play, tit for two tats works just as well as tit for tat, and in some instances outperforms it. Indeed, in biologically relevant evolutionary games, "evolution can be twisted away from defection, toward cooperation" by the introduction of such strategies. Adding generous tit-for-tat "greatly increases the overall level of cooperation and can lead to prolonged periods of steady cooperation" (Nowak and Sigmund 1993, 5091).

Our own social environments most resemble 'noisy' games as opposed to games in which strategies are implemented without flaw in every round. It is not uncommon for us to misinterpret others' signals or fail to convey our intentions in clear ways. Wires can get crossed, identities mistaken, unwarranted assumptions made. However, as we saw above, miscues are often taken to be highly diagnostic of character and purpose, weighted accordingly, and thus reciprocated by real life 'defection'—our tendency to have negative impressions harden into obstinate beliefs.

The moral game (as it were) can be decided quickly and ruthlessly. Opportunities for negotiation and moral advancement can be nipped in the bud owing to bad first moves that limit the opportunity for such outcomes to arise. Yet if negative assessments should no more admit to personal or internal explanations than positive ones, it is important to foster this habit of giving others the benefit of a doubt and allowing for fruitful, constructive, and productive relationships to unfold.

5.5 Moral vulnerability and the virtue of hatred

In the theory of games as in real life, being forgiving has its benefits and costs. Tit for two tats is at a disadvantage when faced with very aggressive strategies, which exploit them to a greater extent than the less lenient tit for tatters; they will be exploited not once but twice before being punished. And in environments where individuals routinely exploit forgiving natures, it would be imprudent to forgive others' transgressions. This underscores the importance of both giving the benefit of a doubt *and* drawing accurate assessments of others, even if they are unfavorable. Without the latter virtue, one can be exposed to moral vulnerability.

If I am correct in claiming that giving others the benefit of a doubt is an important theme in the *Analects*—that it contains injunctions to look beyond internal or personal characteristics when explaining behavior, that it enjoins us to see others as like ourselves—then it would be putting its adherents at risk of being exploited by morally

unscrupulous individuals. Indeed, this issue is broached in a number of places in the text.

6.26 – Zai Wo asked, “If someone were to lie to a humane person, saying ‘A man has just fallen into a well!’ – would he go ahead and jump in after him [to try and save him]? The Master said, “Why would he do that? The gentleman be enticed, but not trapped; he can be tricked but not duped.”

14.31 – The Master said, 'Is a man not superior who, without anticipating attempts at deception or presuming acts of bad faith, is, nevertheless, the first to perceive them?’

Slingerland’s selection of commentary to this last passage is worthy of being cited at length:

The gentleman is trusting of others, and expects the best of them. As *Dai’s Record* says, “The gentleman does not anticipate badness from others, nor does he suspect others of untrustworthiness.” Li Chong sees this open attitude as the key to the Gentleman’s ability to educate others: “If you perceive an act of untrustworthiness in the beginning and then necessarily expect untrustworthiness in the future, this indicates an impairment of the merit of

patient forbearance, and also blocks the road to repentance and change.”
Nonetheless, the gentleman is not a fool, and is the first to perceive when his trust has been misplaced. (Slingerland 2003a, 166)

Being capable of properly judging others and, when necessary, despising them, would be important for any ethical practice which takes as one of its core injunctions to be cooperative, deferential, mindful and conscientious. As Brooks and Brooks note (1998, 165), despising [*wu* 惡] is a classic virtue, appearing in the earliest stratum of the *Analects*.

4.3 – Only the humane can truly love others, and truly despise them.

Those pursuing the Confucian *dao*, ever forgiving and differential, would be prone to exploitation, especially in competitive, unstable, and aggressive environments such as Warring States China. When surrounded by individuals seeking power and position, fame and wealth, it would be imperative to identify those truly unworthy of such consideration (even while erring on the side of false negatives).

While being able to properly judge (and, when necessary, despise) others was seen as important, it is nonetheless true that the text admonishes a general attitude of favorableness. The nobleman is often described as being favorable [*ai* 愛] toward others. According to the earliest dictionary (the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字) *ai* is glossed as *hui* 惠—

meaning 'favorableness' or being 'kindly disposed' towards (Li 1999, 97). In some translations of the *Analects*, *ai* is translated as 'love', but this is overly strong.⁸ In 1.5 *ai* is linked with being frugal, and in 1.6 it is explicitly contrasted with a stronger emotion of 'cherishing' [*qin* 親].

1.6 - The Master said, "The young should be filial at home and respectful in public. They should be conscientious and trustworthy, favorable [*ai* 愛] toward the masses yet cherishing [*qin* 親] the humane."

12.20 - Fan Chi asked about humaneness. The Master said, "It's being favorable toward [*ai* 愛] others."

