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Vytis Silius

CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL CONTROVERSY ON THE NATURE OF EARLY CONFUCIAN ETHICS

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Research supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Marius Povilas Šaulauskas (Vilnius University,
Humanities, Philosophy – 01 H)

Counsellors:

Prof. Dr. Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Brown University,
Humanities, Philosophy – 01 H)

Prof. Dr. Roger T. Ames (University of Hawai'i,
Humanities, Philosophy – 01 H)

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETAS

Vytis Silius

ANKSTYVOSIOS KONFUCINĖS ETIKOS POBŪDIS ŠIUOLAIKINĖSE FILOSOFIJOS KONTROVERSIJOSE

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Mokslinis vadovas:
prof. dr. Marius Povilas Šaulauskas (Vilniaus universitetas,
humanitariniai mokslai, filosofija – 01 H)

Konsultantai:
prof. dr. Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Brown universitetas,
humanitariniai mokslai, filosofija – 01 H)

prof. dr. Roger T. Ames (Hawai‘i universitetas,
humanitariniai mokslai, filosofija – 01 H)

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INTRODUCTION[1]

This dissertation deals with the controversy between two contemporary Western philosophical interpretations of early Confucian ethics: *Confucian virtue ethics* and *Confucian role ethics*. At the centre of this dissertation are the two different presentations of what constitutes the core characteristics of early Confucian ethics. At the same time, this dissertation is a critical reconstruction and analysis of the changing Western reception of early Confucian ethics.

The first interpretation – *Confucian virtue ethics* – will be discussed and analyzed, because during the last several decades it is the most prevalent interpretation in the English language literature (presented in textbooks and encyclopediae of philosophy; see Mou 2009, Wong 2013) and one that receives the widest application. For example, Confucian virtue ethics framework is also used in bioethical (Fan 2002) or jurisprudential (Wang and Solum 2012) discussions. The proponents of this interpretation propose that ethical ideas found in the writings of early Confucians are best understood and most adequately presented as a form of *virtue ethics*, putting the notion of praiseworthy character traits – or virtues – and the cultivation thereof at the centre of early Confucian ethical sensibility. Virtue ethics is a major approach in normative ethics that came to prominence in Western academic circles in the end of the 20th century. The proponents of this approach draw heavily on Plato and, more particularly, Aristotle as the founding fathers of virtue ethics (Hursthouse 2013). Accordingly, the Confucian virtue ethics interpretation claims that the recourse to this ethical theory, originally based on the Western philosophical assumptions and notions, helps contemporary Western reader, some cultural differences notwithstanding, to better understand and explain the meaning and relevance of early Confucian ethical writings.

The second interpretation – *Confucian role ethics* – will be discussed and analyzed because it is the most recent systemic interpretation of early

[1] I am indebted to Diana Fontaine for proofreading the manuscript. All mistakes that are left are most assuredly mine.

Confucian ethics that directly opposes the dominant Confucian virtue ethics interpretation. On the one hand, Confucian role ethics interpretation does not explicitly rely on any ready-made and already existing Western ethical theory as an interpretive framework to elucidate and explicate early Confucian ethical writings. On the other hand, proponents of Confucian role ethics interpretation claim that at the centre of early Confucian ethical thinking there is a concern about flourishing human relationships, which are normatively regulated through familial and societal *roles*. These roles and relations are seen as ontologically and epistemologically primary, because they ground a relational notion of the human being that Confucian role ethics interpretation develops from early Confucian texts. If the notion of a character trait, or the terms of particular virtues, can be usefully applied in explication of early Confucian ethics, they are to be thought of as merely derivative and secondary to the concrete lived relationships.

The two interpretations are compared in this dissertation in order to critically assess the ongoing controversy between the two and to evaluate the prospects of the newly suggested alternative reading of early Confucian ethics as Confucian role ethics.

Relevance of the work

The general interest of academic philosophers in the philosophical relevance of early Chinese thought is evident in a number of academic journals exclusively devoted to comparative philosophical studies (*Philosophy East and West*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Asian Philosophy*, *Dao*, *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*) and in a growing number of articles dealing with Chinese thought published in academic philosophical journals that do not specialize in Asian philosophies, such as *Ethics*, *Philosophy*, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, and others. The relevance of the present dissertation is also evident in an increasing number of PhD dissertations on Chinese thought and its reception defended throughout European, Australian, and American universities, the tendency that is made possible and facilitated by inclusion of Asian thought-related courses into the

curricula of many leading Western universities, as well as numerous conferences and round table discussions organized annually.

More specifically, the relevance of the present dissertation is highlighted by the recently revitalized controversy on the nature of early Confucian ethics found in the English language philosophical writings. During the last couple of decades, the interpretation of early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics has been solidified by inclusion of this interpretational scheme into philosophical encyclopediae (Mou 2009, Wong 2013) and the publication of several recent monographs that argue for a virtue ethics framework in early Confucian studies (Van Norden 2007, Yu 2007, Sim 2007). Moreover, a special journal edition of *Dao* (vol. 9 no. 3) was dedicated to Confucianism and virtue ethics, and many articles by the proponents of this position appear in philosophical journals (Bretzke 1995, Yu 1998, Sim 2001, 2010, Slingerland 2011).

However, the philosophical discussions on the nature of early Confucian ethics and the applicability of foreign conceptual frameworks in early Confucian studies have never been completely settled. Doubts and suggestions were raised even from the virtue ethics camp itself (MacIntyre 1991, Angle and Slote 2013). Even more fervently the controversy over the nature of early Confucian ethics was recently re-animated by the formulation of an alternative framework for translating key terminology and explicating the content of early Confucian ethical writings – the Confucian role ethics interpretation. This interpretation came to prominence after the publication of joint translations by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. of two early Confucian classics – the *Lunyu* 論語 and the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Ames and Rosemont 1998, Rosemont and Ames 2009). After several more articles (Ames 2010, Ames and Rosemont 2011) and a monograph (Ames 2011) Confucian role ethics interpretation is receiving more attention not only among Western but also among Chinese academics (Angle 2012, Weber and Wen 2012). PhD dissertations are being prepared on Confucian role ethics and its relations to various other Chinese and Western schools of thought.

In Chinese-speaking academia several events were already organized in the most prestigious philosophy departments to specifically discuss ideas of role ethics approach to early Confucianism: in 2008, Ch'ien Mu (Qian Mu) Lectures at the Chinese University of Hong Kong; in 2011 an academic workshop at the People's University of China; and in 2013 an international conference at Shandong University. The Chinese neologism for the term "role ethics" – *juésè lúnlǐxué* 角色倫理學 – is being introduced to Chinese readers, as English translations of the *Lunyu* and the *Xiaojing* by Ames and Rosemont (1998, and Rosemont and Ames 2009) were translated back into Chinese, as well as some articles that explicate role ethics position.

Yet another perspective, from which the relevance of the present dissertation can be defended, stems from explicating the universalistic relational concept of the human being, on which Confucian role ethics is based. According to this view, a person is understood as the totality of one's lived roles and relationships. In the recent philosophical, psychological, and sociological academic literature, there is a growing number of scholars who criticize an individualistic notion of the human being as a free, rational, and autonomous self, a viewpoint that has prevailed in Western thought since the Enlightenment (Sandel 1984, Gilligan 1993, Noddings 2002, Midgley 2003, Gergen 2009, Kellenberger 2013). Critical attitudes towards an atomistic understanding of humans as expressed by these authors resonate with the analysis and explication of Confucian role ethics notion of human provided in this dissertation.

The scope of available research

English language literature that presents early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics, or simply tries to elucidate early Confucian ethical ideas through the lens of Aristotelian philosophy, is already extensive. Main studies analysed in this dissertation include Yu (2007), Van Norden (2007), Sim (2007), Cua (1998), Ivanhoe (1993 and 2002). Works of these authors are the most representative source for Confucian virtue ethics approach in English language literature because the authors stand out as the most prominent

advocates that take virtue as the central part of early Confucian ethical thinking. Publications that specifically discuss methodological questions in Confucian studies and that are important for arguments in this dissertation include MacIntyre (1991), Slingerland (2001), Shun (2009). Although Fingarette (1972) has preceded much of the direct controversy on the nature of early Confucian ethics between virtue and role interpretations, his ideas were, in a sense, ahead of its time and have helped to formulate the argument of this dissertation.

In the analysis of Confucian role ethics position, mainly books and articles by Rosemont (2004, 1991a, 1991c, 1988), Ames (2011), Hall and Ames (1987), translations of early Confucian classics with commentaries by Ames and Rosemont (1998), and Rosemont and Ames (2009) were used. The special issue of *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* (see Weber and Wen 2012) was dedicated for the critical assessment of Confucian role ethics position as laid out by Ames (2011).

The controversy on the nature of early Confucian ethics is still an ongoing debate; thus, scholars involved in it are mostly dealing with the explication of their respective interpretative frameworks and discussing the translations of the key terminology. This dissertation finds its unique place among current English language scholarship on the topic, as it is specifically devoted to meta-analysis of the debate between Confucian virtue and role ethics interpretations, and provides comparison and evaluation of underlying assumptions, methodological approaches, and the key arguments of participants of the debate.

Because the dissertation focuses on the current reception of early Confucian ethics in the English speaking philosophical literature and not directly on the relevant early Confucian canons themselves, my primary sources were works of contemporary writers. However, I have examined their claims on early Confucian ethics by consulting early Confucian sources – mainly the *Lunyu*, *Mengzi* 孟子, and *Xiaojing* – in original classical Chinese. For this the Internet databases *Chinese Texts Project* and *Thesaurus Linguae Sericae* were essential.

In Lithuania early Chinese thought and its philosophical reception in the contemporary West did not attract much attention. Several dissertations have been defended on Chinese thought: Poškaitė (1999), Juzefovič (2009), Vaitkevičius (2012). Early Chinese ideas were discussed by Antanas Andrijauskas (1996, 2003, 2004). However, none of these were dealing with contemporary Western philosophical reception of early Confucian ethics, which makes this dissertation the first of its kind in Lithuania.

Objectives of the present research

The goal of this dissertation is to provide a critical analysis of the controversy between virtue ethics and role ethics interpretations of early Confucian ethics. More specifically, this dissertation aims at demonstrating that Confucian role ethics interpretation has suggested a credible alternative to the presently dominating view of early Confucian writings as a form of virtue ethics. Without claiming that Confucian role ethics interpretation presents the final and objectively correct approach to early Confucian studies, the dissertation aims to show that this new and coming interpretation merits further research and development in order to fully reveal its implications; that is, the importance (and the limitations) of relationality as well as the familial and communal roles not only for early Confucian ethics, but also for contemporary philosophical discussions on the scope and nature of ethics and the notion of the human being. In order to achieve this goal, the following tasks are being set:

1) to reconstruct the background, explicate underlying assumptions, and evaluate the core concept cluster of Confucian virtue ethics interpretation;

2) to determine methodological and philosophical positions that set the greatest challenges to virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucian ethics;

3) to reconstruct the background, explicate underlying assumptions of Confucian role ethics interpretation and to determine the focal point of controversy between Confucian virtue and role ethics in interpreting early Confucian thought; to highlight and evaluate the novelty of Confucian role ethics approach;

4) to assess whether Confucian role ethics interpretation is able to tackle challenges that the proponents of Confucian virtue ethics interpretation are facing, and how so.

Thesis of the dissertation

In the current philosophical controversy, proponents of the Confucian role ethics interpretation provide an alternative to the now most prevalent virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucian ethics. The Confucian role ethics interpretation provides new translations for the core Confucian ethical terminology and suggests that communal roles and relations rather than individual character dispositions are the core elements of early Confucian ethics. Confucian role ethics interpretation places the relational concept of the human as the totality of one's *lived* roles and relations, at the centre of its explication of early Confucian ethics, and thus tackles both major pitfalls that weaken Confucian virtue ethics interpretation, that is, a) the incommensurability challenge that stems from the attempt to explicate views of one philosophical system through the conceptual framework of the other; and b) the marginalization of relational aspect in early Chinese ethics, that stems from rendering all the core terminology into aretaic notions.

Methods of research

This dissertation first and foremost is the hermeneutical project that endeavours to critically reflect the ever-changing European attitudes toward Chinese intellectual culture. In various stages of European-Chinese intellectual and cultural exchange, these different attitudes have resulted in differently constructed interpretational schemes explaining the nature and characteristics of Chinese thought. One of the main methodological assumptions throughout this dissertation is that these competing Western explanations, in a large degree, mirror the developments of the philosophical tendencies among Western cultures and thinkers. Thus, the explanation of Chinese ideas necessarily is an eisegetic activity, which tells us at least as much about the one who explains, as about that which is explained. However, the continuous process of establishing and of challenging the prevailing Western interpretations in

Chinese studies awards a careful European reader with an ever more refined understanding of subtleties of the vast and complex Chinese intellectual world. It might not be able to provide us with the final answer what Chinese thinking *is*, but it can well give us a clearer grasp of what Chinese thinking is *not*.

Building on these methodological assumptions, this dissertation starts with the historical reconstruction of early Western reception of Confucian thought. This is meant to clarify the historical and cultural context, in which the virtue and role ethics interpretations of early Confucians have developed to become the main axis of English language philosophical controversy on the nature of early Confucian ethics.

Methods used in this dissertation include semantic analysis, synchronic and diachronic comparative analysis of the key notions, as well as the reconstruction of methodological and philosophical assumptions of both interpretations. Hermeneutical assumption on the importance of cultural and historical background in understanding cultural phenomena is evident in my attempt to explicate both interpretations under the investigation by placing them within the continuous historical process of both English language Chinese studies and the development of Western moral philosophy.

Structure of dissertation

This dissertation consists of an Introduction, two Parts and Conclusions. The two parts critically analyse the backgrounds, underlying assumptions, and the basic vocabularies of Confucian virtue ethics and Confucian role ethics, respectively.

In the first Part, the historical and intellectual background for the formation of virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucian ethics is explained first. In this part, I argue that since missionaries' first attempts to present and explain early Confucian ethics to a Western audience, one widely accepted characteristic of early Confucian writings was the fundamentally practical orientation and disinterest in universally formulated ethical principles, vouched either by the idea of a transcendental God or a rational mind.

Secondly, the arguments in support of virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucian ethics are reconstructed and critically analysed. This dissertation argues that virtue ethics interpretation is a more feasible interpretation of early Confucian ethics than the picture provided by missionaries and the attempts to shoehorn early Confucian ethical sensibilities into the modern Western debates between utilitarians and deontologists. Nevertheless, virtue ethics interpretation, in fact, has continued the earlier tradition that takes Western views as the reference point in intercultural studies. Thus the discussion of virtue ethics interpretation in the second Section of Part 1 is centred on what is presented as the two biggest challenges to Confucian virtue ethics interpretation: a) incommensurability challenge for comparative philosophy attempting to explain one culture through the conceptual framework of another, and b) the reductionist tendency in translating early Confucian core ethical terminology as aretaic notions.

In the second Part, the background of alternative reading of early Confucian ethics as role ethics is explained first. In this part, the main argument is that Confucian role ethics alternative is formulated as an attempt to balance the perceived asymmetry in the comparative philosophy, that is, the situation when Chinese thinkers and thought systems are explained and evaluated solely from Western positions, but the opposite approach is rarely used.

Secondly, arguments for Confucian role ethics interpretation are reconstructed and critically analysed. This dissertation argues that role ethics interpretation attempts to incorporate relational aspects of early Confucian thought as the inherent feature of early Confucian ethics, while trying to avoid the technical terminology of Western philosophical tradition. Thus the discussion of role ethics interpretation in the second Section of Part 2 is centred on what is presented as the focal point of role ethics interpretation of early Confucian ethics: a unique concept of the human as the totality of one's lived roles and relations found in early Confucian texts. Understanding of

“roles” in Confucian role ethics is also explicated, and the potentially problematic points of Confucian role ethics are discussed.

Conclusions are made that proponents of Confucian role ethics interpretation provide a credible alternative to the now most prevalent Confucian virtue ethics interpretation. Confucian role ethics interpretation places the relational concept of the human, as totality of one’s lived roles and relations, at the centre of their explication of early Confucian ethics, and thus successfully tackles both major pitfalls that weaken Confucian virtue ethics interpretation.

Man through man. Man in relation to man. Man created by man. Man strengthened by man. Is it my illusion that I see in this a secret new reality?

Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*

1 VIRTUE ETHICS INTERPRETATION OF EARLY CONFUCIANISM

1.1 Early Western reception of Confucian thought

1.1.1 Reception of Chinese thought in the Enlightenment

Since Jesuit missions to China in the 16th century, academic interest in things Chinese has grown into a separate academic branch of sinology. Part of the interest of sinologists was always Confucian thought and especially its ethical and political ideas. However, until recently, professional European philosophers have rarely taken Chinese philosophy as system of thought that is relevant to their current philosophical questions. If Chinese intellectual traditions were studied, it was usually done from a historical and cultural perspective, and rarely from the philosophical. In order to understand the grounds for this lack of philosophical appreciation, we will now take a look at how some key figures in the European Enlightenment evaluated early Confucian thought.

In the West philosophical interest in Chinese culture had its first major impulse from the writings of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716). He is, arguably, the most prominent Western philosopher who analyzed Chinese thought and compared it to Western modes of thinking without thoroughly

dismissing it[2]. Leibniz's studies of Chinese thought were not hindered by an assumption of the overall supremacy of Western philosophy over other modes of thinking. In the Preface to the *Novissima Sinica* Leibniz has expressed his belief in the superiority of the West in theoretical disciplines, in logic, metaphysics, and "the knowledge of things incorporeal". In Leibniz's words, Westerners "excel by far in the understanding of concepts which are abstracted by the mind from the material" (Leibniz 1994, 46). The same could be said about the superiority of the West in the military sciences, although Leibniz did not think this latter fact should be a source of pride (ibid.).

