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A Comparison of Filial Piety in Ancient Judaism and Early Confucianism

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Translated by Noah Lipkowitz

Abstract

Filial piety is one of the most comparable ethical elements in the Jewish and Confucian traditions, both of which possess a clear overall ethical orientation. Ancient Judaism and early Confucianism advocate extremely similar expressions of filial piety, such as providing for and respecting one's parents, inheriting their legacy, properly burying and mourning them, and tactful remonstrance of elders. However, ancient Judaism and early Confucianism differ on the degree to which one should be filial, the scope of filial piety, and its status within each respective ethical system. Confucianism advocates a more comprehensive and nuanced version of respect for parents than Judaism, while both systems hold distinctive views regarding the extent and scope of filial piety. Both traditions advocate similar kinds of filial piety primarily because they are based on bonds of familial affection and gratitude, and their differences are cultural in nature. Two such decisive cultural factors are Judaism's theocentrism and Confucianism's humanism. Furthermore, the different social institutions and systems of governance brought about by these cultural differences account for the dissimilarities in Jewish and Confucian filial piety. The transcendent nature and emphasis on equality between individuals inherent in Judaism can play an informative role in the revival and reestablishment of Confucian ethics.

Keywords

Confucianism – filial piety – Judaism

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Professor Yu Yingshi recently pointed out that “comparing and contrasting China and the West has been an issue of great concern for Chinese scholars since the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)” and that “the question that most interested [him] is how to understand the cultural similarities between China and the West through the lens of history.”¹ Ancient Judaism—the Judaism of the Old Testament and the Talmud—is not merely part of Western culture but, rather, is one of its widely recognized roots. Due to certain historical factors, the Chinese and Jewish cultures developed in isolation from each other, and these two long-standing and magnificent cultures were barely aware of each other’s existence for many centuries. This state of affairs continued until the end of the twentieth century with the introduction of certain Jewish scholarly works in China. In keeping with Yu’s statements, we as scholars of Jewish studies feel a responsibility to clarify the similarities, differences, and origins of these two civilizations so as to illuminate what is common to both civilizations and what is unique to these two traditions. We must do this while introducing Jewish thought and culture and comparing it with our own, in particular, China’s mainstream culture, Confucianism. Finally, we hope to draw on this foundation of knowledge to enrich our own values.

Early Confucian society, which was agricultural, and ancient Jewish society, which was both nomadic and agricultural, have more in common with each other than with the world’s other civilizations and are thus more comparable. In particular, both cultures exhibit a strong ethical orientation, within which filial piety is a large area of common ground. In order to further the recognition and understanding of Jewish ethics within Chinese academia, and in light of modern China’s need for social reform, especially where filial piety is concerned, this article conducts comparative research into the ethics of filial piety in ancient Judaism and early Confucianism.² We first observe the significance of filial piety and behavior in ancient Judaism and Confucianism through an examination of their texts to determine the “what.” We compare and contrast both traditions and then clarify the familial, domestic, social, and government

1 Yu Yingshi 余英時, “Zhongguo wenhua yu ziyou minzhu bu shi jianrui duili 中國文化與自由民主不是尖銳對立 [Chinese Culture and Liberal Democracy Are Not Diametrically Opposed],” September 19, 2014, http://news.ifeng.com/a/20140919/42032257_0.shtml.

2 Here, “ancient Judaism” refers to biblical and rabbinical Judaism—that is, the Judaism embodied in the Old Testament and the Talmud. “Early Confucianism” refers roughly to the development of Confucian thought beginning during the Western Zhou Dynasty, through Confucius’ life, and up to the beginning of the Han Dynasty. This primarily includes pre-Qin Dynasty Confucian classics, particularly the *Book of Filial Piety* and the filial ethics contained therein.

structures underlying these similarities and differences so as to determine the “why.” Finally, we hope to use the foundation of our analysis to provide a Jewish perspective that can be of use to modern Confucian ethics, in particular to the revival and reestablishment of filial ethics.

Common Conceptions of Filial Piety

In Chinese, the character for “filial piety” (孝 *xiao*) is arranged from top to bottom. At the top is an abbreviated version of the character for “old” (老 *lao*), and at the bottom is the character for “child” (子 *zi*). The Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) *Dictionary of Words and Expressions* (說文解字 *Shuowen jiezi*) provides the following explanation: “Filial—one who is good to his parents. From the characters for ‘old’ and ‘child.’ The ‘child’ carries the ‘old.’”³ Bronze inscriptions from the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BCE) depict the character for filial piety as symbolizing the old and the young supporting each other. In ancient texts, the character for filial piety is often used in concert with the character for “offering” (享 *xiang*). Examples include the *Book of Changes* (周易 *Zhou yi*), which states: “The king will go to his temple, and there he will present offerings with the utmost filial piety”⁴ and the *Book of Songs* (詩經 *Shijing*), in which is written “With joyful auspices and purifications, you bring the offerings.”⁵ It is clear that during the Shang (c.1600–1046 BCE) and Zhou Dynasties (1046–256 BCE), the character for filial piety often referred to ritual sacrifices to ancestors and spirits and consequently had a distinctly religious dimension. After the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BCE), Confucius and his disciples used this foundation to create a set of moral concepts and behavioral norms that revolved around filial duty. These norms would later become an important component of Confucian doctrine.

The fundamental concepts of Confucian filial piety are care and respect. “Care” refers mainly to material support. The *Book of Filial Piety* (孝經 *Xiaojing*) dictates that even if one is a commoner, one must still work hard and live frugally so that one can provide food, clothing, and shelter for one’s parents.⁶

3 Xu Shen 許慎 and Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 [*The Annotated Dictionary of Words and Expressions*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1988), 173.

4 王假有廟，致孝享也。

5 吉蠲為饗，是用孝享。

6 用天之道，分地之利，謹身節用，以養父母。此庶人之孝也。Li Longji 李隆基 and Xing Bing 邢昺, *Xiaojing zhushu* 孝經注疏 [*Annotations of the Book of Filial Piety*] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), 19.

Providing material support for parents is the minimum standard for filial piety. However, Confucius believed that providing merely material support could not constitute genuine filial behavior. Rather, a more essential component of filial piety was respect (敬 *jing*), which for him encompassed respect, love, and reverence. In responding to a question regarding filial piety from one of his disciples, Ziyou, he once said, “Dogs and horses require care as well. Without respect, what is the difference [between caring for animals and parents]?”⁷ Here, Confucius differentiates between the standard of care for people and animals. Furthering Confucius’ view, Zengzi delineates three levels of filial behavior: “In filial piety, respect is paramount. Second is to not bring shame upon one’s parents, followed by the ability to support them materially.”⁸ He believed that respecting one’s parents was the highest level of filial behavior, while material provision remained the lowest. Thus, we find that “care” is the most basic form of filial behavior, while “respect” carries greater importance. If one were to provide for one’s parents but lack the necessary disposition in doing so, then the level of one’s filial behavior would descend to that of an animal.

Ancient Judaism likewise advocates filial piety in its religious texts. In the Old Testament, Judaism’s most important text, God issues the commandment “Honor thy father and mother” in three different places.⁹ Honoring one’s father and mother is thus considered one of biblical Judaism’s core commandments. The original text of the Old Testament uses two separate terms to refer to filial behavior. In the Ten Commandments, first seen in Exodus, the fifth commandment states, “Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God given thee.”¹⁰ In this section of the text, the Hebrew word for filial behavior is *kabed* (כָּבֵד), which corresponds to the English word “honor.”¹¹ In contrast, the related text in Leviticus, “Every one of you is to revere his father and mother, and you are to keep the Sabbath,”

7 至於犬馬，皆能有養。不敬，何以別乎。He Yan 何晏 and Xing Bing, *Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏 [Annotations of the Analects] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), 18.

8 大孝尊親，其次不辱，其下能養。Wang Pinzhen 王聘珍, *Da dai liji jie gu* 大戴禮記解詁 [Interpretation of Dai Senior’s Book of Rites] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983), 82.

9 These three iterations can be found successively in the Chinese and Complutensian Polyglot Bibles in Exodus 20:11, Leviticus 19:3, and Deuteronomy 5:15. In the Hebrew Bible, they can be found in Exodus 20:12, Leviticus 19:3, and Deuteronomy 5:16.

10 Exodus 20:11.

11 Deuteronomy 5:15 also states, “Honor your father and mother, as Yahweh your God has ordered you to, so that you will live long and have things go well with you in the land Yahweh your God has given you.” This sentence is a reaffirmation of Moses’ fifth commandment, and the Hebrew used here is again “כָּבֵד.”

employs the word *tirau* (תִּירָא, root: ירא), which corresponds to the English “fear” or “revere.”¹² It is evident that while the Old Testament uses different expressions to communicate the concept of filial piety, it places great emphasis on the emotion of respect.

