

THE TAO OF CONFUCIAN VIRTUE ETHICS

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THE TAO OF CONFUCIAN VIRTUE ETHICS

Introduction

In recent years we have seen a renaissance of virtue as an important theme in both moral philosophy and Christian ethics.¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, in his now classic *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology*,² argues that the language of morality is in a "state of grave disorder"³ in large part because we have lost touch with the moral tradition which gave unity to a conceptual scheme which now lies in fragmented disarray. MacIntyre's central analytic insight is that all moral traditions are context- or tradition-bound, and thus the primary intelligibility of these ethical systems will lie principally within the particular community out of which they have arisen, and in which they have historically played a formative role.⁴ Following up on MacIntyre's work, a number of moral philosophers and Christian ethicists have recently sought to retrieve the Western heritage of an ethics of virtue through a creative reinterpretation of the work of past masters such as Aristotle and Aquinas. This line of research has already begun to bear fruit, and one of the most prolific proponents of a Christian ethics of virtue, Stanley Hauerwas, succinctly states the central thesis of such an approach as follows:

An ethic of virtue centers on the claim that an agent's being is prior to doing. Not that what we do is unimportant or even secondary, but rather that what one does or does not do is dependent on possessing a "self" sufficient to take personal responsibility for one's action.⁵

Though the term "virtue" has an undeniably rich tradition in ethics, yet, the notion of an "ethics of virtue" has not been widely used in most modern Western moral discourse. According to sociologist John Coleman, S.J., virtue is a neglected moral category in contemporary ethics because

the presumptions for a theory of virtue (substantive community, a teleological understanding of human life, narrative unity which makes sense of life as a whole, tradition) are not congenial either to the dominant ideological foundations of post-modern society or advanced industrial institutions.⁶

If Coleman's analysis of the "uncongenial presumptions" of a virtue theory is added to MacIntyre's central insight regarding the emphasis on the tradition dependence of any community's coherent ethical discourse, then perhaps it would be enlightening to investigate how a system of an ethics of virtue has in fact functioned historically in a different tradition. However, immediately does the so-called problem of "translatability" of ethical discourse from one tradition into another raise its intimidating head. MacIntyre himself seems to be less than sanguine about the prospects for any such project, but on this point a number of contemporary philosophers are not in complete agreement with him.⁷ MacIntyre does raise some important concerns about an overly facile translation of fundamental concepts of an ethical tradition, but I believe that if proper caution is exercised it would be possible at least to describe and explain the key moral terms used in one system to someone formed in another tradition, even if it might be impossible to achieve an exact and unequivocal translation for each of these terms. In fact, such an undertaking of cross-cultural moral dialogue may help clarify and/or expose philosophical difficulties in one's own tradition, while at the same time broadening one's outlook and one's understanding of a different tradition.⁸

The tradition which I propose to investigate is a non-Western one, specifically that of Confucian philosophy. Its historical importance hardly needs to be argued, since it has enjoyed a prominent role for millennia in China, Korea, Japan, and elsewhere. Moreover, the Confucian tradition is still a living one which not only continues to enrich these Oriental societies, but whose insights may well complement our Western understanding of the human person, the moral community, and the ethical life as understood in reference to virtue.⁹

An ethics of virtue has been indisputably the predominant tradition in Confucian society, and though the Occident may regard the Orient as inscrutable at times, clearly no one has ever credibly suggested that the latter is in a state of moral decay or chaos. Moreover, I would suggest that the supposed Oriental "inscrutability" arises from a failure to grasp and appreciate the grounding of the different Confucian virtues in a community-based matrix of close interrelationships. My thesis is that what has allowed the Confucian system to function so well over the centuries is precisely this comprehension of the virtues not as independent habits, but as closely related facets of an integrating moral vision of human life which is conceived simultaneously and inseparably in both its individual and communal dimensions.

To investigate this thesis requires careful attention to Confucian tradition, and yet, clearly such a rich and vast heritage would be impossible even to summarize in the space of a brief article. Therefore, I will treat just one central aspect, namely the nature of the moral vision of the Confucian "Superior Person," (ch n-tzu in Chinese) in the context of the moral community, in order to indicate at least in general the outline of a historically proven version of an ethics of virtue.¹⁰ Consideration of how this Confucian ethics of virtue has successfully functioned might then in turn supplement philosophical reflection on the Western heritage which is being underscored by MacIntyre, Hauerwas and others, as well as to suggest another approach to resolve the ongoing debate between those who espouse an ethics of virtue and against those others who critique such an approach as being insufficiently normative and practically unworkable.

Ch n-tzu (The Superior Person)

The notion of the ch n-tzu, or Superior Person, is one of the most fundamental concepts in Confucian moral philosophy. The original meaning of this word in ancient Chinese usage denoted a man of aristocratic birth.¹¹ Such a person was a ch n-tzu by virtue of his birth; no one not so born could ever aspire to become a ch n-tzu, and moreover, no ch n-tzu could ever lose this status, "no matter how vile his conduct might be."¹² One of Confucius' truly original contributions was to transform completely both the meaning and usage of this term. Prior to Confucius the notion of the ch n-tzu had been restricted to the aristocratic class, and the rest of the population were termed hsiao-jen, literally, "the small man/men."¹³ As Joseph Shih, S.J. notes, "the conditions of his birth determined a man's value. Until the time of Confucius this mentality was re-enforced by objective reality and was sanctioned by religious tradition."¹⁴

But Confucius succeeded in taking over the concept of the ch n-tzu without limiting it merely to the well-born. The whole point of Confucius' teaching was that anyone might become a ch n-tzu or Superior Person, and thus the requisites for being called a ch n-tzu were found only in that person's conduct and not in his parentage. In fact, a man of aristocratic birth who behaved in a mean or small-spirited manner forfeited his claim to be called a ch n-tzu in Confucius' opinion. Therefore, even an aristocrat was capable of being labelled a hsiao-jen or "small-spirited person." In the same way, the non-aristocrats also were liberated, at least in theory, from absolute ties to birth and economics, and now the term could be applied to anyone who refused to follow the path of moral self-cultivation.¹⁵