However, there is a sphere of human knowledge that, according to Leibniz, the Western thought falls behind Chinese. In Leibniz' own words,

> But who would have believed that there is on earth a people who, though we are in our view so very advanced in every branch of behavior, still surpass us in comprehending the precepts of civil life? Yet now we find this to be so among the Chinese, as we learn to know them better. And so if we are their equals in the industrial arts, and ahead of them in contemplative sciences, certainly they surpass us (though it is almost shameful to confess this) in practical philosophy, that is, in the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and use of mortals (Leibniz 1994, 46-7).

In Leibniz's account of the characteristics of early Chinese thinking we already see a theme that will be vibrantly discussed and evaluated among Western intellectuals up to today, and which has facilitated wide-ranging acceptance of virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucian ethics since the last third of the 20th century. That is the predominant practical orientation of Chinese thought, their engagement with concrete and particular experience and the relative disinterest in establishing abstract principles or employing abstract ideas as the grounds for drawing inferences. In Leibniz's evaluation, the fact that "Chinese are thus seen to be ignorant of that great light of the mind, the art

[2] Voltaire probably would be the second major Western philosopher in this regard. See Rowbotham (1932).

of demonstration" (Leibniz 1994, 46) is not seen as disqualifying them from the rational discussion. The system of ancient Chinese symbols found in the *Book of Changes* (易經 *Yijing*) and known as the trigrams and hexagrams (卦 *gua*) was perceived by Leibniz as an early model of a binary mathematics that he himself was working on (Cook and Rosemont in Leibniz 1994, 16-7; for Leibniz's own account see ibid, 73). In addition, in Leibniz's time still very recent cruelties and destructions of the Thirty Years' War stood in stark contrast to the perceived political harmony and civility among the Chinese. Thus, Leibniz exalted "how beautifully all the laws of the Chinese, in contrast to those of other peoples, are directed to the achievement of public tranquility and the establishment of social order, so that men shall be disrupted in their relations as little as possible" (Leibniz 1994, 47).

Leibniz did not think that there are no evils inflicted upon each other among the people in China, as "our folly is indeed great, but quite universal" (ibid). However, he was certain that in the search for remedies of these evils, the Chinese have accomplished much more than the founders of religious teachings in European traditions (ibid). On the other hand, as Gregory M. Reihman points out, Leibniz was also convinced that Chinese shared with him some crucial metaphysical convictions, namely, the view of the world as composed of a plurality of isolated individual substances, interaction of which is organized by a creator God (see Reihman 2006, 53).

However appreciative is Leibniz's assessment of Chinese, looking from today's perspective, it is clear that his understanding was limited by the poor availability of first-hand materials on China in 17th-18th century Europe. A majority of those was produced by various European Christian missionaries, whose accounts of China were influenced by their mission to evangelize Chinese. Leibniz also relied on missionaries for information on Chinese thought. Not surprisingly, Leibniz's understanding of Chinese cosmological, metaphysical, and theological views, as presented in Reihman's quote, was notably Christianized and it is highly improbable that it was adequate.

A follower of Leibniz and an important figure in German Enlightenment Christian Wolff (1679-1754), in his generally positive evaluation of Chinese thinking, has also concentrated on the political theory and ethics of early Confucians. In his 1721 public lecture *Oratio dé Sinarum philosophia practica* (Discourse on the Practical Philosophy of the Chinese) Wolff points out Kongzi's (Kǒngzǐ 孔子, or Confucius) ability to work out a reliable ethical system even without the support of revealed theology or natural religion. Wolff stresses that Kongzi relies on the "force of nature" rather than idea of God in practicing virtue:

> Since the ancient Chinese … did not know the creator of the world, they had no natural religion; still less did they know any witness of the divine revelation. That is why they could only count on the force of nature – and indeed such as was free from all religion – in order to practice virtue (Wolff, in Louden 2002, 73-4).

Here we once again see the appreciation of the practical orientation of the early Chinese, but, in addition, Wolff fully acknowledges that it is probably related to the absence of the idea of a transcendent God Creator in early Chinese thought.

This positive evaluation of the practical orientation and reliance on the concrete in the early Chinese writings comes to an end with the establishment of the primacy of rationality in the Enlightenment project. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) has thoroughly rejected Daoist and Buddhist thinking, as well as much later neo-Confucian legacy, mainly on the charge of mysticism and nihilism. In Kant's evaluation directed mainly at Daoism, "Chinese philosophers strive in dark rooms with eyes closed to experience and contemplate their nihility" (Kant in Reinhart 2006, 53). According to Julia Ching, Kant dismissed "the favorable reports of the Jesuit missionaries, sources from which Leibniz and Wolff derived their enthusiasm – as inspired propaganda" (Ching 1978, 168).

As Reihman suggests in his article, Kant's position could have been influenced and his rejection of Chinese philosophy strengthened not only by his independent understanding of early Chinese ideas in their original form, but also by his philosophical disagreements with Leibniz (see Reihman 2006, 55). This idea, that intellectual tensions within Western philosophy have significantly influenced understanding and assessment of early Chinese thinking should not be taken as a thing of the past. One of the arguments throughout this dissertation is that the disagreements among the Western interpretations of Chinese thought up to today have to be seen as echoing the philosophical developments in the West.

Despite the fact that many Confucians throughout history have criticized Daoists and Buddhist on the grounds – similarly to Kant – of the alleged disregard of the sensible world, Kant did not value Confucian thought any better. He was convinced that

> Confucius teaches in his writings nothing outside a moral doctrine designed for princes ... and offers examples of former Chinese princes ... But a concept of virtue and morality never entered the heads of the Chinese (Kant, in Reihman 2006, 58).

If Daoist, Buddhist and neo-Confucian thinkers for Kant were engaged "in misguided philosophical flights of fancy" (Reihman 2006, 55), Kant's dissatisfaction with morality as laid out by Kongzi, according to Reihman, is largely because "it has not been raised to the level of conceptual reflection" (Reihman 2006, 58; also see Ching 1978, 169). Kant perceives early Confucian morality as based *only* in the common sense and discovered in historical precedents, without formal justification of moral rules by the rationally perceived sense of duty:

> This nation is entirely incapable to rise to what is nobility and duty, and all the morality of Confucius consists of conventional dictums (Kant, *Physical Geography*, Ms. 2599[3], p. 305, in Glasenapp 1954, 103-4).

In other words, the particularity of Kongzi's claims and the perceived lack of abstract conceptualization are clear signs to Kant that early Confucians remained unaware of genuine morality. Julia Ching contends that with such a position Kant "represents a kind of prototype Western philosopher who judges Eastern philosophies according to his own formalist preconceptions and prejudices, while failing to appreciate their basic intentions as well as their own inner dynamics" (Ching 1978, 162).

Ching also suggests that, on a deeper level, what sets Kant and early Confucians apart is their "basically different concept of the self" (Ching 1978, 169). According to Ching, Confucians understand a human person as "naturally related to others", so morality for them is the process of disclosing this basic "openness as a relational subject" (Ching 1978, 169). For Kant, on the other hand, the self "affirms its own freedom", so the morality is rooted in this "thinking subject who must exercise choice to enter into moral relationships" (Ching 1978, 169). Julia Ching does not explicate this idea about different conceptions of the human being in Kant and early Confucians, but this insight anticipates some arguments of Confucian role ethics and an important discussion between different interpretations of Kongzi and early Confucian ethics that will be addressed at greater length in Part 2.

A similar position to that of Kant on Confucian thought can be found in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770-1831) *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*:

> We have conversations between Confucius and his followers in which there is nothing definite further than a commonplace moral put in the form of good, sound doctrine, which may be found as well expressed and better,

[3] This is a quotation from Kant's manuscript of notes for *Physical Geography* lectures. I am quoting from (Glasenapp 1954) and according to his system of numbering the manuscripts, see Glasenapp 1954, xv-xx. Wherever there is an English translation of Kant's quotations in Reihman 2006, I follow it.

> in every place and amongst every people. He is hence … one with whom there is no speculative philosophy. We may conclude from his original works that for their reputation it would have been better had they never been translated (Hegel 1995, 121).

Taken by themselves the evaluations of Confucian thought as having nothing to do with the ideas of "virtue" and "morality" or being a "commonplace moral" do not have to be necessarily dismissive and negative. However the attitude behind these statements can be seen in the question raised by Hegel in a rather rhetorical manner: "What is there to be found in all this learning?" (Hegel 1995, 125) The lack of interest not only in Chinese but also in Asian philosophy generally among the leading Western philosophers in years after Hegel shows that his question was answered negatively. If Asian, including Confucian texts, were the source of a genuine interest to Western scholars then it was from a historical, ethnographical, linguistic, or cultural, but (usually) not from a philosophical perspective.

The perceived disinterest of early Confucians in abstract principles (theological, metaphysical, ethical, or otherwise) was appreciated by some and depreciated by others, but the orientation of early Confucian towards concreteness was unequivocally stressed. However, the active philosophical engagement with the ideas of early Confucians was generally very minimal. Confucian ideas usually were briefly summarized and presented in lecture form as an amusing oddity of the distant *other*. Relevance of early Confucian ideas was seen – if at all – only as a source that shaped the mores of contemporary Chinese, but were seldom employed as the conceptual tools for assessing statements or ideas of the ongoing philosophical debates in the West.

Such treatment can be explained, at least partially, by the fact that Western philosophers did not read classical Chinese, thus their knowledge of early Confucian ideas had come solely through secondary sources – translations or the accounts produced by Christian missionaries. The main objective in the writings of missionaries – despite their painstaking work with the classical Chinese canons in their original form and language – was to use

analysis and discussion of early Chinese thought as the means for facilitating the evangelization of Chinese, rather than unraveling philosophical significance and contemporary relevance of early Confucian concepts. In 17th-18th century Europe there even was heated debate among commentators that, on one side, maintained that Confucianism acknowledged divine creation, immortality of the soul, and other elements primarily associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition and, on the other side, who denied Confucian belief in divine providence and Natural Theology (see Israel 2013).

Such discussions can not be simply dismissed as somewhat frivolous and naïve, because even the works of the most academically sophisticated missionaries had an easily recognizable tint of the search for idea of God in early Confucian texts. To illustrate this point we shall move to the next generation of scholars after Kant and Hegel.

One of the most distinguished sinologists and missionaries of the 19th century, James Legge (1815-1897), clearly was not ignorant of or dismissive towards Chinese intellectual tradition. He was a first professor of Chinese at Oxford University and his translations and detailed commentaries of Chinese classical canons are still required reading for anyone who does research in Chinese culture. However, being a missionary, Legge was also trying to find the idea of a personal God in Confucian writings. His biggest discontent with early Confucian moral teachings was that both Kongzi (551-479 BCE) and Mengzi 孟子 (372-289 BCE)[4] turned away from a more personified understanding of a higher power, referred to as *Shàngdì* 上帝 in the *Book of History* (*Shangshu* 尚書) and the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), and instead toward a more natural and this-worldly image of *tiān* 天, often translated as "Heaven" or "Nature" (see Legge 2001, vol.1, 98 and vol.2, 72).

Legge even claimed that such usage of the term Heaven prepared "the way for the grosser conceptions of the modern literati, who would often seem to deny the divine personality altogether, and substitute for both God and

[4] These thinkers are known by Western readers as Confucius and Mencius respectively, after the Latinized versions of their names.

Heaven a mere principle of order or fitness of things", which, in turn, "has left the people in the mass to become an easy prey to the idolatrous fooleries of Buddhism" (Legge 2001, vol.2, 73). Thus in Legge's account early Confucians once again stand out as practically inclined thinkers that have little to say to Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophers:

> [Confucius] did not speculate on the creation of things or the end of them. He was not troubled to account for the origin of man, nor did he seek to know about his hereafter. He meddled neither with physics nor metaphysics. … Confucius is not to be blamed for his silence on the subjects here indicated. His ignorance of them was to a great extent his misfortune. He had not learned them. No report of them had come to him by the ear; no vision of them by the eye. And to his practical mind the toiling of thought amid uncertainties seemed worse than useless (Legge 2001, vol.1, 97-8).

This last quote from Legge, largely a sympathetic and thoughtful interpreter of Chinese thought, demonstrates yet another point that will stand at the heart of Confucian role ethics criticism of Confucian virtue ethics. Because Christianity certainly is an ultimate reference point for Legge, his evaluation of the differences found in Chinese thinking results in a rather patronizing language of "blame", "ignorance", or "misfortune". Later, in Chapter 2.1.1 of this dissertation, I will present Confucian role ethics argument that implementation of Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics framework for interpreting early Confucian thought often results in a similar "asymmetric" assessments on the part of contemporary philosophers, where Chinese, more often than not, appear to be underachievers.

Yet another reason for a relative absence of Western philosophical engagement with Chinese thought traditions before 20th century can be offered. The stress of rationality and the conviction of the universal nature of rational thought have probably reached its peak in the philosophy of Hegel. The premise of universality and primary importance of speculative rational thought suggests a single and simple template to evaluate intellectual traditions around

the world. In the minds of both Christian missionaries and Enlightenment philosophers, the perceived absence of both the abstract speculation and rigid formal argumentation in early Confucian thought (or in any other non-European tradition) have rendered it into something like proto-philosophy or proto-theology. Even if practical use of Confucian "wisdom" was recognized, it was still seen as just an initial stage of critical rational speculative mind that, according to Hegel's vision, is supposed to achieve its more sophisticated form in European thought. In other words, for the majority of Enlightenment thinkers, Europe was the true and only home of philosophy. As Elmar Holenstein has noted of Hegel:

> As far as he and his period were concerned, there seemed to be cultures in which absurdity which from the outset deserves no further examination was the rule, and rationality which is only recognized on closer examination was the exception (Holenstein 2003).

Thus the Leibniz-like appreciation of early Confucian thought by the time of Enlightenment was rather the exception. Early Chinese thought presented to European thinkers a case, which (acknowledging its fundamentally practical and this-worldly orientation, its disinterest in formulating and relying on abstract and universal principles) could hardly be placed within the rationally constructed and conceived field of philosophy. Understandably, a full philosophical engagement with Confucian tradition was as good as non-existing.

1.1.2 Rise of virtue ethics and its influence for Confucian studies

In the beginning of the 20th century methods of inquiry into non-Western cultures have significantly changed. In the case of Chinese studies, an important impact in changing the reception of Chinese thinking in the West was made by Chinese scholars. Many of these prominent Chinese scholars attended American or European universities, and were influenced by Western

thinkers and ideas. During the first half of the 20th century more direct comparisons between Chinese and Western concepts, modes of thinking, or comparisons between the particular thinkers of the two traditions were introduced into the studies of Chinese thought. Such scholars as Mou Zongsan (牟宗三, 1909-1995), Tang Junyi (唐君毅, 1909-1978), Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭, 1895-1990), Hu Shi (Hu Shih 胡適, 1891-1962), Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie 陳榮捷, 1901-1994), D.C. Lau (劉殿爵, 1921-2010), and others have to be mentioned in this regard. Their work has laid the foundation for future investigations both in China and in the West.

A distinctive characteristic of this new phase in the research on early Chinese thought is the persistent use of Western philosophical terminology in the works on Chinese intellectual tradition. In this period first histories of "Chinese philosophy" are written by Chinese scholars (Hu 2011, first print in 1919; Feng 2009, first print in 1931) that are then later translated into Western languages (Feng 1952). In this period attempts were made to elucidate early Confucian ethical ideas via Kantian moral philosophy, to explain the ideas of Mozi 墨子 (5-4 c. BCE) by the references to utilitarian ethics, and to introduce Daoists and Zhuangzi 莊子 (4-3 c. BCE) as being close to the thinkers of romanticism or scepticism. This "Westernization" of Chinese intellectual tradition was initiated and fostered, on the one hand, by the introduction of Western type of academia into Chinese educational system and, on the other, by the attempt to "legitimize" Chinese thought, that is, to present it as an equally valuable source of philosophical insights into the human and world reality, not inferior to the Western philosophical tradition.

With the introduction of the Western system of higher education to China at the turn of the 20th century, the conviction has strengthened among Chinese intellectuals that the Western style philosophy and Western style of doing science has to be taken as the role model of scholarly inquiry. The attempts were made to "elucidate" traditional Chinese ways of conceptualizing the world of experience by accommodating them to the strict distinctions between

the separate fields of the modern scholarship. Thus the Chinese texts deemed as “literature” had to be separated from the texts that have been perceived as belonging to the field of “history”. In the same manner, Confucian “philosophy” had to be separated from Confucian “religion”.

This in itself is a problematic undertaking, because such distinction does not have an equivalent in the early Chinese texts. The very notions of “philosophy” and “religion” were introduced to Chinese culture in the late 19th century via Japanese as neologisms *zhéxué* 哲學 and *zōngjiào* 宗教, meaning, respectively, “learning of wisdom” and “teachings of ancestry”. The problematic nature of the departmentalization of Chinese intellectual tradition according to Western academic distinctions can be seen in heated discussions if traditional China had “science” (Feng 1998, 571-96; Hu 2013), “philosophy” (Wu 1998; Defoort 2001, 2006; Defoort and Ge 2005/06; Raud 2006), or if “religion” is on the decline in China after the turn of the 20th century (Yang 1961; for opposite results see Goossaert and Palmer 2011).

All these discussions point out that answers to these questions depend on which definition of “science”, “religion”, or “philosophy” we take as an adequate one. For example, Goossaert’s and Palmer’s (2011) work on the status of “religion” in modern China does not support the secularization thesis advanced by Yang (1961). Different results can be explained by the different approaches these scholars have to what counts as “religion”. As J. Brooks Jessup explains, Goossaert and Palmer are able to incorporate martial arts and *qìgōng* 氣功 into their study of Chinese religious practices, because they conceive “the Chinese religion not as an autonomous system, but rather as part of a larger “social ecology” … in which religious elements constantly interact with each other as well as with the broader social, political, and economic environment” (Brooks Jessup 2011, 433). Goossaert and Palmer broaden the scope of the concept of “religion” in its application to Chinese cultural environment and thus are able to register some uniquely Chinese expressions of religiousness.

