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The Difference Between Confucian and Mencian Benevolence

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Abstract

Confucius and Mencius differ in many ways in describing and demonstrating benevolence. For Confucius, benevolence is a basic concept, with filial piety at its core, and entails socially and culturally regulated action; benevolence symbolizes self-perfection while sagacity symbolizes perfection of all things in the universe. In contrast, for Mencius, who transforms the Confucian universe of unending life into a philosophical universe and changes Confucian benevolence of familial respect into a universal and absolute moral sentiment or instinct, the universe is a basic concept. With the universe as the metaphysical core, Mencius changes benevolence from the fruit of intention to an object of thought, so it is no longer a relation between life and its projects but, rather, a relation between the mind and its cultivation. Confucius talks about benevolence through the individual and familial morality while Mencius does so through the universe and human nature. Distinguishing Confucian and Mencian benevolence has theoretical importance for Confucianism and practical importance in our lives.

Keywords

Benevolence – Confucius – Mencius – universe

Regarding benevolence [*ren* 仁], Confucius and Mencius agree on three points. The first is its central importance. The word “benevolence” appears over a hundred times in the sixteen-thousand-word *Analects* [*Lunyu* 論語]. Originator of the doctrine of the Goodness of Human Nature, Mencius believes that benevolence reigns over other virtues, such as righteousness, courtesy, and wisdom,

and advocates for a benevolent government. Second, it has to do with loving one's parents and loving other people. In the *Analects*, the chapter "Xue'er 學而" states that the root of benevolence is filial piety¹ while in the chapter "Yanyuan 顏淵," Confucius tells Fan Chi 樊遲 [b. 515 BCE] that benevolence means loving others. The chapter "Lilou 離婁" in *Mencius* states that a benevolent person is full of love for others and that the truth of benevolence resides in attending to one's parents.² Third, it has to do with sympathy and expanding one's love. The chapter "Yongye 雍也" in the *Analects* states:

If one wishes to be independent, one must also help others to become independent; if one wishes to succeed, one must also help others to succeed.³

The chapter "Wei Lingong 衛靈公" in the *Analects* states: "One must not give to others what one does not want for oneself."⁴

The first section of "Liang Huiwang [梁惠王]" in *Mencius* encourages people to treat all matters with equanimity⁵ and offers this advice from Mencius: "I tend to my elders and extend my effort to include others' elders; I care for my young and extend my effort to include others' young."⁶

Even though Confucius and Mencius hold similar views on benevolence such as these, they have fundamental differences in how to achieve benevolence. We elaborate on how Confucius and Mencius describe and demonstrate benevolence in order to expose these differences.

Root, Source, or Nature: Filial Piety and Sympathy

The statement "the root of benevolence is filial piety" has two possible interpretations. The verb *wei* 為 can mean both "to be" and "to make" (and, by extension, "to practice, to do"). So filial piety can be either the root of benevolence, the first interpretation, or the root of making or practicing benevolence, the

1 孝悌也者，其為仁之本與！ (*Analects* 1:2).

2 仁之實，事親是也 (*Mencius*, book VI, part A, 27).

3 己欲立立人，己欲達達人 (*Analects* 6:30).

4 己所不欲，勿施於人 (*Analects* 15:24).

5 舉斯心加諸彼 (*Mencius*, book I, part A, 7).

6 老吾老以及人之老，幼吾幼以及人之幼 (*ibid.*).

second interpretation. If filial piety is the root of making benevolence, then it is not the root of benevolence itself.⁷

The first interpretation represents the theory of benevolence occurring naturally from filial piety. Huang Kan 皇侃 [488-545] states in his *Notes on Analects* [*Lunyu jijie yi shu* 論語集解義疏]: “Here, surprisingly, filial piety is deemed the source and benevolence the Dao. If filial piety is the source of benevolence, a focus on filial piety will be enough to generate benevolence.”⁸

Qing Confucians such as Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 [1623-1716] and Qian Daxin 錢大昕 [1728-1804] agree with this view.

The second interpretation represents the theory of benevolence as the result of practicing filial piety⁹ and the proponents of this theory include the Song Confucians Zhu Xi 朱熹 [1130-1200] and Cheng Yi 程頤 [1033-1107], who make use of benevolence to explain human nature while attempting to weaken or eliminate the influence of filial piety on benevolence: “There are only benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, and wisdom in human nature. Whence comes filial piety?”¹⁰

Zhu Xi quotes Cheng Yi and states in the *Four Books Annotated* [*Si shu jizhu* 四書集注]: “To realize benevolence, one must start with filial piety; to speak of human nature, one must view benevolence as the root of filial piety.”¹¹

We agree with the first interpretation, that filial piety is the root of benevolence. First, not only is the internal relationship between benevolence and loving one’s parents emphasized repeatedly in the *Analects* and *The Book of Rites* [*Liji* 禮記], but the *History of the Jin* [*Jin yu* 晉語] in the *Histories of the States* [*Guo yu* 國語] also states that “to love one’s parents is benevolence,” and this represents the social consensus since the Spring and Autumn Period

7 Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤, *Er Cheng ji* 二程集 [*Two Cheng Collection*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1981), 125.

