
The exegetical study of the history of Western philosophy is frequently used to inform contemporary philosophical discussions. (There are contemporary Aristotelians, like Martha Nussbaum, and contemporary Kantians, like Christine Korsgaard, to name just two examples.) Obviously, it would be nothing more than necrophilia to reproduce without alteration some historical position. Historical change illuminates limitations of previous philosophies. (I am an admirer of Hegel myself, but I must acknowledge that history did not end with the Prussian state of his era; nor, pace Francis Fukuyama, has it ended yet.) And contrary to what sometimes passes for indubitable truth, philosophy does make some progress just through discussion and argumentation. (In some ways, we now understand Hume's view of the role of reason and emotion in ethics better than he or his contemporaries could have, because we have become clearer than they could have been about the distinctions between emotivism, psychologism, prescriptivism, error theories, ideal observer theories and other positions.)

Generally speaking, if we wish to engage in the "historical retrieval" of earlier philosophical views, our goal should be to produce a position that is, in Lee Yearley's formulation, "credible" and "appropriate." Our interpretation should be "credible" in the sense that it is plausible for us today. A credible appropriation of an earlier philosophical view is one that is a "live option" for contemporary thinkers, given our knowledge of cultural diversity, historical change, modern science, and at least some of the values and institutional forms that have been emphasized as a result of the Western Enlightenment. But at the same time historical retrieval should result in a position that is "appropriate" in the sense that it is faithful to the philosophy that inspires it. It must be recognizable as being, at some fundamental level, a version of the original philosophy. A third criterion, not explicitly mentioned by Yearley but (I think) implicit in what he says,

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1 Yearley, "Confucianism and Genre," p. 140. Of course, we may choose not to engage in historical retrieval at all.
is that the resulting position be "inspiring." By this grandiose term I mean simply that it should be clear why the reconstructed position offers something distinctive and valuable to ongoing philosophical debates.

Ruiism has already been the subject of several efforts at historical retrieval. Perhaps the two most noteworthy have been the postmodern approach, championed by Roger Ames and the late David Hall, and the approach of the so-called "New Confucians" (whom I discussed briefly in my Introduction). In my personal opinion (for whatever that is worth), the New Confucians and the postmodernists are each right about certain things. The New Confucians are right that Ruiism can and should change in certain respects in order to be a plausible contemporary position. In particular, Ruiism must be consistent with some version of democracy and with modern science. (As the New Confucians would agree, this does not mean that Ruiists should accept whatever form of democracy, or whatever uses of modern science, happen to be current. Ruiism can be used to constructively inform and critique democracy and even the ethics of scientific research and application.) And the postmodernists are right that any faithful interpretation of Ruiism will not attribute to it any sort of Cartesianism. Ruiists are not metaphysical dualists, nor are they epistemological foundationalists.

I worry, however, that both of these approaches fail to produce accounts of Ruiism that are sufficiently faithful or inspiring. As I have argued, New Confucianism sees Ruiism through the lens of Buddhist-influenced "Neo-Confucianism." And the resulting position offers little that is inspiring, beyond such sound but vague advice that humans should aim at "a more all-encompassing wisdom." I find postmodernism a similarly distorting framework. Readings of the original texts that make it seem that Ruiists advocate creativity unconstrained by human nature, Heaven and tradition seem very forced to me. And precisely because the postmodern interpretation of Ruiism renders it so similar to Rortian pragmatism, it offers nothing inspiringly new to contemporary debates. (Simply put, we already have one Rorty. Why do we need another who just happens to have written in Classical Chinese?)

But, as Mozi says, "those who condemn another's view must offer something in its place. If one condemns another's view without offering something in its place this is
Part II: The Road Left Behind

I would like to begin by discussing some of the limitations and blindesses of Ruism as an ethical system. These weaknesses must be overcome if Ruism is to be a plausible philosophical alternative for us today.

Ruism is ethically limited by having a monistic conception of value, sexist assumptions about gender roles, a very strong form of "epistemological optimism" (which can lead to intolerance), and a hegemonic conception of the role of virtue in government. In place of these limitations, Ruism can and must learn from the West to place a greater emphasis on pluralism, feminism, epistemological humility (or falllibalism), and procedural justice.

II.A. Monism vs. Pluralism

The claim that Ruism is monistic is easily misunderstood. Monism is not the same as generalism. Generalism is a position on a spectrum with particularism at the other extreme. Ruists are, generally speaking, closer to the particularist end of the spectrum than are generalists like, say, Kant.

In describing Ruists as ethical monists I also I do not mean to deny that they recognize some variety in ethically valuable lives. The lives of the nobles who teach and serve in government, the farmers who plough the fields that produce food for everyone, the craftsmen who produce tools and ritual vessels, the merchants who facilitate the trade of goods, and the wives of all of them (who raise the children, weave silk and manage household affairs), all have value, and are necessary for the functionining of society. However, Ruists are monists in the sense that the valuable roles are very limited, and are hierarchically organized, from most to least exalted:

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2 Mozi 16, "Impartial Caring," p. 64.
nobles, farmers, craftsmen and merchants. Nobles are "great people," while the others are "petty people." The hierarchy is, in principle, fluid and meritocratic. Sage King Shun began as a farmer. The operative word here, though, is began. Because of his Virtue, he could not help but rise to become an official, and then King.

Instead of being ethically monistic, Ruism should become pluralistic. But pluralism, like monism, is a term that is easily misconstrued. In particular, pluralism is importantly different from skepticism and relativism. The ethical skeptic would say that we do not know what really has value. "Perhaps being a serial killer is good, or perhaps being an emergency room nurse is good. Who's to say?" shrugs the skeptic. The relativist, in contrast with both the skeptic and the pluralist, says that value depends on the point of the view of the evaluator. For the ethical relativist, ethical terms like "good" function implicitly like "short":

"He's short."
"No he's not."
"Well, I meant, from the perspective of the other people on his basketball team he's short. Of course, from the perspective of people of average height, like you and me, he's tall."

Ethical relativists can have different views about what the relevant perspective is for judging value. Cultural relativists say that ethical value depends on the perspective of some particular cultural group. So, for example, slavery is wrong when judged from the perspective of contemporary mainstream U.S. culture, but right when judged from the perspective of Hellenic Greek culture. Subjectivism is a special case of relativism in which the relevant group for evaluating claims is each particular person. So the subjectivist would say that the views of a culture or subculture are not the relevant perspective for judging value. Instead, we must appeal to each individual person's perspective.

Non-philosophers sometimes conflate relativism with one of two very different positions: moral isolationism and vulgar relativism. Bernard Williams coined the label

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"vulgar relativism" to describe the position that all ways of life are equally good. This is an unattractive position because it implies that even the most cruel and intolerant lives are good. The life of a serial killer, of Adolph Hitler, of an abusive pimp – are these really on a par with the lives of skilled and dedicated social workers, nurses and kindergarten teachers? Even aside from this, philosophers tend not to regard vulgar relativism as a serious position, since it is not clear that it is coherent. If there are some lives that are not good, then it is clear that declaring a particular way of life good has some content. But if all lives are good, what content does this claim have? Good as compared to what? If all lives are good, what would it mean to say that any life is bad?

Mary Midgley came up with the term "moral isolationism" to describe the view that one should not pass judgment on members of other cultures. As with vulgar relativism, many philosophers doubt that moral isolationism is coherent. On what grounds is judging another culture ruled out in principle? I should not judge another culture if I am ignorant about it, but this is different from saying that I should never judge at all. And how does one decide what counts as a "culture" for this purpose? Contemporary anthropologists would object strongly to the suggestion that any culture has clearly defined boundaries. Can I judge other U.S. citizens? Presumably, but what if the fellow American in question is of East-Indian descent? Does this automatically put her in another culture? I have a friend who fits into that cultural category: she has never visited India, has no interest in Indian culture, only comments on Indian culture to make jokes about how silly she thinks it is, and the only Indian language she speaks is English (with a Boston accent). If I can judge her, how different would she have to be before I couldn't judge her? If I can't judge her, does that mean that BWVN can only judge fellow Americans who are of joint Polish and Dutch descent? Finally, and most fundamentally, if we say that one cannot judge other cultures, what are we to say when other cultures judge us?

Genuine pluralism is neither skepticism nor relativism. The pluralist says that there are multiple kinds of value and that they are not reducible to one kind of value. (She typically adds that it is impossible to instantiate all of these values in one life or in one society, at least not to the same degree.) Pluralism is not skepticism because the
pluralist thinks we do not have any serious doubts about at least some kinds of goods. Only a dogmatic monist or an extreme skeptic could deny that a good school teacher and a good police officer both lead worthwhile lives. Pluralism is also not relativism, because the pluralist does not say that the value of either of these lives depends on our (or our culture's) point of view about them. If our culture does not appreciate the value of a good school teacher, then our culture is simply ignorant about a certain sort of value, the pluralist asserts. And pluralism is not "vulgar relativism," because it judges some ways of life to lack value. Just because many things have value, that does not mean that everything does.