Matters are further complicated if one takes into account that the term "philosophy" is often seen as a "showpiece" in European style universities (Defoort 2001). When it comes to "philosophy", the concept is not only a descriptive name of a human intellectual activity, but often used as an evaluative term, indicating a certain degree of sophistication and achievement. This at least partially explains why, as Defoort (2001, 393) indicates, the question of China having or not having "philosophy" also touches upon the feelings of national pride, which in itself must not have much to do with the ideas presented in Chinese intellectual tradition.

As the result of this double-edged objective to elucidate and to legitimize traditional Chinese thought, different voices within the tradition that came to be called "Chinese philosophy" were portrayed as echoing the disagreements in the history of the *Western philosophy*, such as those between idealists and realists in the field of theory of knowledge, or those between deontology and consequentialism in the field of ethics. These divisions in Western philosophy played a significant role in the philosophical reception of early Chinese thought, as the philosophical value and significance of early Chinese writings were judged primarily according to the requirements that follow from the particular framework inherent in a specific Western philosophical dichotomy.

As an example, consider how Wing-tsit Chan, a leading authority for more than one generation of scholars in Chinese philosophy, is explaining in the introductory passages the differences between brother philosophers Cheng 程 of the 11th century:

> Cheng Yi[5] [程頤] is so much more rationalistic than Cheng Hao [程顥] and Cheng Hao so much more idealistic than Cheng *yì* that it is permissible to say that Cheng Hao inaugurated the idealistic wing of Neo-Confucianism while his brother inaugurated the rationalistic wing, although their differences have been exaggerated in recent years (Chan 1963, 518).

[5] I change transcription method of Chinese characters to *pinyin* whenever I am citing texts that use other methods of transcription.

Wing-tsit Chan in these same terms explains the disagreement between Song 宋 dynasty scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) and his rival Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139-1193) or, by extension, with Zhu's opponent from Ming 明 dynasty Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) over the interpretation of the term *géwù* 格物, denoting a method of inquiry into the world:

> For Zhu Xi, the investigation of things [*géwù* – V.S.] means investigating the principle in things. For Lu, investigation means investigating the mind… These philosophical differences are as sharp as they are incompatible. … Thus they intensified the different emphasis of Cheng *yì* … and his brother Cheng Hao … and formed the two wings of Neo-Confucianism, the rationalistic or the School of Principle and the idealistic or the School of Mind, that were to flourish for several centuries[6] (ibid, 573).

In the comparable manner, the specifically Western and modern dichotomy in moral philosophy between deontologists and consequentialists – largely associated with utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stewart Mill (1806-1873) – that have dominated Western academic discourse during the first part of 20th century has been imposed on the studies of early Confucian thought. Characterizing one of the most heated debates in pre-imperial China among Confucians and the school of Mo (*mòjiā* 墨家) – the popular intellectual movement during the Warring States (*Zhànguó* 戰國, ca. 475-221 BCE) period and vocal critics of early Confucian ideas – Christian Jochim, for example, states:

> The key issue over which the two schools debated is quite familiar to students of recent Western moral philosophy: the issue of the priority of the right over the good (Jochim 1980, 135).

[6] For one position that doubts the accuracy of the term "idealism" when it comes to characterization of Wang Yangming's thought see Lee 1987; also see Liu 1983.

In this framework Mohists (*mòjiā* 墨家) are generally characterized as consequentialist or utilitarian thinkers, not without very sound reasons (see Fung 1952, pp. 84-7; Van Norden 2007)[7]. At the same time their rivals, classical Confucians, have often ended up on the opposite side of this preestablished dichotomy, which, after all, was not set out by Confucians and Mohists themselves. While acknowledging the danger "inherent in this task", Christian Jochim tries, in his own words, to "illuminate" Kongzi's stance on moral questions by stating that "Confucius was undoubtedly one such radical, one is even tempted to say 'pure' deontologist" and that "Confucius can only be understood as a radically deontological ethicist" (ibid, 137-8 and 139).

Because early Confucian texts explicitly reject material gain (*lì* 利) as a motivating factor for human undertakings, the perceived Confucian commitment to follow the precepts of "moral rules" (*lǐ* 禮) played a major role in establishing the deontological reading of early Confucian thought. It is necessary to point out that the deontological reading of early Confucianism was (and sometimes still is) endorsed without challenging the consensus that, for early Confucian thinkers, a context based particularity rather than theoretically formulated abstract principles inform judgments, evaluations, and actions. Once again, it can be argued that the state of the English language moral philosophy of that time, rather than deep affinities of early Confucian and Kantian thought have endorsed a deontological interpretation of Kongzi and his followers.

In the deontological interpretation of early Confucians, the source of the normative standard in the early Confucian thought, it was said, was a realized duty and obligation that allegedly dominated early Confucian thought. It was important in these studies to find and to show the possibility of autonomy and rationality in Confucian ethical writings, because deontological ethics could not function without a rational and autonomous individual, a source of self-legislation (Guo 2007).

[7] For a recent position that raises doubts about the general consensus that Mohism is a kind of utilitarianism see Goldin 2011, 71ff.

Such reading was and still is quite popular among Chinese scholars in both mainland China and Taiwan. On one hand, for Chinese scholars of the early years of 20th century, such as Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, Feng Youlan, and others, implementation of Western philosophical vocabulary was a way of promoting dialogue between European and Chinese intellectual cultures and the possibility to re-introduce the legacy of ancient Chinese tradition as a viable point of philosophical interest. The influence of these great philosophers and teachers on their students at least partially explains why the Kantian approach to Confucianism is so much more popular in China than in the contemporary West.

For example, Guo Qiyong claims, "Kantian philosophy is a vital framework of reference in propagating Confucian moral philosophy" (Guo 2007, 359). At the same time, according to Guo, Mou Zongsan is justified to use specific Kantian terminology while explaining Kongzi and Mengzi, because

> if we proceed from his [i.e., Kant's – V.S.] "categorical imperative" and understand Mencius from the perspective of the will legislating for itself, we will find this kind of interpretation does no harm to Mencius' learning. On the contrary, it is conducive to the communication between Chinese and Western philosophies (Guo 2007, 359; 351).

Clearly, Guo's arguments suggest that the primary rationale behind his and Mou's approach that grants its justification has to do with the presentation of Chinese philosophy to the outside world, that is, in Guo's words, "propagation" and "communication". When it comes to Mèngzǐ's learning, it is, apparently, enough that the approach "does no harm". Could it be that the understanding of Mèngzǐ "from the perspective of the will legislating for itself" does no harm simply because it does not touch upon Mengzi's learning?

It must be acknowledged that in English language literature suggestions occasionally do appear, showing how some conceptual similarities between Kantian and early Confucian traditions may be fruitfully employed in

philosophical discussions (Wawrytko 1982 on “respect” and *jìng* 敬, Nuyen 2010 on “good will” and *chéng* 誠). However, even if we agree that there are some similarities between ethical ideas in Kant and early Confucians, these similarities are matched with even greater differences on a much more basic level. Thus now in the West the attempts to explicate early Confucian ideas in deontological terms are rather uncommon. Much more contemporary Western interpreters explicitly deny the adequacy of deontological interpretations of early Confucian thought. And the main line of argument, once again, is the thorough commitment of early Confucians to the particularity of situation and the absence of abstract universal principles in their ethical teachings. What happened that this feature of early Confucians started to appear for Western scholars as a decisive hindrance to explain early Confucian thought in Kantian terms? Once again, the answer should be sought in the development of Western moral philosophy, namely, the status of Aristotle’s ethical ideas among the mainstream of Western moral philosophers.

As I have suggested earlier, the preoccupation of Western modern moral philosophy with deontological-utilitarian debate did not allow for other models to be developed in explicating Confucian ethical ideals in academic philosophy, even if such models were occasionally suggested. Julia Ching, for example, mentions only in passing that “stoic philosophy probably presents the closest parallel to that of Confucius and Mencius” (Ching 1978, 167). But even comparisons of early Confucian thought to Aristotle, which would become the most prevalent interpretation of early Confucians in English language literature after 80’s, were also very rare during the first half of 20th century. One of the very first attempts to employ Aristotle’s philosophy in an analysis of Confucian thought comes from Max Hamburger in an article that appeared in 1956. One of the early reasons in favor of such a comparison, for Max Hamburger, was his conviction that Aristotle was left out in the scholarly research on early Confucian thought. In Hamburger’s words:

> One of the main stimuli for a closer comparison of Aristotle and Kongziis to be found in the obvious neglect of Aristotle's work in the most recent publications on Chinese philosophy and Confucianism" (Hamburger 1956, 340).

Hamburger noticed that although Homer Dubs, one of the first translators of early Confucian thinker Xunzi 荀子, dubbed him "the Aristotle of China", other prominent scholars of the first half of the twentieth century working on Confucian thought did not follow the implication. According to Hamburger's analysis, "we find but scanty references to Aristotle and some of them only in connection with Plato" in the works of Feng Youlan, Herrlee G. Creel, and E.R. Hughes (Hamburger 1956, 340). Despite Hamburger's explicit defense of an Aristotelian approach to the early Confucians, Hamburger's suggestion did not gain much popularity. Arguably, this had more to do with the general status of Aristotle's ethics among Western philosophers of the time. Hamburger's paper appeared two years before G.E.M. Anscombe published in the same journal her "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958), the article that is widely recognized as a cornerstone for the revival of Aristotelian ideas in Western moral philosophy.

Anscombe has voiced the growing discontent among Western philosophers with the direction of modern moral philosophy. In her often quoted article "Modern Moral Philosophy" Anscombe formulates two main charges against moral philosophy as it is understood and exercised in her times: on the one hand, it is the lack of an "adequate philosophy of psychology", and on the other, it is the reliance on the "law conception of ethics" with the concepts of "being bound, permitted, or excused" embedded in our language. These notions, though meaningful in some contexts, according to Anscombe, "had lost their root" since the Enlightenment has called into question believing in God as a law-giver (see Anscombe 1958, 1; 5). As Anscombe claims, „it is as if the notion 'criminal' were to remain when criminal law and criminal courts had been abolished and forgotten" (Anscombe 1958, 5).

Anscombe, not being a virtue ethicist herself, has anticipated the core points in virtue ethics, namely, the attention to moral psychology or the

character traits of moral agents, and the importance of cultural background, without which the discourse of morality can hardly be meaningful and stimulating for people whose characters and actions a moral theory aims to explain and evaluate.

The trend has further flourished after the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981), which marked the rise of contemporary virtue ethics. Virtue ethics have successfully addressed some basic weaknesses of modern moral philosophy as pointed out by Anscombe. Most notably virtue ethics tried to compensate the lack of attention to moral psychology evident in the deontological and consequentialist ethics. It has also lessened the dependence of ethical thinking on the notions of duty and obligation, instead pushing the concept of virtue and, by extension, the concept of the person into the centre of ethical deliberations. By the end of 20th century virtue ethics has become an established theory in the contemporary academic discourse on ethics. Rosalind Hursthouse points out the change that the status of virtue ethics underwent in the West:

> Virtue ethics was regarded not as a third approach in its own right, but as emphasizing a few interesting points <…>. And now in the latest collections (as I write, in 1998), it has acquired full status, recognized as a rival to deontological and utilitarian approaches, as interestingly and challengingly different from either as they are from each other (Hursthouse 1999, 2).

This change in the Western ethical discourse has in turn resonated in a new wave of comparative studies, where Kongzi and other early Confucians are interpreted through comparisons with Aristotle and contemporary virtue ethics. Eventually, the deontological interpretation of early Confucians started to receive strong criticism from Western philosophers, and the Confucian virtue ethics approach has come to the prominence.

Philip J. Ivanhoe, one of the most prominent advocates for the virtue ethics approach to early Confucians, rejected the possibility to adequately

explain Confucian ethics through either Kantian or utilitarian vocabulary. Ivanhoe gives this explanation of early Confucian ethics:

> [Confucianism is] the ethical view that gives pride of place to the development and importance of various human excellences rather than to calculations of nonmoral good or rational rule following (Ivanhoe 2002, 167n.6).

Ivanhoe takes Heiner Roetz among contemporary scholars as presenting the idea that Kongzi "offered a generally deontological and specifically Kantian style ethical theory" (Ivanhoe 2002, 8). Ivanhoe sees Roetz as mistaken, because the universality that Roetz argues for in Confucian ethics comes "out of more general beliefs about the character of human nature. In this regard, Kongzi is more like Aristotle than Kant" (Ivanhoe 2002, 9).

Stephen A. Wilson is making an argument of weaker form against a deontological interpretation. Wilson claims that deontology is not necessary to appreciate the crucial feature of Confucian ethics, which for him is the perceived ability of Confucian thought to "embody and express the fullest humanity" of ethical agents without "undoing their individuality" (see Wilson 1995, 263; 279).

Edward Slingerland (2001) agrees with Wilsons general position, but goes further, claiming that deontology is incompatible with the "salient aspects" of Confucian thought (Slingerland 2001, 98). In Slingerland's opinion, what makes Confucianism so radically different from deontology is the latter's excessive reliance on rules and overlooking of "the ethical importance of situation-specific judgment" (Slingerland 2001, 100). This was also noted by Antonio Cua:

> [For Confucians] a viable ethical theory is thus subject to pragmatic assessment in the light of changing circumstances. Consequently, ethical requirements cannot be stated in terms of absolute principles or rules (Cua 1998, 268).

This is a clear rejection of the possibility that early Confucianism would have "the notion of principle that possesses the status of objective validity and universal applicability, an appeal that is deemed requisite by most contemporary ethical thinkers (e.g. Kantian, utilitarian, and contractarian)" (Cua 1998, 304). On the other hand, Cua accepts that when "principles are construed somewhat along the line of Kant's notion of maxims or 'subjective principles of volition', i.e., as personal rules of conduct", these "first-person precepts" or "preceptive principles" can be said as having played an important role for Confucian ethical deliberations (Cua 1998, 304).

Generally speaking, Confucian virtue ethics proved to be a successful framework in interpreting early Confucian ideas. Conferences are organized and books are published both in China and the West that investigate more deeply the relations between early Confucian ethical thought and virtue ethics. Scholars who endorse interpreting early Confucians through the lens of virtue ethics claim that it provides a consistent and textually supported view of early Confucian ethics that both enables us to grasp the most fundamental characteristics of early Confucians; it also shows how early Confucian ideas can be used in contemporary debates in moral philosophy (Van Norden 2007, Sim 2007, Yu 2007, Slingerland 2011). Success of the Confucian virtue ethics position is also seen by scholars in that it helps to teach early Confucian ethics at Western universities, as it "will allow a beginning student swift access to pull together the seemingly disparate accounts found in the *Analects*, and thereby grasp the overarching moral tenets of the Confucian tradition" (Santiago 2008). On a more substantial level, the Confucian virtue ethics approach can be seen as successful in that it presents early Confucian ethics as a philosophically interesting and relevant position by relying on and explicating the feature that, since the missionaries, was deemed to be at the core of early Confucian thought, namely, its practical orientation and disinterest in universal principles. Therefore, the concentration on human character and virtue has become a crucial part of the virtue ethics approach to

early Confucians (evidence for this claim will be provided in Chapters 1.2.2 and 1.2.3).

However, the Confucian virtue ethics approach, although critical to previous interpretations, in essence, continues the Western tradition of engagement with Chinese thought in that it takes a Western philosophical framework as the reference point for discussions and evaluations. This attempt to explain one intellectual tradition through the conceptual framework of the other raises serious methodological issues, primarily the question of commensurability between "philosophical traditions that have developed in relative isolation from one another and that are defined quite broadly along cultural and regional lines" (Wong 2011). Without any doubt, our knowledge and understanding of new things can only come via our already existing knowledge and understanding. Thus, our understanding of different ethical system also has to be mediated by our own sense of the ethical. For comparative philosophers this problem of shifting between different cultures is as acute as it is complicated. Confucian virtue ethics, which claims that early Confucian ethics is best understood via Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian terminology of virtue ethics, cannot ignore these methodological problems.

Now we can proceed to an analysis and explication of Confucian virtue ethics, starting from an analysis of how the problem of incommensurability on the methodological level was addressed by Confucian virtue ethics, followed by an explication and critical assessment of the main arguments for Confucian virtue ethics interpretation.

1.2 Confucian virtue ethics: arguments and problems

With the development of virtue ethics in the West, more and more sinological and comparative studies have suggested that early Confucian ethics is best understood as a form of virtue ethics. This framework has been employed not only in the philosophical reception of early Confucianism in the

West, but has also gained a significant popularity among contemporary Chinese philosophers, especially the ones working on comparative ethics or with academic ties to Western universities. Even more striking is the tendency to study Chinese thought using Western philosophical frameworks, including that of virtue ethics (*déxing lúnlǐ* 德性倫理), in Chinese language publications (Shun 2009 acknowledges this tendency). Contemporary virtue ethics is a very broad term for ethical theories that put emphasis on moral virtues and moral character instead of concentrating on particular moral actions. Although virtue ethics may have different sources of inspiration, most authors take ancient Greek philosophy and especially the philosophy of Aristotle as the main source of inspiration. The presentation of early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics also usually takes Aristotle as the counterpart of comparing ideas of the two cultures and explaining the normative power behind the early Confucian writings[8].

In this section I will give an account of the "virtue ethics" approach to early Confucian ethics. My aim is to critically evaluate the methodological stance of the approach and to analyze the conceptual apparatus that allows scholars to present early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics. In this section, my main attention will be to show how the core terminology of early Confucian thinkers is translated and interpreted in the framework of aretaic ethics. First, I will analyze the biggest methodological challenge to interpreting early Confucians from Aristotelian virtue ethics positions, which was articulated by MacIntyre (1991) as an incommensurability thesis. Second, I will turn to explication and critical analysis of the content of Confucian virtue ethics. I will demonstrate how early Confucian *dé* 德 is compared and identified with Aristotelian *arête* and its contemporary counterparts "virtue" and "excellence". As a result, *dé* 德 is placed at the very centre of early Confucian ethics and understood as a personal character trait, or a "virtue",

[8] See Yearley 1990 for a detailed argument for a virtue ethics approach to early Confucian ethics, where he compares Mengzi with Thomas Aquinas, instead of Aristotle. However, the neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is mostly employed in the "virtue ethics" approach to early Confucianism (see Slingerland 2001).

despite some acknowledged important differences in the meaning of *dé* 德 in the early Confucian texts. Third, I will further demonstrate that the virtue ethics framework dictates the reading of other important early Confucian notions, such as *rén* 仁, *yì* 義, *lǐ* 禮 and others, as particular instances of a "Confucian list of virtues". I will point out the difficulties, which spring from translating the core terminology of early Confucian ethics into aretaic notions, mainly, building on the critique articulated by Fingarette (1972).