Traditionally, studies on Confucianism have tended to concentrate on the universal nature of the Superior Person, in an individualistic sense, while neglecting to ground this person in a particular moral community. This tendency must be corrected if we are to appreciate the vital meaning of Confucius' thought for modern times as well as to elaborate the practical meaning for the Confucian ethics of virtue. Confucius stressed constantly that learning to be a chün-tzu was both an on-going and life-long process and obviously, then, this learning process must take place within one's particular moral community. In the Confucian system of virtue ethics the chün-tzu functions morally as what Alasdair MacIntyre terms a "character." Such people are, so to speak,

the moral representatives of their culture and they are so because of the way in which moral and metaphysical ideas and theories assume through them an embodied existence in the social world. Characters are the masks worn by moral philosophers.¹⁶

For the chün-tzu, functioning as the "character" within the moral community involves above all else commitment to the process of moral self-cultivation, in perfecting oneself in the other Confucian virtues, especially jen and li. In this context it is important to note that this process of moral refinement is always worked out in the practical order within the matrix of the moral community as expressed in the Five Relationships and Three Bonds. Thus, in order to appreciate the sweep of the moral vision of the Confucian Superior Person, some brief consideration must be given to the particular understanding of the reciprocal nature of the Confucian moral community, as well as attention to the rudimentary virtues of jen (benevolence) and li (propriety).

The Fiduciary Community of the Five Relations

In any Confucian society it is the set of human relationships which furnishes the basis of the moral community. Traditionally these have been organized hierarchically into five paradigmatic

pairs, namely, 1) Ruler and Ministers; 2) Father and Son; 3) Husband and Wife; 4) Elder and Younger (often portrayed as between elder and younger brother); and 5) Friend and Friend. These Five Relationships were not merely an attempt at early sociological description, but rather they provide the interpretive key to the whole moral life of the Confucian human community. One particular principal moral virtue is emphasized with each one of the individual relationships. Thus, between the king and his ministers there is to be righteousness; between father and son, intimacy; between husband and wife, distinction (reciprocity) of duties; between elder and younger, respect based on propriety; and between two friends, fidelity. One important aspect about the moral dimension of each of the Five Relationships is that not just reason, but also the heart, the affective element, is explicitly involved in guiding both agents within these relational diads.

Within the Five Relationships, three are further highlighted as being the most important. These are called the Three Bonds and represent the relationships between King and Minister, Father and Son, and Husband and Wife. If a society is knit together by these Three Bonds and follows the moral path outlined by the Five Relationships then that society will be truly happy, prosperous and just, with its individual citizens morally upright. One of the foremost contemporary Confucian scholars, Tu Wei-ming, uses the term "fiduciary community" to describe the ideal expressed by the Five Relationships.¹⁷ The understanding of society as a fiduciary community could be contrasted with a view of society as an adversarial system. Certainly the fundamental import of the Confucian Five Relationships is that there can be no split between self and society, since the very identity of each individual human person is conceived essentially in terms of his or her network of relationships. Thus, I am my father's son, my sibling's older brother, and so on. It is through these various relationships that one comes to know who one is.¹⁸

Seen in the context of the fiduciary community, the basic virtue of filial piety, or hsiao, cultivates not only respect and care for one's own parents, but a wider social consciousness as well.

Thus, as Tu Wei-ming notes:

A filial son is likely to be watchful over his personal conduct, conscientious about family affairs, responsive to social obligations and, as a result, qualified for political assignments. It is therefore the belief of many Confucians that filial sons often turn out to be loyal ministers. Consequently they value filiality as an important instrument for fostering political leadership.¹⁹

In the Analects this deeper meaning of filial piety is expressed in the following exchange between Confucius and Tsze-y :

Tsze-y asked what filial piety was. The Master said, 'The filial piety of now-a-days means the support of one's parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something in the way of support;--without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?' [2:7]²⁰

Thus, what makes hsiao true filial piety is not just the physical care of one's parents, but the inner attitude--the moral conviction embodied by this virtue--which in turn functions practically in the care, concern, and sensitivity for this basic bond of the community.

In a similar way, on the governmental level, Confucian society would function best in the relationship of mutual trust embodied in the First Relationship of righteousness or justice (i),²¹ between the sovereign and the ministers. Thus, in the Confucian understanding, the ideal government is not a system of mutual checks and balances designed to insure democratic protection of the individuals' rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but rather a system of mutual trust and aid designed to foster a true community dedicated to a common moral purpose of justice and righteousness.

While it is true that hsiao is important as a formative virtue for both the ruler and his ministers, in their relationship with each other the virtues of jen and li play a more direct role in assuring that the i of true justice and righteousness is embodied in the government. Of all the Confucian virtues, jen and li are perhaps the most often cited, and the most difficult to translate into Western philosophical language. Therefore, some special explication of these two concepts is in order.

Jen (Benevolence)

Jen was another concept which Confucius borrowed from the ancient Chinese philosophical tradition.²² However, it is very difficult to describe this philosophical term adequately, and therefore to the Western mind jen seems to remain one of those truly "inscrutable" concepts of the Oriental world.²³ Because jen defies any precise translation it is customarily merely transliterated from the Chinese pronunciation of the original ideogram.

The etymology of the ideogram is still debated among sinologists;²⁴ however, the character jen itself is a composite of the radical for the human person and the number two.²⁵ Arthur Waley posits that originally jen meant "freemen, men of the tribe, as opposed to min, 'subjects,' 'the common people,'" and only later came to signify 'good' in this sense, which according to Waley was another way of saying 'having the qualities of one's tribe': "For no more sweeping form of praise can be given by the men of a tribe than to say that someone is a 'true member' of that tribe."²⁶

While the original meaning of jen is important for understanding ancient Chinese philosophy, Confucius' own redaction of this term concerns us more here. Wing-tsit Chan maintains that though in a few instances Confucius uses jen to denote a particular virtue such as

benevolence, for the most part Confucius transforms jen into a general virtue. For Confucius "the man of jen is the perfect man. He is the true ch' n-tzu."²⁷

Several other authors writing about Confucian philosophy have proposed various definitions and descriptions of jen and a brief consideration of some of these might serve as the best initial introduction to this elusive concept. 'Humanity' or 'human-ness,' 'humanitarianism,' 'goodness,' 'virtue,' 'benevolence,' or 'love,' have all been used often to translate this term.²⁸ Liou, Kia-Hway says that jen is "the human ideal within its practical possibilities."²⁹ However, Liou cautions against the Occidental temptation³⁰ of trying to specify the precise meaning of jen, since this would tend to rob the concept of its evocative power.