8 He Yan 何晏 and Huang Kan 皇侃 et al., *Lunyu jijie yishu* 論語集解義疏 [*Notes on Analects*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1998), 1069.

9 The proponents of this theory claim that “filial piety is familial love; it is not the root of benevolence but the starting point for developing benevolence” (Huang Yong, “Confucian Benevolence and Global Morality [with Christian Critique of Confucianism],” in *Rujia lunli zhengming ji* 儒家倫理爭鳴集 [*Schools of Confucianism*], ed. Guo Qiyong 郭齊勇 [Wuhan: Hubei Education Press, 1981], 819).

10 Cheng, *Two Cheng Collection*, 183.

11 為仁以孝悌為本，論性則以仁為孝悌之本 (Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu jizhu* 四書集注 [*Four Books Annotated*] [Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994], 45).

[770-476 BCE]. Second, Confucius rarely speaks about nature and the Dao of the universe, and it is highly unlikely that he would accept benevolence as the source of filial piety since this view turns his beliefs upside down.¹² Furthermore, Zhu Xi does not explain why filial piety is the root of benevolence; the above quotation from Cheng Yi, much like Zhu's Theory on the Dao of Things [*Gewu shuo* 格物說], is fragmented and contradictory and therefore unconvincing. Finally, some ancient texts have many editions. In his *Analects Explained* [*Lunyu ji shi* 論語集釋], Cheng Shude 程樹德 [1877-1944] quotes Ye Dehui's 葉德輝 [1864-1927] *Proofreading Japan's Tianwen Edition of the Analects* [*Riben tianwen ben lunyu jiaokan ji* 日本天文本論語校勘記]: [regarding filial piety being the root of benevolence, *xiaoti wei renzhi ben* 孝悌為仁之本] "The Zuli [足利], Tang [唐本], Jinfan [津藩], and Zhengping [正平] editions do not contain the word *wei* [為]."¹³ The absence of the verb 為 obviates the need for the second interpretation.

Ancient texts have described filial piety as a simple and natural feeling and benevolence as a cultural and moral sentiment. When Han Yu 韓愈 [768-824] said that benevolence is universal love, he echoed the Confucian sentiment. From the love of one's parents in the *History of the Jin* to the Confucian universal love, there is an increase in behavioral and spiritual generosity. This increase is not a natural process; it has to be motivated by intention,¹⁴ just as the bamboo slip unearthed at Guodian states, "man creates benevolence." Confucius thinks that sagacity happens when we "view the universe as family and the country as person."¹⁵ He uses the word "desire" [*yu* 欲] to describe this intentional effort and moral cultivation in the chapter "Shu'er" in the *Analects*: "Is benevolence far away? I desire it and it comes."¹⁶ *Shuowen jiezi* [說文解字] describes 欲 as related (indeed logogramatically) to a lack, a deficiency. So *yu*

12 The chapter "Yanghuo" in the *Analects* states that two people can have similar natures yet behave very differently. Nature here is interpreted in the pre-Tang era according to "Gaozi" in the *Mencius*: nature is what one is born with. So nature includes feelings, desires, and emotions. Cheng Yi also writes: "Nature here is temperamental rather than ontological. Ontologically, nature is rational, and there is nothing bad about rationality. This is why Mencius says that human nature is always good." See Zhu Xi, *Complete Notes for Four Books* (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 2001), 207.

13 Cheng Shude 程樹德, *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋 [*Analects Explained*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990), 13.

14 From Kant to Dewey, morality consists of thinking from the position of "us," not "me."

15 以天下為一家，以中國為一人 (Qian Miaojin 潛苗金, "Liyun 禮運," in *Liji yizhu* 禮記譯注 [*Commentary on the Book of Rites*] [Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ancient Book Publishing House], 278).

16 仁遠乎哉？我欲仁，斯仁致矣 (*Analects* 7:30).

means obtaining an object that one does not have or aiming for a goal that one has not reached. The deficiency here is the original feeling, filial piety, proving to be insufficient, so the targeted person of the desire is oneself, and the goal is impartiality and sagacity. Some theorists think that moral intention is only a potentiality to be realized by the mind, that benevolence implies the cultivation, initiation, and implementation of moral intention, and that the first characteristic of benevolence is intention.¹⁷ Because Confucianism is based on filial piety, which is an affective sentiment, moral intention developing along a potentiality is itself sentimental and rational. The role of moral intention is therefore important, though easily overlooked.¹⁸

Feelings are intentional: I desire benevolence, and it comes. Examining texts that discuss benevolence can afford us a glimpse of how this process works. In the chapter “Yanghuo” in the *Analects*, Zai Wo 宰我 [522-458 BCE] states, “Three years of mourning seems long,” to which Confucius exclaims, “Zai Wo is not benevolent!” Wang Yangming 王陽明 [1472-1529] has an explanation for this:

Like plants, we need roots to survive. The love between father and son and between brothers is the source of loving intentions which can develop into benevolence toward other people and love for all things of the world. Mozi’s universal love equates brothers with strangers and kills the source of loving intentions. Filial piety is the root of benevolence; the latter grows out of the former.¹⁹

The newly unearthed text “Nature Originates in Life” states, “Dao starts with love and love starts with nature; the beginning is close to love and the end is close to righteousness.” This is an apt explanation of the *Analects*’ “filial piety is the root of benevolence.”