If expecting the worst from others can make them act poorly, then expecting well from them, thinking favorably of them, might do the opposite.

⁸ As has been noted for other texts of this period. For example, it has long been observed that translating the Mohist's *jianai* [兼愛] as 'universal love' is misleading. For A.C. Graham, it is best translated as 'concern for everyone' (Graham 1989, 41), and Chris Fraser renders it as 'inclusive care', commenting that "like the English 'care', *ai* (love, care) is ambiguous, since it may refer to a range of attitudes from strong affection to detached concern. In Mohist texts the word typically seems to refer to a dispassionate concern about the welfare of its object" (Fraser 2007).

12.16 - The Master said, "The nobleman helps others fulfill their attractive qualities rather than their unappealing ones. The petty person does the opposite."

Admittedly, it seems difficult to figure out just how the gentleman will balance the injunction to be favorable to others and give them the benefit of a doubt with the equally important injunction to properly judge some of them as being morally despicable. There are many considerations that are relevant for the nobleman to take into account when deciding whether to be favorable and forgiving. Consider age: it is a truism that younger individuals are more likely to change their behavior than those who have been habituated into certain beliefs or dispositions. One might therefore accept that certain others will be unlikely to respond to efforts at being accommodating. It may be prudent to take this into account when deciding where one would like to leave oneself open to moral vulnerability and exploitation.

9.22 - The Master said, "We should revere the younger generation. After all, how can we know that they won't be the equals of us? But if a man of forty or fifty yet has no renown, there is nothing to revere."

17.26 - The Master said, "One who has reached the age of forty is still despised will likely be despised until the end."

Yet no matter how the nobleman might balance these injunctions, we would do well to note that fighting the tendency to blame others is a losing proposition unless the person's behavior changes within a reasonable timeframe. In other words, giving others the benefit of a doubt is a strategy with limited shelf-life, naturally protecting one from being overly exploited; the cognitively demanding act of staving off blame and resentment can be expected to last only so long. The injunction therefore marks a strategy to redress a standing psychological tendency, and will prove effective only when others respond and provide evidence of the transitory or contingent nature of their disagreeable behavior. Ultimately, there is only so much any one person can likely do before blame and resentment settle in.

5.6 Conclusion

In social life, there are unending opportunities to find other people boring, disagreeable, repulsive, stupid, sleazy, inept, bigoted, lousy at selecting gifts, bad cooks, infuriatingly slow drivers, disappointing dates, bad philosophers, and so on. The civil person typically conceals these unflattering appraisals, since conveying them may easily suggest that one does not take others feelings or the fact that they have different standards to be worth taking into consideration or tolerating. (Calhoun 2000, 260)

There's no hiding from the facts mentioned by Cheshire Calhoun; people can be disagreeable, repulsive, stupid, sleazy, inept, bigoted, and so on. On any realistic assessment of moral life, we must admit that, as we navigate the social world, there will be endless opportunities for friction to arise with others. Even if one is conscientious about one's own behavior and mindful of being respectful to others this will never safeguard one from finding others disagreeable or difficult.

In this chapter, though, I have tried to afford us reason to question the veracity of assessments such as these, especially when we are unfamiliar with the individual involved. Put another way, given the biases at play in negative assessments, it may be *no accident* that we have endless opportunities to pass negative judgments on others' characters. In the oft-quoted phrasing of Salman Rushdie, we may cherish nothing above this.

We, the public, are easily, lethally offended. We have come to think of taking offence as a fundamental right. We value very little more highly than our rage, which gives us, in our opinion, the moral high ground. From this high ground we can shoot down at our enemies and inflict heavy fatalities. We take pride in our short fuses. Our anger elevates, transcends. (Rushdie 1994)

Giving other the benefit of a doubt may not be easy. It can require going against what others have said about an individual and flagging the information as tentative and needing confirmation, as the *Analects* is well aware.

15.28 – The Master said, “It doesn’t matter if the multitude hates someone; you must still examine the person and judge for yourself. It doesn’t matter if the multitude loves someone; you must still examine the person and judge for yourself.”

At other times, it will require overcoming first-personal observations and evidence. Yet adopting such a stance may be a winning strategy, both in the theory of games and in the game of life. And while serious moral accommodation and tolerance may not always be in the offing on any particular occasion, and certain individuals might not warrant us doubting our negative assessments, a disposition to do so can be propitious to, and sometimes necessary for, accommodation and cooperation to emerge as live options in public life.

6. From Micro to Macro, Again

2.3 - The Master said, "Guide them with regulations, constrain order them through punishments, and the people become evasive and lack shame. Guide them with *de*, constrain them through ritual propriety, and the people will feel shame and so regulate themselves."