A fruitful approach to the discovery of the meaning of jen is to look for its manifestations within various human relationships. Jen expresses itself as a universal love for humankind, yet it is a love which is definitely not equal towards all. Hierarchy in relationships is fundamental to the Confucian mentality, and thus jen is perhaps seen best in the second of the Confucian Five Relationships, i.e, the relationship between father and son. However, jen is not restricted to the family group, but is present as well in the relationships of duty and service to one's nation and to society.

Tu Wei-ming suggests that the best way to come to an understanding of jen is to consider it first of all as "the virtue of the highest order in the value system of Confucianism. In other words, jen gives 'meaning' to all the other ethical norms that perform integrative functions in a Confucian society."³¹

In terms of one's personal moral cultivation jen can be called the highest level of human achievement which functions, again following Tu Wei-ming, as a 'principle of inwardness': "Jen

is not a quality acquired from outside; it is not a product of biological, social or political forces. ... Jen in this sense is basically linked with the self-reviving, self-perfecting, and self-fulfilling process of an individual."³²

However, since this virtue also gives meaning to all the other ethical norms, there are various levels of meaning within jen itself. To understand this function of jen better it must be seen especially in its relation to one other principal Confucian virtue, namely li.

Li (Propriety)

The great importance of li for the ancient Chinese is attested to by the inclusion of the Li Chi or Book of Rites in the canon of Chinese Classics. Though faced once again with the difficult task of finding a precise translation for this ideogram, we must content ourselves with a somewhat inadequate expression.³³ The original ideogram itself is rather complex, requiring eighteen strokes to write, and one dictionary gives the following translations: propriety, good manners, politeness, ceremony, worship, the external exemplification of eternal principles, the feeling of respect and reverence.³⁴ H. G. Creel states that the original meaning for li was 'sacrifice' and that only later was its meaning expanded to include "the ritual used in sacrifice and then to cover every sort of ceremony and the 'courtesy' that characterized the conduct of those who made up a ruler's court."³⁵

Confucius was very respectful of li and its proper place in Chinese society, but he could never be termed merely a fastidious legalist or someone who advocated ritual for ritual's sake. The relation of jen to li was foundational in Confucius' philosophy, as any number of passages of the Analects attest, and here we can cite just one such occurrence: "The Master [Confucius] said, 'If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity [jen], what has he to do with the rites of propriety

[li]? If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with music?' [Analects, 3:3]." Tu Wei-ming states that the function of li is to act as the "externalization of jen in a specific social context. No matter how abstract it appears, jen almost by definition requires concrete manifestation. A Confucian personality does not speculate on the metaphysical connotations of jen for their own sake."³⁶

Like jen, the correct cultivation and practice of li has a strong community or social dimension. Jen is the principle of inwardness, but this is not an inwardness which seeks perfect inner harmony by eliminating all involvement in the world. Rather the point of li is to actualize jen so that the person can be of use to society in the real world. The moral significance attached to the propriety embodied in li is a distinctive mark of Confucian ethics, and once again highlights the communal grounding of the understanding of the ethics of virtue.

The strong social aspect of jen, lived out through exercise of li, can be demonstrated in a pair of conversations between Confucius and two of his disciples in Book 12 of the Analects: "Yen Y an asked about perfect virtue [jen]. The Master said, 'To subdue one's self and return to propriety [li] is perfect virtue. If a man can for one day subdue himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will ascribe perfect virtue to him. ...Chung-kung asked about perfect virtue. 'It is,³⁷ when you go abroad, to behave to every one as if you were receiving a great guest; to employ the people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice; not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself; to have no murmuring against you in the country, and none in the family" [Analects 12:1-2]."

One commentator, Leonard Shihlien Hs , summarizes the lesson of these two exchanges by calling li the "socializing factor in moral discipline."³⁸ Tu Wei-ming uses the expression of having a creative tension between jen and li to illustrate this dynamic interdependence.³⁹ However,

mere observance of the proper ritual behavior will not by itself guarantee the cultivation of this 'perfect virtue' called jen. Along with following the demands of li one must do so with a proper attitude or intention of sincerity. This connection between the proper behavior commanded by li and the internal attitude necessary to fulfill the demands of propriety is summarized well by Liou, Kia-Hway: "The Confucian ideal of authentic morality must be the synthesis between traditional ritual and true feeling. Thus, according to Confucius, there is no authentic ritual without true feeling which animates this rite; in the same way, there is no authentic morality without a rite which gives it discipline and orientation. This Confucian synthesis is above all a concrete synthesis in which the principle resides in the moral feeling springing from the depths of a person's being."⁴⁰

Part of Confucius' genius as a moral philosopher was that he was able to take the traditional Chinese rites and ritual behavior and revivify them by binding them to the realities of everyday life, but always in the context of his wider understanding of moral virtue and its cultivation. It is this Confucian vision which helps us to see then the intimate inter-relation between jen and li. The overall moral vision which guides the Confucian chün-tzu, or Superior Person, in the application and integration of the Five Relationships, as well as individual virtues like jen and li, is called the tao.

Tao (The Way)

Strictly speaking the ideogram tao means a path or way. Thus, as a principle, tao may appear deceptively simple at first glance.⁴¹ The ideogram has two levels of basic meaning: the concrete, such as 'road' or 'path', and the philosophical, such as 'principle', or 'truth'. However, the 'Way' seems to be as good a translation as any in English, since it conveys both levels of meaning at the

same time.⁴² Thus, as a moral concept tao refers to the governing vision which guides one along the path of life. In China, philosophy was never considered a "science," as it has been in the West, but rather an art. However, it was an art that was meant to take an entire lifetime to master. For Confucius philosophy was a means by which one learned to become human. The Confucian understanding of the human person is not as a biological or ontological entity, but rather as a process in which each individual strives to actualize the potential to become a truly human person. In this light, jen is the fundamental virtue, but the understanding of virtue itself is related to following the tao of humankind. In fact, Tu Wei-ming states that tao is the root metaphor of the Analects.⁴³ Tu Wei-ming goes on to say that in Confucian philosophy the Way is "an unceasing process of self-transformation as a communal act. It is specified as a human way, a way of life."⁴⁴

For Confucius the tao was that which should always concern the Superior Person, as the following passage illustrates: "The Master said, 'The object of the superior man [ch n-tzu] is truth [tao]. Food is not his object. There is ploughing;--even in that there is sometimes want. So with learning;--emolument may be found in it. The superior man is anxious lest he should not get truth [tao]; he is not anxious lest poverty should come upon him" [Analects 15:31]. The tao is not an impossible ideal, as Confucius indicates in his praise of one of his favorite disciples, Yen Y an: "Alas! I saw his constant advance. I never saw him stop in his progress" [Analects 9:20].