We can see from all this that benevolence is the concern for others’ well-being and suffering and the desire to help others achieve what one wants to achieve for oneself (such as independence and success). In the

17 Li Youzheng 李幼蒸, *Renxue jieshi xue 仁學解釋學 [Benevolence Explained]* (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2004), 153, 152, 197.

18 In “The New Proanthropus,” the idea of initiation discloses the immanent aspect of enlightenment, but it does not talk about the intentional aspect (Feng Youlan, “The New Proanthropus,” in *The Collected Essays* [Beijing: Peking University Press, 2000], 2: 240-252).

19 Wang Yangming 王陽明, *Chuanxi lu 傳習錄 [The Practice of Knowledge]* (Zhengzhou: Zhengzhou Chinese Classics Publishing House, 2004), 79.

same vein, Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 [1893-1988] states that “benevolence is instinct, emotion, and intuition,”²⁰ while Wang Yangming offers the following explanation: “Intention has a transcendent object that we call ‘matter’ [wu 物]. When one desires benevolence toward other people and love for all things in the world, this benevolence and love are the ‘matter.’”

This passage explains the feeling-intention structure, which generates motivation, action, creation, and assessment. What needs to be emphasized is that this structure starts with the sentiment and behavior of filial piety and ends in solicitude for all.

Mencius stated that “benevolence begins with a sympathetic mind.”²¹ Sympathy is a combination of love and pain. There is a famous Mencian demonstration of sympathy: “When we see a child about to fall into a well, we feel an apprehensive sympathy whose aim is not to better our relationship with the parents, to boast in front of our friends, or to stop the child from crying.” It is obvious that this sympathy for the endangered child is different from filial piety: the former is a universal and absolute moral instinct while the latter is a socially and culturally prescribed sentiment. Mencian benevolence’s break with history and culture is intentional, not accidental, and it is given a metaphysical source—the universe—as compensation. Mencius claimed in the first part of “Gaozi”: “Benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, and wisdom do not come to me from the outside but are inherent within me. I am given them by the universe.” And also: “A man without sympathy is not a man at all.”²²

Such is the essence of the Mencian doctrine of the Goodness of Human Nature. The transformation from an instinctive feeling to an attribute gifted by the universe not only is possible; it is inevitable. This is because the feeling of sympathy is separate from the sympathetic mind that contemplates it, and the sympathetic mind does not equate benevolence that grows from it. Zhu Xi uses Zhang Zai’s 張載 [1020-1077] “Three-Part Doctrine” (mind, nature, and feeling [*xin-xing-qing* 心-性-情]) to explain the somewhat confusing theory of Mencius: “Sympathy is feeling, the sympathetic mind is mind, and benevolence is nature. The three are mutually dependent.”²³

20 Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, *Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue* 東西文化及其哲學 [*Comparative Culture and Philosophy*] (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1999), 133.

21 惻隱之心，仁之端也 (*Mencius*, book II, part A, 6).

22 仁義禮智，非由外鑠我也 (*Mencius*, book VI, part A, 6. 此天之所與我者; *ibid*, book VI, part A, 15. 無惻隱之心，非人也; *ibid.*, book II, part A, 6).

23 Li Jingde 黎靖德, ed., *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 [*Zhu Xi's Sayings*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986), 1286.

The difference between Confucian and Mencian ideas of benevolence is now clear: Confucius uses man and filial piety (feeling) to talk about benevolence²⁴ while Mencius does so with the universe and moral rationality (nature and mind).

The Confucian living universe has been transformed into the Mencian moral and philosophical universe; benevolence has also changed from the fruit of desire to the object of thought. Mencius stated, “The function of the mind is to think. One always acquires something through thinking. If one does not think, one acquires nothing.” Here, thinking does not involve the ordinary kind of thinking but a search in a specific direction, and to acquire is to set benevolence (which is nature) as one’s guiding principle in life. Even though the Mencian doctrine of the Goodness of Human Nature became “the principle for thousands of generations,” its metaphysical description does not take full account of the historicity of human nature. The relation between man and benevolence, which is a question of execution between life and its projects in Confucianism, becomes a question of cultivation and a relation between mind and nature for Mencius. Under the framework of the mind as the master of feelings and human nature, the holism of the philosophy of life is vitiated. Feelings are stripped of their importance and become a passive factor to be suppressed due to their opposition to nature.²⁵ When Wang Yangming asserts that “conscience is only the mind distinguishing right from wrong,”²⁶ the evisceration of Confucius’ benevolence is complete. Mencius was the instigator of this tragic ending.

Structure or Status: Essence or Virtue

Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 [1895-1990] noted that the *Analects* treats benevolence sometimes as one of the virtues (along with righteousness, courtesy, and wisdom) and sometimes as “virtue perfected”; the former belongs in ethics

24 We say this in a relative sense. Benevolence concerns the philosophy of life and is not limited by moral feelings or concepts. During the Republican period, people such as Liang Shuming, Chiang Kai-shek, and Chen Lifu used the philosophy of life to reconstruct Confucianism. Xiong Shili, the founder of neo-Confucianism, was also a proponent.