In the post-biblical rabbinical text, the Talmud, one rabbi distinguishes honor from fear through concrete examples: “As for fear, I mean that a son may not stand where his father stands, sit where his father sits, contradict his father in speech, nor may he be on equal footing with his father. In contrast, honor means that a son must feed and clothe his father and assist him in leaving and coming home.”¹³ In this sense of the word, “fear” emphasizes emotions of reverence and respect, and “honor” refers primarily to the provision of material support. In his *Mishnah Torah*, Maimonides, the famous Jewish legal scholar of the Middle Ages, employed a similar lexicon to echo the views expressed by the rabbi above.¹⁴ Thus we can see that the filial obligations expounded in rabbinical Judaism coincide largely with those of early Confucianism in that both traditions include the material and emotional duties of care and respect.

The reverence implied in the Jewish commandment of honoring one’s parents is also an element of Confucian filial piety, which is embodied in the practice of “ritual” (禮 *li*). Chapter 1 of the Confucian classic the *Book of Rites* states that in a traditional Chinese house, certain areas are the exclusive domain of the father, and his children are not to set foot in these areas, lest they overstep their authority and disrespect their father.¹⁵ This manner of respect is the same as that expressed in the above-mentioned rabbi’s declaration that a child must not stand in his father’s place nor sit in his seat. Chapter 12 of the *Book of Rites* also explicitly dictates standards of care that a son and his wife must maintain for both of their parents. Such care includes rising as soon as the chickens crow to clothe and brush their parents’ hair. Moreover, parents’ cousins are to be “treated only with respect,” and it is forbidden for the younger

12 Leviticus 19:3.

13 Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin, 31b. Unless otherwise specified, the version of the Babylonian Talmud referenced in this paper is *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1935-48).

14 Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Sefer Shoṭtim, Hilchot Marim 6:3; *ibid.*, Eliyahu Touger, trans., *Mishneh Torah: A New Translation with Commentaries* (New York/Jerusalem: Moznaim, 2001), 376-378. Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* comprises 14 books. *Hilchot Marim* is the third chapter in *Sefer Shoṭtim*, the last book. This chapter discusses filial piety in the Bible.

15 人子者，居不主奥，坐不中席，行不中道，立不中门。Zheng Xuan 郑玄 and Kong Yingda 孔颖达，*礼记正义 [Notes and Commentaries on the Book of Rites]* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), 33.

generation to hiccup, cough, sneeze, yawn and stretch, spit, or shiver in their presence. Nor may the younger generation display any bias or look askance at their parents' cousins.¹⁶ Thus, the image is formed of the dutiful son who walks with caution in the presence of his father.

In addition to caring for and respecting their parents, children are also expected to inherit and advance their parents' legacy. This is both an expression of filial piety and an inherent requirement. Confucian filial piety explicitly includes carrying on the affairs and beliefs of one's parents. Chapter 31 of the *Book of Rites* states that a son's filial sentiment should be expressed by his inheriting his father's ideals and aspirations.¹⁷ A father and son should remain of one heart and one mind even after the father is deceased. The Confucian dictum "When the father is alive, watch the son's aspirations. When the father is deceased, watch the son's behavior. He can be deemed filial if he does not deviate from his father's way three years after his death"¹⁸ is not only about remaining faithful to the "father's way," but even includes the obligation that the son take on his father's occupation and "not change his father's ministers, nor his father's mode of government."¹⁹ In the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the Confucian scholar Zhu Xi demonstrated how one should carry on the affairs and beliefs of one's parents with an example: "The Duke of Zhou honored his ancestors by perfecting the virtue of King Wen and King Wu. This is what it means to carry on the legacy of one's predecessors."²⁰ Judaism expresses a similar conception of continuing the legacy of one's predecessors. One rabbi writes that a father "must be respected in life and in death." For example, while a father is alive, if a son goes somewhere at the behest of his father, he must say he has come because of his father. After his father is deceased, a son must say "my father, my teacher" when referring to his father. A son must regard his father as a teacher both because he has benefited from his personal instruction and because after his father's death, he is the heir and vessel of his father's teachings.²¹

As an ethical sentiment, filial piety transcends the limitations of time and even mortality. In both Confucianism and Judaism, filial obligations remain

16 Ibid., 973.

17 夫孝，善繼人之志，善述人之事者也。

18 父在，觀其志。父沒，觀其行。三年無改於父之道，可謂孝矣。 He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 11, 57.

19 不改父之臣與父之政。 Ibid., 296.

20 周公成文、武之德以追崇其先祖，此繼志述事之大者也。 Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Si shu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 [*Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 27.

21 Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 31b; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Mamrim 6:4-5, 378.

constant whether parents are living or dead. Confucius once said that “a filial child must honor his parents with the proper ritual and treatment whether they are alive or dead. Only in this way can he remain filial.”²² The *Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸 *Zhongyong*) states, “When they are alive, serve them according to ritual propriety; when they are dead, bury them according to ritual propriety and sacrifice to them according to ritual propriety. This is the ultimate expression of filial behavior.”²³ The *Book of Filial Piety* tells us that “the love and reverence of parents when alive, and the grief and sorrow following their death—these are the duties of the living. Having carried out this righteous conduct during his parents’ life and death, a filial son has fulfilled his duty to his parents.”²⁴ Judaism also advocates honoring parents after their death. For example, whether he is alive or dead, children may never directly call out their father’s name.²⁵ Judaism requires eleven months of mourning for parents, after which a son says to his deceased father, “I wish you life in the next world.”²⁶ This bears great similarity to Confucian practice. It is evident that both traditions place great value on funeral rites and perpetuating the will of the deceased.

Although Confucianism dictates that a child must obey, respect, and revere his parents, this does not mean a child must unconditionally accept his father’s mistakes. In fact, while Confucianism emphasizes obedience, concession, and deference to parents, it also has a tradition of being critical of one’s superiors. This “critical” aspect may be considered another important kind of filial behavior alongside care, respect, inheriting one’s parents’ legacy, and seeing to their funeral rites. In the *Analects*, Confucius advises children to “Remonstrate with parents gently.”²⁷ Zengzi likewise instructs that the gentleman should “criticize according to what is right.”²⁸ This notion is given further weight in *Xunzi*, where it is written, “Follow the Way and not the ruler. Follow what is just and not the father.”²⁹ Here Xunzi contrasts “the Way” and what is “just” with the will of a ruler or father, thereby making moral rationality the utmost

22 生，事之以禮。死，葬之以禮，祭之以禮。He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 17.

23 事死如事生，事亡如事存，孝之至也。Zheng and Kong, *Notes and Commentaries of the Book of Rites*, 1681.

24 生事愛敬，死事哀感，生民之本盡矣，死生之義備矣，孝子之事親終矣。Li and Xing, *Annotations of the Book of Filial Piety*, 72.

25 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Mamrim 6:3, 376.

26 *Ibid.*, 6:5, 378.

27 事父母幾諫。He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 56.

28 以正致諫。Wang, *Interpretation of Dai Senior’s Book of Rites*, 80.

29 從道不從君，從義不從父。Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 [*Collected Interpretations of Xunzi*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 1986), 347.

expression of filial piety. The *Book of Filial Piety* addresses the true meaning of correcting one's superiors: if one is aware that his father is guilty of "unjust" conduct and blindly follows him despite such awareness, this is no longer filial behavior.³⁰ However, Confucianism holds a harmonious relationship between father and son in the highest esteem, and so when a son does criticize his father, he must do so appropriately, taking care to remain respectful. This was Confucius' intention when he said, "Heed but do not follow. Respect but do not transgress."³¹ Zengzi advocated that a child "remonstrate but not contradict" the errors of a parent.³² The *Book of Rites* further explains how one should act in this manner of circumstance: "When a son is critical of his parents, he must adopt a respectful tone and gentle diction. If his parents do not listen to him, a son should remain respectful as ever and wait until they are in high spirits or there is a suitable moment before broaching the subject again."³³ Because the rationale behind remonstrating a parent is helping that parent avert an injustice, such criticism may still be considered filial behavior.

Rabbinical Judaism resolves this issue in a manner similar to Confucianism. If a son discovers that his father's behavior violates any holy law, he is supposed to correct his father in a timely fashion. Even so, the son must remain tactful in his reproach. Here, Maimonides provides a practical example: "When one discovers that his father has violated a law, he cannot say 'Father, you have violated the Torah's laws.' Rather, he should say, 'Father! Is it not written that we should act in such and such a way?' as if he were asking a question and not admonishing him."³⁴ In this way, the son can uphold the sanctity of the law and, at the same time, maintain his father's dignity through skillful means. This is also a flexible kind of filial piety.

In summary, Confucianism and Judaism have a great deal of common ground when it comes to the basic content of filial piety. Where Confucianism tells us to respect our parents, Judaism has a corresponding commandment. Confucianism's most basic form of filial behavior comprises material care, respect, and reverence, and Judaism advocates the same. Confucian filial piety

30 父有諍子，則身不陷於不義，故當不義，則子不可以不爭於父，... 故當不義則爭之。Li and Xing, *Annotations of the Book of Filial Piety*, 57.

31 見志不從，又敬不違。He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 56.