Paul K.K. Tong distinguishes three aspects of tao which relate to the human person in his life: First, tao can be seen as an external and trans-subjective norm which is realized in the virtue of li; second, tao as it relates to the person himself consists in the virtue of jen, which Tong says is a reverential and humanizing love; and third tao is interiorized in the person through the practice of the virtue of ch'eng, which, though usually translated as sincerity, Tong translates as fidelity.⁴⁵

In the centuries after Confucius' death the notion of tao became central to the religious philosophy called taoism, and there was much discussion about the properties and nature of tao among the Neo-Confucianists. However, Confucius himself never gave any systematic treatment of tao, and it would be misleading to suggest that tao furnished a metaphysical basis for the Master's philosophy. Quite simply Confucius did not discourse in such terms, and for him the tao was obvious--it was the Way: nothing more, nothing less. However, since it was the Way, men must always seek to walk within the confines of this path. One who did not practice virtue then was simply one who was not on the Way, nor aspiring to be a ch' n-tzu. The tao is not a path external to the human person, but is realized in the fulfillment of one's humanity. The Way is not some means followed to an end, nor, in the words of Tu Wei-ming, does it "provide an ideal norm or a set of directives to be complied with. It functions as a governing perspective and a point of orientation."⁴⁶

Though Confucius never presented a treatise on the nature of the tao, it is nevertheless clear from his references to it that the Way could not be separated from the will of Heaven, so some few remarks on this final concept are in order in our overview of the basic Confucian moral terms.

T'ien-Ming (The Mandate of Heaven)

The doctrine of the t'ien-ming was a concept used by the first rulers of the Chou dynasty to justify their overthrow of the Shang dynasty. This political turmoil occurred a few centuries before Confucius was born, but the idea of the t'ien-ming figures prominently in Confucian thought.⁴⁷ Since Confucius consistently averred that he was merely a transmitter of the ancient traditions, it is worthwhile to delve into this particular concept a bit more deeply.⁴⁸

The classic doctrine of the t'ien-ming is given in a Chou proclamation made to the conquered Shang people, which is recorded in the Shu Ching (the Book of History). The king's representative is quoted as saying, "God⁴⁹ sent down correction on Hea [or Hsia, the dynasty prior to Shang], but the sovereign only increased his luxury and sloth, and would not speak kindly to the people. He proved himself on the contrary dissolute and dark and would not yield for a single day to the guiding of God--this is what you have heard. ...Heaven on this sought a true lord for the people, and made its distinguishing and favouring decree light on T'ang the Successful [Shang dynasty], who punished and destroyed the sovereign of Hea."⁵⁰

This quotation provides a glimpse of the idea of the Mandate of Heaven which has played such an important part in traditional Chinese political philosophy. In the eyes of Heaven the principal requisite for receiving the Mandate is that the ruler respect and treat the people well. As H. G. Creel notes, the importance of the concept of the Mandate of Heaven in the history of Chinese political life "was to establish, in theory, the principle that the rulers existed for the sake of the people, rather than the reverse, and they held their powers only in trust, as a kind of stewardship, subject to revocation if they did not use them well."⁵¹

Inherent to the notion of t'ien-ming is the idea of Heaven itself. On this subject Confucius did not give a great deal of instruction. One of the most oft-cited passages in the Analects has led not a few commentators over the years to maintain that Confucius himself was probably agnostic: "The subjects on which the Master did not talk, were--extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder and spiritual beings" [Analects 7:20]. However, the thesis that Confucius was either atheistic or agnostic simply does not stand up to a careful inspection of the works attributed to him. The citation above probably refers only to a reluctance to engage in discussion of superstition since

the ideogram for 'spiritual beings' could also be rendered as 'spirits' in the sense of goblins and demons. Wing-tsit Chan tenders a more reasonable presentation of Confucius' probable views on Heaven: "the Confucian transition from religious Fatalism to humanistic Waiting for Heaven's Mandate was the reason Confucius seldom talked about the Way of Heaven. He still looked to Heaven with great reverence, for to him, the Way of Heaven was the foundation of rites, and governmental measures were the application of those rites. But he did not talk much about the Way of Heaven, because there was always an element of uncertainty in its operation and because he chose to lay increasing emphasis on human affairs. In short, the major premise of Confucian ethics was still the Way of Heaven, but there was a growing attention to man."⁵²

Support for Chan's views can be marshalled from certain exchanges between Confucius and his disciples as recorded in the Analects. One of the most convincing passages is the following: "The Master said, 'I would prefer not speaking.' Tze-king said, 'If you, Master, do not speak, what shall we, your disciples have to record?' The Master said, 'Does Heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced, but does Heaven say anything?'" [Analects 17:19]. In this selection Confucius is arguing that one's actions are more important than one's words, and the proof he offers for this assertion is that this approach corresponds to the way Heaven operates in the world.