25 Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 criticized the theories of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi as “static” because they are based on Mencian benevolence while Hu Hong’s 胡宏 “dynamic mystery” inherits the Confucian philosophy of life.

26 Wang, *The Practice of Knowledge*, 304.

while the latter belongs in philosophy.²⁷ If we agree with this distinction, we can say that the essence of Confucian benevolence is philosophical while Mencian benevolence, whose source is the universe, is always bound up with other concepts (such as righteousness and politics) and therefore belongs basically in ethics and political science.

We look at the essential role that benevolence plays in Confucianism first. A concept is essential when it does not derive from any other in the system, though other concepts may derive from it. Some examples are Laozi's Dao, Zhu Xi's *li*, Plato's idea, Hegel's absolute spirit, and Confucian benevolence.

We must also mention the universe here. The role of the universe has degraded during the evolution from a deterministic to an ethical view of life.²⁸ From passages such as "the universe is impartial and its operation virtuous" and "the universe sees what the people see and hears what the people hear," the *Book of Documents* [*Shang shu* 尚書] shows that the universe has gradually acquired an intention that revolves around the people. "For Confucius, the universe comes into being through human nature . . . I, not the universe, give birth to benevolence. There is no Dao of the universe outside of benevolence."²⁹ Furthermore, this Dao of the universe results mainly from Confucius' instinctive feelings about himself and the world, no dominant force is involved. His disciples often rue the absence of discussions on nature and the universe.³⁰

This essential nature is also revealed in the fact that benevolence is the basis of other important Confucian ideas. In *Analects*, the chapter "Bayi" states, "When one is not benevolent, what good are rites? When one is not benevolent, what good is music?"³¹ The biography of Zhai Fangjin 翟方進 [53-7 BCE] in *The Book of the Han* explains it thus: "No job is suitable for a man without benevolence; if talented, he is the plague of the country."³² Bao Xian 包咸 [7-65 BCE] also provides a footnote for this: "A man without benevolence cannot be courteous or well-versed in music." These are all explanations of how benevolence operates in the social system. Qian Mu 錢穆 [1895-1990] says that "benevolence is the basis of courtesy. The Duke of Zhou created the system

27 Feng Youlan, "Further Discussion on Confucian Benevolence," *Confucian Studies* 3 (1989).

28 Fu Sinian 傅斯年, *Xingming guxun bianzheng* 性命古訓辯證 [*Ancient Theories on Life*], vol. 1 (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006).

29 Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Zhongguo renxinglun shi* 中國人性論史 [*History of Nature*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Joint, 2001), 88-89.

30 夫子之言性與天道，不可得而聞也 (*Analects* 5:13).

31 人而不仁如禮何？人而不仁如樂何？ (*Analects* 3:3).

32 不仁之人，亡所施用；不仁而多才，國之患也 (Ban Gu, "Biography of Zhai Fangjin," in *Book of the Han* [Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1962], 3420).

of rites while Confucius defined benevolence.”³³ This implies that Confucius established benevolence as the foundation for the system of rites and music.

Newly unearthed texts confirm these arguments. The Five Elements section of *Guodian Chu Slips* states: “Benevolence is the basis of rites and music and relates harmoniously with the other four elements.”³⁴ This same passage is expressed in the earlier *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* [*Mawangdui boshu* 馬王堆帛書], also in the Five Elements section, as “sagacity is the basis of rites and music and relates harmoniously with the five elements.”³⁵ How does benevolence generate rites and music? Through the people, and through sages in particular, pre-Qin philosophers described the source of the various cultural systems as “sagacious productions” [*Shengren zhizuo* 聖人製作]. The Legalists think that these systems are the result of rational trends while the Mohists attribute them to a mysterious kind of love. The above-mentioned sagacity is particularly illuminating here. Wang Guowei 王國維 [1877-1927] stated that the Duke of Zhou established the Yin system, which consists of three parts: primogeniture, ancestral worship, and prohibition of marriage between people with the same surname.³⁶ This is a statement of facts. Benevolence as a Confucian basis is an explanation of values, “inferring a sage’s motives through his actions.”³⁷ This sagacious benevolence starts with love [concern is the common feeling of all sagacious productions] and comes into being through the realization that there is Dao in the universe and that one will succeed if one abides by it. The Five Elements section of the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* states, “An honorable man is not wise if he does not have concern in his heart. . . . Wisdom comes through contemplation. . . . Without benevolence, contemplation has no depth. Without wisdom, contemplation does not go far.”³⁸

This profound and boundless sagacity is manifested in rites and music, and benevolence is the driving force behind these sagacious productions. This

33 Qian Mu 錢穆, *Lunyu xinjie* 論語新解 [*Analects Re-examined*] (Beijing: SDX Joint, 2002), 54.

34 Li Ling 李零, *Guodian chujian jiaodu ji* 郭店楚簡校讀記 [*Notes on Guodian Chu Slips*] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2002), 79.

35 *Silk Manuscripts from Mawangdui Han Tomb* [馬王堆漢墓帛書], vol. 1 (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1980).