1.2.1 Problem of incommensurability in Confucian virtue ethics[9]

In a volume dedicated to comparative studies, Alasdair MacIntyre published an article presenting early Confucian and Aristotle's thoughts as incommensurable thought systems, explicitly expressing doubt that notions and statements of one incommensurable thought system can be adequately expressed and addressed within the framework of the another (MacIntyre 1991). The position MacIntyre argued for in this article has been taken by proponents of Confucian virtue ethics as a challenge to their approach (Slingerland 2001; Yu 2007; Sim 2007; Van Norden 2007). The challenge is even more pressing, as it was formulated by the thinker, whose ideas have largely shaped the virtue ethics approach in general.

According to Richard J. Bernstein, "'incommensurability' was thrust into the centre of Anglo-American philosophical debates because of Thomas Kuhn's provocative book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*" (Bernstein 1991, 87). MacIntyre extends the use of the term from exact sciences and applies it in his article to intercultural studies. Here McIntyre discusses comparative philosophy that explains, evaluates, and compares Aristotelian and Confucian approaches to ethical issues by putting these two thought systems into one – neo-Aristotelian – conceptual framework. In this article MacIntyre treats early Confucian and Aristotelian thought systems as

[9] Fuller explication of ideas in this section was published in form of an article, see Silius (2013).

incommensurable. According to MacIntyre, the incommensurability is "a relationship between two or more systems of thought and practice, each embodying its own peculiar conceptual scheme, over a certain period of time" (MacIntyre 1991, 109). The peculiarity of any given thought system, according to MacIntyre, is so pervasive that it manifests itself not only in the different concepts used by adherents of that system of thought and practice, but also in rules and ways of argumentation different and specific for that system, different standards and measures of interpretation, explanation, and justification, different norms of achievement, and so on. Because cultures and systems of thought and practice are dynamic entities that change over the time, MacIntyre acknowledges that the systems that were incommensurable at one point of history may become commensurable at another. However, during the time of incommensurability, according to MacIntyre,

> It will be the case that those who inhabit each of the two or more rival schemes of thought and practice embody them in their beliefs, actions, judgments, and arguments in such a way that it is both the case that the members of the two or more rival parties can agree, each from their own point of view, that they are referring to, characterizing, and conducting their inquiries about what is indeed one and the same subject matter, and yet also in their characterizations of and questions about that subject matter employ, to some large and significant degree, concepts whose applicability entails the nonapplicability, the vacuousness, of the conceptual scheme or schemes employed by their rivals (MacIntyre 1991, 109-10).

MacIntyre suggests that incommensurable systems will share a certain structure that will enable them to agree that the subject matter of their interest is the same, but, nevertheless,

> It is at a second level of characterization that predicates are applied in accordance with standards internal to and peculiar to each of the rival standpoints and such that each set of standard excludes the possibility of application for key predicates of its rivals. And this use of predicates will

> give expression to distinctive modes of observation, of seeing as and of imagining, as well as of reasoning (MacIntyre 1991, 110).

We can sum up MacIntyre's position on incommensurability of thought systems into five main points relevant to comparative philosophers. The first point, one of the main themes throughout, is that there can be no neutral and at the same time meaningful standpoint from which we could compare two rival systems of thought and practice. As MacIntyre puts it, we could supply an account neutral with respect to any two rival systems, but such an account would be "at so bare a level of characterization that it will be equally compatible with far too many rival bodies of theory" (MacIntyre 1991, 105).

The second and related point is that the lack of universal and neutral standpoints for comparison makes it obvious that even the statement of the nature of contrast between two rival systems of thought and practice is problematic, because it is very likely to assume a certain specific view of what counts as problematic issue. Accordingly, one will have to engage into equally specific way of how to formulate and solve that issue (MacIntyre 1991, 107-8).

The third point deals with the relation between incommensurability, translatability, and the issue that will be very important for MacIntyre's critics – the possibility for mutual understanding between two different cultures. According to MacIntyre, when the incommensurability arises from untranslatability of the natural or technical languages, in which the rival systems of thought and practice are expressed, it does not follow that all mutual understanding is precluded (MacIntyre 1991, 111). In MacIntyre's view, understanding comes from immersion into the rival system and from learning their specific ways of reasoning and expressing the results of that reasoning. It sounds as if for MacIntyre understanding is a process of practical engagement and not merely a result of theoretical elucidation. The incommensurability thesis, as MacIntyre presents it, does not suggest that the incommensurable systems are impenetrable and inaccessible for each other's adherents. It also does not maintain that *nothing* meaningful can be argued from one system against the other. However, it does suggest that it is impossible to adequately

and fully reiterate the problematique of one system of thought with the conceptual framework of the other incommensurable system without losing a significant degree of meaning and uniqueness of that system. A similar critique of Confucian virtue ethics will be seen in the discussion on the Confucian role ethics position in Part 2. Both MacIntyre and Confucian role ethics proponents hold the position that we eventually may achieve understanding of another thought system and even present a substantial critique, but it will not happen if we both start *and* finish our investigation of the incommensurable thought system by applying our own standards and conceptual frameworks.

The forth point MacIntyre directs more to Aristotelians, which shows that he admits that a Confucian framework could probably render this aspect of comparative philosophy differently or find it irrelevant. MacIntyre suggests that the conceptual grasp of incommensurability helps to advance the conversation between two rival systems, because the idea of incommensurability can help Aristotelians understand that their rejection of the rival standpoint was "inevitable", stemming from the imposition of their standards of argumentation and justification upon the system that operates in rather different and incommensurable ways. MacIntyre explains the possible reaction from Aristotelians:

> They would have to conclude that no rational encounter, no dialectical appeal to mutually acknowledged principles of any kind, whether principles embodied in shared established opinions or principles necessary for the achievements of scientific explanation and understanding, had taken place or could so far have taken place (MacIntyre 1991, 112).

In other words, the concept of incommensurability makes one aware that there are other consistent and workable ways of describing and explaining the world reality. We can say that according to MacIntyre, the recognition of incommensurability of two rival theories may foster more charitable treatment of the rival theory, allowing it to state its position in its own framework, and it prevents the temptation of a reductionist treatment of world cultures.

This point should be seen as MacIntyre's suggestion to allow the rival system of thought and practice to be different from one's own; that is, allowing it to operate in its natural modus, according to its natural standards. At the same time, because MacIntyre does not see cultures and systems of thought and practice inherent in these cultures as static and monolithic, but rather as changing through the course of their history, the incommensurability of some two theoretical standpoints is not taken by MacIntyre as an unavoidable matter of fact that makes the rational encounter impossible. This leads us to the last and fifth point of MacIntyre's incommensurability thesis: the suggestion that the rational debate and encounter between Aristotelian and Confucian systems can take place only by so enriching the linguistic and conceptual resources of one's own tradition that would enable the parties to provide a more adequate representation of each other. According to MacIntyre:

> That accurate representation will be of the other as a historically developing body of theory and practice, succeeding or failing at each stage, in the light of its own standards, in respect of the difficulties or problems internal to it. That is, what the Aristotelian will have had to provide for his or her own use will be a history of Confucianism written and understood from a Confucian point of view… (MacIntyre 1991, 117)

MacIntyre finishes his paper with suggestions that should facilitate such conversation between two or more rival bodies of theory and practice that would not, in MacIntyre's words, be "sterile". First, he suggests that as comparative philosophers we should "understand our own standpoint in a way that renders it from our own point of view as problematic as possible and therefore as maximally vulnerable as possible to defeat by that rival" (MacIntyre 1991, 121). Then, MacIntyre claims, we have to make sure that "we do not allow ourselves to forget that in comparing two fundamental standpoints at odds with each other … we have no neutral, independent standpoint from which to do so" (MacIntyre 1991, 121). According to MacIntyre this means that we can compare Confucianism and Aristotelianism

from the Confucian point of view, or from Aristotelian point of view, or from some third, equally specific standpoint with its own internal structure, standards, and vocabulary, for example, Buddhist or Kantian.

In Confucian studies many adherents of virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucians have taken MacIntyre's position as a challenge. It is especially acute problem for virtue ethics approach to Confucian texts, as the main thesis of this group of scholars – that early Confucian thought is best understood as a form of virtue ethics[10] – can be seen as an attempt to express the sensibilities of one tradition with the vocabulary of another incommensurable tradition. Yu Jiyuan, for example, notes that MacIntyre's version of incommensurability "threatens our project of comparing the ethics of Aristotle and Confucius", but Yu, nevertheless, does not find MacIntyre's "rejection of the possibility of the comparison between Aristotelianism and Confucianism to be acceptable" (Yu 2007, 6-7).

We can discern two ways – "negative" and "positive" – in which adherents of virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucians have tried to meet MacIntyre's challenge. The goal of the negative response (Yu 2007, Sim 2007) is to refute MacIntyre's critique by showing that it is contradictory, wrong, and/or harmful. According to Yu Jiyuan, MacIntyre's position "is not clear" and MacIntyre "seems to be caught in confusion" (Yu 2007, 7; 8). Where does Yu see this alleged confusion in MacIntyre's position? Yu explains that MacIntyre's understanding of the incommensurability of two rival systems is leading "to the impossibility of adjudicating their rival claims" (Yu 2007, 7). However, MacIntyre allows rational encounter and, something that Yu finds ironic, MacIntyre draws his conclusion about the incommensurability of Confucianism and Aristotelianism "through comparative study of these two theories" (Yu 2007, 7). Thus Yu concludes that MacIntyre is seemingly confused between "the result of comparative philosophy and its mere possibility" (Yu 2007, 8).

[10] See, for example, Ivanhoe 2002, 167 n. 6; Slingerland 2001, and others.

Yu quotes MacIntyre's suggestion that mutual understanding becomes possible for adherents of rival systems after they learn each other's language; Yu gives us a hint where to look for resolving MacIntyre's confusion:

> In saying this, however, the problem is no longer about the possibility of comparison, but about how comparison should be done and what qualities a comparativist need possess in order to get the job done appropriately. These are very different issues (Yu 2007, 7).

While I agree with this particular claim of Yu, I can't agree with the implications of his "no longer", which suggests that questioning the very possibility of comparison was an initial intention of MacIntyre's article. It is implied that only Yu's interpretation clears up MacIntyre's position saving MacIntyre from confusion. However, I see Yu Jiyuan here not resolving MacIntyre's "confusion", but clearing up his own misreading of MacIntyre's position.

Yu does not cite where MacIntyre claims that a comparison is not possible or that such a possibility is at the centre of MacIntyre's enquiry. Yu claims that "what is at stake is the possibility of comparison" (Yu 2007, 7), but the article of MacIntyre holds no such claim. To the contrary, as MacIntyre says straightforwardly at the end of the article, his whole undertaking was to discuss and to "bring out … more generally something of how conversation between rival bodies of theory and practice, rooted in very different cultures, has to proceed, if its interchanges are not to be sterile" (MacIntyre 1991, 120-1).

The main source of these misunderstandings, in my opinion, is the tendency to take MacIntyre's claims as absolute, when in reality they are not without important qualifications. For example, when MacIntyre says that he sees no "*neutral and independent* method of characterizing those materials in a way sufficient to provide *the type* of adjudication between competing theories of the virtues which I had once hoped to provide" (MacIntyre 1991, 105; emphasis added), his critics simply see it as a claim about the "impossibility of

adjudicating rival claims" (Yu 2007, 7). When MacIntyre stresses that the incommensurability is a relationship "over a certain period of time" and that "two different and rival conceptual schemes may be incommensurable at one stage of their development and yet become commensurable at another" (MacIntyre 1991, 109), Yu sees it as a problem, "if two incommensurable systems can reach mutual understanding, why are they still incommensurable?" (Yu 2007, 9)

It is important to point out that the language, in which MacIntyre formulates his analysis of comparative philosophy, may make his position seem ambiguous. "Incommensurability" is a strong term that precludes variations in degree, thus making it difficult to conceptualize what a "lesser" incommensurability between two systems would look like. If there are no intermediate states of "lesser" incommensurability that would eventually lead to dissolution of incommensurable states, can we – and this is Yu's point – make sense out of the notion of "temporarily incommensurable" systems[11]? This view of incommensurability is correct, as Kuhn was also talking about a "transition between incommensurables" that "must occur all at once (though not necessarily in an instant) or not at all" (Kuhn 1970, 150). However, the impossibility of change in degree of some state does not preclude the possibility of change of the state itself. No-one can be "more" married today than one was yesterday, but one can certainly be married or not-married at different points of time.

However, it is important to see where MacIntyre's critics do indeed enhance MacIntyre's position. Yu Jiyuan notes that for MacIntyre incommensurability probably becomes such an important issue only because it is difficult to "adjudicate between rival claims and determine which side is the winner for truth" (Yu 2007, 8). MacIntyre shows in his paper that an adequate rational encounter between two rival systems of thought and practice might result in one system coming "in the light of its own standards of rationality, theoretical and practical, to be recognized by its own adherents as rationally

[11] I thank Roger Ames for drawing my attention to this point.

inferior to some other rival and incompatible tradition" (MacIntyre 1991, 117). Moreover, MacIntyre elaborates on two conditions that have to be satisfied in order to judge the inferiority of one system. He also points to the possibility that the adherents of the "inferior" system may not acknowledge it at the beginning, but "those external to that standpoint, who have incorporated within their own structures of understanding an accurate representation of that standpoint and its history, may on occasion be able to recognize such a condition of failure" (MacIntyre 1991, 117-8). Even if it is unintentional, the language of failure in MacIntyre's article supports Yu's charge that MacIntyre is looking for the winner in the cultural exchange and comparison. The fact that the examples of incommensurable systems that MacIntyre chooses come from the exact sciences, may also contribute to the belief that the cultural incommensurabilities are resolved in cultural "paradigm shifts" analogical to those in the sciences described by Thomas Kuhn (see Kuhn 1970)[12]. However, it is highly questionable, whether it is possible to reject the entire cultural system as a failure and it is not clear if such a wholesale rejection could result in a successful transition to some other system. The history of China's wholesale rejection of Confucian heritage during the early 20th century and the Cultural Revolution of 60's and 70's may strengthen such doubts.

The concept cluster that surrounds the "incommensurability" term in its original context in Kuhn's book further fosters absolutist readings of MacIntyre's use of the term, and the notion of a "paradigm shift" plays an important part here[13]. If this notion is applied in intercultural studies, a possible reading of incommensurability is one that maintains the necessity for an adept of one cultural tradition to convert to another tradition (to shift between paradigms) by totally abandoning one's own. But changes normally are less clear-cut in cultural exchanges where practical engagement does not require a

[12] Hall and Ames point out specifically that "MacIntyre's examples of cultural incommensurability continue to be largely drawn from scientific models" (Hall and Ames 1998, xii).
[13] Bernstein points out the difficulties that Kuhn's readers had with his use of "paradigm shift": "Such expressions as 'different worlds,' 'conversion,' and 'gestalt switches' led (or rather, misled) many sympathetic and unsympathetic readers to think that his conception of a paradigm is like a total self-enclosed windowless monad – and that a paradigm shift necessitates an 'irrational conversion'" (Bernstein 1991, 88).

complete theoretical agreement. As Hall and Ames point out, the sense of community between Anglo-Europeans depends much on the invocation of terms such as “freedom” or “justice”, despite the fact that there are numerous disagreements on theoretical content of these notions (see Hall and Ames 1998, xv). Probably a more suitable metaphor to describe intercultural exchanges is not a “paradigm shift”, but a “tradition graft”. When one plant is engrafted onto another, the recipient plant may bear fruits of the graft, while at the same time keep its original roots. Thus the responsible cultural grafting could help to introduce new cultures to the old habitats without endangering the local cultures. But then, if one is justified in doubting the adequacy of the notion of “paradigm shifts” in intercultural studies, one is also justified in doubting the adequacy of the notion of “incommensurability”.

To sum up, Yu’s uneasiness that MacIntyre’s idea of incommensurability hinders the whole project of comparative philosophy, as it negates the possibility of understanding between incommensurable cultures, most likely overstates MacIntyre’s initial position. At the same time, Yu does not address a valid charge by MacIntyre, namely, that if an Aristotelian hopes to achieve an accurate representation of the unfamiliar and potentially incommensurable Confucian system of thought, “what the Aristotelian will have had to provide for his or her own use will be a history of Confucianism written and understood from a Confucian point of view (MacIntyre 1991, 117).

Not all proponents of virtue ethics interpretation have attempted to refute MacIntyre’s claims as “confused”. In the study of early Confucian and Mohist thought, Van Norden (2007) attempts to formulate theoretically neutral ground for a cross-cultural comparison by suggesting that a distinction be made between “thick” and “thin” accounts of theory. Although Van Norden does not mention MacIntyre’s incommensurability challenge in this context, because he attempts to work out a neutral framework, the impossibility of which was claimed by MacIntyre, I take Van Norden’s position to be a “positive” response to MacIntyre’s incommensurability thesis.

Because Van Norden admits that Aristotelians and Confucians "disagree significantly over many major issues", he also wants to prevent the possible reproach that using Aristotelian virtue ethics as an interpretational scheme for early Confucian ethics may result in a distortion of one or even both theories under investigation. Van Norden employs the distinction between "thick" and "thin" accounts of any given theory as a way of finding common, neutral ground for comparing two very different cultures or theories. Van Norden indicates that he develops this methodological approach from the insights of Gilbert Ryle, Clifford Geertz, Bernard Williams and Martha Nussbaum (Van Norden 2007, 16-17). Van Norden describes the distinction as follows:

> We can give a "thin" description, which has little theoretical content and which can be shared by a broad range of discussants who might disagree significantly over many other matters. One might think of the thin description as simply "fixing" the topic of disagreement between participants in a discussion. In contrast, a "thick" description is the detailed account given by a particular participant in the discussion and framed in terms of the distinctive concepts and commitments of that participant (Van Norden 2007, 17).