32 諫而不逆。Wang, *Interpretation of Dai Senior's Book of Rites*, 84; Zheng and Kong, *Notes and Commentaries of the Book of Rites*, 1556.

33 父母有過，下氣怡色，柔聲以諫。諫若不入，起敬起孝，說則復諫。不說，與其得罪於鄉黨州閭，寧孰諫。Zheng and Kong, *Notes and Commentaries of the Book of Rites*, 976-977.

34 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Mamrim* 6:11, 380-382.

includes inheriting and carrying out the legacy of one's father and forefathers, and Judaism imposes similar requirements. Confucian filial piety emphasizes respect for parents in both life and death, and Judaism largely does the same. Finally, Confucianism and Judaism both promote tactful criticism of parents when they transgress. Consequently, ancient Judaism and early Confucianism may be said to have sets of filial ethics that are identical or at least fundamentally in agreement.

Differing Versions of Filial Piety

If we conduct a more detailed analysis of Jewish and Confucian filial piety, we find that they do, in fact, diverge. These traditions differ in three main respects: the degree of filial behavior, the extent and scope of such behavior, and the relative status of filial piety within each society, which differs widely between the two cultures.

The difference in degree of filial behavior required is evident first in the nature of the care accorded to parents. Confucian filial piety necessitates not only material care but also that children please their parents with their behavior. When Zixia asked Confucius about filial piety, Confucius replied, "The difficulty lies with one's countenance." (色難) He continued, "For the young to handle the affairs of the old, and when there is food and drink, for them to serve their elders first. Is *this* filial?"³⁵ In Confucianism, although the young doing labor for the old or serving them food and drink may be filial expressions, they do not constitute authentic filial piety. True filial behavior, which is more difficult, requires that parents always be treated with an amiable demeanor so as to maintain their own positive disposition. The *Book of Rites* mandates: "When a filial son cares for his parents, he delights their hearts and does not go against their will. He delights their ears and eyes and makes it so that they may sleep peacefully. He serves them faithfully with his own food and drink."³⁶ Thus, in Confucianism, "care" is not limited to providing food and clothing but, rather, includes ensuring one's parents' peace of mind.

In comparison, although the Old Testament also says to "Make your father and mother glad. Let those who gave birth to you rejoice," this kind of guidance

35 有事，弟子服其勞；有酒食，先生饌，曾是以為孝乎。He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 19.

36 孝子之養老也。樂其心，不違其志，樂其耳目，安其寢處，以其飲食忠養之。Zheng and Kong, *Notes and Commentaries of the Book of Rites*, 995.

is rare.³⁷ Moreover, there is no concrete guidance regarding how to please one's parents while serving them. The Talmud discusses the degree to which one must respect one's parents in several places, including the following story. There was once a filial son named Dama, son of Nethinah, who had the opportunity to earn 600,000 gold coins as a merchant. However, because the key he needed to do so was stored beneath his sleeping father's pillow, he did not disturb his father's rest. Another rabbi wrote the story with a prize of 800,000 gold coins with the same outcome. Yet another rabbi commented that this Dama once sat among Roman aristocrats and adorned himself with gold-embroidered silk robes. During this time, his mother arrived, tore his robes, beat him on the head, and spit in his face. Yet Dama never lost his temper and did not embarrass his mother.³⁸ Another story speaks of a very filial rabbi named Tarfon. Whenever his mother went to bed, he would kneel so that she could use him as a stepstool. Because of this, Tarfon would boast at school of his filial behavior. However, his peers admonished him, saying, "This does not even constitute half-filial behavior! True filial piety is when your mother throws a bulging coin purse into the sea and you do not blame her for any wrongdoing. Could you do this?"³⁹ These stories demonstrate that, from a Jewish perspective, reverence for one's parents cannot be measured in gold. Filial behavior is more valuable than money. At the same time, we can see that while Judaism regards respect and reverence for parents as more important than one's individual material and emotional comforts, its discussion of filial behavior stops at the point of comparing material benefits. This falls short of the Confucian standard of "delighting" parents.

Confucianism and Judaism also exhibit different degrees of mourning and remembering deceased parents. Confucianism places tremendous emphasis on death through its emphasis on required attitudes and behaviors surrounding the death of a parent and its aftermath. In order to emphasize the importance of according parents a proper funeral, the *Mencius* instructs that "Supporting one's parents while they are alive is not enough to be considered a grand affair. Only performing the proper rites when they die can constitute a grand affair."⁴⁰ What, then, constitutes a proper funeral? According to the *Book of Filial Piety*, when a parent dies, the children must weep bitterly and loudly in a way that is unpleasant to the ears. They must lie prostrate while crying,

37 Proverbs 23:25.

38 Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30a.

39 Ibid., 31b.

40 養生者不足以當大事，唯送死可以當大事。Zhao Qi 趙岐 and Sun Shi 孫奭, *Mengzi zhushu* 孟子注疏 [*Annotations of Mencius*] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), 260.

and when they speak, their speech must be simple and austere. They may only wear mourning clothes and must remain unmoved by music. When they eat, it must be as if their food has no taste.⁴¹ In other words, one's sorrow must come from within and be made manifest in one's grieving.

The *Book of Filial Piety* also clearly regulates funeral rites. The deceased must be given a shroud and placed within two coffins, an inner one and an outer one, and sacrifices must be made before their memorial tablet. Mourners must wail uncontrollably and sorrowfully send off the dead. Burial sites must be chosen via divination. Even after the funeral, relatives must "Prepare the temple and offerings for them to enjoy."⁴² This is a memorial ceremony that consists of placing a tablet inscribed with the name of the deceased in the family's ancestral shrine.⁴³ After this, relatives are further obligated to occasionally recall the deceased: "In the Spring and Autumn they offer sacrifices, and periodically think of the deceased."⁴⁴ Confucianism dictates that a son must mourn his father for three years. This rule can be found in the *Book of History* (*Shangshu* 尚書) the *Zuo Commentary* (*左傳 Zuo Zhuan*), the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Xunzi*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Book of Filial Piety*.⁴⁵ Mencius was aware of this rule and believed it to be a tradition in place for some three dynasties: "Three years of mourning, wearing rough mourner's garb, and eating gruel. From the emperor to the common people, everyone has observed this practice for three dynasties."⁴⁶ While mourning, a son must observe certain protocols. In particular, he must don coarse, crudely sewn mourner's clothing, carry a mourner's staff of unworked bamboo, and live in a temporary thatched cottage constructed outside his house. He must also eat gruel and sleep on a straw mat with a headrest made of earth. Even later conquerors of China

41 Li and Xing, *Annotations of the Book of Filial Piety*, 67.

42 為之宗廟，以鬼享之。

43 Ibid., 70.

44 春秋祭祀，以時思之。The *Doctrine of the Mean* also states: "In Spring and Autumn, they cleaned the ancestral temple, laid out the sacrificial vessels, dressed in the ceremonial clothing, and prepared the seasonal foods [春秋修其祖廟，陳其宗器，設其裳衣，薦其時食]." See Zheng and Kong, *Notes and Commentaries of the Book of Rites*, 1680.

45 See He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, books 1 and 17; Zhao and Sun, *Annotations of Mencius*, books 3A and 5A; Xunzi's *Lilun* 禮論; Zheng and Kong, *Notes and Commentaries of the Book of Rites*, chaps. 3 and 38; Li and Xing, *Annotations of the Book of Filial Piety*, chap. 18.

46 三年之喪，齋疏之服，飭粥之食，自天子達於庶人，三代共之。Zhao and Sun, *Annotations of Mencius*, 156.

ensured that the ancient rite of a three-year mourning period remained institutionalized in China.⁴⁷

The death of a parent is also a significant life event in Judaism. Judaism requires relatives to be present at the moment of the individual's passing and to bury them as soon as possible after death. Unless the death takes place on the Sabbath or another holiday, the body is usually buried that day. Relatives attending the funeral must rend their clothing to show their emotion. The period of *shiva* lasts for seven days after the funeral, during which the children of the deceased are forbidden to work so that they may focus on the memory of the deceased. Friends and relatives come to offer their condolences, comfort the family, and pray. Lamps and candles are lit constantly.⁴⁸ After *shiva*, there are no further strict mourning obligations other than a prohibition against celebration for eleven months after the parent's funeral.⁴⁹ Evidently, although Judaism and Confucianism both advocate intense mourning and recollection of the deceased, as well as proper funeral rites, Judaism places fewer requirements upon mourners. The solemnity of funeral and burial rites, the duration of mourning, and the number of taboo behaviors during the mourning period are all fewer in number than their Confucian counterparts.

In characteristically ethical cultures, it is common to regulate behavior through prohibition. For example, the Torah has 613 commandments, of which 248 are positive obligations and 365 are negative prohibitions.⁵⁰ Judaism and Confucianism are of one mind when it comes to using this method to discuss filial piety. That is, they often define what is *not* filial in an attempt to better illustrate what is. In this sense, discussion of unfilial behavior is discussion of filial piety nonetheless. We must also note that, while the Jewish and Confucian traditions both include discussions of unfilial behavior, a clear disparity exists between their views on what constitutes such behavior.