A concrete example may help. Suppose a friend is contemplating whether to go on to graduate school to get her doctorate in mathematics, or to begin a career as a painter. She realizes that the demands on her time and energy of being a committed mathematician or painter will preclude her being even reasonably successful if she tries to do both, so she has to choose one. She comes to us for advice. If we are a skeptic, we will tell her that some philosophers (like Plato) have presented good arguments that a life of theoretical contemplation is best, but other philosophers (like Nietzsche) have argued for the supremacy of creativity over theory. The arguments seem equally strong, so, unfortunately, we do not know what the right choice for her is, or even whether there is a right choice. In contrast, if we are subjective relativists, we will tell her that whichever life she decides is best is best, relative to her perspective. We may have our own opinion about her choice. Perhaps we think that mathematics is dull while art is stylish and exciting. But asking someone else for opinions about ethical value is like asking someone else what you should order for dinner. I like Spam®. (Honestly.) But that doesn't mean you should eat it. If our friend tells us that her parents think

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4 Relativism is often confused with skepticism. In short, skepticism says that you do not know that the way things seem to you is the way they really are. Subjective relativism says that the way things seem to you is the way they really are. Cultural relativism says that the way things seem to a given culture is the way they really are. If relativism is true, there is nothing beyond your own (or your culture's) perspective for you to be wrong about. Pluralism says that we know that there is more than one kind of value, whether cultures or people can see this fact from their perspective or not.
becoming an artist is frivolous, we should respond, "It is frivolous – relative to their perspective." Finally, if we are a pluralist, we will tell her that both lives have value and are fine choices. If her parents do not appreciate the value of being an artist, that is unfortunate, but they are wrong. Then, if we are also particularists, we will look for details of her situation that may help her make her choice. Does she find that, although she has better than average talent in both, she has much more aptitude for mathematics than for painting? Does she, perhaps, admire artists more than mathematicians, but personally get more satisfaction out of teaching and researching mathematics? Mathematicians generally make their most important research contributions before the age of thirty. What does she think of studying mathematics now, and keeping open the possibility of returning to painting later in life? The pluralistic particularist, if she has zhi 智, "wisdom," will be skillful at knowing what questions to ask.

II.B. Sexism vs. Feminism

Becoming pluralistic is one way in which Ruism should overcome its ethically monistic tradition. Sexism is another aspect of this monism. Just as men's roles are highly constrained and hierarchically evaluated, so are the roles of women. Women do have indispensable roles to play in Ruist society. And even within the context of Ruist texts, women are sometimes singled out for praise, including times when they are ethically superior to their male relatives. Kongzi was quite willing to meet with Nanzi, a woman who was politically influential, even though the meeting scandalized his disciple Zilu (6.28). And Kongzi is reputed to have praised Lady Ji of Lu for her knowledge of the rites.5 Mengzi tells an anecdote in which a wife and concubine have a much better developed sense of shame (the basis of righteousness) than does their husband (4B33). And the stories told of Mengzi's mother reprimanding him (including taking the side of Mengzi's wife against him) suggest that women were viewed as independent,

5 Raphals, "A Woman Who Understood the Rites."
and sometimes superior, ethical agents.⁶ On the other hand, neither Kongzi nor Mengzi questions the fundamental distinction in gender roles between men and women. Kongzi took no female disciples, and championed tradition. Mengzi said that the the roles of husband and wife are marked by "differentiation," and that a proper mother advises her daughter, as she leaves to join her husband's family for the first time, that she must be obedient (3A4, 3B2).

So instead of being sexist, Ruism must learn to become feminist. Some work has already been done in the direction of creating feminist Ruism.⁷ There is nothing, I think, essentially sexist about Ruism. Ruism emphasizes the importance of acting in accordance with our roles. But it is not a requirement of Ruism in itself that these roles be static or attached to specific genders. This is illustrated by the Ruist Li Zhi, who provides an unorthodox but challenging defense of the equality of women, by appealing to *yin-yang* cosmology. There are also ways of constructively re-reading the Ruist tradition so as to provide resources for feminism. The stories involving Kongzi and Mengzi that I mentioned are good examples of sources that stress the ethical capacity of women. In addition, my feeling is that some of the *Odes* represent a distinctive female perspective that has been ignored or de-emphasized by the mainstream commentarial tradition, but can be recovered. For example, we hear, across the millennia, the voice of an abused wife in the ode, "The Lad." She sings of how kind he was to her at first:

A simple-looking lad you were,  
Carrying cloth to exchange it for silk.  
But you came not so to purchase silk --  
You came to make proposals to me.

But after she goes to live with him, his behavior changes:

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⁶ These stories are collected in an appendix to D.C. Lau's *Mencius*.

⁷ See, e.g., Li Chenyang, *The Sage and the Second Sex*. 
When the mulberry tree sheds its leaves,
They fall yellow on the ground.
Since I went with you,
Three years have I eaten of your poverty.
And now the full waters of the Qi,
Wet the curtains of my carriage.
There has been no difference in me,
But you have been double in your ways.
It is you, Sir, who transgress the right,
Thus changeable in your conduct.

For three years I was your wife,
And thought nothing of my toil in your house.
I rose early and went to sleep late,
Not intermitting my labours for a morning.
Thus on my part our contract was fulfilled,
But you have behaved thus cruelly.

She hopes for the support of her blood-relatives, but they mock her:

My brothers will not know all this,
And will only laugh at me.
Silently I think of it,
And bemoan myself.\(^8\)

Ruists have always looked to the *Odes* for ethical guidance, including properly training our emotions. Why should they not be used to attune us to the plight of physical and emotional abuse? Mengzi teaches us about the importance of extending rón 仁,  

\(^8\) Mao 58. Translation modified from James Legge. For another example of a woman bemoaning the sadness of her life, see "Cypress Boat" (Mao 26).
"benevolence." Becoming more sympathetic to the suffering of women, including the ways in which this suffering has been accentuated by mandated gender roles, is an important extension of benevolence.

II.C. Epistemological Optimism vs. Fallibalism

Ruism, at its best, encourages some kinds of tolerance and humility. Both Kongzi and Mengzi remind us that when others fail to appreciate us or respond to us as we hope and expect, we should look for the cause within ourselves, rather than blaming others. Furthermore, an overlooked passage in the *Zuo Commentary* provides an insightful (and canonical) defense of the right of the people to criticize their government:

> A man of Jing rambled into a village school and started discoursing about the conduct of the government. In consequence Ran Ming proposed to Zichan to destroy the village schools. But the minister said, "Why do so? If people retire morning and evening and pass their judgment on the conduct of the government, as being good or bad, I will do what they approve of, and I will alter what they condemn. They are my teachers. On what ground should we destroy the schools? I have heard that by loyal conduct and goodness enmity is diminished, but I have not heard that it can be prevented by acts of violence. It may indeed be hastily stayed for a while, but it continues like a stream that has been dammed up. If you make a great opening in the dam, there will be great injury done, beyond our power to relieve. The best plan is to lead the water off by a small opening. In this case our best plan is to hear what is said and use it as a medicine."

In general, the use of punishment and violence is always regarded as the last measure.

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to be employed by anyone who genuinely follows the Ruist Way. (The large prison population in the U.S., and the use of violence against the Tian-an Men Square protestors would have been condemned by Kongzi or Mengzi.)

However, the tolerance of Ruism is limited in certain important ways by what Thomas Metzger has labeled "epistemological optimism." Metzger coined this label to describe what he saw as a facet of the Neo- and New Confucian worldviews: the confidence that knowledge can be obtained. Metzger saw this as distinguishing Ruism from at least modern Western thought. Pace Metzger, epistemological optimism has also been one aspect of Western modernity. In different ways, rationalists like Descartes and empiricists like Bacon believed that by following the right method knowledge could be given a firm foundation. (This confidence in method is part of what postmodernism is, rightly, reacting against.) However, it is also true that a significant strand in the Western tradition has challenged Western epistemological optimism, on the grounds that certainty in one's convictions is ethically and politically dangerous.