36 Wang Guowei 王國維, *Guantang jilin* 觀堂集林 [*Guantang Collection*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1959), 10: 2-11.

37 因其行事而加乎王心 (Su Yu 蘇輿, “Yuxu,” in *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證 [*Luxuriant Dew of Spring and Autumn Annals Explained*] [Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1992], 159).

38 Li, *Notes on Guodian Chu Slips*, 78.

essential aspect ensures the integrity of the systems and gives them the theoretical support that allows them to renew themselves through the ages. The chapter “Liyun” in the *Book of Rites* states, “If rites did not exist, righteousness would have created them.”³⁹ The chapter “Fanlun” in the *Huainanzi* states, “A sage creates rites and music but is not confined by them. There is a method in ruling a country and it begins with bettering people’s lives.”⁴⁰ Both these statements express the previous conclusion.

The basic concept of Mencian thought is the universe. The first section of “Gaozi” in *Mencius* talks about the standards by which people abide; a great man follows high standards while a petty man follows low standards. Zhao Qi 趙岐 [d. 201] explains this in *Commentaries on Mencius* [*Mengzi zhangju* 孟子章句]: Low standards symbolize basic instincts while high standards symbolize lofty aspirations; high standards aspire to courtesy and righteousness while low standards want to satisfy basic instincts.⁴¹ The chapter “Jinxin” in *Mencius* states, “The function of the mind is to think.”⁴² The objects of thought are the things that derive from the universe, such as benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, and wisdom. Mencius believed that they constitute human nature: “An honorable man’s nature is such that he has benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, and wisdom in his mind.”⁴³

Even though Mencius claimed that benevolence reigns over other virtues, he seemed unwilling to emphasize this point. He also stated that benevolence means loving other people and is closer to Confucius in equating benevolence to tending to one’s parents.⁴⁴ Confucius used benevolence to explain sagacity while Mencius stated that Yao and Shun’s guiding principle

39 禮，雖先王未之有，可以義起也 (Qian, “Liyun,” 284).

40 聖人制禮樂而不制於禮樂。治國有常以利民為本 (Liu An 劉安, “Fanlun 汜論,” in *Huainanzi Zhu* 淮南子注 [*Annotation on Huainanzi*], annot. Gao You 高誘, *Zhuji jicheng* 諸子集成 [*Collected Interpretation of Zhuzi*] [Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 1986], 7: 213).

41 小，口腹也；大，心志也。大體，心思禮義；小體，縱恣情慾 (Zhao Qi 趙岐, “Mengzi zhangju 孟子章句 [*Commentaries on Mencius*],” in *Lianghan quanshu* 兩漢全書 [*Collected Works of the Han Dynasty*] [Jinan: Shandong University Press, 2009], 16225, 16226).

42 心之官則思 (*Mencius*, book VI, part A, 15).

43 君子所性，仁義禮智根於心 (*Mencius*, book VII, part A, 21).

44 In the chapter “Liang Huiwang,” Mencius said that “a benevolent man does not abandon his parents; a righteous man always puts the ruler first.” This usage of benevolence is similar to “benevolence means never abandoning one’s roots” in *Commentary on Master Zuo’s Spring and Autumn Annals*.

was none other than filial piety.⁴⁵ He believes that the ancients were better people in that they knew how to extend their exemplary behavior.⁴⁶ To act according to the Dao of the universe, one must, of course, see the world as family, extend one's care to other people's elderly and children, and view all matters with equanimity. But is "extending exemplary behavior" enough to cover all that is involved? We think not. The *Guodian Chu Slips* contain information about the times of Yao and Shun: "During the era of Yao and Shun, the throne was not inherited but passed on to chosen sages. Yao and Shun became king not to benefit themselves but to benefit all people. The rule of the sages represents the pinnacle of sagacity; benefiting all people represents the height of benevolence. Such is how the ancients talked about sagacity, benevolence, and wisdom."⁴⁷

If Mencius abandons the Confucian foundation of benevolence, it is because he wants to start with the universe and the four virtues and put benevolence alongside righteousness, courtesy, and wisdom: "Benevolence begins with the sympathetic mind, righteousness the aversion for sins, courtesy humility, and wisdom the ability to distinguish right from wrong. Man possesses four virtues as he has four limbs."⁴⁸ Benevolence ends up being merely one of the virtues.

If benevolence is viewed as human nature and a virtue in ethics, it can only relate externally to politics and philosophy, unlike its Confucian internal connection with love and desire. Mencius stated, "The ancient sage-kings possessed sympathetic minds which enabled them to implement compassionate administrations. Using sympathetic minds for compassionate administrations is as easy as it is natural."⁴⁹ In short, benevolence is sympathy while politics comprises the rule of sages and the system of owning property, which enable people to become more aware or enlightened in the end. This is not too far from the political ideals and the era of the three sage-kings to which Confucius aspires, but in the *Analecets* he speaks only of serving the masses and the simple

45 堯舜之道，孝悌而已矣 (*Mencius*, book VI, part B, 2).

46 古之人所以大過人者，無他焉，善推其所為而已矣 (*Mencius*, book I, part A, 7).