47 Zheng and Kong, *Notes and Commentaries of the Book of Rites*, 1816. For additional details on the origins of the "three years of mourning" practice, see Ding Ding 丁鼎, "San nian zhi sang' yuanliu kao lun "三年之喪"源流考論 [Determining the Origins of the 'Three Years of Mourning']," *Collected Papers of History Studies* [史學集刊], no. 1 (2001).

48 Xu Xin 徐新 and Ling Jiyao 凌繼堯, eds., *Youtai baike quanshu* 猶太百科全書 [*The Jewish Encyclopedia*] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1993), 572.

49 Shlomo Ganzfried, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: A New Translation and Commentary on the Classic Guide to Jewish Law*, trans. Rabbi Avrohom Davis (New York: Metsudah, 1996), 2: 1181-1189; David J. Goldberg and John D. Rayner, *The Jewish People, Their History and Their Religion* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 380-381.

50 Maimonides lists the Torah's 613 commandments in the introduction of his *Mishneh Torah* as preparation for the reader study the Torah as oral law. For a complete list of these laws, see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, 38-91.

The *Mencius* lists “three offenses against filial piety” and “five offenses against filial piety.” It is written in book 4 of the *Mencius*: “There are three offenses against filial piety, the gravest of which is to fail to produce a male heir.”⁵¹ According to the explanation written by the Han Dynasty scholar Zhao Qi (趙岐), the first of the three offenses is not to obey one’s parents, to go against their will, or to lure them into committing an injustice. The second is, when one’s parents are old, to lack the resources to care for them, to fail to provide them with nourishment and warmth, to lack the funds necessary for their medical care, or to fail to obtain an official rank, salary, and good reputation. The third is to fail to take a wife and bear a son or to continue lighting incense for the ancestors. Having no male heir is considered the gravest of the three offenses against filial piety.⁵² Book 4 of the *Mencius* also enumerates five offenses against filial piety.⁵³ Here, the aforementioned three offenses are partially repeated, this time more meticulously differentiated. There are some new additions as well. To summarize, one need only look to the *Mencius* to discover that Confucianism’s treatment of unfilial behavior is rather detailed.

The Old Testament also provides examples of unfilial behavior. For example, Exodus names those who hit or scold their parents.⁵⁴ Deuteronomy mentions those who disrespect their parents.⁵⁵ Proverbs refers to those who “mistreat” and “cast out” parents and “mock the father, and despise the mother’s instructions.”⁵⁶ On the whole, these forms of unfilial behavior—insolence, scorn, beating, and scolding—can be reduced to disrespectful attitudes and mistreatment. When compared with Confucianism’s three and five offenses, Judaism’s offenses rest within a much narrower scope and are much less detailed and systematic than their Confucian counterparts. In fact, much of the unfilial behavior denounced

51 不孝有三，無后為大。

52 Zhu Xi, *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*, 286-287.

53 世俗所謂不孝者五：惰其四支，不顧父母之養，一不孝也；博奕好飲酒，不顧父母之養，二不孝也；好貨財，私妻子，不顧父母之養，三不孝也；從耳目之欲，以為父母戮，四不孝也；好勇鬪狠，以危父母，五不孝也。 Zhao and Sun, *Annotations of Mencius*, 278-279. It means, “People often claim that there are five offenses to filial piety. To not care about your parents through laziness (a failure to work) is the first offense. To not care about your parents by playing games or drinking liquor is the second offense. To not care about your parents by clinging to material wealth and being partial to one’s wife and children over one’s parents constitutes the third offense. To indulge one’s desires in a way that shames one’s parents is the fourth offense. To fight in a way that endangers one’s parents comprises the final offense.”

54 Exodus 21:15, 17.

55 Deuteronomy 27:16.

56 Proverbs 19:26, 30:17.

in Confucianism is never even addressed by Judaism. This is undoubtedly an area worthy of attention for the body of Jewish law, which places great importance on nuanced discussion.

The *Analects* also instructs that “While your parents are alive, do not travel far. If you do travel, you must have a purpose in doing so.”⁵⁷ The *Book of Rites* tells us that a son should generally remain by his parents’ side, but if he must travel far, he must inform his parents of his intended whereabouts so as to put them at ease. In order to prevent his parents from fearing for his safety, he must also steer clear of dangerous situations.⁵⁸ “Preventing worry” is a form of filial behavior that expresses deep psychological concern for parents. This specific kind of filial behavior is nowhere to be found in the Jewish tradition.

Confucian filial piety was originally a system of domestic ethics, and only after successive generations of scholarly interpretation did it break free from the walls of the household and expand into a rich, far-reaching sociopolitical ethical system. Filial piety led to new terms of address for brothers and elders and was even applied to rulers in a manner that linked filial piety with fidelity to a sovereign. The *Book of Filial Piety* states, “The filial piety with which the gentleman serves his parents may become fidelity to a ruler. The sense of fraternal duty with which he serves his elder brother may become deference to elders.”⁵⁹ If we regard filial piety as a form of familial ethics, then honoring elders, being faithful to a ruler, and other hierarchical forms of social filial piety certainly transcend its domestic scope. It has now expanded into a sociopolitical ethical system whose purpose is no longer to govern relationships within a family but, rather, to delineate, solidify, maintain, and harmonize all manner of social relationships. It serves the function of maintaining social stability and order.

The *Analects* raises the point that those who are filial at home are often obedient citizens.⁶⁰ Consequently, expanding filial piety’s application to all of society can create a harmonious society. “Teaching filial piety is a tribute of reverence to all the fathers. Teaching fraternal piety is a tribute of reverence to all elder brothers. Teaching the duty of a subject is a tribute of reverence to all

57 父母在，不遠游，游必有方。He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 57.

58 夫為人子者：出必告，反必面。所游必有常... 不登危，懼辱親也。Zheng and Kong, *Notes and Commentaries of the Book of Rites*, 32-35.

59 君子之事親孝，故忠可移於君；事兄悌，故順可移於長。Li and Xing, *Annotations of the Book of Filial Piety*, 55.

60 其為人也孝弟，而好犯上者，鮮矣；不好作亂者，未之有也。He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 3-4.

rulers.”⁶¹ From a Confucian perspective, as long as the people are filial, there will exist “loving fathers and filial sons, love and respect among brothers, and benevolent rulers and loyal ministers,” thereby bringing about a well-ordered nation. The Han Dynasty rulers readily accepted and implemented a practice of “governing the world with filial piety,” and later dynasties all looked favorably upon this method of ruling.

In contrast, Jewish filial piety has always remained within the domain of domestic ethics. First, Judaism regards filial piety as having a fixed scope—namely, parents. It does not govern relationships between brothers, let alone toward individuals outside the family. Although in practice Jews also advocate respect for elders, this teaching is rarely found in early Jewish documents.⁶² Second, even if filial piety occasionally extends to teachers, a teacher is, in a sense, a “spiritual parent.” This is because a teacher provides spiritual cultivation, and the spiritual takes precedence over the physical. This notion aligns rather well with the Confucian saying “to be a teacher for a day is to be a father for life.” Thus, the relationship between a teacher and a student can be understood as a familial relationship. Moreover, the scope of Jewish filial piety has never encompassed rulers or had a sociopolitical relevance. Instead, it is unique in that Jewish filial piety transcends secular custom and has been raised to the level of love for the divine.

The Talmud groups God and parents together as “partners” worthy of pious devotion: “Our rabbis taught: There are three partners in man, the Holy One, the father, and the mother. When a man honors his father and his mother, the Holy One says, ‘I ascribe merit to them as though I had dwelt among them and they had honored Me.’”⁶³ If we take into account the fact that God is the

61 教以孝，所以敬天下之為人父者也。教以悌，所以敬天下之為人兄者也。教以臣，所以敬天下之為人君者也。Li and Xing, *Annotations of the Book of Filial Piety*, 53. The second essay in *Lü's Spring and Autumns Annals* [*Lü shi chunqiu xiaoxing lan* 呂氏春秋·孝行覽] also says, “In tending to the root, there is nothing more essential than filial piety. If a ruler is filial, then his reputation will spread far and wide. Those under him will be obedient, and all will praise him. If ministers are filial, then they will be faithful in their service to their ruler, uncorrupt in governance, and willing to sacrifice themselves if disaster strikes. If scholars and the common people are filial, then they will harvest enthusiastically. They will succeed in attack and defense. They will not tire, and will not flee. Filial piety is the root of the legendary emperors and the guiding order behind all manner of affairs. When this principle is implemented, all that is good will be realized, and what is ill will be no more. All under heaven will follow it. This is filial piety!”