Epistemological optimism is potentially dangerous, because if I believe that my methodology guarantees truth, a natural conclusion is that I have nothing to gain from a genuine dialogue with others. If epistemological optimism is true, then my failure to convince others could only be because they are perversely obstinate. A natural practical conclusion to be drawn is that they should be silenced lest they seduce others with their errors. Likewise, if I know with certainty what the right course of action is, it seems that only cowardice could prevent me from taking the most seemingly extreme measures, if these are dictated by the right. The problem, of course, is that others are often subjectively certain of the rightness of their actions, when we know they were mistaken (the pagans who threw Christians to the lions, the Christian knights during the

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10 Metzger, Escape from Predicament.

11 This trend has a long pedigree. Augustine stressed the fact that reason is corrupted by original sin. Consequently, we cannot fully trust our own reason, nor can we hope to persuade everyone else. Augustine recognizes that this has political implications. Thus, when Augustine distinguishes the City of God from the City of Man, he is calling into question the possibility of one order for both ethics and government.
Crusades, the Inquisitors during the Counter-reformation, the Nazis, the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, the Weather Underground – pick your favorite example).

I would not recommend that Ruism become epistemologically pessimistic. A general skepticism about values is as ethically crippling as dogmatism. Consider a Buddho-Confucian scholar like Tan Sitong, who went to his death, fighting for good government in China, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Protestant minister who was executed by the Nazis for trying to save Jews. Would either of these have had such courage if they had thought, “Well, I don’t know whether oppressing others is really bad. I mean, sure, it seems that way to me. But who’s to say?” Fanatical certainty in one’s own convictions is ethically dangerous, but I worry that the hot-tub skepticism fashionable today may be dangerous in its own way.

Ruism should instead embrace epistemological fallibalism, the claim that we can know that some things are true, but that we cannot (generally speaking) have absolute certainty. Living up to epistemological fallibalism is what Aristotelians would describe as a "theoretical virtue," since it deals with the capacity of the mind to know. However, it is intimately connected with "practical virtues." It requires great humility, courage and discipline to actually acknowledge in practice that one is fallible. All of us fail at this some of the time, and many of us fail at it persistently, even while we are mouthing support for open-mindedness.12

Epistemological fallibalism does not require perfect impartiality. As Kant argued theoretically, and as Kuhn illustrated historically, perfect impartiality is impossible. However, epistemological fallibalism does require sympathetic understanding and dialogical argumentation. Sympathetically understanding the positions of our interlocutors requires that we see why they – as rational, fellow human beings – see the world as they do. Their errors must be explicable as something other than the expressions of their vices. This is true even (perhaps especially) when we find their views abhorrent. In general, if you do not understand why large numbers of people are

12 In the original draft of this chapter, I wrote "opponent" where I have "interlocutor" now. Ironically, in describing my interlocutors as "opponents" (which suggests that they must be vanquished, like enemies in battle) I illustrated a failure to understand sympathetically and argue dialogically.
attracted to a position with which you disagree, you have not thought carefully enough about it. To invoke the language of Thomas Kuhn, one has to develop the habit of learning to see the world through alternative paradigms.

There are, of course, limitations to sympathetic understanding. It is ethically dangerous to come to see the world as a white supremacist. And it would be naive, in many cases, to rule out the use of hermeneutics of suspicion to explain people’s beliefs. But part of treating another human with respect is acting as if he is rational. (After all, we are not fully rational ourselves, but we expect our views and our arguments to be treated as serious positions, not as symptoms of our hidden motivations.) So the decision to completely abandon a hermeneutics of restoration in regard to interpreting any particular text or individual must be made rarely and reluctantly.

For the majority of cases, in which sympathetic understanding is a goal, we must combine that understanding with dialogical argumentation. To argue dialogically is to respond to the arguments and objections of our interlocutors in a manner that is not satisfying only for us, but also, in principle, intelligible and persuasive from the perspective of our opponents. Dialogical argumentation also requires that we solicit the responses of our interlocutors to our own objections and arguments. Again, as a general rule, if you do not know what your opponent would say in reply to your arguments, you do not have good reason for holding your own beliefs.

None of this can be done perfectly, completely or algorithmically. On most vexing questions, we will never persuade most of our opponents. The most we can hope is that we have responded to their objections in ways that ought to convince them. But we can never be certain that we have done so, since there is no definitive test of when they ought to be convinced. Likewise, there is no test to be sure that we have adequately understood alternative positions. And we cannot call into question everything, all the time, or consider every possible alternative position. Consequently, it requires zhi, wisdom, to know when systematic understanding and dialogic argumentation have reached a tentative conclusion. (And then it requires zhi again to know when dialogue should be re-opened.)
II.D. Virtue and Procedural Justice

As I have presented it, Ruism is a form of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics is an ethical approach for individuals, but it also has political implications. Minimally, if any form of virtue ethics is right, it seems that it is a requirement of any legitimate political system that it make it at least *possible* to become virtuous. As John Dewey observed, it is self-contradictory to hold that there is no virtue without thought and choice, but then to deny most men access to the social conditions necessary for these things. More substantially, we might see it as an obligation of a political system to *promote* virtue. However, this obligation is, I think, more likely to need to be balanced against other desiderata of a political system. For example, it might very well be that encouraging virtue is in tension with the demand to avoid too extreme an epistemological optimism. Perhaps encouraging virtue to a certain high degree is warranted only if we are quite certain that doing so will not discourage alternative ways of life that might be, for all we know, virtuous. For example, many people in our society act as if they were quite certain that promoting, at the least, some version of Christianity is an ethical obligation of government. On the other hand, many intellectuals in academia seem to take it as one of their primary educational tasks to disabuse their students of the last shred of religious belief (or at least Christian belief). Both of these groups have far more confidence in their access to ethical truth than do I.

Beyond permitting or encouraging virtue, Ruism (in common with some versions of Western virtue ethics) envisions a *constitutive* role for virtue in governing. Kongzi hoped to train virtuous individuals who could be trusted with government power, including a very wide degree of discretionary authority. To be sure, Ruist Kings and their ministers are limited in their actions by ritual and tradition. But the whole point of being particularistic is that these constraints are flexible, depending on the specific circumstances. The attraction of this political particularism is, of course, that a genuinely virtuous and wise government official has the authority needed to achieve the

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13 Quoted in Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*. 
good. The danger is that those with less-than-sagacious virtue may misuse their authority, either by giving in to the temptations of bribes of wealth, power or favors, or through simple error (the well-intentioned judge assuming that he need not investigate any further, because the answer seems quite clear to him). Wang Yangming is reported to have ordered summary executions of prisoners, relying upon his liang zhi (his innate, perfect ethical understanding), to tell him whether they were guilty. Did he decide correctly? Perhaps. I have enough faith in Wang that I assume that, in such cases, he only let his liang zhi operate on evidence of some kind. But were I one of those prisoners, I would have wished for more.

What more? Procedural justice obtains when there are public rules that are followed consistently. Procedural justice is an institutional good that has been underemphasized by Ruists historically. Obviously, some procedural rules are worse than nothing. No matter how consistent one is in applying "trial by ordeal" to suspected witches, it's a bad idea. But many of the procedures surrounding due process in U.S. courts, or how to resolve a Constitutional crisis over vote-counting, or even how to get a driver's license, provide individuals with some protection against the arbitrary use of authority. It is easy to underestimate the value of procedural justice, by pointing out that it not infrequently fails in one of two ways. Sometimes procedural justice fails when, precisely because it is followed, it fails to achieve either efficiency or substantive justice or both. Anyone who has had significant dealings with either their state department of motor vehicles or the post office is aware that the problem is typically not that procedural justice is flouted, but that it is followed to the point of madness. In addition, we can all cite our own personal favorite case of the guilty going free, or the innocent being punished, despite procedural justice.

Ruists would also emphasize another way in which procedural justice can fail: procedural justice cannot exist without at least minimally virtuous individuals to

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14 Ivanhoe, Ethics in the Confucian Tradition. (The phrase liang zhi comes from Mengzi 7A15. For Mengzi himself, it refers to one's sprouts of virtue, which must be cultivated to grow into fully developed virtues; for Wang, it refers to the complete and perfectly formed goodness that all of us possess from birth, but which is obscured in most of us by selfish desires.)
implement it. Rules against taking bribes are meaningless unless enough people have the yi 義 that makes them ashamed to be bribed, or ashamed to not enforce the punishments when others violate the rules. Furthermore, a Ruist who had read Wittgenstein would note that a rule does not tell you how or when to apply it.\textsuperscript{15} No matter how much case law there is, and no matter how specific the statutes, a judge needs zhi to know when, and when not, to sustain an objection or exclude evidence.