Van Norden's idea is that once we find the "thin" description of the theory, by the virtue of it having "little theoretical content", we have established for ourselves a framework that can accommodate very different positions and serve as a neutral basis for comparative work. However, exactly such possibility of a neutral account was challenged by MacIntyre's incommensurability thesis. As quoted before, MacIntyre claimed that even if we could supply a neutral account with respect to any two rival systems, such an account would be "at so bare a level of characterization that it will be equally compatible with far too many rival bodies of theory" (MacIntyre 1991, 105). Is Van Norden able to suggest a framework that would be "thin" enough not to distort any of the two theories in question, but that at the same time would not fail to say anything substantial about them?

The "thin" account of virtue ethics that Van Norden employs in his work includes four elements. These four elements are intended by Van Norden to be "thin" enough not to impose alien ideas and concepts to the system of thought in question, but also to be "thick" enough not to be empty, that is, void of any explanatory value. Thus, according to Van Norden's thin description, virtue ethics is

> (1) an account of what a "flourishing" human life is like, (2) an account of what virtues contribute to leading such a life, (3) an account of how one acquires those virtues, and (4) a philosophical anthropology that explains what humans are like, such that they can acquire those virtues so as to flourish in that kind of life (Van Norden 2007, 21).

If we consider seriously the central place that the notion of "virtue" takes in Van Norden's description, we have to take into account that even if Van Norden succeeds in establishing "thin" account of *virtue ethics*, he still provides a "thick" account of *ethics*. There might be a consistent ethical vision that is concerned with a worthy – or "flourishing" – human life, but that takes, for example, a rationally grasped sense of duty or human relationships rather than virtue as the primary contributor to leading such a life. We have to conclude that Van Norden's "thin" account of virtue ethics is not free of theoretical content, as MacIntyre's understanding of a neutral ground for comparisons would require and what Van Norden's distinction between "thick" and "thin" attempts to achieve. Van Norden's "thin" account of virtue ethics, to put it once more in MacIntyre's words, deals with the "second level of characterization that predicates are applied in accordance with standards internal to and peculiar to each of the rival standpoints and such that each set of standard excludes the possibility of application for key predicates of its rivals" (MacIntyre 1991, 110). These "second level characterizations" are implemented in Confucian virtue ethics discourse; thus it requires us not to

forget the thickness, that is, the specific theoretical content of the framework in use.

As our knowledge of the early Confucian world increases and the need to legitimize early Confucian thinking against Western philosophical criteria as a valid *and* philosophically relevant position decreases, incommensurability will become even a greater challenge to anyone attempting to explain early Confucian ethics through some foreign conceptual framework. The more nuanced our understanding of original early Confucian terminology, the more immediate our awareness is of enriching potentiality of cultural differences encoded into natural and philosophical languages that early Confucians used. To keep insisting that, at least for a Western audience, Kongzi is best understood through Aristotelian or some other Western terminology, would mean either negating the abilities of Western philosophers to learn new terminology, or it would mean maintaining that Western terminology is *prima facie* better suitable to express ethical sensibilities. I do not think any of these alternatives would or should be taken as true statements.

To sum up, MacIntyre's article on incommensurability presents a valid and important challenge for comparative philosophers who are employing the conceptual framework of one tradition to explain the ideas of the other. I have argued that "negative" attempts to refute MacIntyre's challenge by maintaining that it is supported by contradictory and confused claims are not successful, as they tend to misread MacIntyre's original position. On the other hand, the "positive" attempt to meet MacIntyre's challenge by providing "thin" description of virtue ethics as a neutral and not sterile ground for comparisons between Aristotelian and Confucian traditions is not successful, as it falls short in meeting the requirement of neutrality by engaging in the theoretically laden discourse of virtue ethics. At least strictly from a methodological perspective, it leaves virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucians vulnerable to the incommensurability challenge. If early Confucian ethics and virtue ethics each is "embodying its own peculiar conceptual scheme", that is, if they are incommensurable, it is to be expected that the virtue ethics conceptual

framework eventually will impede understanding and/or expression of unique features of early Confucian ethical sensibility.

This does not right away disqualify virtue ethics framework from use in the comparative philosophy, as it might not be incommensurable with, for example, early Confucian ethics. We should not forget that looking from a historical perspective, as it was argued in the previous section, Confucian virtue ethics has made a decisive contribution to Western studies of China in bringing the philosophical relevance of early Confucian ethics to the fore. Confucian virtue ethics has explicated the practical orientation and disinterest in universal principles of early Confucians as a philosophically interesting and coherent position that can contribute to contemporary discussions in moral philosophy. In virtue ethics interpretation practicality and particularity of early Confucian thought has become the cornerstone of its philosophical appeal. Thus it seems to be conceivable that in this particular case the interpretation of early Confucians via virtue ethics framework happens to be both valid and the most adequate approach[14].

Thus now we have to turn to the analysis and evaluation of the specific content of virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucian ethics, to which the next section is devoted. Our goal is to assess how virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucian is supported, and what are the affects of using an Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian conceptual framework onto the understanding of early Confucian ethics.

1.2.2 *Dé* 德 as "virtue" and the centre of early Confucian ethics

Contemporary virtue ethics has gotten its name because of the emphasis that it gives to the notion of virtue, and, by extension, to the human character in ethical considerations. Eugene Garver has pointed out that in this regard

[14] That would make MacIntyre wrong on presenting Confucians and Aristotelians as working in incommensurable conceptual schemes, but not on his general methodological challenge to those who would attempt to interpret one thought system through the conceptual scheme of *incommensurable* thought system.

contemporary virtue ethicists are quite different from Aristotle, since *arête* – as important a term it is – can hardly be said to be a central piece of Aristotelian ethics:

> The [Aristotle's] *Ethics* is not a "virtue ethics." Its subject is *eudaimonia,* happiness, and it discusses virtue because happiness is virtuous activity. Contemporary virtue ethics locate ultimate value in good agents without the ties to happiness, the soul … (Garver 2006, 124).

The dissatisfaction with the emphasis of deontological and consequentialist moral theories on particular actions gave rise to the emphasis on moral character of a particular human being in virtue ethics. And the special place in this scheme had to be given to the most praiseworthy part of moral character, that is, to the "good" traits of moral character, or the virtues. As Richard A. H. King puts it:

> Virtue ethics, to be an interesting ethical position, has to posit the primacy of virtue – for naturally both utilitarians and duty ethicists think that virtues are important, insofar as dispositions of persons conflict with or contribute to fulfilling duties or maximising utility. But they are derivative in these systems; … It has to be argued that virtue is the crucial concept. (King 2011, 12)

The attention to the life-long personal cultivation in the early Confucian texts that contrasts sharply with the preoccupation of deontological and utilitarian moral theories with the rightness of particular actions has suggested to many that Confucianism is best understood and explained as a form of virtue ethics. The possibility of translating the term *dé* 德, one of the key terms of early Chinese ethical-political writings, as the early Confucian equivalent of the term "virtue" has been seen as strengthening the idea to interpret early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics.

Textual issues

The conceptual affinity of Chinese notion *dé* 德 with the Greek notion *arête* has drawn the attention of many scholars. Just as the meaning and

translation of *arête* still inspires many discussions, translation of the term *dé* 德 is not an easier task for sinologists and philosophers. Together with the most common translation of *dé* 德 into English as "virtue", many other translations have been suggested: power, inner power, moral power, (moral) charisma, potency, excellence, etc.

One of the most authoritative sinologists of the 20th century, David Nivison, has clearly acknowledged the difficulty of translating and explaining *dé* 德 by presenting the term as the one "that most of us uneasily translate 'virtue', or leave untranslated" (Nivison 1996, 17). Nevertheless, in order to grasp the meaning behind the term, Nivison has provided a deep analysis of the term *dé* 德 from its oldest instances of usage in the bone and bronze inscriptions. Some examples date from about 1200 BCE, and Nivison supports his reading with later texts from the 7th century BCE (see Nivison 1996, 19; 25). Nivison reconstructs the usage of the term from short, and at first sight, quite vague statements of religious purposes. Particular instances that Nivison analyzes are examples of sacrifice conducted by the king to heal illnesses of a royal consort and of two other princes. The context of this sacrifice, according to Nivison, is that the king has ritually offered himself in the sick person's place, thus asking the offended spirits to attack him, instead of the ill person in concerned (Nivison 1996, 21). Against this background, the very first appearance of *dé* 德 in his examples Nivison already translates as "virtue" (even though he puts it in parenthesis *and* inverted commas!): „Testing: 'The assisting princes having been restored [to health]; the king's *dé* ("virtue") is with this [event] even more approved [by the ancestors]'"[15] (Nivison 1996, 23). Nivison explains the rationale of his reading as follows:

> In this rite in which the king as diviner-intermediary assists another person to get well, the king's offer of self-sacrifice, ideally, has this result: not only does the sick person get well; further, the king does not himself get

[15] 貞有復左子王德于是益若 (from Nivison 1996, 22).

> sick; and more, because of his willingness to put himself in danger on behalf of another, his *dé*, "virtue", is magnified (Nivison 1996, 23).

Nivison sums up his findings:

> "Virtue", *dé* [德], is clearly some kind of inner mental entity. … (1) "Virtue" is a property of a good king; but really of any good person. (2) It is generated, or given in reward for, acts of generosity, self-restraint, and self-sacrifice, and for an attitude of humility. (3) It is at the same time constitutive of such behavior and of such an attitude. (4) It is something good to have, not just for itself but for its consequences for the possessor. … (5) … it seems to be a collection of virtues (Nivison 1996, 29-30).

This list indeed looks like a valid, if not an exhaustive, explication of the English term "virtue"; however, it is not clear if these characteristics exhaust the meaning of *dé* 德 in early Chinese writings and if they are the most important aspects of its semantic field.

In his study of foundations of Confucian thought, Yuri Pines also points out that *dé* 德 before Kongzi was primarily associated with the ruler and "originally referred to the ruler's charisma or *mana*" (Pines 2002, 180) that attracted divine support. From his analysis, it does not seem that, before Kongzi, the term would refer to stable character traits, but rather to some state of political empowerment that is associated with a particular person. Yuri Pines refers to Kominami Ichirō's study, in which he asserted that *dé* 德 was understood as something given from outside:

> Initially Heaven conferred *dé* [德] on the ruler, who then conferred it on his ministers, and they transmitted *dé* [德] to their descendents. The ministers, therefore, were primarily passive recipients of the *dé* [德] and not active possessors (Pines 2002, 181).

Pines agrees that closer to Kongzi's times, usage of *dé* 德 started to manifest more ethical aspects, but he explains it with the dissemination of

political power from a strong central political leader – the king – to the increasingly influential stratum of aristocrats. In Pines' words:

> The transformation of the term *dé* [德] reflects the overall pattern of Chunqiu[16] ethical development in which aristocrats, searching for a new self-image, appropriated attributes of the ruler's behavior (Pines 2002, 184).

Although Yuri Pines also translates the term as "virtue", from the material that he is quoting it is clear that *dé* 德 – when used in ethical sense – has referred to a wider context than the character traits of a particular individual. Commenting on the passage from 546 BCE, found in *Zuozhuan* 左傳, where a noble from a state of Jin 晉 praises his late state leader to the prime minister of another state, Yuri Pines notes:

> Shi Hui's *dé* [德] cannot be summarized either as the ruler's charisma or as ministerial reverence. It referred to his successful management of the affairs of his lineage, and meritorious service to his rulers, to his proper communication with the deities, and to his moral conduct, which explains why his scribes and invocators "had nothing to be ashamed of". In this short passage Zhao Wenzi succeeded in combining political, religious, and moral aspects of "*dé*" [德], turning this term into a generic term for all kinds of proper behavior, virtue rather than *virtus* (Pines 2002, 183).

The strongest reservation to read *dé* 德 as "virtue" in the context of early Chinese writings was recently expressed by German sinologist Robert Gassmann who attempts to "come to terms" with the *dé* 德. For Gassmann it means, first of all and contrary to Nivison, the necessity to deconstruct the rendition of it as "virtue" (see Gassmann 2011). Gassmann starts from a discussion on methodological strategies in trying to understand the key notions of early Chinese writings.

[16] Spring and Autumn Period 春秋時代, approximately 771-476 BCE.

He criticizes two methods widely used in Chinese studies for being "blind alleys" of Chinese lexicography. One of these methods is "specifically sinological (and traditionally Chinese) method of analyzing meanings … [that] builds on the epigraphical analysis of archaic characters, thus developing a kind of etymology of the writing of the characters involved" (Gassmann 2011, 97-8). The pictographic origin of many Chinese characters makes this method very appealing, as it may foster a hasty conclusion that the meaning of the character is somehow directly given to the reader through visualization. On the one hand, the point of Gassmann's critique seems to be that such visualization is straightforward and informative only in simple cases. But on the other hand, and more importantly, Gassmann claims that such a method relies on a misunderstanding of the relation between words and writing (ibid, 97). It is true that meanings of written words change over time, but it would be difficult to believe that they change randomly and without any semantic relation that would make such historic approach absolutely futile. Gassmann apparently shies away from such a categorical position and points out in his footnotes that he does not want to negate "the relevance of received meanings", as his biggest concern is that "the reconstruction of historical meaning should not be principally based on later developments" (ibid, 99 n.20). In other words, Gassmann warns us not to commit *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy. However, it seems that Gassmann criticizes the misuse of epigraphical analysis rather than the method itself; thus we can doubt, if it is an adequate assessment to call the method a "blind alley".

The second "blind alley", according to Gassmann, has been trod even by some of the most acclaimed and prolific translators of ancient Chinese texts, such as Richard Wilhelm and Victor H. Mair. Gassmann quotes from Wilhelm's and Mair's own accounts, explaining their choices of translating the particular Chinese characters and showing that besides etymological studies a fair amount of personal intuitions are involved in deciding for one or the other equivalent for the term in question. In Wilhelm's case it is the inspiration he got from Goethe's *Faust* that convinces him to choose German "der Sinn"

(mind[17]) for Chinese *dǎo* 道 (see Gassmann 2011, 95). In Mair's case it is the perceived correlation between the meanings of the Chinese word *dé* 德 "pronounced approximately *dugh* during the early Chou [Zhou] period" and "words deriving from Proto-Indo-European *dhugh*" (Mair, cited from Gassmann 2011, 96) that supposedly sheds light on the Chinese term[18].

Gassmann claims that Mair "fails to explain why certain *Indo-European* etymologies are particularly predisposed to shed light on the meaning of *dé* [德], and, if this should arguably turn out to be the case, *how* they do so" (Gassmann 2011, 97; italics in original). A similar point is made by Gassmann in the case of Wilhelm's translation of *dǎo* 道:

> Even if Wilhelm were intuitively correct in his rendering of … *dǎo* [道], we are not one single step nearer to a scientifically argued understanding of the meaning(s). Moreover, this "method" in no way limits or defines the considerable range of equivalents that can be, and in fact have been, postulated (Gassmann 2011, 95-6).

Gassmann's point is that even if such scholarship is based on broad "lexicological erudition", it lacks evidence, which is "verifiable within the framework of inter-subjective procedures" (Gassmann 2011, 99), thus many different equivalents can be and have been postulated by scholars with different intuitions.

Gassmann does not address Nivison's work at any length in his article and only mentions him in one of the footnotes, saying that Nivison's rendition of *dé* 德, along with some other done by "outstanding sinologists", "suffer from one, the other, or several, of the graver shortcomings" (Gassmann 2011, 111 n.49).

[17] English translation here is given according to Gassmann's paraphrase, though it is worth mentioning that German "der Sinn" has other English meanings that can also be closely associated with *dǎo* 道: "meaning", "signification", "sense (of sth.)". I thank Geir Sigurdsson for drawing my attention to this point.

[18] Victor H. Mair suggests that "'integrity' is the only word that seems plausible throughout" as a translation for *dé* 德 (cited from Gassmann 2011, 97).

Most probably, Gassmann's complaint with Nivison's translation would be similar as with Wilhelm's and Mair's. Although Nivison does not rely on epigraphical analysis and is looking for broader cultural and linguistic context, the whole procedure which brings about the translation of *dé* 德 as "virtue" is missing in Nivison's analysis[19]. Nivison acknowledges that the context he puts together is "guesswork" and prompts his readers: "you must judge for yourselves whether it is good guesswork" (Nivison 1996, 21).

As quoted above, Nivison's inference is that because king is willing to put himself in danger on behalf of another, the king's *dé* 德 that increases, as stated in the bone inscription, should be rendered as "virtue" in English. While it certainly seems a plausible inference, Gassmann's criticism appears to be valid in this case as well. Paraphrasing Gassmann, even if Nivison's inference is correct, his analysis does not limit the range of equivalents for translating *dé* 德 that can and have been postulated. In other words, Nivison's analysis does not prevent reading of *dé* 德 as "moral power" or "moral charisma", etc.

In Gassmann's own account, *dé* 德 in the text from Warring States period, thus of early Confucian writings as well, can not be translated as "virtue" or "virtuous" for number of reasons. Gassmann's primary examples are drawn from legalist – *fǎjiā* 法家 – writings. The analysis of *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 indicates for Gassmann that none of the contexts in which *dé* 德 was used supports the reading of the term as "virtuous". In Gassmann's words:

> The fact that in two passages [*de*] 德 represents a bivalent verb (i.e. with nouns in the subject and the object position) indicates that we are not dealing with a stative verb, but rather with *dynamic* or *relational* verbs – which again is hardly in favour of the received understanding in terms of 'virtuousness' or 'virtue' (Gassmann 2011, 102; italics in original).