62 For example, Leviticus 19:32: “Stand in the presence of a person with gray hair. Show respect for the old.”

63 Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30b.

parent of all mankind in Judaism's creation myth, Jewish filial piety includes both parents and God. This kind of relationship can even be used to establish a "larger family" in the universal sense. Evidently, the main function of Jewish filial piety has always been to maintain a hierarchy between parents and children, and God and humanity, as well as to instill respect for and obedience to parents and God. The different treatment of domestic ethics in Confucianism and Judaism draws a dividing line between both traditions' conceptions of filial piety, which demonstrates how they differ in application and scope.

Generally speaking, analyzing a single concept's status within an entire doctrine serves as the primary basis for evaluating the importance of that concept within the system to which it belongs. Thus, we now address the relative position of filial piety within the Confucian and Jewish traditions, respectively. We know that "benevolence" (仁) is the most important concept in Confucianism, and it has been used as the foundation for all Confucian theories and institutions since the time of Confucius himself. Thus a pressing question for Confucianism has always been how to understand and even realize benevolence. In contrast, filial piety is considered the first step on the road to benevolence. It has been said: "The gentleman tends to the basics. Once these are established, the entire Way flows naturally. Filial piety and fraternal devotion—are these not the root of benevolence?"⁶⁴ Because filial piety and fraternal duty are most pertinent to daily life and, moreover, are the most common and feasible forms of ethical behavior, they are considered the starting point for benevolence—in other words, moral perfection. Feng Youlan (馮友蘭) once noted that this "root of benevolence" refers to a form of filial piety that asks us to begin with those close to us so that we may learn to empathize.⁶⁵ Because of this interaction between filial piety and benevolence, filial piety received ample attention in early Confucianism. As the Confucian ethical system developed, it became abstracted into both a form of virtuous behavior and a kind of moral sense, thereby ascending the ranks of Confucian virtues.⁶⁶ This is evidenced by the following excerpt from the *Book of Filial Piety*: "Confucius

64 君子務本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其為仁之本與！He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 4; see Zhu Xi, *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*, 48. According to Zhu's explanation, the character 為 [wei] acts as a verb here, and 為仁 [weiren] therefore means to act benevolently, which is to exhibit one's innate benevolence.

65 Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史 [A History of Chinese Philosophy] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961), 437n1.

66 Chen Lai 陳來, *Gudai zongjiao yu lunli—rujia sixiang de genyuan* 古代宗教與倫理—儒家思想的根源 [Ancient Religions and Ethics—The Origins of Confucian Thought] (Beijing: SDX Joint, 2009), 333-334, 340-341.

said: 'Filial piety is the root of all virtue and the stem from which all moral teaching grows.'⁶⁷ Clearly, filial piety became the most fundamental and important virtue in Confucian doctrine after successive generations of scholarly analysis. One could even call it the "first virtue" of Confucianism.

In contrast, filial piety is important in Judaism but plays a smaller role than its Confucian counterpart. As previously mentioned, honoring one's father and mother is Judaism's fifth commandment. The preceding four commandments dictate that the Israelites accept Yahweh as their god, forbid idol worship and taking the lord's name in vain, and keep the Sabbath (because the Sabbath is a holy day connected to the creation of the world). These four commandments pertain to the relationship between people and a transcendent God and are regarded as the first part of the Ten Commandments. The remaining six commandments address secular relationships, including respecting parents and forbidding murder, stealing, improper sexual conduct, bearing false witness, and coveting the property of others.⁶⁸ Judging from this sequential order, filial piety is a commandment of the second variety, and thus it is not as important as commandments dictating the relationship between man and God. From a theological perspective, although it is the first among "secular" commandments, honoring one's father and mother will always be second to worshipping God.⁶⁹

Rabbinical Judaism places greater emphasis than biblical Judaism on filial piety. As mentioned above, rabbinical Judaism argues that honoring one's father and mother is tantamount to honoring God. However, even if children honor both God and parents, the respective positions of God and parents are not the same. God always occupies the supreme position because parents and children alike worship Him. Additionally, Judaism instructs children to

67 子曰：‘夫孝，德之本也，教之所由生也。’ Li and Xing, *Annotations of the Book of Filial Piety*, 3.

68 Deuteronomy 5:6-21; Exodus 20.

69 Louis E. Newman, *An Introduction to Jewish Ethics* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2005), 107; Tian Haihua 田海華, *Xi bo lai shengjing zhi shijie yanjiu* 希伯來聖經之十誡研究 [*The Ten Commandments of the Hebrew Bible*] (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2012), 95. Some scholars also group the Ten Commandments into the first five and the remaining five. According to this view, the commandment to honor one's mother and father belongs to the first group. This division places the commandment among the religious commandments rather than the secular ones, and in doing so demonstrates the importance of this commandment within Judaism. However, this reorganization of the commandments does not change the fundamental fact that worshipping God takes prominence over respect for parents.

“honor” and “fear” both their parents and God, but only God is worshipped. “Worship” implies both honor and fear, but far surpasses both in degree. As the quintessential monotheistic religion, Judaism regards God as the only object of worship. The rabbis who identified both parents and God as “partners” in receiving children’s honor never intended for parents to be the object of worship. Otherwise, they would have violated Judaism’s fundamental monotheistic principle.

To summarize, ancient Judaism and early Confucianism exhibit clear differences in the degree, application, and scope of filial piety, as well as its position within the overall doctrine of each tradition. “Differences of degree” refers primarily to differences in comprehensiveness and nuance, and Confucianism is more thorough in both of these respects. When it comes to the application and scope of filial piety, both traditions adopt unique standpoints. Confucianism expands filial piety from its familial ethical foundations into sociopolitical territory, while Jewish filial piety has always remained a domestic affair. The status of filial piety is also different in both traditions. Confucianism has always accorded importance to filial piety, and this importance grew as scholars successively reinterpreted the concept. Meanwhile, filial piety occupies a secondary position in Judaism for theological reasons.

How Can Both Traditions Advocate a Common Filial Piety?

How can ancient Judaism and early Confucianism, with their unrelated origins, advocate like forms of filial piety? Fundamentally speaking, Judaism and Confucianism hold similar views regarding care and respect for parents, carrying out their wishes, funeral and mourning rites, and how to remonstrate with them, primarily because both traditions are grounded in affection for and gratitude toward family members. Emotions are an important aspect of humanity. From Plato’s psychological framework of “reason, emotion, and will,” to Aristotle’s emotion-based hedonic theory of the soul, to David Hume’s sentimentalist ethics, none of them denied that emotion was an innate aspect of human nature and was inherently tied to morality. Familial affection and gratitude are embodiments of our intrinsic human nature. In this sense, they comprise a natural basis for filial piety, thereby playing an essential role in the genesis of filial piety and its initial progression.

Ancient Confucians used precisely these innate sentiments to ground their filial instructions. To synthesize their collective works, the character for “filial piety” (孝) has always been an ideogram consisting of the characters for “old”

and “child.”⁷⁰ The information transmitted by this compound is that “the child carries the elder,” and thus we can observe the intergenerational familial relationship implied by this character. Confucianism has always regarded continuing the family line as extremely important. Mencius’ statement that “there are three offenses against filial piety, and to fail to produce a male heir is the gravest of the three” clearly depicts the relationship between filial piety and furthering the family’s bloodline.⁷¹

Moreover, this relationship is repeatedly cited in Confucian ethical theory and practice. Scholarly research has indicated that “love for a biological son is the deepest psychological basis for benevolence (仁 *ren*). As a form of moral consciousness, benevolence refers first and foremost to the love one feels for a family member.”⁷² This familial love is an emotion that transcends pure reason, and this is the filial piety that we have in mind. Evidently, a foundation of familial affection serves as both the starting point for the Confucian theory of affection for one’s fellow man and the chief manifestation of benevolence. The patriarchal clan system that we examine in the second half of this paper, which was endorsed and maintained by Confucianism, was also built on a foundation of affection for family members. Historical Confucian theories were easily accepted precisely because they conformed to human emotions, and the corresponding social systems derived their stability from this same foundation. This is one reason that traditional Chinese society lasted for over one thousand years.

Familial affection has often influenced Confucian filial piety in tandem with the emotion of gratitude. In the *Analects*, Confucius’ reply to Zaiwo’s question of whether a dutiful son should observe three years’ mourning illustrates the importance Confucius attached to filial piety and its related duties. At a deeper level, it reflects Confucius’ call for spontaneous gratitude toward parents. Zaiwo believed that three years of mourning was too long and illustrated his point with examples. He contended that it was detrimental to the system of rites already in place and argued that it did not match the natural progression of the four seasons. He believed that a mourning period of one year would suffice. Confucius replied by asking Zaiwo whether he would have “peace of mind” if he violated the three-year mourning period, to which Zaiwo replied

70 Xiao Qunzhong 肖群忠, *Zhongguo xiao wenhua yanjiu* 中國孝文化研究 [Research on Chinese Filial Culture] (Taipei: Wu-Nan, 2002), 11-12.

71 不孝有三，無后為大。Zhao and Sun, *Annotations of Mencius*, 248.