But there is an important difference between minimal and sagacious virtue. As Han Feizi pointed out in his criticism of Ruism, government cannot rely on having sages, since they are so rare. And my own experience with academic politics (where, as the saying goes, the battles are so ruthless because the stakes are so insignificant) has given me increased appreciation for the protection given by clear rules that people are just too ashamed to violate. This is why I have entitled this subsection "virtue and procedural justice." For while I think Ruism gives too little emphasis to procedural justice, and places too much confidence in the discretionary authority of the supposedly virtuous, I think it is right that procedural justice requires at least minimal virtue to operate.\textsuperscript{16}

In summary, in order to be credible or plausible for us today, Ruism must adapt to become compatible with democracy and modern science (as the "New Confucians" have stressed) as well as with pluralism, feminism, epistemological fallibilism, and procedural justice.

\textbf{Part III: The Road Ahead}

I have discussed some of the ways that Ruism should learn from the heritage of the Enlightenment. But is Ruism also inspiring for us today? What does Ruism have to

\textsuperscript{15} David Wong does, in fact, make just this point. (See Wong, "Reasons.")

\textsuperscript{16} I do not mean to suggest that the Ruist tradition has been completely ignorant of procedural justice. One of the achievements of Han Dynasty philosophy was to synthesize Ruism with elements of "Legalist" thought, including a more procedural approach to government. This was philosophically brilliant, historically significant and (on the whole) socially beneficial.
offer modernity? This depends on which Ruist philosopher we are talking about, of course. Here I shall limit myself to a discussion of the possible contributions of a Neo-Mengzian virtue ethics.

A. Human Nature and Self-Cultivation

1. Mengzian Naturalism

Mengzi's conception of human nature and self cultivation, especially when it is distinguished from the later School of the Way interpretations of it, is both plausible and challenging. The notion that we have innate but incipient tendencies toward virtue, and that these tendencies have a natural pattern of development, is perhaps unique. (As I shall explore more below, Mengzi's position can also be defended from some of the objections that have been levelled against it.) As MacIntyre points out, the tendency among modern Western ethical views is to dispense with the notion of potentiality. Human nature is reduced to mere uncultivated actuality. Consequently, modern Western ethical views from Hobbes to Moore and beyond emphasize discovery models of self-cultivation. (Ironically, this makes them similar, if only in a bare structural way, to the School of the Way approaches.) The earlier virtue ethics approaches of the West, which MacIntyre champions, do stress the transition from potentiality to actuality. However, Aristotle himself had, like Xunzi, an almost pure re-formation model. Human nature has no (or nothing more than the most inchoate) tendencies toward virtue. We must be reshaped through habituation (and ritual, in Xunzi's case) so as to acquire virtuous feelings, perceptions and dispositions. Ironically, those in the Western Platonistic tradition often have developmental aspects to their thought that give them some structural similarity to the Mengzian position. For Plato (and to some extent for Augustine and Aquinas) becoming virtuous is just discovering something you already "know." But this discovery occurs as a result of a developmental process, and as in the

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17 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. 
case of Mengzi, one starts out, from birth, with the first stage in the process already completed. However, as the postmodernists would be quick to point out, Platonists are quite different from Ruists of any variety. For Platonists, ethical cultivation is still discovery rather than development. And Platonists always place a greater emphasis than do Ruists on theoretical activity, both in ethical cultivation and in the life that one leads as a result of having been cultivated. In contrast, for Mengzi, as we have seen, ethical cultivation has a much more significant emphasis on carefully guiding and training the emotions.

Furthermore, the general issue of how to become a better person has received little attention in Anglo-American philosophy in the last century. Philosophers have almost conceded this topic to psychologists and pop self-help gurus. This is unfortunate, both because philosophers had traditionally addressed this sort of question, even in the West, and because the particular argumentative and systematizing skills that philosophers are trained in might help enrich this discussion. I hope we can see a revival of philosophical interest in techniques of ethical cultivation and self-cultivation, and along with it discussions of human nature.

I also hope that, along with this revival of discussion of ethical cultivation will come increased attention to the rhetoric of persuasion. Contemporary Anglo-American philosophers are often phenomenally good at tight, logical argumentation. They are also typically good at "silencing" others in debate. But silencing is not the same as persuading. If we silence someone in debate, we have produced an argument which he does not know how to answer. But this does not entail that he has come to believe our conclusion. Much less does it entail that he will be motivated to act differently. On the other hand, if we persuade someone, she actually has come to accept the truth of our conclusion. There is, of course, no guarantee that persuasion will lead to action. But

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18 I have in mind here rational persuasion, in which we get someone to accept our conclusion for good reasons. I realize there are many complex and disputed issues regarding how to distinguish rational persuasion from other kinds. I do not have the space to enter into these issues here. I will limit myself to the observation that we all do, in fact, distinguish between cases of someone being persuaded justifiably
action seems more likely than it does in cases in which persuasion has not occurred. In
general, if we philosophers want to make a difference in the world, we have to get better at persuading: arguing in ways that actually have a chance at changing the minds of other. This will involve such things as developing a better sense for how our arguments affect the emotions of others. (In other words, how can we use cognitive extension to enable affective extension?) It will also involve actually listening to and understanding how most other people think. Ruists, like all intellectuals, have sometimes ascended to rarified heights from which the voices of "the people" are inaudible. But Ruists have generally been "public intellectuals," and very successful ones, for over two thousand years.

The difference between silencing and persuading is related to the difference between two styles of ethical reasoning. A modern metaphor may help to illuminate the distinction I have in mind. Contrast theoretical physics and engineering. In theoretical physics, one attempts to arrive at highly general claims, often through deductive proof. Equations in theoretical physics give the general relations of force to mass and acceleration, energy to mass, gravity to mass and distance, etc. In contrast, in engineering, one is faced with a concrete problem and attempts to find a specific solution. For example, a civil engineer may be asked to design a bridge that spans a river. She will need to know what kind of vehicles (of what weight and number) will use the bridge, how many lanes of traffic the bridge is to accommodate, how wide the river is, what the budget and timetable for completing the bridge are, etc. She will then design a particular bridge, given these particular constraints, and these particular desiderata.

Now, is ethical reasoning more like theoretical physics or more like engineering? I suspect that many philosophers have had physics in the back of their minds as a paradigm for what methodology ethics should employ: both should be general, abstract and formulated in clear rules. But thinking of ethical reasoning as like engineering may be more accurate. If ethical reasoning is something that we actually employ in our lives, then we are dealing with particular desiderata and particular constraints. The focus on and their being persuaded unjustifiably. (This is so whether we can agree on a general account of what marks this distinction.)
these particulars may give us solutions that are both more faithful to the context and more likely to persuade others.

The ethics-as-engineering metaphor is multi-dimensional. (Cf. Chapter 3, §IV.D.) Another dimension of similarity is revealed when we consider the relationship between theoretical physics and engineering. To a certain extent, the two are independent. Some results in physics have no engineering applications, or their applications are not discovered for years. And engineering, in a broad sense, existed long before physics as an autonomous discipline did. However, the two fields are related. Concrete engineering problems (how does one aim a cannonball correctly?) stimulated the development of kinematics and dynamics in the early modern era. Conversely, engineers continually make use of results from physics in designing bridges, lighting systems, etc. Similarly, taking an ethics-as-engineering approach does not rule out more abstract and general discussions of ethics completely. For example, I think much of my discussion of Mengzi in this chapter is fairly abstract. But (while I certainly may be mistaken in the way in which I have carried out this discussion), I do not think it is impossible in principle to have a fruitful general discussion of what the desirable features of a virtue ethics are.

As our earlier discussion of the limitations of Ruism suggests, Mengzi's position must be modified in certain ways. His primary metaphor for ethical cultivation is the cultivation of plants. Even within particular plant species, there is some variation. Because of conditions of sun, shade, wind and rain, this flower grows tall in one direction, while another flower is shorter, and turns in another direction. Still, paradigmatic instances of plants do not differ too much. One stalk of hearty, healthy millet is pretty much like any other one. And the sprout of a willow tree does not grow to become a mulberry tree, no matter how we manipulate its environment or cultivate it. So Mengzi's sprout metaphor suggests that there is one proper course of human development and one proper goal. This is an example of Ruist monism. Instead, we should come to think of human ethical cultivation in pluralistic terms. One aspect of this pluralism is the recognition that our choices among good lives endow the things we choose with agent-relative value, because they become our aspirations. Had
Lance Armstrong decided to retire from competitive cycling after he developed testicular cancer, I do not think he would have been making an unworthy choice. He could have led some other sort of worthwhile life. But once he decided to return to competitive cycling and enter the Tour de France, succeeding in his chosen way of life came to have special value, precisely because it was his choice.