4.13 - The Master said, "If one can govern through ritual propriety and deference, what difficulties could he have? If one cannot govern through ritual propriety and deference, of what use are they?"

12.1 - If for one day you managed to retrain yourself and turn to the ritual propriety, you could lead the world back to humaneness."

14.41 - The Master said, "If those above love ritual, then the common people will be easy to manage."

The broad unifying theme of this dissertation is the relationship between microethical considerations and macro-level moral conduct. I have argued that attending to what might conventionally be thought of as minor variables in moral practice can lead to *mutual ethical bootstrapping*—that is, prompting or lifting one another towards our moral ideals. If the situationist literature is true, then whether or not any particular individual will be able to fulfill her ethical obligations on any particular occasion will hinge on a

number of variables in that situational context. Being mindful of the influence exerted by the prompts we introduce to our situations thus enhances the probability of meeting our own moral ideals, as well as sustaining agreeable and reciprocal relationships with others. I have used the *Analects* as a source of reflection on these facts, arguing that it reflects the interconnectedness of behavior currently investigated in experimental social psychology. My goal has been to both enrich our understanding of the moral psychology of that text as well as use it as a springboard to motivate norms of interpersonal morality applicable today.

The *Analects* is not solely concerned with interpersonal morality, though, and it is clear that Confucius believed minding such cues and observing ritual propriety could lead to more dramatic societal transformations, beyond the personal level. As the passages above suggest, conscientiousness in observing ritual propriety was thought to be a key component to achieving widespread social order and harmony. On first pass, this claim must have seemed as incredible then as it does today. Observance of the rites—especially those of the waning Zhou 周 dynasty—had eroded steadily over the preceding centuries, and were considered unimportant. But this is not the main problem in taking Confucius seriously. Even if the Zhou rites were to suddenly be observed, it remains difficult to imagine how this could foster the kinds of social changes Confucius claims.

Confucius lived and taught at the outset of the Warring States 戰國 period (463-222 B.C.E.), a time of immense upheaval and instability, and many believed that prevailing circumstances demanded stronger, more authoritarian measures. The area of the world now known as China was divided into a number of independent states that often settled their differences through wars as opposed to diplomacy. Economic growth became ever important, and advances in agriculture and trade allowed for the rise of massive conscript armies armed with new technologies (such as the crossbow). Warfare reached a degree of brutality never witnessed before. Domestically, internecine battles amongst the aristocracy shattered traditional ties, leading to increased social mobility but also increased competition and strife. The Warring States period was a time when both dispossessed nobles and upwardly mobile peasants vied to gain favor with the rulers of the various states, and ambition became a determining factor in how fast one climbed the social and political ladder. And even though Confucius lived before such disorder had reached its zenith, many of his contemporaries found his commitment to norms of propriety trite, the idealistic longings of an apologetic member of the literati.

In spite of this, Confucius thought observing ritualistic propriety held the key to social transformation. Is this plausible? The question is important for it bears on the scope of the present project. Just how much can we expect of a normative theory that has only two basic imperatives—to mind manners and give others the benefit of a doubt? What positive benefits might accrue from observance of these norms above and

beyond their impact on how certain interactions with others unfold? I cannot here explore this question in any great detail. However, there are reasons to think that attending to micro level signals in public life really can lead to patterns of behavior that make a difference at the macro level.

First, consider the *broken windows* theory of crime, which claims that the most effective way to lower incidents of crime is not by targeting it on the macro level but on the micro level; by addressing 'quality of life' crimes (such as public disorderliness, fare-skipping, aggressive panhandling) and attending to external variables suggesting lack of care or oversight (such as graffiti, abandoned cars, or broken windows) more serious crimes will decline in step. How? According to the theory's advocates, small signals of disorder (e.g. harassment, broken windows) convey a sense of neglect and lack of oversight, a community with no caretakers or concerned citizens. These signals can serve as to invite more serious transgressions and increased criminal activity. Crime, in short, is infectious or contagious. Effectively treating crime means treating the underlying causes and not the overt symptoms. Diligently policing misdemeanors and lesser crimes creates a general atmosphere of crime intolerance; if you get busted for fare-skipping, chances are that you'll get persecuted for more severe crimes as well.

Broken windows theory thus depicts individuals as sensitive to environmental cues, prompted (consciously or not) to commit crimes in the presence of certain cues and

not in others.¹ Confucius's preoccupation with 'upright' or 'civil' behavior might be seen as reflecting a parallel belief in the ability of effecting widespread change through attention to minor variables. The ways we greet each other, the language we use to describe one another—these small signals can foster social cohesion and harmony, cultivating trust and goodwill that will prove valuable when more serious issues need be addressed. Social changes begin through public participation and concrete engagement with other individuals in structured settings, where shared activities might afford opportunities to forge bonds of familiarity and trust. Here it is important to bear in mind the formal, structured aspects of *li*.