72 Zhu Yiting 朱貽庭, ed., *Zhongguo chuantong lunli sixiang shi* [zengding ben] 中國傳統倫理思想史 [增訂本] [An Intellectual History of Chinese Traditional Ethics (Expanded Edition)] (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2003), 37.

in the affirmative. After Zaiwo left, Confucius reacted angrily, explaining from the perspective of gratitude why three years of mourning are necessary for peace of mind. Children hardly leave their parents' side until after three years of age, and so a three-year mourning period serves as reciprocity for this initial period of care.⁷³ The period of pregnancy and its hardships are not even factored into this sum. We can now understand Confucius' anger with Zaiwo, for Zaiwo either could not understand or completely disregarded the significance of those three years in favor of a simplified, utilitarian alternative.

Confucianism contains numerous further examples of emphasis on the emotion of gratitude. In the Confucian classic the *Book of Songs* (詩經 *Shijing*), it is written: "The kindness of parents is higher than the heavens when they give their children life, live together with them day after day, raise them with the utmost care, and love them dearly."⁷⁴ This means, consequently, for grown-up children to repay their parents' dedication with a filial heart is actually "a matter of course."⁷⁵ Confucian filial piety is founded upon this awareness of the innate human emotions of familial affection and gratitude. It is an ethical obligation saturated with emotion.

Ancient Jewish texts devote attention to affection for and gratitude toward family members as expressions of human nature, but these concepts receive different amounts of emphasis at different stages of history. The importance of familial ties is reflected in the Old Testament, in which the ancient Israelites' desire for sons—that is, biological heirs—is an important theme. God repeatedly commands that the Israelites "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth," and the desire to bear an heir is tested time and again in the Bible.⁷⁶ We observe that, with the background of the desire to bear and raise a son, many female figures in Judaism bore the torment of infertility. These figures include Sarah, the wife of Abraham,⁷⁷ Rebecca, the wife of Isaac,⁷⁸ and Rachel, the wife of Jacob.⁷⁹ Yet God ultimately granted each of these figures a son, and these sons were cherished all the more by their fathers because of their miraculous births.

73 予之不仁也！子生三年，然后免於父母之懷。夫三年之喪，天下之通喪也。予也有三年之愛於其父母乎！He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 275.

74 父兮生我，母兮鞠我，拊我畜我，長我育我，顧我復我，出入腹我。欲報之德，昊天罔弔。"Liao'e 蓼莪" [Minor Odes], in *Book of Songs*.

75 Li and Xing, *Annotations of the Book of Filial Piety*, 22.

76 Genesis 1:28, 9:1.

77 *Ibid.*, 18:9-15.

78 *Ibid.*, 25:21.

79 *Ibid.*, 30:22-24.

In addition to its emphasis on male heirs, the Old Testament goes to great lengths to chart humanity's genealogy since God's creation of the earth, particularly that of the Semites (the forbears of the Jewish people).⁸⁰ Readers often choose to skip over this information, which does not lend itself to easy reading. However, with the aim of compiling and circulating classic texts in mind, the inclusion of genealogies within these central texts serves to preserve and strengthen hereditary memory. We believe that the frequency with which this method is used demonstrates the emphasis that the ancient Israelites placed on biological heirs. There are genealogies in the Bible that illustrate this point, with two model examples in Genesis and Chronicles 1. The genealogy in Genesis is scattered among the chapters and records humanity's lineage in several segments: from Adam up to Noah (chapter 5), from Noah's three sons to their descendants (chapter 10), including a direct line from Noah's son, Shem, to Abraham.⁸¹ The line that ultimately reaches Abraham, the first Jew (then called Abram), also extends as far back as the Israelites who went to Egypt, who were the descendants of Jacob.⁸² This lineage displays how God chose the Israelites from all of humanity and gives special prominence to the heritage passed down from Abraham to Isaac and then to Jacob in order to illustrate the integrity of the Israelite bloodline. The genealogies in Chronicles are relatively streamlined in format and cover a longer period of time. They take up nine chapters in total and stretch from Adam to the era of David and Solomon, even covering portions of the lineage in exile and return to the land of Israel. This genealogy expands upon the time period and scope of that in Genesis and covers more important biblical figures. Thus, it more systematically reflects the origins and inheritance of the Israelite line.

Filial piety is an intergenerational ethical concept, and as such it does not involve children alone. A more appropriate understanding of filial piety regards it as a "relationship" between parents and children. This relationship is unquestionably rooted in familial sentiment and usually is manifested in the home. Biblical depictions of domestic life often present a comfortable setting. For example, the happiness of Abraham and his wife, Sarah, when she gave birth to their first child when Abraham was one hundred,⁸³ Isaac's blessing of Jacob and Esau,⁸⁴ and Jacob's leading his sons to Egypt to seek refuge and their

80 Genesis repeatedly records and restates humanity's lineage—Abraham's in particular. Related records can be found in Exodus, the Book of Numbers, and Chronicles.

81 Genesis 11:10-26.

82 *Ibid.*, 46:8-27.

83 *Ibid.*, 21:2-8.

84 *Ibid.*, 27:27-29; 27:39-40.

subsequent reunion with Joseph.⁸⁵ If we temporarily exclude the religious and focus only on the secular events that occur in these stories, we are left with a distinct sense of the love between family members. It was this familial bond that enabled the twelve tribes of Israel, descended from Jacob, to unite, accept the same monotheistic beliefs, and ultimately establish Judaism. Additionally, later generations of Jews have used this biological lineage as a standard for determining whether someone is Jewish. Whether the paternal or maternal line, it is ultimately an individual's genetic lineage that plays the decisive role. The ties between a parent and child can never be severed. Jewish filial piety developed from this foundation of familial affection.

We can refer back to God's creation of mankind in order to understand the function and significance of gratitude in Jewish filial piety. The interpretations found in rabbinical Jewish texts are particularly illuminating. According to the Genesis, chapter 2, God created Adam from earth and imbued him with a soul, after which he created Eve from one of Adam's ribs. After this, humanity multiplied. The Talmud provides an explanation of this process, which explains God's creation of man and makes it more concrete: "Man's white substance becomes the brain and veins, and woman's red substance becomes flesh, blood, and skin. Life, the spirit, and the soul all come from God."⁸⁶ According to the Talmud's explanation, the descendants of Adam and Eve are all creations of God through a synthesis of their parents' biology and God's gift of the soul. This explanation thus involves parents in the process of creation such that it is a father, mother, and God who create a life together. Appreciation for this gift of life is a debt of gratitude. As the Jewish scholar Louis E. Newman has said, "Some Jewish authorities have observed the basic principle of gratitude in the commandment to honor one's parents, and have thereby come to view it as a general commandment."⁸⁷ In this way, gratitude performs a fundamental role in Jewish filial piety.

In short, children are filial in order to repay their parents' gift of life, nourishment, and education. This filial piety reasonably complies with human nature and is common to all regions and eras. The reason Judaism and Confucianism have so much in common when it comes to filial piety is that they share a common foundation in human nature—that is, the bonds of familial affection and gratitude. It is this shared underpinning that explains how these two ancient civilizations, separated by space and time, could hold the same views.

85 Ibid., 43:27-45:15.

86 Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 31a.

87 Newman, *An Introduction to Jewish Ethics*, 106.

Why Jewish and Confucian Filial Piety Differ

Combing through the variation in both traditions described above, we cannot help but inquire a step further: why do Judaism and Confucianism differ on so much if they agree on genealogical matters? From where does each tradition derive its unique aspects?

We believe that their unique attributes originate in the different cultures in which these two traditions were conceived and developed. From what has already been written, we can see that Judaism and Confucianism both place tremendous emphasis on the here and now, which is manifested concretely in their attention to the perception of and reaction to human emotion. Both traditions interpret and explain filial piety in terms of the bonds of familial affection and gratitude. However, Jewish filial piety involves a more fundamental religious element, while Confucianism has used these emotions as the starting point for the design of an ethical system of governance, taking the humanist side of Chinese culture to its utmost.

Judaism is both the first and the quintessential monotheistic religion. Biblical Judaism and rabbinical Judaism have the following main characteristics. First, Yahweh (God) is the only god and object of worship. No other deities are permitted. Second, Jews must believe in the word of God, which is revealed through prophets and their insights. Furthermore, the commandments of the Old Testament are a record of God's covenant with Moses and are God's direct commandments to mankind. Third, Jews can commune with God via sacrifice or prayer. Fourth, the Israelites are God's "chosen people," and thus God has established a covenant with them that has become Jewish law. Fifth, Judaism advocates "righteousness through deeds," that is, the belief that every Jew can become a righteous individual by adhering to the Torah's commandments. Sixth, everyone is created in God's image, and, consequently, all are equal before God. Seventh, Judaism decrees that all Jews live by the commandments of the Torah, which is comprehensive in its instruction. Therefore, a Jewish life is a religious life, and there is no aspect of life that is purely secular. The result of this religious life is that it "makes the ordinary holy." It is clear from these characteristics that Judaism is a theocentric religion. In other words, God serves as the highest entity and legislator and lies at the very core of Judaism. Jewish life is carried out in accordance with divine guidance in the form of God's commandments.