[19] Another influential analysis of *dé* 德, provided by Donald Munro, mostly relies on epigraphical analysis. Munro is looking at early forms of *dé* 德 that he calls "antecedents" of the term and also at their components and reconstructs religious and political contents in the early meanings of the term. According to Munro, one of religious aspects is the meaning "to consult" the spirits. Later the political content was added and meant, in Munro's words, "the eliciting of response of loyalty or gratitude from the people" (see Munro 1969, 185-93).

In the Part 2 of this dissertation we will see that this dynamic and relational aspect of the term *dé* 德 – as well as of many other terms in early Confucian writings – will also be pointed out by the proponents of role ethics approach, arguing that this feature shows important differences in connotations and implications of the term *dé* 德 in Confucian usage and that of *arête* or "virtue" in Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian usage. Relying on his methodology to look for syntactic constructions, such as the pairing of nouns, Gassmann draws attention to the fact that in *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 *dé* 德 is often paired with the term *xíng* 刑, which means "punishment". Gassmann concludes:

> [This] evidently weakens the assumption that *dé* [德] denotes a universal moral concept ('virtue') put to political use because it seems difficult to interpret 'punishment' as an element of a superordinate ethical category (Gassmann 2011, 103 n. 29).

Further, contrary to Nivison, who claims that *dé* 德 "appears to be a quality or psychic energy in the king", that is, "a property of a good king; but really, of any good person" (Nivison 1996, 24; 29), Gassmann claims that although *dé* 德 is a sort of power, "such power is not inalienable property of person":

> It is therefore transferable, and can … certainly be encroached upon or arrogated. The commonly received understanding of *dé* [德], i.e. 'virtue', is hardly relatable to this process of alienation (how would one person – not in an instrumentalizing sense – use another person's 'virtue' as his own virtue?) (Gassmann 2011, 103-4).

Finally, Gassmann suggests that *dé* 德 in the Warring State period has denoted several words, the root meaning of which is to "obligate" (Gassmann 2011, 106). In this regard his understanding of the term is not that different from that of Nivison. Nivison also gives an example of *dé* 德 used as a bivalent verb in a form "A has *dé* [德] with B". Nivison explains that "this is an ancient colloquial idiom with a simple meaning: A has done something for B, and B consequently feels a debt of gratitude to A" (Nivison 1996, 25). According to

Nivison, in early Chinese context this feeling of debt is so strong that "I come to think of it not as a psychic configuration in myself, but as a psychic power emanating from you" (Nivison 1996, 26).

Gassmann states a similar feature of *dé* 德, saying that it "is the establishment of a dependency between two parties, the obligee and the obligor," however he concludes the opposite from Nivison:

> It is important to note that *dé* [德] is not born out of a moral or ethical principle uniquely residing in the obligee (which would be characteristic of a virtue). ... The anecdotes suggest that *dé* [德] often results from opportunities and constellations that present themselves (Gassmann 2011, 107).

Both Nivison's and Gassmann's explanations suggest that *dé* 德 is a result of a particular interaction between people, something that is co-authored, and something that bonds people in their relationship even stronger. However, it seems that this interpersonal, correlative, and shared meaning of *dé* 德 gets lost as soon as it is rendered into English "virtue" in Nivison's translation, if not for Nivison himself, then for a reader less familiar with the old connotations of the Chinese term.

One possible rebuke to Gassmann could be that he ignores possible important differences in the meaning that early Confucians and legalists have invested into the term *dé* 德. Gassmann acknowledges differences between these two schools, but he claims that in this particular case differences are not in the understanding of the term, but rather in the political goals that each of these schools are attempting to reach. In Gassmann's opinion a major difference in the use of the term lies in the vision of government that has to be achieved through the implementation of *dé* 德 (see Gassmann 2011, 107). Therefore, Gassmann is confident that his results of the analysis of *dé* 德 are valid for most late Warring States texts, Confucian texts including.

What this comparison of Nivison's and Gassmann's analysis of *dé* 德 shows is that there can be hardly one and final rendition of the term *dé* 德, one which would encompass all important aspects pointed out by various scholars. While "virtue" certainly is one of the possible renditions it at best can be seen as a tentative translation that should not overshadow such crucial aspects of *dé* 德 as its processual nature exposed in a verbal usage of the term and its relational and situational aspects pointed out by Gassmann.

Philosophical issues

Although many scholars writing on the philosophical and ethical significance of *dé* 德 and on Confucian ethics more generally do mention various possible renditions of the term, in most cases all the qualifications are left at the introduction, and "virtue" is used as the default translation. I will now present how *dé* 德 is interpreted by some of the most vocal proponents of virtue ethics approach to early Confucianism and how it influences their explication of the early Confucian ethical system.

Scholars who have proposed interpreting early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics have been largely inspired by the alleged centrality of virtue – or its equivalent in Chinese – in both Aristotelianism and early Confucianism. An equally important argument for accepting virtue ethics framework was the conviction that early Confucian ethics, when seen through the lens of virtue ethics, would become more lucid, coherent, and relevant for a contemporary reader.

Without any particular reference to Aristotelian ethics, Antonio Cua attempts to present early Confucian ethics as an "ethics of virtue" on the basis that "throughout its long history, Confucianism has stressed character formation or personal cultivation of virtues (*te*) [*dé* 德]" (Cua 1998, 269). Cua acknowledges that he works under the *assumption* that *dé* 德 can be rendered as "virtue", since up to this day there are numerous different interpretations of the Confucian use of the term (Cua 1998, 269). For Cua, the main goal of his "conceptual experiment" is an attempt to reconstruct what he has called

"relatively loose system of action-guides" of early Confucianism as "an ethics of virtue with a coherent conceptual scheme" (Cua 1998, 1; 271). In other words, putting *dé* 德 as "virtue" at the centre of Confucian ethical thinking helps Cua to show the unity of basic Confucian notions, their interconnection and/or interdependence.

P.J. Ivanhoe, one of the early proponents of virtue ethics approach, notes that the concept of virtue played a central role in early Chinese thought (Ivanhoe 1993, 1) and that the roots of the term had "very strong metaphysical overtones" (according to Wilson 1995, 276). Ivanhoe follows the explication of Nivison when he asserts that "*dé* [德] ('virtue') was a kind of *power* which accrued to and resided within an individual"[20] (Ivanhoe 1993, 2). Furthermore, according to Ivanhoe, Kongzi developed the notion of *dé* 德 as a "moral term of art" and that it was "seen as an endowment each person receives at birth, an inheritance one either cherishes and develops or ignores and squanders" (Ivanhoe 1993, 6). To support this claim Ivanhoe cites *Lunyu* as saying, "Heaven created the *dé* [德] within me"[21] (*Lunyu* 7.23, cited from Ivanhoe 1993, 6 n.14). However, it is not clear how this passage can support the claim that for Kongzi *dé* 德 was given at birth. There is no grammatical or lexical evidence in the quoted sentence that would unambiguously support such a reading. In addition to this, it is hard to find any statements in early Confucian writings suggesting that children have some sort of *dé* 德. Later Ivanhoe also points out that

> we do find Kongzi claiming that in order to live a proper human life one must cultivate oneself to fulfill certain role-specific obligations that express a range of distinctively human excellences. Such claims are part of the evidence for understanding him as advocating a form of virtue ethics (Ivanhoe 2002, 9).

[20] Note how the relational aspects of *dé* 德, indicated both in Nivison and Gassmann and discussed above, are dropped here, stressing the possession of *dé* 德 by an "individual".
[21] 天生德於予 (*Chinese Text Project*).

It is not entirely clear how, for Ivanhoe, the endeavor to fulfill "role-specific" obligations makes early Confucians into advocates of a form of virtue ethics. It seems to me that for Ivanhoe "virtue ethics" is a very loosely describable ethical position, the most important characteristic of which is to be concerned with the cultivation of a person and not being content with the prescriptions for the right conduct. In other words, any ethical system that is not deontological or utilitarian throughout is *a* form of virtue ethics. Such a position would explain Ivanhoe's somewhat rushed and perfunctory attribution of virtue ethics framework to early Confucians.

Yu Jiyuan writes that "for both ethics of Confucius and Aristotle, the central question is about what good life is or what kind of person one should be. More strikingly, both ethics answer this central question by focusing on virtue, that is, the quality that makes a person a good person" (Yu 2007, 24). May Sim makes a similar point, but also mentions the views on training a good person as granting a stable common ground for comparison of Kongzi and Aristotle. According to May Sim, "both Confucius and Aristotle emphasize the role of virtue, and both stress the significance of exemplary individuals for moral training and the dependence of such training on the socio-political context" (Sim 2001, 453). Moreover, Sim argues that the question what kind of person is happy for both thinkers can be answered objectively and strikingly similarly: "the happy life is the life of exemplary virtue" (Sim 2007, 23-24). In these accounts we notice that once *dé* 德 is appropriated as an early Confucian equivalent of the term "virtue" and it is drawn into virtue ethics framework, it ceases to be a complicated term, whose semantic scope includes feelings, powers, actions, and interrelatedness between a person and the surroundings. Although these properties of the term are mentioned in a passing manner, the multiplicity and complexity of the original ancient Chinese term are sacrificed in philosophical explications for the putative lucidity, consistency, and plainness of early Confucian ethics as a system. *Dé* 德 becomes a personal feature to be found "within an individual", received at birth and cultivated by

certain kind of persons who then eventually achieve the ultimate goal, that is, the happy life.

A much more careful approach in translating *dé* 德 into „virtue“ is taken by Bryan Van Norden (2007), who has provided a thorough explication of both possibilities and problems of using the specific virtue ethics framework in early Confucian studies. Van Norden makes it clear in the beginning of his book that when it comes to the term *dé* 德 "we are not dealing here with a notion that is quite the same as either the English 'virtue' or the Classical Greek '*arête*'. *Dé* is a sort of "ethical force" that a person has, which can have a transformative effect on others" (Van Norden 2007, 21). Van Norden also notes an important fact that *dé* 德 occasionally was used in the negative sense, "like a characteristic vice" (Van Norden 2007, 21)[22]. However, Van Norden is confident that to interpret early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics is both a valid and useful task. Van Norden addresses possible objections "that it distorts Chinese philosophy to interpret it in the light of notions for which there are no terms in Classical Chinese" and calls such a position "the lexical fallacy" (Van Norden 2007, 22). Henry Rosemont, whose interpretation of early Confucians will be discussed in Part 2, is quoted as an example of this, according to Van Norden, "erroneous" position:

> The only way it can be maintained that a particular concept was held by an author is to find a term expressing that concept in his text. Thus we cannot say so-and-so had a "theory of X," or that he "espoused X principles," if there is no X in the lexicon of the language in which the author wrote (Rosemont 1988, 41 n. 11, cited from Van Norden 2007, 22).

Van Norden rejoins to this charge by suggesting that it is possible "to have a concept" of something, even if one "lacks a word for it". Thus, according to Van Norden:

> It seems clear that Anaximander and Anaximenes were doing philosophy, had views about philosophy, and (in some sense) had the concept of

[22] These last two points about *dé* 德 are also stressed by Yu (2007, 30).

> philosophy, even though both lived before the Greek term for philosophy, 'philosophia', was coined by the Pythagoreans (Van Norden 2007, 22)[23].

It is doubtful whether Van Norden's rejoinder refutes Rosemont's claim. On one hand, whereas Rosemont's point is mainly focused at a conceptual and theoretical level, Van Norden gives an example of a practice – a set of actions – that can be undertaken without a conceptual and theoretical explication of it. It is conceivable that a person could play a chord or a sequence of chords on a piano without having the concept of a chord, but it is questionable if such person could have "a chord theory".

Van Norden's qualification that Anaximander and Anaximenes "in some sense" had the concept of philosophy is too vague to assess whether he and Rosemont are talking about the same thing. Knowing the general positions of these two authors, it seems that Rosemont's claim is narrower and more specific than Van Norden takes it. On the other hand, Rosemont does indeed use this claim as support to his objection to call early Confucian ethics a form of virtue ethics. However, the quote that Van Norden chose from a footnote of Rosemont's article does not show the whole picture. Rosemont's claim that he consistently argues for in several articles throughout years is that a person can not be said to have "a theory of X" when there are no lexical equivalents in his or her language not only for X, but also for the key concepts that are closely intertwined with X. These closely intertwined key concepts of any theory Henry Rosemont calls "concept clusters"[24]. In this sense Rosemont's claim is broader and more general than Van Norden wants to take it.

1.2.3 Early Confucian core concepts as Confucian list of "virtues"

[23] A similar claim to Van Norden's, but even more radical is put forward by Sim (2007), who also argues for virtue ethics approach to early Confucians. In her recent book Sim lists ten categories of Aristotle – such as substance (*ousia*), quantity (*poson*), quality (*poion*), and others – and claims that "Confucius uses these categories even when he does not mention them" (Sim 2007, 51).

[24] Henry Rosemont's notion of "concept clusters" will be discussed in Section 2.1.3. For various forms of Rosemont's fuller claim that was rehearsed here, see Rosemont 1986, 205-6; Rosemont 1991b, 81; Rosemont 2013, 17.

Translating *dé* 德 as "virtue" and placing it at the centre of early Confucian ethics significantly influences how the rest of most important early Confucian ethical concepts are translated and interpreted. The following analysis in this chapter attempts to highlight both the tendency to render key early Confucian concepts into aretaic notions, as well as problems with such an approach.

In Van Norden's words:

> A large number of virtues have played an important role in the history of Ruism [25]: *rén* 仁 ("humaneness" or "benevolence"), *yì* 義 ("righteousness"), *lǐ* 禮 ("propriety"), *zhì* 智 ("wisdom," sometimes written 知), *zhōng* 忠 ("devotion"), *xìn* 信 ("faithfulness"), *yǒng* 勇 ("courage"), and *xiào* 孝 ("filial piety"). Some of these translations are fairly accurate, others are merely "tags" for want of a better translation. (Van Norden 2007, 117)

Here Van Norden indicates some of the key concepts found in the early Confucian writings, and not many would challenge the adequacy of this list. However, the translation of these key notions already hints to the interpretation of early Confucian ethics that a scholar endorses; thus translation is a matter of heated debate among contemporary scholars. Van Norden's introduction of the list clearly shows the formed tradition in the contemporary scholarship to render the key concepts of early Confucian texts as "virtues" and, accordingly, to translate them in the substantive form. In the following analysis I intend to highlight some of the important problems with the quoted translations.

Rén 仁 as "benevolence"

In early Chinese studies the term *rén* 仁 is widely and unequivocally considered to be the pivotal ethical category in early Confucian ethics. Confucian virtue ethics find in this notion one further confirmation that virtue stands at the centre of early Confucian ethical sensibility.

[25] Van Norden uses the more native Chinese name "Ruism" as a reference to *rújiā* 儒家, the name of a school or a tradition that is called "Confucianism" in Western languages.

Commentators usually point out that *rén* 仁 in early Confucian writings can be used in both a broader and narrower sense. In its narrow sense *rén* 仁 is said to roughly correspond to a particular virtue of "benevolence", and in its broad sense, to be a sum of all particular virtues (see Van Norden 2007, 117-8), or to be a "general virtue". According to Yu, "in most places, *rén* [仁] is described as a general quality that embraces particular virtues or character traits, and is thus virtue in its entirety or in its inclusiveness" (Yu 2007, 33-4). There is some overlap of the meaning of *rén* 仁 in the broad sense with the meaning of *dé* 德, so that Yu even asks "is the virtue ethics in the *Analects* an ethics of *dé* [德] or an ethics of *rén* [仁]?" (Yu 2007, 32; also see Pines 2002, 185).

The importance of the term to the early Confucian ethical system is emphasized by the fact that it was rarely mentioned in the old canonical writings seen as the foundation of all Chinese civilization. For example, in the *Book of Poetry* (*Shijing*) *rén* 仁 is mentioned twice, in the *Book of History* (*Shangshu*) only once (see Pines 2002, 184)[26]. According to Yuri Pines, the early meaning of the term was synonymous with the political dimension of *dé* 德 and "had a downward orientation, the ruler's kindness for his subjects" (Pines 2002, 184). He also points out that *rén* 仁 grew in importance even before Kongzi's time, but "Confucius apparently inherited and reinforced existing tendencies to elevate *rén* 仁 into the most significant of the virtues" (Pines 2002, 184).

For Pines "virtue" here does not seem to be a technical term and simply denotes a praiseworthy and desirable quality of any sort. For example, he indicates that in the early *Zuozhuan* 左傳 speeches from 8th to 7th century BCE *rén* 仁 "refers to a mild, noncoercive *policy* that was … the political manifestation of *dé* [德]" (Pines 2002, 185, emphasis added). However, in the

[26] The digital sources *Chinese Texts Project* and *Thesaurus Linguae Sericae* give 5 occurrences of *rén* 仁 in the corpus of *Shangshu*.

Confucian virtue ethics approach *rén* 仁 is seen as the central virtue term that supports and enhances the reading of early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics.

P.J. Ivanhoe translates *rén* 仁 as "complete goodness", and in his account Kongzi "intends the term to describe a general virtuous disposition to do what is good and fine" (Ivanhoe 2002, 168 n.11). Ivanhoe indicates that there is some shift in the meaning of the term from Kongzi to Mengzi, as "Mengzi uses the term to mean the specific virtue of compassion, which he claims exists as an innate, nascent disposition in human nature" (Ivanhoe 2002, 168 n.11).

Yearley translates *rén* 仁 in the *Mengzi* as the virtue of "benevolence" and describes it as "a disposition to react compassionately and to act to alleviate suffering" (Yearley 1990, 38). We can see a slight difference in his and Ivanhoe's explanations of the term, as Yearley points out that some sort of "innateness", or a quality of being Heaven's gift, is characteristic of *sì duān* 四端, or "four potentials", but not of an already fleshed out "virtue of compassion". Only when actualized in everyday situations, one of these potentials – in Mengzi's terms *cèyǐn zhī xīn* 惻隱之心, or "a sensitivity to the sufferings of others" – becomes the virtue of benevolence (*rén* 仁) (see Yearley 1990, 36).