For Confucius, governing by means of *li* meant not simply governing while abiding personal norms of conduct, but also emphasizing the public observance of formal, ceremonial rites. These would include important ancestor rites associated with the royal line, seasonal rites commemorating important dates in the harvest cycle, and state musical performances. Participating in public forms of shared activity such as these would cause the people to have a sense of propriety and order themselves without

¹ Broken windows theory remains controversial. Advocates point to practical results in cities such as New York as vindicating the theory, whereas critics believe crime rates are either overdetermined or sensitive to other factors. For a highly readable account of broken windows theory and its application to New York crime, see Gladwell (2002), chapter four. For an alternative (and equally controversial) explanation of the drop in New York crime, the abortion hypothesis, see Levitt and Dunbar (2005), chapter four.

the need for coercive laws and punishments.² A modern concept that resonates with this is that of *social capital*.

In broad terms, social capital refers to the supplies of social trust, norms and networks that people can draw upon to solve common problems. Social capital is fostered by networks of civic engagement, including neighborhood associations, sports clubs, churches, schools, online communities, and other forums where participation can bridge individuals and make it more likely that members of a given community will cooperate for mutual benefit. These associations and networks can also foster norms of generalized reciprocity, facilitate efforts of coordination, and fuel exchanges of information. Unfortunately, as Robert Putnam has observed, social capital is on the decline in the U.S., largely because people no longer participate in such networks to the extent that they used to (Putnam 2001). If true, this would be troubling for many reasons. First, by providing arenas for practice and feedback, such networks are a major source of cultivating the skills needed to negotiate normative space with others; with the erosion of these networks comes the erosion of moral skill. Inattention to social rituals and public rites can lead individuals disconnected or apathetic toward one another. Second, making competent moral judgments requires having veridical access to the world, and all citizens have an interest in reducing the moral and prudential risks they

²The *Analects* is noteworthy for its hostility toward the use of laws and punishments as instruments of governance.

expose themselves to by participating in larger institutional schemes, regardless of their particular conceptions of the good (Buchanan 2002; 2004). Even while western liberal democracies do a comparatively good job in making information available to its citizens, providing them with avenues of recourse to challenge authorities, they are no less at risk of being systematically deceived or misinformed as compared to citizens of other societies. Social networks and communal associations can constitute an important safeguard against such deception. A decline of networks of civic association can lead to a decline in the quantity and quality of information that we share, leading individuals to rely on their own resources instead of (naturally) pooling them with others in community networks.³ Just as interpersonal flourishing can be a product of attending to micro level details of our conduct with one another, so too can social capital result from local participation in networks and community associations. Participating in these groups can lead to social cohesion, trust, and epistemic gains. Recently, there have been calls to revive social participation of this sort in Western liberal democracies like our

³ One might wonder whether such social networks would *foster* or *hinder* one's ability to acquire true beliefs. For example, if the groups I participate in are comprised of individuals not unlike myself, if they come from the same socio-economic or cultural background, if they share the same interests or hobbies, then one might question the value of such associations in pooling divergent views and filtering out false beliefs, for it is reasonable to assume that its members will be predisposed to having the same beliefs. Would such networks not function to reinforce preexisting beliefs? First, it is not clear that many of these organizations would be so homogenous. It's true that some organizations are comprised of particular demographics (i.e. parents, bowlers, chess players) or concerned with particular issues (neighborhood safety, poetry, animal rights). However, these demographics and these interests can overlap with a whole range of others. And even if individuals share much in common, their beliefs will not align perfectly, information will be unevenly spread, and critical abilities will vary as well. The pooling of even relatively homogenous individuals would therefore have epistemic benefits.

own. For example, we might look to revive or re-emphasize the role of civic rituals and symbols in society (Wingo 2003; Wong 2000), or initiate new civic rituals, such as a national 'deliberation day' in major election years (Fishkin and Ackerman 2004).

Whether attending to micro-level variables in moral conduct can create the more widespread social benefits Confucius alludes to is an open question worthy of future research, taking us beyond the facts about social cognition and behavior that have been the focus of this dissertation. Nonetheless, they constitute a natural extension of the methods of this dissertation, exploring lower level phenomena from an empirically informed perspective to reflect on higher order normative commitments and theories. I will explore these topics in subsequent research.

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Biography

Hagop Sarkissian was born on March 13, 1974, in North York, Ontario, Canada. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Toronto in June 1997, majoring in Philosophy and East Asian Studies. After spending two years studying classical and modern Chinese at National Taiwan Normal University (Taipei, Taiwan), he returned to Toronto, where he began his graduate studies.

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