In comparison with ancient Judaism's consistent religious development, Confucianism has elements of religious mysticism as well as a tradition of humanism. This humanist nature was particularly evident in Confucianism's early stages. Scholars generally agree that the ideas of the Western Zhou

Dynasty provided the background and intellectual resources for Confucian thought.⁸⁸ In particular, the Western Zhou witnessed the awakening and development of secular thought. In contrast to their immediate predecessors in the Shang Dynasty, who worshipped gods and spirits, the people of the Zhou Dynasty turned their gaze away from the supernatural and toward worldly affairs, focusing their attention on “the people.” From the establishment of the concept of “virtue” by the founder of the Zhou Dynasty to the duke of Zhou’s establishment of rites and ritual music, and ultimately to Confucius’ continuing the Zhou legacy via the propagation of Zhou institutions and the study of benevolence (仁 *ren*), the constant focus had been worldly affairs and everyday life.⁸⁹ Successors to the Zhou universally recognized this shift as well. Zichan, the Spring and Autumn Period statesman endorsed by Confucius, once famously said: “The way of heaven is distant, and the way of man is near. We cannot reach the former.”⁹⁰ This clearly reflects the secular mind-set of the period. Additionally, the attitude with which Confucianism handled the worship of ancestors, deities, and spirits completely differed from that of the Shang and early Zhou Dynasties. Confucius once said, “How can you serve the spirits if you cannot serve man?”⁹¹ and “Respect ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance.”⁹² In the *Analects*, it is also written, “Confucius did not speak of the extraordinary, feats of strength, chaos, or the supernatural.”⁹³ Later generations inherited the humanist tradition of early Confucianism and adopted it as a guiding principle.

Of course, we cannot conclude from this that Confucianism lacked a transcendent religious dimension. Early Confucian classics such as the *Book of Songs* regard Heaven as the creator of man: “Heaven gave birth to the multitude of humanity, and in each of them inscribed its laws.”⁹⁴ In the *Analects*, Confucius also considered Heaven an entity capable of punishment and reward, warning: “He who offends Heaven can pray to no one.”⁹⁵ These examples indicate that

88 Chen, *Ancient Religions and Ethics*, 18.

89 For more information on the development of “virtue” since the Western Zhou Dynasty, see Wang Bo 王博, *Zhongguo ruxue shi: xianqin juan* 中國儒學史·先秦卷 [A History of Chinese Confucianism: Pre-Qin Volume] (Beijing: Peking University Publishing House, 2011), 1-13.

90 天道遠，人道邇，非所及也。Yang Bojun 杨伯峻, *Chunqiu zZuo chuan zhu* 春秋左传注 [Annotations of the Chronicle of Zuo] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981), 1395.

91 未能事人，焉能事鬼。He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 164.

92 敬鬼神而遠之。Ibid., 87.

93 子不語怪、力、亂、神。Ibid., 102.

94 天生烝民，有物有則。 “Major Court Hymns,” in *Book of Songs*.

95 獲罪於天，無所禱也。He and Xing, *Annotations of the Analects*, 39.

early Confucians treated Heaven as a transcendent object of ultimate faith. It is simply that the humanist aspects of Confucianism eclipsed its religious elements. When compared with Judaism and its theocentrism, Confucianism is an ethical system with religious elements that regards humanity as its primary focus.

This analysis of both cultures aids our contrast of the degree and scope of Jewish filial piety, as well as its etiquette and relative position within the tradition, to the corresponding aspects of Confucianism. As the focus of Judaism, God is considered the only object of worship, while parents occupy a secondary role, under which they are accorded honor and fear, which do not reach the degree of worship. If one worships anything other than God, including one's living or dead parents, then one has violated Judaism's first prohibition: idol worship. The Jewish prohibition against idolatry and polytheistic worship is maintained consistently within the tradition, such as in Exodus 32, in which Moses struggles with his fellow Israelites after they resort to idol worship while wandering in the wilderness. It is also written in Genesis: "God created mankind in his own image; male and female, he created in His own image."⁹⁶ Since every person is a creation of God, we are all equal in dignity. Judaism is deeply influenced by this egalitarian spirit, and so its filial piety does not surpass a recognition of hierarchy between father and son, thereby weakening the degree of veneration accorded to parents. Since worship and respect for God are primary, and reverence for parents is secondary, caring for one's parents need not meet the Confucian standard under which parents must be respected *and* pleased.⁹⁷ By the same token, pious worship of God is naturally a primary virtue, since God is the only acceptable object of worship. In comparison, filial piety is relegated to a secondary form of moral behavior. Since every Jew can become a righteous individual by following the Torah's commandments, and since these commandments are comprehensive in their content, filial piety is one of many moral commitments, and therefore it is not and need not be so meticulously delineated as it is in Confucianism. Perhaps excessive attention to filial piety runs the danger of detracting from one's observance of other commandments. Since Jewish life is a life governed by divine commandments,

⁹⁶ Genesis 1:27.

⁹⁷ Judaism also addresses the issue of "serving" God. In Proverbs 3:9, it is written, "Honor Yahweh with your wealth and with the first fruits of your harvest." Biblical Israelites used sacrifices as a form of worship. There were various kinds of offerings, such as peace offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings, burnt offerings, and meal offerings. For details, refer to Leviticus.

filial piety is not a purely secular form of domestic ethics, and consequently worship of God takes precedence.

In Judaism, bonds of familial affection and gratitude take a back seat to faith in God, such that the filial ethical relationship becomes a religious commandment and is prescribed as one of many religious duties. Because filial piety is a duty, Jews need only fulfill it as such. With God's permission and punishment as a "barrier," there is no motive or need for an expanded application or further explication of filial piety in Judaism. Its degree and scope are quite limited in comparison to those of Confucian filial piety. Consequently, while from a philosophical perspective Jewish filial piety is also grounded in innate familial affection, a religious or biblical perspective reveals God as the ultimate root of filial piety. From this perspective, filial piety is a special bond between God and his "chosen people," inscribed in the God-given laws passed down to the Jews by Moses. We could thus say that the characteristic features of Jewish filial piety derive from their being a part of a quintessentially monotheistic culture.

As two cultural traditions deeply rooted in human nature, ancient Judaism and early Confucianism are both expressions of the same human nature but manifested in different times and places. They were each a fusion of a common human nature and a particular spatiotemporal setting. By responding to the needs of their time periods, they created institutional forms uniquely suited to their respective conditions, and these institutions in turn continued to strengthen their intellectual traditions, thereby accounting for the differences in Jewish and Confucian filial piety.

Confucianism's emphasis on familial bonds and ethical relations directly influenced traditional systems of governance as well as the relationship between Confucianism and political affairs. Family ties have characterized Chinese governance since the Xia Dynasty founder Yu the Great "ruled the nation like a family." During the Zhou Dynasty, institutional reform was based on bonds of consanguinity, in particular the establishment and development of systems that delineated family lines and dictated the number of temples allowed for various members of the aristocracy.⁹⁸ The idea of "structuring the family and the nation according to the same principle" was advanced through the establishment of institutions that distinguished varying degrees of familial relation. The sociopolitical structure that regarded "all under heaven [as] one family" was established with the Zhou rulers as the heads of this "grand family", i.e. the entire patriarchal system (宗法制度).

98 Wang Guowei 王國維, "Yin zhou zhidu lun 殷周制度論 [Institutions of the Late Shang and Zhou Dynasties]," in *Guan tang ji lin 觀堂集林 [Selected Works of Wang Guantang]* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959), 10: 454-455.

Confucianism continued to build on this foundation, establishing concentric systems for governing human interaction as indicated by the adage in the *Great Learning* (大學 *Daxue*), “Cultivate your character, manage your household, govern the nation, and all under heaven will be pacified.”⁹⁹ From a Confucian perspective, a household and the nation share the same structure. The nation is an extension of the family, and the ruler acts as the head of a household. This is what makes possible the seamless transition from household to nation and from father to sovereign. Within the household, filial piety is the ethical bond between family members. This same kind of relationship can be extrapolated to the national scale, where it can develop in parallel with a patriarchal clan system. By this logic, there is no difference between obedience to a father and loyalty to a ruler. This attitude persisted until the “governance through filial piety” school formally established the close relationship between filial piety and governance through its slogan of “let filial piety become loyalty,” as represented in the *Book of Filial Piety*. Such ideas had profound influence on the construction of traditional Chinese systems of governance.