Another commentator, Cheng Yang En, suggests three major aspects of the ethico-theological significance of Confucius' use of the t'ien-ming. First, by employing the concept of the t'ien-ming Confucius reaffirms the religious tradition of ancient China. Second, the idea of the Mandate of Heaven signifies a providential view of history: "History is at the mercy of Tien, it unfolds under the righteous and impartial judgement of Tien Ming." The third, and final, aspect

points to two important political implications for the human community which are to be discovered in the t'ien-ming: "First of all, it declares that people were, are and always will be the subject of history. A dynasty rises or falls according to its attitude toward the masses. To discern God's will is to listen to the will of the people. ... and secondly, in revealing and maintaining the absolute righteousness of the universe, Tien Ming includes the idea of 'natural law'."⁵³

The importance for the ruler to obey the Mandate of Heaven is obvious, but the Confucian redaction of the Chou dynasty doctrine of the t'ien-ming stresses instead the conformity of the individual person, the ch n-tzu, to the Mandate of Heaven, in order to exercise a moral political conscience in all human affairs. William Theodore de Bary captures this dynamic well when he maintains that, broadly conceived, the tien-ming represents and functions as the "compelling voice of conscience and ideal standard" which, in turn, serve "as the ultimate criterion and court of judgment in assessing human affairs."⁵⁴ The tien-ming provides a cosmic dimension to the individual's own moral understanding, and according to de Bary, furnishes the human person with the capacity for self-transcendence. The "political" aspect or aim for the individual moral cultivation of the ch n-tzu is well-known, and thus in this social project of the moral transformation of the human community, "Heaven's imperative in the minds of men serves as the fulcrum. So it is too with the stance of the noble man [ch n-tzu], standing on the same moral ground at court, hoping to transform the ruler."⁵⁵ Thus, the concept of the Mandate of Heaven functions both as an interpretative key for reading the "signs of the times" and the ultimate standard for judgment according to Confucian ethics. In other words, man is not the measure of all things. The tao is a human path to be sure, but this path is always trod with the implicit religious belief in, and interior understanding of, ethics as ultimately the way of Heaven (even though Chinese

philosophy never expressed tien in the anthropomorphic terms common to Western language about God).

Evaluation of a Confucian Ethics of Virtue

Though much more could be said to flesh out these basic concepts, we have now at least a sketch sufficient for outlining, by way of conclusion, a brief evaluation of the Confucian ethics of virtue as a whole. It is important to note from the outset a fundamental difference between the Confucian ethics of virtue and most current Western elaborations of this term. While both traditions obviously focus on the nature of the individual moral agent--what Hauerwas meant by his assertion that being is prior to doing--in the Confucian ethics of virtue there is the inseparable dimension of the moral community in which the individual exists. Only in relation to his social identity does the individual in turn discover and develop the moral aspects of his life. Greater emphasis on the formation of character (as contrasted with a preoccupation with the evaluation of individual actions) is common to both conceptions. However, in the Confucian system this moral formation is never conceived of in terms of some individualistic ideal of perfection. Here the general Confucian approach to virtue ethics would mitigate against any excessive individualism, which has been a charge often levelled against virtue ethics. Instead, in Confucian moral philosophy the accent falls on the collaboration of the individual in a harmonic unfolding of the entire moral universe. This cosmic dimension of the universe is expressed especially through the Five Relationships and the tao which is always understood as a path or moral vision in accord with the designs of Heaven (t'ien-ming).

Therefore, it is this "moral matrix," represented by the Five Relationships, tao and t'ien-ming, which both grounds and integrates each of the specific Confucian virtues such as jen (benevolence), li (propriety), or hsiao (filial piety). The communal basis of this moral matrix is the key insight of the Confucian system: it is not enough to have virtues as individual moral ideals; we need to organize these ideals into a coherent vision, not just for the individual moral agent, but also as an understanding for the whole moral community as well. The community dimension therefore is often the "missing element" or weak link in contemporary Western conceptions of the ethics of virtue.

Seen in the light of the whole community, the ch'ün-tzu then is not some sort of exceptional moral hero who lives on a lofty plane far above the common masses, but rather the Superior Person serves as a paradigm, model or guiding ideal of someone who dedicates himself to the integration of moral wisdom in both his own life as well as in the community. The moral vision, or tao of the ch'ün-tzu, likewise is not a private quest, but a most public search for the comprehension of the demands of social ethics. Properly speaking, in the Confucian system all ethics are always social ethics; even the private cultivation of one's inner harmony is directed ultimately at the unfolding of external social harmony.⁵⁶

The Confucian virtues are not employed as criteria or standards in the sense of moral norms to judge an individual's actions; rather, they are the means by which one first deciphers the significance of this or that aspect of his life, and then acts or responds in the appropriate manner. Thus, in the light of the Five Relationships and a particular virtue such as li or hsiao, I first ask myself what is the proper thing to be done in relationship to my moral identity as a son, a father, elder or younger, a public official, and so on. Coupled with this moral questioning is the

concomitant life-long practice of the virtues which will then enable me to behave consistently in an ethically correct, or human, manner. However, the point to be underscored is that the concrete meanings of the virtues are always discovered within this moral matrix of the life of the community; there is no ideal fulfillment of jen, li or hsiao which can be abstracted from the whole web of relationships which ground both the understanding and application of these individual virtues.

The Confucian ethics of virtue, then, implies a corresponding notion of a community of character in which both the individual and the community as a whole integrate their ethical life of virtue according to the fundamental vision expressed by the tao of the ch' n-tzu. Such an ethics of virtue could help correct an excessive individualism--which has often been a critique levelled by Oriental philosophers against most Occidental ethical theories. Moreover, an ethics of virtue militates against any moral minimalism; the question is not "What must I do?" or "How far can we go?" but "How can I best realize the ideal of being a filial child, a dutiful parent, a just administrator?" and so on.

The Confucian ethics of virtue is also one which has both a long tradition and strong roots still in the cultural ethos of the Orient. To be sure, this system has its difficulties and limitations. It is difficult to measure, quantify and codify any ethics of virtues. In value conflict situations or limit cases, the moral calculation according to virtues seems to be somewhat ambiguous or deficient. Clearly, the concepts of a community of character and an ethics of virtue do not obviate the need for critical reflection on the formulation and application of moral norms. Nevertheless, these notions of virtue ethics seek to flesh out at least a part of moral philosophy which perhaps has had only a skeletal outline for far too long.⁵⁷ Moreover, moral norms alone cannot provide for the total formation of moral character. Something else is required to complement this process of moral

development, and this is where the notion of moral consciousness or vision comes into play. In other words, the development of a coherent moral vision refers both to what we see and to the way we see. Following this moral (in)sight into our reality, then, the ethics of virtue helps train our response. Thus, both moral vision and ethics of virtue involve the creative use of imagination and practical versatility in our concrete moral actions, decisions, and commitments.