Good lives will be similar in certain respects. Specifically, each will manifest, to some degree, the Mengzian cardinal virtues. But these manifestations can take quite different forms in different kinds of good lives. I hope these claims will become somewhat clearer as I discuss the Mengzian cardinal virtues and conceptions of human flourishing below.

III.A.2. Responses to Some Common Objections to Mengzi’s View

Even when Mengzi’s position is modified in the direction of pluralism, the appeal to human nature as a foundation for ethics invites several kinds of objections. Obviously, I cannot definitively refute the more powerful of these objections in the space of one chapter. However, I would like to sketch the beginnings of responses to these objections, because it is often assumed that they are definitive and unanswerable. I want to, at the least, motivate a reasonable doubt that the case against Mengzian naturalism has been proven.

Objection: Becoming virtuous cannot be natural, because (as Mengzi acknowledges) it typically requires education and a cultural context conducive to it. Something similar to this objection was formulated by Xúnzǐ 荀子.

Response: Natural characteristics and activities can require nurturing and education in order to develop, even among non-human animals. For example, in order to realize its nature,

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19 See Xunzi’s essay, “Human Nature Is Bad,” in Readings.

20 Graham both notes this fact and anticipates the response I outline here (Graham, "Background," pp. 28-29). It seems likely that, by Xunzi’s time, the notion of xìng had shifted in meaning, so that Mengzi and Xunzi are, at least in part, arguing at cross-purposes. But this does not entail that Mengzi and Xunzi have not significant disagreement over human nature. See Van Norden “Two Views of Human Agency.”
a cat must receive not only water and food (of sufficient quantity and quality), but also
the nurturing of another cat (usually its mother) for at least two, and usually closer to six,
months after birth in order to have a good chance of survival. Furthermore, cats are
unlikely to learn how to hunt and eat their prey unless shown how to hunt by other
cats. So for cats (as for humans) a healthy environment involves active nurturing and
even education by other members of their species.

Consequently, it is a misunderstanding to claim that a trait cannot be natural
simply because it requires a certain level of nurturing or education in order for it to
develop.

Objection: The effort to derive conclusions about what humans should do or
what characteristics they ought to have from claims about human nature violates the
fact-value distinction (or the is-ought distinction). Something like this seems to be one of
Chad Hansen’s major objection’s to Mengzi’s view: “Mencius confuses his implausibly
[sic] specific moral psychology with normative theory.” In standard philosophical
terminology, Mencius ... is trying to get an ought from an is. Response: Hume is
often taken to have established the is-ought distinction in his A Treatise of Human
Nature. However, it is controversial what this distinction is, whether it even exists, and
even whether Hume himself wished to endorse it. One way of explaining the

\[\text{Morris, Catwatching, pp. 91-92.}\]

\[\text{Although it is clear that there is an inborn killing pattern with kittens, this pattern can be damaged by
unnatural rearing conditions. Conversely, really efficient killers have to experience a kittenhood that
exposes them to as much hunting and killing as possible} \ (\text{Morris, p. 96; see also Morris, pp. 77-78}).\]

\[\text{For an intriguing discussion of whether cats also have “cultures,” see Thomas, Tribe, especially pp.
109-113.}\]

\[\text{Daoist Theory, p. 168.}\]

\[\text{Daoist Theory, p. 180 (emphasis in original).}\]

\[\text{See Hume, Treatise, III.i.1, for the locus classicus. Mackie presents a sympathetic account of Hume’s
view, but acknowledges that it } \text{“leaves open the possibility that there should be objectively prescriptive
moral truths ...” (Hume’s, p. 63). Searle, “How,” is a famous, but controversial, argument that the is-ought
gap can be bridged. Gewirth, ”Is-Ought,” reviews a variety of arguments that the gap can be bridged.
Porter, Recovery, 43-48, discusses some Thomistic perspectives on this issue.}\]
distinction is that one cannot validly derive any conclusion that is evaluative from any set of premises that are completely non-evaluative (i.e., have no evaluative content whatsoever). Now, Mengzi would have violated the distinction (thus interpreted) if he regarded the notion of human nature as completely non-evaluative but then attempted to draw evaluative conclusions from that conception of human nature. However, it seems clear that Mengzi regards the notion of human nature as already evaluative. For Mengzi, to say that X is an aspect of human nature is to say that it is good for humans to develop X. But then Mengzi is not attempting to derive an evaluative conclusion from a set of purely descriptive premises. Rather, he is deriving some normative conclusions from others.

One might then present a follow-up objection that Mengzi ought to use only a value-neutral conception of human nature. But is there such a conception? James Wallace has argued that any "study of living creatures as such, including modern biology, inevitably involves normative considerations." After all, in describing and classifying animals, we do not focus on injured specimens, or even the statistically most common specimen (since in many species the majority of newborn animals do not survive to adulthood). And even if Wallace is wrong about biology, Mengzi is not trying to do biology as we understand it. On what grounds do we deny Mengzi, in principle, any appeal to a philosophical anthropology which includes a specifically normative conception of human nature?

Consequently, even if there is a fact-value dichotomy, Mengzi does not violate it, because he is not attempting to deduce normative claims from non-normative ones.

Objection: Mengzi’s view of human nature is logically circular, because a natural way of life is defined in terms of a thing’s potential and healthy conditions of

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27 The is-ought distinction is too big an issue to address adequately here. I shall content myself with observing that if we phrase the distinction as I did above, then I believe that it is true. However, it then seems trivial. Consider an analogy. I cannot derive any conclusions about dolphins from any set of premises that make no reference to dolphins. This does not show anything interesting about the ontological status of dolphins or about the semantic status of claims made about them.

development, but a thing’s potential and its healthy conditions of development are identified in terms of the resulting natural way of life. A.C. Graham seems to reject Mengzi’s view for this reason.  

Response: This objection assumes that there is something suspect about adjusting theoretical concepts in light of one another. However, I subscribe to the now common view that we must accept some version of theoretical holism. For example, in physics, the concepts of space, time, mass, and energy are interrelated. Consequently, the shift from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics required a simultaneous adjustment of our understanding of each of these concepts in the light of the others. A further holism is introduced if we reject (as I think we should) the “myth of the given.” In other words, our observations are not theoretically innocent and incorrigible reports or pure sense-experience. Rather, all our observations are theory-laden, made in terms of some background theoretical beliefs. The Michelson-Morely experiments were taken to provide empirical evidence for Special Relativity. But even the most basic observations involved in these experiments (e.g., the absence of interference patterns) were comprehensible only against a background of theoretical beliefs. Holism does not, I think, make our theories contentless and subjective. We can evaluate our (comparatively) theoretical beliefs in the light of (comparatively) empirical evidence, and some conceivable theoretical adjustments can be ruled out as ad hoc or otherwise implausible. We also interpret and evaluate putative evidence in the light of our theoretical commitments.  

Similarly, the relationship between our understandings of a healthy environment

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30 As Quine famously wrote, it is “folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements, which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements, which hold come what may. Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system [of our statements]. Even a statement very close to the [experiential] periphery [of our system] can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination or by amending certain statements of the kind called logical laws. Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision” (W.V.O. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” in From a Logical Point of View, 2nd. rev. ed. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980], p. 43).
and of human nature are holistic, since we interpret each in the light of the other. This does not mean that every adjustment of the two notions is equally plausible. Furthermore, empirical data can lead us to modify our understandings of these two concepts. For example, it was commonly believed at one time that homosexuality is the result of an abnormal childhood sexual development, and that it was part of a larger fabric of psychological problems. However, evidence suggests no correlation between either of these factors and homosexuality. These factors do not make it impossible to continue to hold that homosexuality is unnatural, but they do make it considerably less plausible.

Consequently, the mere fact that Mengzi's key concepts are interdefined does not entail that they are empirically vacuous or viciously circular.

Objection: The notion of naturalness assumes a teleological worldview, which is metaphysically implausible. Response: Mengzi's worldview is teleological in the sense that living things (at least) are intentionally created (by Heaven) to meet certain standards. However, an appeal to human nature does not require a worldview that is teleological in this particular way. All that naturalness requires metaphysically is that there be, for a given kind of living thing, certain facts about its pattern of development to maturity, its characteristics and activities when mature, and the environmental conditions that allow for these. Evolutionary theory could be used to provide a non-teleological explanation for why these facts obtain.