As a religion that places great emphasis on actions, ancient Judaism pays particular attention to the role that “deeds” play in salvation. This is called “righteousness through deeds.”¹⁰⁰ According to this principle, an individual may become righteous through adherence to the holy laws of the Torah. Collectively and as a nation, adherence to God’s laws is necessary for a peaceful society and prosperous nation. These conditions directly influence the dynamic between Judaism and governance. As we know, the Israelites can be traced back to a common ancestor (Abraham), and their twelve tribes have a common lineage. However, due to the presence of God and the Torah’s laws, the Israelites never developed a society or system of governance modeled after a patriarchal clan system, as was the case in ancient China. We may observe in the Old Testament that, from the time of Moses to the era of the biblical judges, Israelites lived under a theocracy.¹⁰¹ Even during the Israel’s period of united monarchy, theocratic governance predominated, the gist of which was the following: God is the true ruler of the nation, while human rulers—leaders of the people like Moses, or tribal leaders and judges, elders, and kings—were

99 修身、齊家、治國、平天下。

100 For a comparison between Judaism’s “righteousness through deeds” with Christianity’s “justification by faith,” see Fu Youde 傅有德, *Youtai zhexue yu zongjiao yanjiu* 猶太哲學與宗教研究 [*Jewish Religion and Philosophy*] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House, 2007), 174-178.

101 Baruch Spinoza, 神學政治論 *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. Wen Xi 溫錫增 (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1982), 232.

in theory only implementing laws prescribed by God. Moreover, these leaders were required to govern according to these laws, lest they face condemnation by prophets or even revolt instigated by them. Under a theocratic system of this sort, people's ultimate concern was the implementation of divine laws.

In contrast to the concentric structure of Confucian governance, Judaism adopted a "top-down" method for establishing political legitimacy. Under the premise that all Jews completely accept the Jewish faith, Jewish sovereigns derived their authority from Judaism's holy source—God—and maintained their rule with the help of their subjects, who lived in accordance with the holy laws. At the same time, this theocracy did not tolerate improper behavior from its rulers but, rather, supervised their rule through the use of prophets, who would often openly condemn unsuitable rulers in God's name. We should take special note of the humble backgrounds of the majority of biblical prophets and that "they transmitted the word of God, reflected the demands of the common people, and represented society's conscience."¹⁰² The social critiques of these fearless prophets realized the ideals of justice and fairness and established a balance between ruler and subject through prophets' willingness to speak out. Influenced by the opinions and behavior of prophets, Israelites held their rulers accountable by remaining loyal to God. They adhered to the laws of the Torah and sought a holy life over secular subsistence. Thus, it is not peculiar that the ancient Israelites lacked "fidelity" to a sovereign monarch. Moreover, if we consider the influence of religion on sociopolitical dynamics, Judaism's mode of conduct in society can be summarized as "love." With the prerequisite of love for God, one must love God and his neighbors.¹⁰³ To put it concretely, one must love God through sacrifice and by honoring His commandments, and one must love others through equal treatment and "loving others as oneself."

In this schema, Judaism bifurcates love into love for God and love for humanity, and parents are grouped among all of mankind. This weakens the special love accorded to parents—that is, the space in which filial piety resides. With this restriction on filial piety imposed by religion, all roads ultimately lead to God. Rulers therefore need not resort to secular ethics such as filial piety in order to maintain a population of compliant citizens nor do they need to rely on extensions of filial piety—fraternal deference, respect for elders, and fidelity to a sovereign—in order to harmonize social relationships among brothers

102 Fu Youde, "Xi bo lai xianzhi yu rujia shengren bijiao yanjiu 希伯來先知與儒家聖人比較研究 [A Comparative Study of Hebrew Prophets and Confucian Sages]," *Chinese Social Sciences*, no. 6 (2009).

103 Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18.

and neighbors. In other words, ancient Israel did not develop a conception of filial piety that extended beyond parents and into other households, society, and government precisely because this was unnecessary.

In summary, substantial differences in the cultures of ancient Judaism and early Confucianism account for dissimilarities in their versions of filial piety. Among these cultural differences, Judaism's theocentric stance and Confucianism's humanist characteristics play a decisive role. Likewise, the different systems of governance and social dynamics established by each tradition also served to produce divergent conceptions of filial piety.

Commentary

In recent years, discussion of filial piety has been ongoing within Chinese academic circles.¹⁰⁴ This paper does not aim to critique that body of work nor does it attempt to offer a comprehensive discussion of filial piety. We are concerned with comparing the ancient Jewish and early Confucian conceptions of filial piety and addressing two observations made in relation to the characteristics of Jewish filial piety. These observations may serve as a reference in the revival and reestablishment of Confucian filial piety as an ethical principle.

First, rooting filial piety in both the transcendent and human dimensions can prevent it from becoming excessive. Early Confucians entrenched filial piety in familial bonds and regarded providing for and respecting one's parents as its core spirit. Both now and in the past, regardless of whether the individuals concerned are Jewish, Chinese, or other, these bonds provide a strong base for moral behavior. At the same time, we should note that ancient Confucianism as a whole adopted an indifferent stance with regard to transcendent values and, instead, devoted disproportionate attention to human bonds of affection. This stance was largely responsible for suppressing the transcendent dimension

104 For example, Chinese scholarly circles have been discussing the question of "relatives covering for each other" in recent years. See Guo Qiyong 郭齊勇, *Rujia lunli xin pipan zhi pipan* 儒家倫理新批判之批判 [A Critique of New Criticisms of Confucian Ethics] (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2011); idem, ed., *Rujia wenhua yanjiu* 儒家文化研究 [Research on Confucian Culture] (Beijing: SDX Joint, 2008). Foreign scholars have taken an interest in the issues surrounding Confucian filial piety as well. For a summary of this discussion and an overview of recent research, please refer to Hagop Sarkissian, "Recent Approaches to Confucian Filial Morality," *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 9 (2010); Cecilia Wee, "Filial Obligations: A Comparative Study," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2014).

that filial piety should possess, thereby resulting in a tendency toward its pronounced humanism and secularism.

In ancient Judaism, bonds of familial affection serve as a foundation for filial piety rooted in human nature, and at the same time a transcendent God serves as the ultimate source of human morality. Because God takes precedence over parents, faith and reverence for God take precedence over love and respect for parents. This variety of filial piety has limitations. It cannot serve as the primary virtue or highest object of pursuit. In addition to respecting one's parents, one should also live in reverence of the infinite and transcendent. Such an individual is capable of continuously reflecting upon and rectifying his filial behavior in daily life precisely because he possesses this religious disposition.

Second, equality tempers the hierarchy imposed by intergenerational relationships. There is undoubtedly a necessary hierarchy between junior and senior; however, this kind of relationship can be a source of conflict between parent and child if taken to the extreme. Therefore it can be detrimental to the development of filial piety. Jewish filial piety avoids this pitfall by according individuals an equal status. The Old Testament stresses equality because every individual is created in God's image. God, as creator of the world, is worshipped by all, and as Jewish believers in God, parents and children are equals. This equality makes possible a social buffer such that the relationship between parents and children will not end in deadlock and collapse due to a strict delineation of authority between junior and senior. In reestablishing a modern Confucian filial piety, we should keep this equal relationship between parent and child in mind and make it such that both parents and children respect each other's dignity. In this way, we can construct a modern filial ethic in which both sides of the equation are aware of their mutual rights and responsibilities.¹⁰⁵

Ancient Judaism and early Confucianism are artifacts of the past. Just as Christianity underwent a reformation in the seventeenth century that established a religious and ethical foundation for contemporary individuals in the West, Judaism underwent its own reformation in the early nineteenth century and devoted nearly a century to completing traditional Judaism's modern transformation. This metamorphosis allowed modern Jews to assimilate into

105 After examining various Western and Chinese forms of filial piety founded on parent-child relationships, Cheng Zhongying 成中英 proposes that a modern filial piety should be one of "parallel responsibilities between parent and child." He stresses the mutual rights and obligations of both parent and child. See Cheng Zhongying, "Lun rujia xiao de lunli ji qi xiandaihua: Zeren, quanli yu dexing 論儒家孝的倫理及其現代化：責任、權利與德行 [On the Ethics of Confucian Filial Piety and Its Modernization: Rights, Responsibilities, and Virtuous Behavior]," *Journal of Sinology* (漢學研究) 4, no. 1 (1986).

mainstream Western society and, at the same time, sustained Jewish culture by maintaining its unique characteristics. Chinese culture is currently in the midst of its own modern transformation. Like the Jews after the French Revolution, since the Opium Wars, the Chinese have continually faced conflict and decisions divided along traditional and modern as well as national and global lines. When faced with such decisions, the Jewish people chose to adopt an inclusive path of “both/and”—rooted in tradition and accepting of modernity. That is, they steadfastly maintained their traditional identity as a people while, at the same time, joining mainstream global society. The lesson of Judaism’s modernization is undoubtedly valuable for Chinese culture. Perhaps we can draw upon Judaism as a resource in modernizing our own filial ethics. We can create a union of traditional values and a modern spirit by simultaneously remaining rooted in a traditional conception of filial piety, including the recognition that familial bonds constitute the foundation of filial piety, and accommodating the modern values of equality, freedom, universal love, and individual rights. In this way, we can both retain the Confucian humanist tradition and seek out a transcendent form of filial ethics.

These thoughts are reflections of a macroscopic nature following a comparison of the concepts of filial piety in ancient Judaism and early Confucianism. The concrete execution of bringing traditional filial piety into the modern era is a matter beyond the scope of this paper.

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