47 《唐虞之道》：唐虞之道，禪而不傳。堯舜之王，利天下而弗自利也。禪而不傳，聖之盛也。利天下而弗自利也，仁之至也。故昔賢仁聖者如此 (Li, *Notes on Guodian Chu Slips*, 95). *The Book of the Han* states that *The Book of Rites* was written by 70 disciples of Confucius; scholars think that the Confucian texts of the *Guodian Chu Slips* can be similarly attributed.

48 惻隱之心，仁之端也；羞惡之心，義之端也；辭讓之心，禮之端也；是非之心，智之端也。人之有是四端也，猶其有四體也 (*Mencius*, book II, part A, 6).

49 先王有不忍人之心，斯有不忍人之政矣。以不忍人之心，行不忍人之政，治天下可運之掌上 (*Mencius*, book II, part A, 6).

joys of playing with children and bathing in the Yi River in the springtime. Perhaps this is the difference between ethics and a philosophy of life?

Cultivation or Completion

The word for benevolence [*ren* 仁] is written differently in the Guodian Chu slips, with a heart/mind [*xin* 心] underneath the body [*shen* 身]. This shows the connection between the mind and the body and that one must contemplate, control, cultivate, and perfect oneself.⁵⁰ Here, perfecting oneself should be understood in the sense put forth by the central text, *The Golden Mean*: “An honest man does not want to perfect himself only; he wants to perfect everything in the universe. To perfect oneself is benevolence, to perfect everything is wisdom. The function of human nature is to combine these two aspects.”⁵¹ Honesty allows one to experience the Dao of the universe which is the generation and change of life forms. To perfect oneself is to connect this solemn and serene living universe with one’s own way of life and cultivate benevolence which connects one with the whole of the universe. Because benevolence implies oneness with the universe, sagacity means giving of oneself to all.⁵² To perfect everything, therefore, is to participate in perfecting a symbiotic relationship with everything in the universe.

Filial piety is the root of self-perfection; benevolence is the symbol of self-perfection; sagehood is the highest level of self-perfection. This is the logic of Confucian benevolence.

50 Liang Tao 梁濤, *Guodian zhujian yu simeng xuepai* 郭店竹簡與思孟學派 [*Guodian Chu Slips and the Si-Meng School*] (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2008), 66.

51 《禮記·中庸》：誠者，非自成己而已也，所以成物也。成己，仁也；成物，知也。性之德也，合內外之道也 (Qian Miaojin, “Zhongyong,” 653).

52 “Benevolence is oneness with the universe” comes from *Commentaries on I Ching*. Cheng Hao believes that all the most profound thoughts of the sages are all in the section “Xici [系辭].” See Cheng and Cheng, *Two Cheng Collection*, 13. The key here is that one can have a direct apprehension of the universe. *Commentaries on I Ching* also states: “A sage is as virtuous as the universe, as clear as the sun and moon, as punctual as the seasons, and as knowledgeable about man’s fortunes as the gods and ghosts. If he acts before the proper time, the universe does not contravene him. If he acts later than the proper time, he still knows how to abide by the law of nature.”

“Beliefs and desires are intentional,” says John Searle.⁵³ Benevolence that seeks self-perfection implies the formation of a moral character that pursues a meaning or goal. Psychologically speaking, a will is a cognitive desire formed often by unregulated instinct, impulse, or experience; willpower is the strength and durability of the goal of the desire. That Liang Shuming uses will and desire (instinct, intuition) to describe benevolence is not a mechanical application of Bergsonian ideas; Liang clearly has some affinity with Confucius in describing benevolence. Because self-realization is a goal of life, Confucian benevolence is a theory of action.

In the chapter “Xianwen 憲問” in the *Analects*, Zilu 子路 [542-480 BCE] asks what constitutes an honorable man.

“He cultivates himself so that he is respectful of others.” Confucius says.

“Is that all?” Zi Lu asks.

“He cultivates himself so that his neighbors can live peacefully around him,” says Confucius.

“Is that all?”

“He cultivates himself so that everyone in the society can live peacefully; even Yao and Shun found this difficult.”⁵⁴

In the *Analects Correctly Explained*, Liu Baonan draws from *The Great Learning* [*Daxue* 大學] to give this explanation: “To cultivate means to cultivate one’s own moral character. To live peacefully with one’s neighbors is to govern one’s family properly. To live peacefully with everyone in society is to govern the country properly.”⁵⁵ To cultivate oneself implies having a clear and strong goal, which constitutes the intentionality of benevolence. Psychologists and philosophers agree that behavior is organized around a desired goal.⁵⁶ If one wants

53 John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of the Mind*, trans. Liu Yetao 劉葉濤 (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 2007), 1.

54 子路問君子。子曰“修己以敬。”曰：“如斯而已乎？”曰：“修己以安人。”曰：“如斯而已乎？”曰：“修己以安百姓。修己以安百姓，堯舜其猶病諸？”(*Analects* 14:42).

55 修己者，修身也。安人者，齊家也。安百姓，則治國平天下也 (Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, “Lunyu zhengyi 論語正義 [*Analects Correctly Explained*],” in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 [*Collected Interpretation of Zhuzi*], 1: 329.