In particular, Mengzi's conception of human nature asserts that humans have incipient dispositions toward benevolence, righteousness (a sense of shame), and some other virtues. Biology offers three evolutionary explanations for why we find such ethical dispositions in humans and some other animals (despite the fact that such inclinations often seem to reduce the likelihood of their owner's survival): kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and group selection.31 To understand the mechanism of kin selection, suppose that I am disposed to share my resources with my own kin and to

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31 Charles Darwin adumbrated all three of these explanations in his Descent of Man, Part I, Chapters 4-5, pp. 100-138.
risk my life to protect them. Even if these dispositions make it less likely that I will survive to pass on my genes, these dispositions make it more likely that my kin will survive to pass on their genes, and kin are genetically quite similar. Consequently, ethical dispositions end up being more likely to be transmitted.

Reciprocal altruism occurs when animals perform some service(s) for one another under the following conditions: there is a cost to the performer of the service but a benefit for the receiver, and there is a time-lag between performing the service and receiving it back oneself. Reciprocal altruism can be adaptive if there is a sufficient degree of reliability that others will reciprocate. It is possible for reciprocal altruism to occur among purely self-interested animals. However, such an arrangement is highly unstable. Effective long-term employment of reciprocal altruism is facilitated by dispositions such as honesty, loyalty and benevolence. Consequently, insofar as reciprocal altruism increases a creature’s chance of survival, the dispositions that support it will be selected for.\(^\text{32}\)

Group altruism is the most controversial of the three mechanisms; many biologists deny that it occurs. However, Darwin himself argued that a “tribe” among whom dispositions such as courage are comparatively more common is more likely to survive than its neighbors, and hence the members of the tribe are more likely to pass on the genes that account for these dispositions.

Consequently, we do not need a specifically teleological metaphysics in order to make sense of Mengzi’s view. In fact, while evolutionary biology does not entail the details of Mengzi’s position, it does provide a non-teleological explanation of why humans could have "sprouts of virtue."

**Objection:** The only kind of ethics that respects the dignity of a person is one that grounds all morality in a human’s free choices. A person should, of course, make informed choices that take into account information about her own psychology, as well as facts about the culture of which she is a part and its history and traditions. However, it is not only illegitimate, but also morally objectionable, to attempt to arrive at any

\(^{32}\) The classic paper on this topic is Trivers, "Evolution."
conclusions about what one ought to do based on anything external to one's own freely choosing will. (Some philosophers will make this point by saying that a morality that tries to judge human choices by anything external to that choice is "heteronomous," or that a person who tries to shift the responsibility for her choices to anything beyond herself is "inauthentic.") I think that it is partly this intuition that leads Roger Ames to describe a position like the one I find in Mengzi "repugnant."\(^3\) **Response:** Any ethics of human nature suggests that we are ethically bound by something other than our own freely choosing will, so such an ethics must be heteronomous in the technical Kantian sense, or inauthentic in the Sartean sense. However, many of us are unsatisfied with Kantian or existentialist foundations for ethics. Charles Taylor has brilliantly documented the way in which the conception of a self that stresses "autonomy" and "authenticity" is the product of a parochial historical progression in the West.\(^4\) Taylor also gives powerful arguments that it is ultimately incoherent to suggest that moral value comes solely from free individual choice. After all, if nothing has value independently of our choices, what difference does it make what we choose? But it seems that it often does make a great deal of difference what we choose. This is why our choices are often momentous.\(^5\) At the very least, I would say that an ethics of human nature like

\(^3\) Ames, "Mencius," p. 74). Ames does not use this as the basis for a criticism of Mengzi, but instead as a motivation for reading Mengzi in an alternative way.

\(^4\) Taylor, *Sources.* The fact that our current conceptions of "autonomy" and "authenticity," and the ethical intuitions that go with them, are very recent Western inventions, should make us cautious about accepting any interpretation of native Chinese philosophy that (like that of Hall and Ames) appeals to similar intuitions.

\(^5\) To illustrate our radical freedom to choose, Sartre gives the example of a young man in France under the Nazi occupation, trying to decide whether to stay and care for his aged mother or to go and join the Resistance. Most of us would share Sartre's intuition that there is no one "right" choice in this situation. (And when I say "most of us," I do not include most Ruists, who I think would almost certainly favor staying to care for one's aged mother.) However, as Taylor observes, we can imagine a number of other choices (e.g., leaving one's mother to open a candy shop in Paris) that would seem like simply wrong choices, even if the young man freely chose them. See Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism,* and Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity.*
Mengzi's is a helpful corrective to the extreme emphasis on individual choice found in many modern Western moral views.

In addition, there is a way in which an ethics of human nature can satisfy part of the intuition that may underly the view that heteronomy is bad. Since an ethics of human nature is based on facts about our characteristics, needs, and processes of development as human beings, it is not imposed on us as something alien to us as embodied, natural creatures. This will not satisfy a strict Kantian (or his cousin, the Sartean existentialist), but it may help address one intuition that leads people down those paths.

Consequently, Mengzi's view is indeed inconsistent with a radical view of human autonomy, but this is not necessarily a disadvantage of Mengzi's view. There is good reason for rejecting the sort of emphasis on radical autonomy that Mengzi's view challenges.

Objection: Study of other cultures has demonstrated that there is no such thing as human nature, or at least that there is insufficient content to human nature to provide a basis for any substantive ethical claims. A similar line of argument to this was used by the Chinese Mohists prior to Mengzi, but it is more familiar to most Westerners as a conclusion of cross-cultural anthropology. Response: Although this argument is often used in a facile way, it is potentially much more powerful than the previous objections we have considered. However, anthropological opinion on this topic has vacillated. Nineteenth-century anthropology largely ignored the great variety in what appear to be healthy and successful ways of life in favor of Procrustean developmental patterns that located contemporary Western cultures at the apex, and relegated other cultures (and earlier stages in Western culture) to lower rungs on the latter. In reaction against this, twentieth-century anthropology, of which the work of Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict is paradigmatic, has stressed cross-cultural variety, to the point of suggesting (sometimes) that human nature is

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infinitely malleable. However, many of the paradigmatic studies that were used to support this claim have been shown to be unreliable, including Mead's study of adolescent sexuality in Samoa, Benedict's studies of Japanese culture, Benjamin Whorf's study of the Hopi language, and Branislaw Malinowski's supposed counterexample to the Oedipus Complex among the Trobriand. As a result, some have come to agree with anthropologist Donald E. Brown, who has made the (admittedly controversial) claim that, "[w]hatever the motive may be for resisting the idea that there is a human nature whose features shape culture and society, its intellectual foundations have all but collapsed." Equally controversial is Brown's claim that there is some evidence for a list of universal or nearly universal characteristics of human societies: the use of narrative and poetry, facial expressions such as smiling and crying, marriage (in some form), incest taboos (especially against mother-son incest), rituals (of some form) to mourn the dead, rules (of some kind) regulating theft and the use of violence, and others. More recently, psychologist Paul Ekman has concluded, on the basis of decades of empirical research, that the facial expressions of seven emotions are universal across cultures: anger, happiness, fear, surprise, disgust, sadness and contempt. (Interestingly, the Record of Rites gives a list of seven "passions," four of which clearly overlap Ekman's list: happiness, anger, sadness, fear, love, dislike and desire.)

I think we should walk away from this controversy with at least two lessons.

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41 Ekman, *Emotions*.
42 *Li ji*, "Li yun." Interestingly, the term "dislike" (wù 负), can cover the senses of "disgust" and "contempt." In addition, "desire" does not make Ekman's list, but this is because the Chinese notion of "passions" is a broader concept than that of "emotions." Finally, I find it hard to believe that "love" is not a universal human emotion. So there is perhaps even more correspondence between the two lists than there seems at first.
First, anthropological studies are relevant to the issue of whether there is a human nature and, if so, what its content might be, so it would be irresponsible for those working on ethics of human nature to ignore them. Second, it is premature to conclude that the non-existence of human nature has been demonstrated; the controversy is very much a live one.

Let me stress again that I know I have not definitively refuted any of these objections to Mengzi's conception of human nature (much less answered every possible objection). However, I hope I have at least made clear that a Neo-Mengzian model of human nature and a developmental picture of ethical cultivation are defensible and worthy of further philosophical exploration and elaboration.