Confucius' particular genius was to adapt the ancient Chinese rites and philosophy to his own age, and, as the Confucian system evolved, the web of the five basic social relationships held the moral ideals of the virtues such as jen and li in a coherent whole. Over the past twenty-five centuries Confucianism has proved to be both durable and adaptable. It is my contention that this same genius which has inspired so many creative thinkers in the past may continue to aid Oriental cultures in their efforts to confront the challenges of the post-modern world, and may also throw some light on the "grave disorder" of our own moral landscape which so often seems especially inscrutable.

Resum

In recent Western moral philosophy various theories of an "ethics of virtue" have stimulated both interest and debate. Meanwhile, in Confucian societies an ethics of virtue has been the predominant system for millennia. This article investigates the key aspects of the Confucian system, namely the notions of the ch'ün-tzu (Superior Person), the Five Relationships of society, the particular Confucian virtues of jen (benevolence) and li (propriety), the moral vision of the tao (Way), and the understanding of the t'ien-ming (Mandate of Heaven). The thesis of the article is that the moral matrix provided by the web of social relationships is what allows the Confucian ethics of virtue to function so well. Greater attention to this communal grounding of an ethics of virtue may help clarify and/or expose some of the philosophical difficulties in the current debate on ethics of virtue vs. ethics of duty, as well as broaden our outlook and understanding of a different ethical tradition.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a good selection of some recent articles on the theme of virtues see Concilium 191 (1987), "Changing Values and Virtues." In this same issue Jean-Claude Wolf presents a fine list of recent Western literature on the virtues, "A Bibliography on the Virtues," pp. 131-134.
2. Interest in this book, if not the topic at large, is amply testified by the fact of a second edition in English (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 1984), plus translations in several other languages: in German as Der Verlust der Tugend. Zur moralischen Krise der Moderne, Theorie und Gesellschaft, 5, (Frankfurt-am-Main: Campus Verlag, 1987); in Italian as Dopo la virtù: Saggio di teoria morale, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988); and in Spanish as Tras la virtud, Crítica Filosofía, (Barcelona: Ed. Crítica, 1987).
3. MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 2.
4. For a good overview of the basic concepts treated in MacIntyre's work, see the recent article of Terrence Kennedy, C.Ss.R., "The Intelligibility of Moral Tradition in the Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre." Studia Moralia 29 (1991): 305-321.
5. Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic, (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 113. Almost any work of Hauerwas bears ample witness to this theme, such as his Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975, 1985), or Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection, (Notre Dame: Fides Press, 1974). A more recent work which focuses on a retrieval of the tradition of St. Thomas is Jean Porter's The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Virtue, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990).
6. John Coleman, S.J., "Values and Virtues in Advanced Modern Societies," Concilium 191 (1987): 3.
7. MacIntyre expresses his reservations most clearly in his Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). Perhaps most notable among those who oppose

MacIntyre's views on this point is Jeffrey Stout, especially in the latter's Ethics After Babel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988). Recently, another voice has argued for the possibility of a middle position between MacIntyre and Stout. See Stephen E. Fowl's article, "Could Horace Talk with the Hebrews? Translatability and Moral Disagreement in MacIntyre and Stout," Journal of Religious Ethics 19 (1991): 1-20. Peter Mehl has also questioned MacIntyre's "tradition-independent" approach by contrasting it with Basil Mitchell's approach of greater relative "tradition-independence." In summarizing Mitchell, Mehl notes that "although no inquirer is outside of all traditions (else he or she can make no case), Mitchell claims that as humans we have access to certain general standards of rationality, standards not limited to certain traditions but part of what makes up human enquiry within the human context. We have discovered, by looking at enquiry, standards of rationality that have proven themselves to be relatively adequate guides to negotiating life, in particular the pluralism of standpoints. MacIntyre himself seems to have done just this when he points to the features presupposed in traditions of rational enquiry. Although we are all inside some tradition or traditions, we have the capacity to recognize cognitive shortfalls and make persuasive innovations or criticisms." Peter J. Mehl, "In the Twilight of Modernity: MacIntyre and Mitchell on Moral Traditions and Their Assessment," Journal of Religious Ethics 19 (1991): 50.

8. The process I am suggesting here is in certain ways akin to what transpires when one begins to learn a foreign language: inevitably one's comprehension of the grammar, vocabulary, syntax, etc. of one's native language is also sharpened through such study.

9. The bibliography on comparative religious ethics is growing steadily. One very worthwhile study of related interest to this article would be Cosmogony and Ethical Order: New Studies in Comparative Ethics, ed. Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). This work contains fifteen essays on the relation of cosmogonical and ethical beliefs, thirteen of these originated as papers presented at conferences at the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1981 and 1982. See especially Lee H. Yearley's "A Confucian Crisis: Mencius' Two Cosmogonies and Their Ethics," pp. 310-327.

10. Even a treatment of just this one concept would require more than one journal article. Therefore, I will merely sketch some of the principal aspects of this moral vision within the context of

the Confucian understanding of the moral community, and limiting myself to selections from the Analects. Also as far as possible I will try to let the Confucian tradition speak for itself, and therefore will consider primarily the interpretations of the Chinese philosophical concepts as presented by contemporary Chinese philosophers themselves. A common defect of articles which treat Confucianism for Western audiences is the tendency to "translate" into a word or two the key Confucian terms without sufficient further elaboration of their significance and deeper meaning. Thus, the uninitiated reader is left with a superficial comprehension at best, or worse, a fundamental misunderstanding of the concepts employed.

11. Literally the ideograms signify "ruler's son," and an exact translation of this term like many other Chinese concepts, has baffled scholars over the centuries. Other terms which have been frequently employed are the Prince, the Noble Man, the Gentleman, and the Great Person. I have rejected using these because of their potentially misleading aristocratic connotations. I have opted instead for another widely-used term, the "Superior Person." This term however, could also in turn be misconstrued if it were understood in the sense of arrogance, or greater innate worth, or some other such similar misconstruction.

12. Herr Lee Gessner Creel, Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung, (New York: New American Library, 1953): 30.

13. The ideograms for hsi ao-jen mean literally a "small person," and thus came to represent the foil to the ch-n-tzu, or Superior Person, in Confucian philosophy. Often hsi ao-jen is translated as "mean man," though this rendition is open to being misunderstood as signifying merely an unkind person. "Small-spirited" would better capture the correct Confucian nuance. There is no differentiation of form between singular and plural meanings of this ideogram.