Van Norden's account of *rén* 仁 in early Confucian writings is similar. He also stresses differences in the meaning of the term found in *Lunyu* and in the *Mengzi*. According to Van Norden, in Confucius' usage *rén* 仁 refers mostly to the summation of all human virtue "including, but not limited to, benevolence" (Van Norden 2007, 118). Because in the *Mengzi* the term is normally used to refer to benevolence specifically, he uses different translations for *rén* 仁 in different texts. In discussions of *Lunyu*, *rén* 仁 is translated as "humaneness", and in discussions of *Mengzi* or Mohists, it is translated as "benevolence" (Van Norden 2007, 118). Van Norden claims that for Mengzi *rén* 仁 might have been a conceptual instrument to differentiate his

teachings from his biggest rival Mozi 墨子. Mozi was teaching about universal or "impartial" love – *jiān'ài* 兼愛, whereas for early Confucians *rén* 仁 was grounded in one's affections for one's parents, and thus was graded and differentiated (see Van Norden 2007, 247-9). Summing up the meaning of *rén* 仁, Van Norden says:

> Mengzian benevolence is a disposition toward agent-relative obligations involving the well-being of others. … To be benevolent is to be pained by the suffering of others and to take joy in the happiness of others … Benevolence requires differentiated love … Fully developed benevolence frequently requires action (Van Norden 2007, 249).

The understanding of *rén* 仁 as denoting a character trait, or an innate disposition of a person, has produced heated debates among Western scholars. The strongest resistance in reading the term in its broader sense as indicating a general virtue once again comes from Robert Gassmann. In his article devoted to clarifying the ancient Chinese usage of terms *rén* 人 and *mín* 民, usually translated as "human" and "people" respectively, Gassmann also draws important conclusions about the meaning of the term *rén* 仁. As Gassmann's conclusion goes against the vast majority of scholarship on early Chinese thought, I will quote it in some length:

> The character 仁, standing for the verb "to behave in a *rén*-like way" or the noun "*rén*-like behavior", designates, in the Eastern Zhōu period, a pattern of behavior that has its origin in kinship structures, in a *Rén*-group [人]. It denotes intra-group behavior, i.e., the correct behavior towards one's relatives. In the second place, it can, for holders of certain offices, denote situationally correct behavior towards people outside the *Rén*-group, i.e., to non kin or *Mín* [民]. I am afraid it was *not*, at that time, a general, abstract philosophical, or ethical concept. It had *no* affinity to "humanity", "humaneness", or "benevolence", and all attempts to read such meanings into the pre-Qín texts are highly questionable and misleading (Gassmann 2000, 359; italics in the original).

Gassmann's interpretation of the term not only stands in sharp contrast to Confucian virtue ethics understanding of *rén* 仁 as, in Ivanhoe's words, "an innate, nascent disposition in human nature" (Ivanhoe 2002, 168 n. 11). Gassmann also contradicts almost all scholarship on early Confucian thought that takes *rén* 仁 as an ethical category. Strong formulations aside, Gassmann's argument is worth attention. Firstly, he points out that for early Chinese, *rén* 仁 shows the quality of behavior patterns among people, thus denoting the quality of interaction rather than a quality of an individual character. Secondly, Gassmann claims that "situationally correct" behaviour in societal interactions for early Chinese was modelled with a reference to "correct behavior towards one's relatives". Both these claims we will see elaborated in a more detailed manner by the proponents of Confucian role ethics in Part 2.

The most widely discussed objection to read *rén* 仁 as denoting some inner quality or a character trait of an individuated person has appeared in an influential book by Herbert Fingarette (1972). In it Fingarette has issued a warning not to psychologize Kongzi's terminology (Fingarette 1972, 43). I take it to be an important objection to the narrower reading of *rén* 仁 as the particular virtue of "benevolence". After all, the notion of virtue can hardly be disassociated from the notion of *psyche* as the locus point in which all the virtues "reside". Not surprisingly, many proponents of virtue ethics approach to Confucianism at some point voice their critique of Fingarette's reading of *Lunyu*, mainly accusing him of imposing behavioristic ideas on Kongzi (see for example Van Norden 2005, 10; Van Norden 2007, 111). These accusations keep reappearing despite the fact that Fingarette explicitly pointed out that he presents in his book "a tacit *contrast* between Confucius' view and the thin and sterile 'behaviorist' view" (Fingarette 1978, 512; emphasis in original).

Fingarette's main point is that although *rén* 仁 "seems to emphasize the individual, the subjective, the character, feelings, and attitudes; it seems, in short, a psychological notion" (Fingarette 1972, 37), but translating this term with an equivalent such as "benevolence" does not do justice to the text, as it

merely reinforces “the natural tendency to read into a text the ideas by which one is already seized” (Fingarette 1972, viii). Ideas that obscure our understanding of Kongzi by imposing our own “European background assumptions”, according to Fingarette, are those that “favor the individualistic and subjectivistic view of man” (Fingarette 1972, viii-ix).

In Fingarette’s own view, “Confucius speaks in terms of action *xíng* [行] because for him it is action and public circumstances that are fundamental, not esoteric doctrine or subjective states” (Fingarette 1972, 40). To be sure, the majority of virtue ethics proponents along the psychological aspects also indicate the active aspect of the so-called Confucian virtues. For example, Van Norden stresses that “fully developed benevolence frequently requires action. … [T]he *completely benevolent* person will act appropriately in response to these feelings and perceptions” (Van Norden 2007, 249; emphasis in original). However, by explicitly putting virtue at the centre of early Confucian ethics, virtue ethics approach diminishes the importance of this interactive side of early Confucian ethics by rendering it secondary, stemming from some primary source, which is the inner quality of a particular individuated person.

Fingarette’s objective here is not to argue for the fundamental importance of action and disregard psychological structures as insignificant or even non-existent. The depiction of Fingarette’s position as behavioristic is misleading, because the main thrust of Fingarette’s argument attempts to question and go beyond the distinction of “inner” and “outer”, psychological and social, “soul” and “social mask” that favours one or the other in conceptualizing a human being. Fingarette argues that this distinction is familiar to us, but it probably was alien for Kongzi and, presumably, other early Confucians. According to Fingarette:

> I must emphasize that my point here is not that Confucius’s words are intended to exclude reference to the inner psyche. He could have done this if he had such basic metaphor in mind, had seen its plausibility, but on reflection had decided to reject it. But this is not what I am arguing here.

> My thesis is that the entire notion never entered his head. The metaphor of an inner psychic life, in all its ramifications so familiar to us, simply isn't present in the *Analects*, not even as rejected possibility (Fingarette 1972, 45).

In order to fully appreciate this important point in Fingarette's argument, we have to take into account that in *Lunyu* we will not find this opposition between the "inner" and the "outer" – *nèi wài* 內外 – realms of the person. The term *wài* 外 – the "outer", or "outward" – does not appear in the text at all. The closest use of *nèi* 內 that would hint at some kind of separate "inner" realm of personhood that is important to a person's overall moral stature we find in the passage 4.17: „The Master said, 'When you meet persons of exceptional character think to stand shoulder to shoulder with them; meeting persons of little character, look *inward and examine yourself*'"[27] (LY 4.17[28], emphasis added).

However, from the passage it is not clear what are the limits or boundaries of that "self" within which one should examine oneself, let alone to suggest that Kongzi is referring to something resembling *psyche*. It might be helpful to look at another passage where Zengzi 曾子, a highly regarded student of Kongzi, explains how he examines daily his "person" on three counts:

> In my undertakings on behalf of other people, have I failed to do my utmost (*zhong* 忠)? In my interactions with colleagues and friends, have I failed to make good on my word (*xin* 信)? In what has been passed on to me, have I failed to carry it into practice?[29] (LY 1.4)

In this passage we can clearly see that an examination of one's "person" (*shēn* 身), something that can easily be associated with introspection, with the

[27]子曰：「見賢思齊焉，見不賢而內自省也。」(*CTP*)

[28] LY indicates quotes from *Lúnyǔ* 論語, or the *Analects* of Confucius, quoted according to Ames and Rosemont 1998, if it is not indicated otherwise. Numbers indicate the chapter (the book) and the passage in it.

[29] 曾子曰：「吾日三省吾身：為人謀而不忠乎？與朋友交而不信乎？傳不習乎？」(*CTP*)

look into the inner "depths" of one's soul, is for Zengzi essentially an observation of his person *within* his interrelations[30].

Thus, when Fingarette says that *rén* 仁 "is intimately linked to the relationship between man and man" (Fingarette 1972, 42), he stresses the importance not to locate *rén* 仁 as a virtue isolated within a distinct individual, but to see it as a term denoting the phenomena that exists and reveals itself only *in-between* two humans, that is, in their interaction. Fingarette also points out, contra the accusations of behaviorism, that in his understanding *rén* 仁 must not be identified with "the act as overt"; it is rather some directional power that emanates from the person in the interaction with another person and that directs our attention to the "personal perspective" of the whole observable situation (see Fingarette 1972, especially 52-5).

Fingarette is suggesting that in Kongzi's view of a human being, actions of a particular person, the roles that this person undertakes in all kinds of public ceremonies and interactions with other humans, are not seen as derivative, i.e., supposedly emerging *from* personality described in psychological terms. Fingarette's point is that for Kongzi all this seemingly outer activity *is* personality just *as much as* any "inner" activity is. Fingarette agrees that *rén* 仁 is meant to designate "personal perspective", but, according to him, "the move from *rén* [仁] as referring us to a person on to *rén* [仁] as 'therefore' referring us to his inner mental or psychic condition or processes finds no parallel in the *Analects*. Certainly there is no systematic or even unsystematic elaboration of any such connections" (Fingarette 1972, 43).

Thus the indirect challenge of Fingarette's position to virtue ethics approach is more subtle than a mere demand to take an active aspect of early Confucian key terms into account. It raises the question whether presenting *dé* 德, *rén* 仁, and other terms as "virtues" does not reduce their scope of

[30] The question of the meaning and importance of *nèi wài* 內外 use in early Confucian ethics becomes much more complicated when one examines *Mengzi*. In an exchange between Henry Rosemont and Herbert Fingarette over Fingarette's reading of early Confucians, both scholars considered a possibility that Mengzi could "differ radically" with Kongzi on the inner/outer distinction (Rosemont 1978, 518 and Fingarette 1978, 513).

reference in such manner that additional explanations become necessary, in order to account for the importance of social and cultural contexts surrounding a person, and also of the importance of her interactions within this context. We will see a similar line of thought formulated by role ethics approach in its critique of the implementation of virtue vocabulary in the interpretation of early Confucian ethical thought.

Explications of other early Confucian key terms – *yì* 義 and *lǐ* 禮 – as "virtues" also seem to follow the chosen interpretative "virtue ethics" framework more than a clear association of these terms in early Confucian texts with the character traits of distinct persons.

***Yì* 義 as virtue of "righteousness"**

Van Norden shows clearly the complexity of the term *yì* 義, which was variously translated into English as "moral", "morality", "moral principles", "right", "righteousness", "duty", "appropriateness", and so on. Van Norden tells us that *yì* 義 "as a quality of acts" has a quite consistent meaning in early Confucian texts that he sums up with the quote from the *Zhongyong* 中庸, chapter 20: "*Yì* 義 is what is *yí* 宜 'appropriate'" (cited from Van Norden 2007, 118). According to Van Norden, for early Confucians "what is 'appropriate' will take into account one's social role, so it is 'agent-relative'. … [I]t is overall more like an agent-relative *prohibition* to avoid certain kinds of conduct" (Van Norden 2007, 118; italics in original).

Although Van Norden claims that *yì* 義 "can also be a term that refers to a virtue, the stable disposition to perform acts that are *yì* [義]" (Van Norden 2007, 118), he also presents quite a different position formulated by D.C. Lau, one of the leading translators of early Chinese philosophy. In the introduction to his translation of *Lunyu* D.C. Lau has this to say about *yì* 義:

> Rightness [*yì* 義] is basically a characteristic of acts, and its application to agents is derivative. … The rightness of act depends upon their being

> morally fitting in the circumstances and has little to do with the disposition or motive of the agent" (D.C. Lau, cited from Yu 2007, 143).

D.C. Lau's reading of the term gets very solid support from early Confucian texts, where *yì* 義 is used often in rhetorical structures as a positive opposition to *lì* 利, or material gain: "Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) understand what is appropriate (*yì* 義); petty persons understand what is of personal advantage (*lì* 利)"[31] (LY 4.16). We find similar usage in the *Mengzi*: "What is the point of mentioning the word 'profit' [*lì* 利]? All that matters is that there should be benevolence and rightness [*rén yì* 仁義]"[32] (*Mengzi* 1A1). Such parallel usage of these terms suggests that both Kongzi and Mengzi were indicating two phenomena of the same kind. As Mozi, the contemporary of Mengzi said: "Different classes are not comparable"[33] (*Mozi* 41&43 B6, in Johnston 2010, 475). The term "profit" *lì* 利 is not seen as exclusively or primarily indicating an individual character trait. *Lì* 利 can be applied to the agent and read, like Van Norden does with other terms, as "a disposition". However, paraphrasing D.C. Lau, such usage would be derivative. That the "profit" *lì* 利 along with *rén* 仁 and *yì* 義 are applied for much broader context than one's individualized character traits is seen in another passage from the *Mengzi*:

> If a subject, in serving his prince, cherished the profit motive [*lì* 利], and son, in serving his father, and a younger brother, in serving his elder brother, did likewise, then it would mean that *in their mutual relations,* prince and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, all

[31]子曰：「君子喻於義，小人喻於利。」(*CTP*)
[32]王亦曰仁義而已矣，何必曰利？(*CTP*) All English translations from the *Mengzi* 孟子 are taken from Lau 1970 and follows its passage numbering, unless stated otherwise.
[33]異類不比

cherished the profit motive to the total exclusion of morality [*rén yì* 仁義][34]. (*Mengzi* 6B4; italics added)

Van Norden allows that if D.C. Lau is right, then *yì* 義 is not a virtue term "per se". At the same time Van Norden claims that, while it may be true about the use of *yì* 義 in *Lunyu*, in the later text of Mengzi the term "becomes primarily a virtue term". According to Van norden, "righteousness [*yì* 義] is a disposition to accord with agent-relative prohibitions involving the expression and preservation of one's own ethical character" (Van Norden 2007, 119; 258).

The meaning of *yì* 義 is similarly presented by other virtue ethics proponents. A virtue ethics interpretation acknowledges that *yì* 義 for early Confucians is fundamentally related to the whole situation including – but not limited to – any dispositions that a person acting with other persons might possess. However, the relatedness to the situation evident in the term is eventually diminished by rendering *yì* 義 in the final analysis as an aretaic notion.

Yu Jiyuan notes that as important the term is in the early Confucian writings, *yì* 義 does not receive clear elaboration in neither *Lunyu*, nor in *Mengzi* (Yu 2007, 141). Nevertheless, Yu presents the term as the virtue of appropriateness in choosing one's actions. Yu relies on a passage 15.18 in *Lunyu* that associates *yì* 義 with the term *zhì* 質 – "essential stuff" – to explain the term as "a quality that only an excellent person possesses" (Yu 2007, 142). Yu summarizes previous interpretations of *yì* 義 as referring either to an ethical standard or to a faculty of practical reason. In his own account, "the term can be understood as 'what is appropriate to do' or as 'the virtue of judging and doing what is appropriate'. … These two aspects are closely related and indeed are inseparable" (Yu 2007, 144).

[34]為人臣者懷利以事其君，為人子者懷利以事其父，為人弟者懷利以事其兄。是君臣、父子、兄弟終去仁義，懷利以相接 (*CTP*)

Yu compares the Confucian term *yì* 義 to the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* as "their respective notions of ethical wisdom" (Yu 2007, 141). According to Yu, Aristotelian virtue ethics require that a virtuous action would firstly be informed by ethical knowledge, that it would be chosen by the agent for its own sake, and that it would flow from a fixed character. Yu calls this knowing and choosing "the intellectual aspect of an Aristotelian virtue" (Yu 2007, 148). In Yu's virtue ethics interpretation of Kongzi, the knowing-choosing structure in Aristotle finds its counterpart in the "wisdom-appropriateness" (*zhì-yì* 智義) structure in Kongzi. Here Yu compares *yì* 義 to "wisdom (*zhì*) [智] in practical affairs", and sees the difference in that "to have wisdom [*zhì* 智] is to know the social rites and their ontological grounds, while appropriateness [*yì* 義] is more closely associated with the agent's choosing and determining" (Yu 2007, 151). Once again, in Yu's interpretation, *yì* 義 is more presented as a character trait of a person, diminishing or overlooking these aspects of the term that refer to the whole state of affairs, of which a person is but one constituent.

_Lǐ_ 禮: from "the rites" to virtue term

The rendition of otherwise interaction and situation oriented key terms in early Confucian writings into aretaic notions is clearly stated by Van Norden in his explication of yet another crucial term for the whole Confucian tradition – *lǐ* 禮:

> *Lǐ* [禮] originally referred to "the rites" (which are a set of practices, and not a virtue per se), and this is clearly its sense throughout the *Analects*. But when used by Mengzi and School of the Way Ruists as a virtue term, *lǐ* [禮] often refers to a disposition connected with following the rites. (When used in this sense I render it "propriety.") (Van Norden 2007, 117).

Lǐ 禮 is unequivocally acknowledged by both Chinese and foreign scholars as one of the most distinct and unique Confucian terms, that has almost no counterpart in other systems of thought both, in East and West. The

virtue ethics interpretation tries to accommodate this key concept, just like in the case with *rén* 仁 and *yì* 義, by showing that *lǐ* 禮, too, can be rendered into aretaic notion. The particularity and importance of the term makes it necessary to look closer to the reading of *lǐ* 禮 as a virtue term in early Confucian writings.

Lǐ 禮, just as other Chinese terms, has been variously translated, but "the ritual", "the rites", "propriety", or some variation of these English terms are the most frequent translations. Early Confucians did not invent the term, but received a long tradition of various interpretations of it. Looking for foundations of Confucian thought, Yuri Pines notes that the whole Chunqiu period is marked by the "statesmen's painstaking efforts to put an end to the disintegration, prevent anarchy, and restore hierarchical order" (Pines 2002, 89). According to Pines, these efforts have resulted in "a major achievement", that is, in the formulation and explication of the concept of ritual *lǐ* 禮, which was evolved by Chunqiu thinkers "into the guiding principle of individual, social, and political life" (Pines 2002, 89).