III.B. The Virtues

In the West, Plato provided one of the most influential lists of the cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, courage and moderation. Aristotle divided virtues into two broad classes, intellectual virtues and virtues of character. However, he gave a longer and potentially open-ended list of virtues. Aquinas adopts Plato's list of four virtues, but specifies that these are the four natural virtues, which must be supplemented with the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. Aquinas then skilfully explains how other virtues are "parts" of one of these cardinal virtues. There are two principles by which these thinkers assure the completeness of their lists. On the one hand, they tie specific virtues to human psychological faculties. This is perhaps most prominent in Plato, for whom wisdom is the excellence of the rational part of the soul, courage is the excellence of the "spirited" part of the soul, moderation is the excellence of the appetitive part of the soul, and justice is the excellence achieved when no part of the soul tries to do the job of any of the other parts. The other principle for assuring the completeness of the lists is dividing human life into spheres of action and experience. Aristotle emphasizes this to a greater degree than does Plato. So courage is the excellence that deals with situations in which significant goods are at risk, especially one's life, while "humility" is the excellence that deals with situations in which social
honors are at stake. For Plato, these would both count as "courage," since they are excellences of the spirited part of the soul. Nonetheless, it would be an oversimplification to claim that Plato only uses the psychological faculty principle, while Aristotle only uses the spheres of experience principle. They (and Aquinas) appeal to both principles, but to varying extents. The flexibility and power of Plato's list of cardinal virtues (especially as expanded by Aquinas) has been well-demonstrated. However, I think that the Mengzian list of cardinal virtues is also illuminating, and is more intuitive in some ways.

In the case of both Mengzi and his School of the Way followers, the division of virtues is almost exclusively in terms of spheres of experience. Mengzi does mark a division among human faculties. On the one hand, there is the heart, the "greater part" of oneself, which is the seat of our cognitive emotions; on the other hand, there are the sense organs, the "lesser part" of oneself, which are the seat of our physical desires (6A15). Mengzi could have associated virtues with the proper functioning of each of these faculties, but I see no evidence at all that he (or his School of the Way followers) did so. Instead, the Mengzian virtues are grouped according to the aspects of human action and experience to which they correspond. I will now sketch how I think this correspondence works. I think I am being faithful to Mengzi's general intuitions, but I should stress that I am doing historical retrieval here, rather than historical exegesis. So I claim license to go beyond what Mengzi says explicitly.

Humans are beings that are social, distinct, expressive and temporal. (1) In saying that humans are social, I mean that living well for humans involves, to at least some degree, participation in a community. Consequently, one sphere of human experience is assisting others. (2) While humans are social, they are also distinct from one another. Ruists since Kongzi himself have acknowledged the common-sense intuition that, at some level, Yan Hui is not Zigong. In saying this, I do not assume anything like radical individualism. Part of a person's distinction from others is provided by her standing in particular relationships with other people: part of my identity is that I am the son of CRVN, for example. So another sphere of human experience is having an identity as distinct from society. (3) The kind of sociality that humans have requires
the expression and appreciation of meaning through symbols and beauty. In every human society we know of, and in every human society we can concretely imagine, people use gestures, expressions, body language and objects (in addition to spoken language) in order to convey meaning and facilitate interactions of various kinds. (This is especially, although not exclusively, true in those interactions that distinguish people from others.) In addition, the kinds of interactions humans have can be done skilfully (hence beautifully) or clumsily (hence distastefully). Thus, one sphere of human experience is the production and appreciation of the beautiful. (4) Finally, humans live in a world that is temporal; it undergoes change. The results of this change are sometimes predictable. (I will almost certainly lose in this jiu jitsu match, because I have lost every single other time.) But even predictable change can require great skill. We know (usually) whether the launch of a satellite into orbit will be successful, but the prediction of this requires immense intellectual talent and training. Other times, we cannot predict the results of change with certainty, so we must learn to think and act as best we can under conditions of uncertain change. (The Yi jing seems tailor-made for advising us in such open-ended situations.) So one sphere of human experience is change, and the difficulty of predicting the results of change.

Each of these four spheres of human activity and experience corresponds to one of the four Mengzian cardinal virtues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sphere of Experience</th>
<th>Virtue (Chinese Name and Standard English Label)</th>
<th>Virtue (Intuitive English Name)</th>
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43 The movie Four Weddings and a Funeral illustrates the British ritual of the best man giving a wedding speech that is intended to be witty, risqué and to cast the groom in an unfavorable light. We see one character give a speech that achieves these goals skilfully and charmingly, while another character fails at the same task in a clumsy and embarrassing way. At one level, we could say that the second character fails to properly assist others, or that he violates the practices that allow people to maintain their individual identities and relationships. Perhaps more plausibly we could say that he fails to respond to the demands of the complex and fluid situation that he faces. But this character knows what, generally speaking, is demanded of him in this situation, and he is properly motivated to achieve it. He simply is lacking in the skill to gracefully navigate this social situation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assisting Others</th>
<th>Benevolence (仁)</th>
<th>Benevolence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Distinction from Others</td>
<td>Righteousness (義)</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Producing and Appreciating Beauty</td>
<td>Propriety (禮)</td>
<td>Refinement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change and Uncertainty</td>
<td>Wisdom (智)</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we begin to think about the Mengzian virtues in this broader way, the limitations of some of the standard English labels become especially evident, so I have supplied some alternative, intuitive English names for two of the virtues.

I would argue that there is, not a unity of these virtues, but an interdependence among them. One person may have benevolence to a greater degree than she has integrity, while in another person the opposite is the case. (This may have been true of Liu Xiahui and Bo Yi, respectively.) However, a deficiency in any one virtue limits the extent to which one can have the other virtues. To pick an extreme case, suppose we try to imagine someone who has a high degree of benevolence, yet has only minimal wisdom. This person might have a disposition to sympathize with the suffering of others and to act on this sympathy, but without wisdom this disposition will fail to reliably result in effective assistance. Simply put, as well-intentioned as one may be, how can he actually help anyone if he doesn't know how to do so (or even what would count as "helping in this situation")? If your partner repeatedly misses work because of a drinking problem, and you sympathize with her, what should you do? Cover up for her? Ignore the problem? Tell her she has to sober up or move out? The wise person either knows the answer, or at least knows that he doesn't know the answer, and knows how to start finding out the answer.

It is perhaps tempting to say that, although the well-intentioned person would be more effective if he were also wise, he could still be deemed to be benevolent just on the basis of his sympathy and good intentions. But remember that virtues are
excellences that enable one to lead a flourishing life. The sympathetic but foolish person has a disposition that, if it contributes to a flourishing life at all, does so only accidentally and sporadically. At this point, one might object that, realistically speaking, no one is merely sympathetic without any trace of wisdom. I think this is true, but it just goes to show the interrelationship of the virtues. Anything recognizable as sympathy would have to be accompanied by some degree of wisdom. To the extent that sympathy was part of the excellence of benevolence, to that extent it would incorporate wisdom, because without wisdom it could not contribute to living a flourishing life.

So if we characterize them abstractly, we can recognize Mengzi's four cardinal virtues as characteristics that are necessary in any society. In addition, many aspects of Mengzi's specific characterizations of the virtues seem to me, at the very least, worth taking seriously. (1) Consider "benevolence": we humans do generally have a very strong disposition toward agent-relative concern for our family members, friends and members of our communities. I do not think the Mohists present a good argument for overriding this disposition, and I think Thomas Nagel (among others) diagnoses what is generally wrong with such arguments.44 (2) Regarding "righteousness" or "integrity": Some have objected to a sense of shame as a motivation for virtuous action, but I agree with Williams that any properly functioning virtuous agent would have a sense of shame.45 (3) The parts of Mengzian "wisdom" are acknowledged to be virtues in the Western traditions as well. But I find it more intuitive to think of wisdom as a disposition that enables the proper functioning of the other virtues, rather than being (as it is for Aristotelians) the master virtue itself. (4) Finally, as Joel Kupperman has pointed out, Ruists have much to offer by drawing the attention of philosophers to living a life that is beautiful.46 In addition, I suggest that they are superior to some Western philosophers who have stressed beauty and style (such as Nietzsche and Foucault), because Ruists like Mengzi have a more robust and plausible conception of how beauty must fit in with other aspects of human life, such as benevolence and integrity.

44 Nagel, View from Nowhere.
45 Williams, Shame and Necessity.
46 Kupperman, "Naturalness Revisited."
III.C. Human Flourishing

1. Ritual

Ritual is a topic that has received almost no attention among secular philosophers in the West. Yet, as I noted in my discussion of Kongzi, ritual is potentially a very powerful transformative social force. In particular, we (and I now limit my discussion to the contemporary United States, since that is the non-Chinese culture I know best) have a society increasingly marked by fragmentation and a lack of civility. These are the sort of problems that ritual, at its best, can help address. A well-functioning communal ritual gives people a sense of belonging to a larger group. This both expresses and reinforces a commitment to working for the well-being of the group, and to dealing with disagreement and conflict in a peaceful and respectful way.