14. Joseph Shi h, S. J., "The Place of Confucius in the History of Chinese Religion," Gregorianum 51 (1970): 495.

15. Related to the concept of the ch-n-tzu (Superior Person) is the notion of the sheng-jen or Sage. Confucius usually reserved this latter term to designate an ancient philosopher or ruler who merited great respect in terms of his moral reputation. The ch-n-tzu instead was the expression of the moral ideal for the living. However, in terms of Confucian ethics what is predicated of one can be applied to the other. For an interesting overview of the

concept of the sheng-jen see Rodney Taylor's "The Sage as Saint: The Confucian Tradition," in Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions, eds. Richard Kieckhefer and George Bond, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988): 218-242.

16. MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 28.

17. The expression of fiduciary community is used by Tu Wei-ning as a principal organizing concept in his analysis of the Doctrine of the Mean. See especially the third chapter of his Centrality and Communalism: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness, rev. ed., (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989).

18. This same insight is also echoed by Alasdair MacIntyre, as he observes that in "many pre-modern, traditional societies it is through his or her membership in a variety of social groups that the individual identifies himself or herself and is identified by others. I am brother, cousin and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe. These are not characteristics that belong to human beings accidentally, to be stripped away in order to discover 'the real me'. They are part of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties. Individuals inherit a particular space within an interlocking set of social relationships; lacking that space, they are nobody, or at best a stranger or an outcast." After Virtue, pp. 33-34.

19. Tu Wei-ning, Centrality and Communalism, p. 41.

20. For the translation of texts from the Analects all citations will be given merely in terms of book and chapter. The Analects is the central work in the Confucian canon, and I am using the classic work of James Legge, the Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and the Doctrine of The Mean, Chinese Text; Translation with Exegetical Notes and Dictionary of all Characters, (New York: Dover Publications, 1971 (republication of the second revised edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893 as Volume I in "The Chinese Classics" Series)). Though Legge's translation might be considered technically outdated from a sinologist's point of view, however since it has been so widely used in Western literature I feel that it would be more helpful to help the non-expert track the pertinent vocabulary.

21. The ideogram 义, (sometimes Romanized as yi), according to one dictionary can be rendered as right conduct, righteousness,

morality, duty to one's neighbour, public spirit, patriotic, loyal, and faithful. R. H. Mathews, Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary, rev. American ed., (Shanghai: China Inland Mission and Presbyterian Mission Press, 1931; Cambridge (MA): n.p., 1944): 448.

In various literary contexts it has also been translated as principle and obligation, as well as justice. However, the term definitely should not be equated with the Western understanding of justice. For a further treatment of the ramifications of this point see R.P. Peerenboom's recent article, "Confucian Justice: Achieving a Human Society," International Philosophical Quarterly 30 (1990): 17-32. Peerenboom discusses the Confucian notion of a just society in contrast to John Rawls' well-known concept of "justice as fairness" and suggests that the Confucian concept might be both a challenge and a corrective to that of Rawls.

22. According to the calculations of Wng-tsit Chan, 58 of the 499 chapters of the Analects are devoted to the concept of jen while the word itself is used 105 times. Cf. Wng-tsit Chan's A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963): 16.

23. As one noted sinologist, William Theodore de Bary, observes, "for the Chinese the idea is not so much to analyze and define concepts precisely as to expand them to make them suggestive of the widest possible range of meaning. Generally, the more crucial or central the idea, the greater the ambiguity." In William Theodore de Bary, ed., Self and Society in Ming Thought, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970): v.

24. For a discussion of the etymology of jen, as well as the Confucian redaction of this term see Lin, Y-sheng's article, "The Evolution of the Pre-Confucian Meaning of Jen and the Confucian Concept of Moral Autonomy," Monumenta Serica 31 (1974-75): 172-204.

25. Nearly all Chinese characters are comprised of one of the more than two hundred radicals, each of which is made up of between one and seventeen strokes, and a body which in turn is usually a composite of several other radicals. Analysis of these components often, though not infallibly, sheds light on the etymology and meaning of the character itself. In the case of the character jen, since it is a combination of the characters for human person and two, the original meaning was thought to involve some notion of human interaction.

26. Arthur Waley, in his introduction to The Analects of Confucius, Vintage Books, (New York: Random House, 1938): 27.

27. W'ng-tsit Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p. 16.

28. For some other helpful articles on the background meaning of jen, in addition to Lin, Y-sheng's article already cited, see the following three articles: W'ng-tsit Chan, "The Evolution of the Confucian Concept Jen," Philosophy East and West 4 (January, 1955): 162-175; 295-315; Herbert Fingarrette, "Hunan Community as Holy Rite: An Interpretation of the Confucian Analects," Harvard Theological Review 59 (1966): 51-67; and Tu W'ei-ming, "The Creative Tension between Jen and Li," Philosophy East and West 18 (1968): 29-39. Also helpful is the discussion found in Wm de Bary, et. al., Sources of Chinese Tradition, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960): 26.

29. "Jen est l'idéal de l'homme dans ses possibilités pratiques." Liou, K'ia-Hway. L'Esprit Synthétique de la Chine: étude de la mentalité chinoise selon les textes des philosophes de l'antiquité, Bibliothèque de Philosophie Contemporaine, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961): 23.

30. "Renonçons désormais à notre tentative occidentale de fixer le Jen comme un objet de connaissance en face de nous-mêmes." ("Let us renounce our western tendency to classify Jen as some sort of an object to be known outside of ourselves.") *Ibid.*, p. 27.

31. Tu, W'ei-ming, Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought, (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979): 6. This most helpful book is a collection of fifteen previously published essays, and the selection cited here can also be found in Tu, W'ei-ming's article, "The Creative Tension between Jen and Li," which has already been cited.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

33. Indeed, Leonard Shihlien Hsü states emphatically that "The word Li has no English equivalent." The Political Philosophy of Confucianism: An Interpretation of the Social and Political Ideas of Confucius, His Forerunners and His Early Disciples, (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1932): 93.

34. Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary, p. 566.