56 Davidson said, “Behavior is explained, described, and predicted through its reason and consequence . . . it is intentional” (Ouyang Kang 歐陽康, ed., *Dangdai yingmei zhuming zhexuejia xueshu zishu* 當代英美著名哲學家學術自述 [*Contemporary Philosophers Explain Themselves*] [Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2005], 73).

to care for the elderly and the young and to live peacefully with people from far and near, one must choose the appropriate behavior and devise a proper plan. To gather knowledge through investigation into things, to have the right view, to fill one's mind with sincerity, and to give of oneself to all: this is the plan of action in order to "participate in perfecting life with everything in the universe."

A scholar must have a strong mind and steely resolve, for his shoulders are heavy with responsibility and the path before him is long. To choose benevolence as one's responsibility, is it not a heavy burden? To continue one's practice until death, is it not a long path?⁵⁷

The above passage from the chapter "Taibo 泰伯" in the *Analects* shows the sagacity, loftiness, and difficulty of this life path.

To cultivate oneself, under this framework, means far more than the simple moral cultivation that Song Confucians call *gong fu*; it must be understood as an ideology of life that corresponds to the goal of self-perfection. Only by doing this can the logic of Confucian benevolence hold up and the three books of the *Commentaries on I Ching*, *The Golden Mean*, and *The Great Learning* combine to form an organic whole.⁵⁸ Cheng Hao and Hu Hong's proposition that "life is the Dao of the universe and goodness is the logic of life"⁵⁹ connects with the spirit of Confucian benevolence and constitutes a system that holds its own against that of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. This is key because only under the framework of philosophy of life can benevolence be affective and intentional, and only an affective and intentional benevolence can be dynamic.

We can see this clearly from the Mencian belief that one can understand nature and the universe by giving one's mind free rein. The first section of "Jinxin 盡心" in *Mencius* states, "In exhausting the function of the mind, one will comprehend one's own nature and consequently one's destiny. By setting one's mind to this goal and through cultivation, one serves the universe. One awaits one's destiny in cultivation whether one's life is long or short. This is

57 士不可不弘毅，任重而道遠。仁以為己任，不亦重乎！死而後已，不亦遠乎！（*Analects* 8:7).

58 Cheng Hao believes that *The Great Learning* comes from Confucius while Mou Zongsan thinks that it has a different approach than *Commentaries of I Ching* and *The Golden Mean* and believes its content unworthy, perhaps because he takes Zhu Xi's commentaries as the true interpretation.

59 天只是以生為道，繼此生理者，即是善也（Cheng and Cheng, *Two Cheng Collection*, 29).

how one should conduct one's life."⁶⁰ To give one's mind free rein is to exhaust the function of the mind. But the Mencian mind is not simply a mind that cognizes but contains meanings and values, a combination of thinking and thoughts. This coincides with the meaning of the word "exhaust [*jin* 盡]" given by *Origins of Words*: to empty the content of a vessel. The only difference is that this emptying is also done by the mind: the mind thinks and pursues its thoughts. Given the a priori logic that sets benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, and wisdom as the content of the mind, it is only natural that they become the thoughts that the mind thinks and pursues.

In terms of behavior, to exhaust the mind can be understood as the thinking mind functioning according to meaning and reason. In explaining the difference between the mind and the Dao, Zhu Xi says, "Experiencing the world through the desires of the eyes and ears, that is the mind; experiencing the world through meaning and logic, that is Dao. The mind is weak and prone to stumble; the Dao is infinitesimal and difficult to trace."⁶¹ This is in the same vein as the Mencian saying about the great man and the petty man; a great man "gains content" for his mind.

The Golden Mean states that one's nature is given to one by the universe. This nature is in reality one's emotions, such as happiness, anger, sadness, and joy, or the "original feelings";⁶² in short, it is liveliness. Goodness is harmony, which is the result of emotions properly expressed. One can express life's possibilities through self-perfection or perfection of all things in the universe. *The Golden Mean* statement that "everything grows when heaven and earth are aligned" is consistent with the Confucian "one can promote Dao through one's own actions"; this is the true meaning of "participating in perfecting life with everything in the universe." By defining nature as benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, and wisdom and placing them inside the mind, Mencius demotes emotions and destroys their legitimacy.⁶³ Emotions no longer figure in the process of knowing one's nature. Mencius stated, "An honorable man is better

60 盡其心者，知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。存其心，養其性，所以事天也。殀壽不貳，修身以俟之，所以立命也 (*Mencius*, book VII, part A, 1).

61 知覺從耳目之欲上去，便是人心；知覺從義理上去，便是道心。人心則危而易陷，道心則微而難著 (Li, *Zhu Xi's Sayings*, vol. 78).

62 *Guodian Chu Slips* states that nature is the *qi* of happiness, anger, sadness, and joy; this is consistent with *The Golden Mean*.