But precisely because we are a pluralistic and comparatively ritual-poor society, the preservation and development of rituals presents special problems. In order for a ritual to function, a significant number of people must participate in it, and must feel about it in the right way. If one creates a new ritual ex nihilo, or even revives a long-ignored ritual, it will frequently fail to achieve these two conditions. In addition, even rituals that are successful for certain groups may become divisive in other ways. If we allow school-sponsored prayer, it will alienate and offend one portion of the population. But if we disallow it, we alienate and offend another portion. (And both sides self-righteously assume that the other is being narrow-minded and unfairly foisting their beliefs on others.) One alternative is to aim to produce rituals for self-selected groups, leaving participation voluntary. Thus, Christians celebrate Christmas, Jews celebrate Hannukah, and some African-Americans celebrate Kwanzaa. The problem is that, by its very nature, this approach fails to develop rituals that link diverse groups together. Generally speaking, the more a ritual is, in Geertz’ formulation, a model for and a model of, the more effective it will be in shaping behavior. But, to the same extent, the ritual will express values that will offend some segment of the population.
It is tempting to dismiss the problem as intractable, and conclude that rituals must always be of limited (and perhaps ever-lessening) significance in a society such as our own. However, I submit that one of the most significant problems in our society is a feeling of alienation. Humans need to feel "at home" in their communities. The failure to feel "at home" makes it difficult for people to sustain their commitments to social participation and to acting for the good of others. But I do not have a principled solution to the problem of how to reconcile rituals with pluralism. The most we can do is to recognize the power of rituals, judge them on a case by case basis, always keeping an eye on how rituals include or fail to include others, and work for their creation and preservation when we feel it will be beneficial.

III.C.2. Living Well

Let's review. A fairly limited number of candidates for "the good life" have been proposed. Aristotle dismissed as candidates for human flourishing the lives dedicated to wealth, physical pleasure and social prestige. Instead, he considers as serious candidates the "practical life" of virtuous activity with others aimed at the good of the community and the "theoretical life" of research and contemplation of general truths. (I pass by in respectful silence the mountain of literature that already exists on why there seems to be an unresolved tension between these two candidates in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and whether the two actually can be reconciled.) Aquinas agrees with Aristotle in rejecting wealth, physical pleasure and social prestige, and adds arguments against fame and bodily health. He takes seriously the two candidates that Aristotle considers, but ultimately argues that the human good can only be found in the beatific vision of God. Artistic production has been deemphasized by those in the Aristotelian tradition. For Aristotle himself, it counts as a sort of *poiēsis*, "making," and hence is considered banausic and unfit for the highly cultivated. However, the Romantic tradition in the West has been more sympathetic, stressing the value of the appreciation and production of painting, sculpture, music, poetry and other imaginative literature.

One of the values of studying Chinese philosophy is that it can offer us
alternative conceptions of flourishing ways of life. As we have seen, for Ruists, theoretical understanding is a means to achieving other goods, rather than an ultimate goal. In addition, Ruists have had great respect for artistic production and appreciation, particularly in calligraphy, painting, music and poetic composition. This is often because of the assumption that aesthetic appreciation can guide our emotions in appropriate ways. Furthermore, in later Ruist appreciation of art often merges with a "Daoist" reverence for the ethical value of skilful activity. One of the most famous stories in the "Daoist" Zhuangzi is about Butcher Ding, whose skilful dismembering of an ox carcass amazes a ruler. When questioned, Ding explains that he does not rely upon "skill," but instead follows the Way. Through years of intensive practice, Ding has learned to stop seeing with his eyes and to intuitively follow the natural structure of the ox's body as he carves. This kind of practice is remarkably effective. But Zhuangzi seems to hold it up as an instance of a kind of activity which is valuable in itself, and not just for its effects. This became one of the inspirations for the Zen Buddhist ideal of skilful activity as overcoming the false dichotomy between self and the rest of the world. Hence, archery, calligraphy, the martial arts, painting, swordsmanship and flower arrangement all became activities that could potentially be stimuli to and manifestations of enlightenment. The character Lin Daiyu in Dream of the Red Chamber expresses this view in regard to playing the Qin (a sort of zither):

I realized that playing the Qin is a form of meditation and spiritual discipline handed down to us from the ancients.⁴⁷ ... The essence of the Qin is restraint. It was created in ancient times to help man purify himself and lead a gentle and sober life, to quell all wayward passions and to curb every riotous impulse. ... [When you play, your] Soul may now commune with the Divine, and enter into that mysterious Union with the Way.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Cao, Story of the Stone, vol. 4, p. 152 (chapter 86).
⁴⁸ Cao, Story of the Stone, vol. 4, p. 154 (chapter 86).
If we find something plausible in the meditative view of artistic activity (which I do, at least), then we can broaden our list of flourishing lives to include the life of skillful activity. Thus, the skilful archer, basketball player and actor take their place beside the astronomer, the philosopher, the senator and the dean.\textsuperscript{49}

Perhaps most distinctive of Ruism, though, is the view that there is great ethical value simply in life with one's family and friends. Passing the time of day with one's friends, playing with one's children, going on a picnic, attending a religious service then having a leisurely brunch – for Plato or Aristotle these are only means to some higher goal. But why should they not be \textit{the} goal? Or, at the very least, why should social activities like these not be an indispensable \textit{part} of living well? I have been struck by how some philosophers I know, in the grip of an Aristotelian or Platonistic conception of human flourishing, assume without question that the best and most important part of human life is intense intellectual activity and philosophical debate. They seem at a loss when I ask them how their love for and life with their partner, friends and family fits into this conception. It is typically not that these more personal aspects of their life are unimportant to them; it is that the only framework for thinking about human flourishing that they know relegates it to insignificance. But, in doing so, it impoverishes their understanding of their life, and of human life in general.

The following passage (probably fabricated long after the time of Kongzi, unfortunately\textsuperscript{50}) suggests the Ruist conception of human flourishing that I personally find

\textsuperscript{49} Keep in mind that, for a Mengzian, the exercise of skill should be in the context of a life that also manifests benevolence and righteousness. Consequently, the actor who skillfully portrays the humanitarian character, but is cruel off the stage, is leading a bad life by Mengzian standards. (Can Mengzi provide a compelling explanation of \textit{why} such a skilled but cruel actor should cultivate benevolence? Can \textit{any} virtue ethical account do so? This is a challenging question that I hope to turn to in a later work.)

\textsuperscript{50} I think that Steven Van Zoeren is correct in suggesting that the earliest sections of the \textit{Analects} "are characterized by sayings with no narrative context at all or relatively simple contexts," while in later passages "we find narratives of complexity and sophistication" (\textit{Poetry and Personality}, p. 23). This passage, \textit{Analects} 11.26, seems to be one of those passages that shows great narrative sophistication (ibid., pp. 60-3). It is clearly, though, a tremendously interesting passage, which is worth at least an
most attractive and inspiring:

Zilu, Zengxi, Ranyou, and Zihua were seated in attendance. The Master said to them, “I am older than any of you, but do not feel reluctant to speak your minds on that account. You are all in the habit of complaining, ‘I am not appreciated.’ Well, if someone were to appreciate your talents and give you employment, how would you then go about things?”

Zilu spoke up immediately, “If I were given charge of a state that could field a thousand chariots -- even one hemmed in between powerful states, suffering from armed invasions, and afflicted by famine -- before three years were up I could infuse it with courage and a sense of what is right.”

The Master smiled at him, and then turned to Ranyou. “You, Ranyou!” he said, “What would you do?”

Ranyou answered, “If I were given charge of a state sixty or seventy -- or a least fifty or sixty -- square li in area, before three years were up I would see that it was materially prosperous. As for instructing the people in ritual practice and music, this is a task that would have to await the arrival of a gentleman.”

The Master then turned to Zihua. “You, Zihua! What would you do?”

Zihua answered, “It is not that I am saying that I would actually be able to do so, but my wish, at least, would be to devote myself to study. I would like, perhaps, to serve as a minor functionary -- properly clad in ceremonial cap and gown -- in charge of ancestral temple events or diplomatic gatherings.”

article or book chapter on its own. Here I only cite half of it to illustrate, in a cursory way, the Ruist conception of human flourishing.
The Master then turned to Zengxi. “You, Zengxi! What would you do?”

Zengxi stopped strumming upon the zither, and as the last notes faded away he set the instrument aside and rose to his feet. “I would choose to do something quite different from any of the other three.”

“What harm is there in that?” the Master said. “Each of you is merely expressing your own aspirations.”

Zengxi then said, “In the third month of spring, once the spring garments have been completed, I should like to assemble a company of five or six young men and six or seven boys to go bathe in the Yi River and enjoy the breeze upon the Rain Altar, and then return singing to the Master’s house.”

The Master sighed deeply, saying, “I am with Zengxi!”

Me too.