35. H G Creel, Chinese Thought, p. 32.
36. Tu, Wei-ming, Humanity and Self Cultivation, p. 10.
37. Because the classical Chinese is a very compact language, certain interpolations must be made in order to translate some parts of the text of the Analects into readable English. Legge marks his interpolations by putting them in italics. Strictly speaking, these italicized words are not found in the original.
38. Leonard Shihlien Hs, The Political Philosophy of Confucianism p. 95.
39. Tu, Wei-ming, "The Creative Tension Between Jen and Li," pp. 10-14.
40. "L'idéal confucéen de la morale authentique doit être la synthèse du rite traditionnel et du sentiment vrai. Ainsi, selon Confucius, il n'y a pas de rite viable sans un sentiment vrai qui anime ce rite; de même, il n'y a pas de sentiment moral authentique sans un rite qui le discipline et l'oriente. Cette synthèse confucéenne est surtout une synthèse concrète dont le principe réside dans le sentiment moral jaillissant du tréfonds de l'homme." Liou, Ki-a-Hway, L'Esprit Synthétique de la Chine, p. 39.
41. Tao is a concept which has different meanings depending on the philosophical context in which it is being used. The Confucian tao and the tao of the Taoists cannot be understood in precisely the same way. A Korean theologian, Jung Young Lee, differentiates these two understandings of tao in the following way: "Both Confucians and Taoists call ultimate reality tao, but they mean very different things by the word. The Confucian tao is the supreme principle of human, social existence, encompassing what we would consider both morals and manners and religious rituals. ... For Confucians, tao means right personal relationships. ... Taoists, on the other hand, regard tao as a cosmic rather than human principle. Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, needing somehow to express the inexpressible, resorts solely to impersonal symbols. ... For Taoists, tao is the principle of the whole natural cosmos, of which human life and community are a harmonious but infinitely insignificant part. It is the Taoist concern with cosmic process that shaped the concept of an impersonal tao; the preoccupation with social harmony shaped the concept of a more personal tao." Jung Yung Lee, The Theology of Change: A Christian Concept of God in an Eastern Perspective, (Mar yknoll: Orbis Books, 1979): 53.

42. The 'Way' is also the most widely used term for translating tao, though, as always variations can be found.

43. Tu, Wèi - nìng, "The Value of the Human in Classical Confucian Thought," Humanitas 15 (1979): 161. This essay is also found in Tu, Wèi - nìng's more recent book, Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation, SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985): 67-80. The author acknowledges that he has borrowed the idea of a 'root metaphor' from Herbert Finckelstein, in the latter's Confucius - The Secular as Sacred (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972): 18-36.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Paul K. K. Tong, "Understanding Confucianism" International Philosophical Quarterly 9 (1969): 523. For additional discussion of the virtue of sincerity in Confucian thought see also Tu, Wèi - nìng's Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Chung-yung, Monographs of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, no. 3, (Hawaii: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976). His fourth chapter, "The Moral Metaphysics," is particularly helpful in this regard. A thorough treatment of the notion of ch'eng, as well as a possible Christian interpretation is found in the recent doctoral dissertation of Luke Jong-Hyeok Sim S.J.: The Christological Vision of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola and the Hermeneutical Principles of 'Sincerity' (Ch'eng) in the Confucian Tradition. Dissertation ad Doctoratum in Facultate Theologiae Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana. Romae, 1992.

46. Tu, Wèi - nìng, Humanity and Self-Cultivation, p. 37. This essay was originally published as "The Confucian Perception of Adulthood," Daedalus 105 (1976): 109-123.

47. For an exposition of the various lexical usages of t'ien and related terms, such as nìng, see Giancarlo Finazzo's The Principle of T'ien: Essay on its Theoretical Relevancy in early Confucian Philosophy, (Taipei: Mei Ya Publications, 1967).

48. For a good summary of some of the more religious aspects of Confucius' thought, see Joseph Shih's article cited above, "The Place of Confucius in the History of Chinese Religion." Shih states that, "The absolute dominion of God and man's duty of unconditional obedience to Him these tenets constitute the essence of the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven. They also represent the legacy received by Confucius from the Duke of Chou, whom he admired

and strove to emulate." p. 490.

49. In this instance, however, the Chinese character used for "God" is Shang as in Shang-ti, or "Lord of Heaven," and not t'ien.

50. The Shoo King or the Book of Historical Documents (two parts), Vol. 3 of the Chinese Classics, rev. ed., trans. James Legge (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960): 495-497.

51. H.G. Creel, Chinese Thought, p. 23.

52. W'ng-tsit Chan, "What is Living and What is Dead in Confucianism?" in Religious Trends in Modern China (delivered as the 1950 Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953): 30.

53. Cheng, Yang En, "The Idea of T'ien-Ming in the Book of Historical Documents," Ching Feng 29 (1986): 218. Though there is some correspondence, obviously one cannot equate Cheng's use of the term "natural law" here with the whole Western tradition.

54. William Theodore de Bary. "The Prophetic Voice in the Confucian Noble Man." Ching Feng 33 (1990): 7. In this article, which was originally presented at the 1988 International Confucian-Christian Conference in Hong Kong, de Bary argues that the ideal of the Confucian Superior Person includes a "prophetic voice" which should be seen in counterpoint to the Sage King.

55. *Ibid.*

56. The locus classicus for this concept of moral progression from the individual outwards, and the translation of the ideal into actual practice, is found in the so-called "eight steps" enunciated in the Great Learning: the investigation of things, extension of knowledge, sincerity of the will, rectification of the mind, cultivation of the personal life, regulation of the family, national order, and world peace. According to tradition, the Great Learning contains a short text by Confucius himself in which these steps are outlined, and this is followed in turn by a much longer commentary by the philosopher Tsang.

57. In this regard see James A. Donahue, "The Use of Virtue and Character in Applied Ethics," Horizons 17 (1990): 228-243. Donahue grapples with the criticism made against "virtue ethics" that it is insufficiently normative, and therefore unable to assist

practical decision making. He claims that "virtue ethics" does in fact yield some central moral norms, and also provides a compelling framework for moral choice. Donahue concludes his discussion with a brief case study to illustrate his position.

For a related study see Michael Slote, "Some Advantages of Virtue Ethics," in Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology, eds. Owen Flanagan and Amie Oksenberg Rorty, (London: M T Press, 1990): 429-448. However, Slote casts his discussion largely in terms of the individual agent qua individual, and neglects the community aspect of a coherent theory of virtue ethics.