63 Mou Zongsan argues that Mencius uses the moral mind to cover Confucian benevolence, and this is true. But he also thinks that dynamism implies existence, and this is an oversight. Zhu Xi's static theory of rationality is a perfunctory response to Mencian doctrine of the Goodness of Human Nature (Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Xinti yu xingti* 心體與性體 [*Mind and Nature*] [Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1999], 21, 23).

than others because he keeps his mind on benevolence and courtesy,"⁶⁴ and again, "The best way to cultivate the mind is to avoid desires."⁶⁵ Serving the universe and knowing one's destiny is the purpose of cultivation. In a static universe, benevolence transforms from a creative force and goal into a moral principle. If we understand "awaiting one's destiny" as waiting for one's opportunity and linking it with "benevolent administration" at the theoretical level, are we not separating essence from function if we insist that Mencian benevolence is not static?⁶⁶ If we have to make a comparison, the Mencian thoughts we have discussed here are comparable to the idea of "cultivating oneself with all one's effort" [*xiu ji yi jing* 修己以敬].⁶⁷

If cultivation itself becomes the goal, living harmoniously with neighbors and the world becomes insignificant, and sagacity and wise administration are reduced to topics of psychology.

Conclusion

The Sages section of *Zhu Xi's Unrestricted Thoughts* states, "Confucius leaves no trace, Yan Hui a little, Mencius much."⁶⁸ This is a comment more on the theoretical style than on personality, and the reason for this statement is the difference in era and the discourse of the era. Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 [1619-1692] says, "Yao, Shun, and Yu set laws, and Confucius expounds Dao."⁶⁹ Confucius' main task was to establish a foundation for the system of rites and

64 君子所以異於人者，以其存心也。君子以仁存心，以禮存心 (*Mencius*, book IV, part B, 28).

65 養心莫善於寡欲 (*Mencius*, book VII, part B, 35).

66 Hu Hong criticizes Zhu Xi for "essence without function." On some level, Mou Zongsan's controversial theory of humbling oneself also divides essence from function.

67 Mencius may have found a soulmate in Zhu Xi, who says in *Four Books Annotated*, "Confucius has amply explained practice for humility." For Zhu, scholars need to do two things: to be humble and to go where reason takes them. But according to the Japanese *Proofreading the Seven Classic Texts*, "the word for humility has the word for 'person' underneath in the old texts." If this is the case, then Zhu's theories will be difficult to hold up, and it is more obvious that the conversation has cultivation of the self as goal and emphasis on empirical proof, practice, and effect.

68 Zhu Xi and Lv Zuqian 呂祖謙, ed., *Zhuzi jinsi lu* 朱子近思錄 [*Zhu Xi's Unrestricted Thoughts*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 2000), 127.

69 Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, "Dutong jianlun 讀通鑑論," in *Du yidian fajia zhuzuo* 讀一點法家著作 [*Legalist Writings*] (Shanghai: Fudan University Political Declaration Group, 1974), 269.

music, and he begins by the thoughts of the Three Kings. Mencius' main task was to "set the minds straight, eradicate erroneous thoughts, move away from biased behavior, and let go of extravagant expressions," and he begins by providing answers to the problems at hand. Confucius adopted the principles of the Zhou kings Wen and Wu and expounded traditional thoughts without updating them; his words and actions were without fanfare and he did not insist. But for Mencius, whose solutions for practical problems are roundly criticized as impractical, what choice does he have except to create a philosophical and theoretical universe?

Confucian benevolence is the basis of Confucianism, the center of concentric circles; its connection with later Confucianists is manifested by the common understanding that essence can be glimpsed through function. This understanding indicates that it is possible to use phenomenology to study Confucianism; that is, through the reversible property of phenomenology we can revert the analysis of current problems to an understanding of the reasons why these problems appear in the first place.⁷⁰ It is also a basic method for explaining ancient sages' texts and the only way to inherit our traditions and to enrich our culture by responding to practical questions.

Theoretically speaking, both Confucius and Mencius regard the universe as basic. One uses it to affirm the essence of life and define benevolence by feelings while the other uses it to affirm a philosophical essence and explain benevolence by human nature. Explaining benevolence by human nature is a metaphysical discourse on morality and philosophy while defining benevolence by feelings is a religious discourse on life. If we agree that there are big differences between the philosophy of life and the political philosophy emanating from the beliefs that the mind controls human nature and emotions, that human nature keeps emotions in check, that human nature is what is given us at birth, and that rites and music satisfy our desires and needs; if we agree that distinguishing these differences has not only theoretical significance for resurrecting Confucianism but also practical significance for our lives, then we must make an earnest effort to study the difference between Confucius and Mencius.⁷¹ Modernity is not only about values but also involves

70 Heidegger says that all explanations of reality must return to *agere, agens, energiein*, and *ergazesthai* (Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Ding Yun 丁耘 [Shanghai: Shanghai Publisher of Translations, 2008], 131).

71 Mou Zongsan's Three Song-Ming Schools of Philosophy regards Hu Hong and Liu Zongzhou as orthodox and Zhu Xi as inconsistent. But it seems that Mou does not recognize that the same thing can be said about Confucius and Mencius. A possible reason is that Mou thinks highly of metaphysical discourse. See Mou, *Mind and Nature*.

social structure and methods for thinking and behaving. This means that we must make adjustments in our traditions and recreate organic relations for them, as Martin Luther did for Christianity. Confucianism will become more flexible and capable of broader interpretations as a result.

Let us return to Confucius.

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