This term that was politically and socially very important for Chunqiu period clearly has religious origins. A Chinese dictionary from the 2nd century C.E., *Shuo wen jie zi* 說文解字, explains the character as follows: "*Lǐ* 禮 is *li* 履; by it spirits are served to bring good fortune. It comes from 'to expose' (*shì* 示) and 'vessel' (*fēng* 豐)"[35] (quoted from Pines 2002, 276 n. 8). Although in the early stages meaning of the *lǐ* 禮 was largely confined to sacrificial rites, Pines' analysis shows that already the earliest use of the term in its political and social function "aimed to stabilize political and social life by emphasizing differences in rank, regulating interlineage succession and also, probably, by reinforcing cultural unity among the Huáxià [華夏][36] states" (Pines 2002, 92; 90). The term was one of the tools of political power and as such had to

[35]禮：履也。所以事神致福也。从示从豊(*CTP*). Probably there is a typo in Pines's translation of this passage, because various dictionaries, including *CTP*, give the pronunciation of 履 ("footwear", "walk on", "tread") as *lǚ*, not *li*.
[36] This is an old name for China.

compete with alternative suggestions from other intellectual schools throughout history[37]. The long history of heavy Confucian influence on Chinese political thought shows that attempts of various schools to challenge the Confucian ideal of *lǐ* 禮 were, in Pines's words, futile (see Pines 2002, 276 n. 2). Undeniably, the rich content of the term contributed to its success, as it appealed not only to political and social, but also to religious and, especially after Kongzi, moral sensibilities.

The meaning of *lǐ* 禮 changed through centuries and Yuri Pines demonstrates that from its application to interstate and military activities, the realm of *lǐ* 禮 gradually started to shift towards the domestic social order, where it had to secure the maintenance of hierarchical relations and prevent internal strife and conflicts (see Pines 2002, 94). That meant less attention to decorative ceremonies and more attention to expression of *lǐ* 禮 principles in personal relations among the different ranks of statesmanship. According to Pines, by mid-sixth century B.C.E., *lǐ* 禮 "encompassed both administrative and personnel policy and was no longer coterminous with ceremonial decorum. … Adherence to *lǐ* [禮] became the distinctive mark of the 'superior men' [*jūnzǐ* 君子]" (Pines 2002, 96). However, yet further development of the term was to come in the writings of early Confucians, that made *lǐ* 禮 a distinctively Confucian notion. According to Pines, from the Warring States period, *lǐ* 禮 is inseparable from the idea of moral self-cultivation, although such a meaning was irrelevant for thinkers in earlier times (see Pines 2002, 102-3). This marks a major shift in the meaning of the term.

The ethical significance of *lǐ* 禮 never goes unnoticed by scholars interpreting early Confucian thought in the time of Kongzi and after him. Van Norden explains the use of *lǐ* 禮 in *Lunyu* exclusively as a form of human activity that, on one hand, may fall under the category of etiquette, but, on the other hand, at times "seem to be coextensive with ethics" (Van Norden 2007,

[37] For English studies of pre-imperial and early imperial Chinese political thought see, for example, Ames 1983, Peerenboom 1993, Chang and Yu 1998, Wang and Chang 1986.

101). According to Van Norden, this human activity is learned and it is regarded as sacred, that is, as something "having an authority that is not reducible to that of human individuals" and "the proper attitude toward it is awe or reverence (*jìng* 敬)" (Van Norden 2007, 102).

Van Norden makes an important observation that for early Confucians this special human activity they call *lǐ* 禮 is much more than mere rigid formalities and that the proper engagement with *lǐ* 禮 necessarily influences personality: "as we participate in an external order maintained by human agency yet characterized by sacrality, we internalize values expressed by that order" (Van Norden 2002, 111). Nevertheless, in Van Norden's account, *lǐ* 禮 does not become a virtue term until Mengzi. Van Norden is confident that for Mengzi *lǐ* 禮 "refers to not just a *practice*, but also a *virtue*" (Van Norden 2007, 270; italics in original). Such interpretation leaves room for ambiguity, as immediately after this statement, Van Norden quotes the 4A27 passage from the *Mengzi*, in which *lǐ* 禮 together with music *yuè* 樂 are portrayed as something that helps regulate, adorn, and delight in benevolence *rén* 仁 and righteousness *yì* 義. Van Norden concludes,

> The fact that Mengzi immediately brings up music after discussing *lǐ* [禮] suggests that he is talking about rituals, since many ritual practices were done with musical accompaniment. If this reading is correct, however, it seems that Mengzi himself thought of *lǐ* [禮] primarily in the sense of ritual practice rather than as a virtue (Van Norden 2007, 271).

This and the observation that *lǐ* 禮, in Van Norden's own words, is the only virtue in *Mengzi* that is associated with different emotional reactions, leads Van Norden to conclude that "there is internal evidence in the *Mengzi* that our philosopher is a little uncertain about this virtue himself" (Van Norden 2007, 270). This statement by Van Norden hints at the problematic nature of the attempt to interpret key Confucian terms as aretaic notions. When faced with difficulties of interpretation, the principle of charitable reading would

require us to entertain doubts about *our* imposed interpretational framework upon Mengzi, that is, our reading of *lǐ* 禮 as an aretaic notion. Thus it is rather surprising to see an otherwise careful interpreter like Van Norden concluding that the cause of the perceived contradictions must lie with Mengzi and his "uncertainty about this virtue". Despite this uneasiness with Mengzi's supposedly uncertain grasp of the term *lǐ* 禮 as a virtue term, Van Norden finds it possible and useful to read *lǐ* 禮 in this way, because it "could conceivably mean that the virtue of *ritual propriety* 'regulates and adorns' the virtues of benevolence [*rén* 仁] and righteousness [*yì* 義]" and such a reading is, in Van Norden's opinion, "both textually defensible and philosophically interesting" (Van Norden 2007, 272; italics in original). Van Norden does not explain if resisting the inertia to shoehorn *lǐ* 禮 into the virtue term would make it less textually defensible and philosophically interesting. It seems that at the very least it would safeguard Mengzi from portraying him as being "little uncertain about this virtue".

The fundamentally social and interpersonal nature of *lǐ* 禮 is pointed out even by proponents of virtue ethics interpretation themselves. Such interpretations raise further doubts about the attempt to read *lǐ* 禮 as a character trait that leads or motivates one to action. For P.J. Ivanhoe *lǐ* 禮, which he translates as "rites", were a kind of social practice that "included not only grand religious ceremonies of state, but what we would call rules of social etiquette and standards of personal conduct" (Ivanhoe 1993, 15). The most important function of these practices, according to Ivanhoe, was to sustain and foster the process of self-cultivation; thus *lǐ* 禮 "were not intended merely to elicit particular kind of behavior, the goal was to instill certain attitudes and dispositions in the practitioner" (Ivanhoe 1993, 15). *Lǐ* 禮, according to Ivanhoe, helped do this by restraining excessive behavior and by keeping our "virtuous tendencies" within proper measure (see Ivanhoe 1993, 16-7). It is important to note that, for Ivanhoe, engagement in *lǐ* 禮 not only positioned the

human being in the social world, but also hinted to the larger order of the natural world. In Ivanhoe's words, *lǐ* 禮 "defined a system that was not only the best possible shape for society but one that fit human beings into a larger natural order. In this sense, they described the way the world should be" (Ivanhoe 2002, 1).

The suggestion of Confucian virtue ethics to read even such interpersonally, situationally orientated notions as *lǐ* 禮 in aretaic terms appears to be even more problematic once we consider Van Norden's treatment of the concept *shù* 恕. This term is used only twice in the *Lunyu*, and only once both in the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* 荀子. However, the term is considered to be an important part of early Confucian ethical concept cluster, as it is named by Kongzi's student as constituting the "one thread" that runs through all Kongzi's teachings (LY 4.15); Kongzi himself points out to it as the "one expression" (*yī yán* 一言) that sums up one's activity one should practice throughout one's life (LY 15.24). Kongzi explicates the term with a formula that in contemporary academia is often referred to as the Confucian "Golden Rule": "do not impose on others what you yourself do not want"[38] (ibid). Van Norden translates the term as "reciprocity" and explains that he does not "class reciprocity, *per se*, as virtue, since it seems to be more a 'technique' (*fāng* 方) for thinking about others" (Van Norden 2007, 119). While it is easy to endorse Van Norden's reading of the term, it is difficult to understand what for Van Norden differentiates *shù* 恕 from *rén* 仁 or *lǐ* 禮, so that it does not require or foster an aretaic reading of *shù* 恕. Maybe reading *shù* 恕 as *virtue* rather than a technique of reciprocity would also be, paraphrasing Van Norden, a "textually defensible and philosophically interesting" position?

Van Norden supports his understanding of *shù* 恕 as the technique *fāng* 方 rather than virtue with the reference to a passage in the *Lunyu*:

[38]己所不欲，勿施於人。(*CTP*)

> Authoritative persons establish others in seeking establish themselves and promote others in seeking to get there themselves. Correlating one's conduct with those near at hand can be said to be the method [*fāng* 方] of becoming an authoritative person [*rén* 仁][39] (LY 6.30).

The term *shù* 恕 is not mentioned in this passage, thus it appears that Van Norden treats the described method of "establishing others in seeking to establish oneself" as analogical to *shù* 恕. As such an interpretation is valid and reasonable, Van Norden's argument could be that the instrumental function of *shù* 恕 (or its equivalents) with the other "virtue" (in this case *rén* 仁) prevents us from interpreting the former both as "technique" and as "virtue". However, the *Lunyu* contains passages where *lǐ* 禮 (the ritual) is rendered as instrumental in achieving *rén* 仁 (LY 12.1) or – the other way around – *rén* 仁 is seen as instrumental in excelling in *lǐ* 禮 (LY3.3). Thus the rendition of one or the other early Confucian term as denoting a character trait, or "virtue", appears to be arbitrary.

In a recent article by Antonio S. Cua (2008) we will find a different tendency, that is, to read *any* important ethical term in early Confucian texts as an aretaic notion. In this article Cua elaborates on the idea that the early Confucian texts talk about cardinal or basic interdependent virtues and dependent virtues. Cua supports this distinction with the one he finds in the writings of Xunzi, that is, between "*gòngmíng* 共名, or generic terms, and … *biémíng* 別名 or specific terms" (Cua 2008, 10). The cardinal or basic virtues, according to Cua's reconstruction of early Confucianism, are *rén* 仁, or in Cua's words, "an *ideal theme* of concern for humanity", "virtue of flexibility" *yì* 義, and "ritual observance" *lǐ* 禮.

The notion of dependent virtues for Cua includes not only such terms that were often read as "virtues" by other scholars ("trustworthiness" *xìn* 信, "filiality" *xiào* 孝, "courage" *yǒng* 勇), but also many other terms that,

[39]夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲達而達人。能近取譬，可謂仁之方也已。(*CTP*)

according to Cua, “reflect personal merits” (Cua 2008, 10): “self-control” *kèjǐ* 克己, “culture, cultural refinement” *wén* 文, “caution in speech and conduct” *shèn* 慎, “warm-heartedness” *wēn* 温, “resoluteness in commitment” *gāng* 剛, and others (see Cua 2008). Although Cua expresses his conviction that the Confucian notion of an ideal person, or *jūnzǐ* 君子, “offers a way to contribute to the recent revival of virtue ethics” (Cua 2008, 7), from his broad usage of the term “virtue” we can infer that for Cua “virtue” is more an open metaphor that refers to any ethically acceptable and praiseworthy phenomena, rather than a clearly defined technical term of virtue ethics.

From the above analysis of Confucian virtue ethics translating key early Confucian terminology into aretaic notions reveals that Fingarette’s challenge he raised in relation to psychologization of *rén* 仁, can be equally extended to all other cases. As it was suggested earlier, the important challenge for virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucianism then is the question: Does presenting *dé* 德, *rén* 仁, and other terms as “virtues” reduce their original scope of reference? Once early Confucian key terminology is translated and explicitly interpreted as “virtues”, a modern Western understanding of virtue as residing in the *psyche* of an individual comes to the fore, and early Confucian notions become individualized and psychologised. Attitudes, preferences, and action patterns are seen in this view as secondary and stemming from an ontologically and epistemically primary source – a character disposition.

This is not to say that the core terminology of early Confucians had nothing to do with what *we now* would call an individual and psychic as opposed to social and bodily. The claim in this dissertation is that, following Fingarette, psychologization and individualisation is a reductionist reading of early Confucian terminology. In order to reveal the full meaning of early Confucian terminology, virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucians needs additional explanations that would help to reveal the importance of inter-personal and cultural contexts surrounding a person, or the importance of one’s interactions within one’s context as an integral notional part of the term. An

aretaic reading of early Confucian terminology, once again explicating Fingarette's point, introduces a radical distinction, a split between "inner" and "outer", character and action, personal and interactive, where the primary importance is always given to the former member of an alternative. While it may help to highlight some important features of early Confucian ethics, it hides the others from the spotlight. It diminishes the relational nature of early Confucian ethics, renders relationality as secondary, springing from the primary source – the character of an individual.

However, the difficulties with incommensurability challenge and unnecessary psychologization of key early Confucian terminology aside, the virtue ethics interpretation has made important achievements in explaining early Confucian thought to a Western audience. Confucian virtue ethics interpretation has provided a framework that allowed deeming early Confucian ethics a consistent and reasonable ethical system, despite the widely acknowledged disinterest of early Confucian thinkers in discovering or formulating universal principles. The primarily practical and situational character of early Confucian ethics, that has been emphasized already in the early Western reception of Chinese thought in the age of Enlightenment, has come to be seen as a central part of a "philosophically interesting" (Van Norden 2007, 272) position, once Western sinologists and philosophers put early Confucian ethics into the virtue ethics framework.

Another achievement of Confucian virtue ethics interpretation is that it presents early Confucian thought as a valid source of arguments relevant to present day philosophical discussions over ethical matters. Some interpreters argue that presenting early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics strengthens virtue ethics, as it expands the possible list of virtues that are important for human flourishing – for example, adding the "virtue" of *xiào* 孝, or "filial piety" (Ivanhoe 2007). Some believe that rendering early Confucians as virtue ethicists may help to bring Aristotle and Kongzihead-to-head "where the strengths and weaknesses of their ethics are revealed and each can suggest remedies for the other's deficiencies" (Sim 2007, 2). Others claim that looking

at the cultural differences in explanation of a particular virtue, let's say "courage", can result in a more coherent understanding of it (Yearley 1998). Yet others point out to situationist critique of virtue ethics (Harman 1999), as the case where an argument from Confucian virtue ethics could provide an additional way to meet the challenge (Slingerland 2011).

In a chapter on virtue ethics and discussing its future direction, Rosalind Hursthouse noted that the growing interest in Chinese thought among Western philosophers has a tendency to emphasise common ground between the ancient Greek and the early Chinese traditions (Hursthouse 2013). However, Hursthouse also points out that as such interest "gains strength, it may well introduce a more radical departure" (ibid). It seems that the last quote should be rewritten in the past tense, as a new interpretation of early Confucian ethics becomes increasingly more visible both among the English-speaking Western and Chinese academics. This interpretation positions early Confucian ethics in strong contrast to all Western ethical systems, including virtue ethics. It claims that early Confucian ethics is centred on the unique relational concept of the human found in early Confucian texts, one that takes a human to be the totality of one's lived roles and relationships. Therefore this interpretation suggests understanding early Confucian ethics as *role ethics*.

The goal of the Part 2 of this dissertation is to critically analyse this newly proposed framework for interpreting early Confucian ethics – Confucian role ethics. As the proponents of Confucian role ethics often present their position in contrast to Confucian virtue ethics interpretation, a question to be asked is: can Confucian role ethics escape the difficulties we have found in Confucian virtue ethics interpretation, while preserving those achievements that Confucian virtue ethics has made?

2 CONFUCIAN ROLE ETHICS AS ALTERNATIVE READING OF EARLY CONFUCIANISM

As explained in the first part, the interpretation of early Confucian texts as a form of virtue ethics is by far the most common and widely accepted approach in the English language academic philosophy today. It is also a very popular interpretative framework in the contemporary Chinese language scholarship on early Confucian thought (see Shen 2001, Zhang 2011, Gong 2011, and others). However, many scholars have expressed doubts whether the virtue ethics framework most adequately explains early Confucian ethical sensibilities. In Chinese-speaking academia, a deontological reading of early Confucians still has its followers, with Lee Ming-huei 李明輝 as arguably the best known proponent of this position for the Western audience (see Lee 2013a and 2013b; in Chinese also see Lee 1994 and 1990).

English-speaking academia, on the other hand, has made at least several attempts to find a better framework to understand and explain early Confucian ethical writings. Liu Yuli (Liu 2004), for example, argues that Confucian ethics does not fit the label of virtue ethics in "the strict sense". The main complaint of Liu with the virtue ethics approach is that it does not give due attention to the importance of moral rules in Confucian ethics. Liu does not argue for a deontological or utilitarian approach, however, but attempts to present Confucianism as a "unique kind of ethics" that combines rule-based morality and attention to virtues (see Liu 2004, 102-39).

Andrew Zhonghu Yan, on the other hand, uses Paul Tillich's existential theology and especially his analysis of ontological structure of human as the main interpretive and conceptual framework to reveal – through perceived commonalities and differences – both the original message in the *Lunyu* and its contemporary relevance. Yan Zhonghu's "existential reading" of Kongzi also attempts to point out the "theological implications" of the *Lunyu*, for example, its soteriological dimension (see Yan 2011).

During the last decade a new systematic approach to early Confucian ethics – Confucian role ethics – was developed and is winning increasingly more attention both in the English language academic writings and in China[40]. According to this position, early Confucian writings present a unique ethical system, which takes particular human relations as its primary and central concern. At the heart of this ethics is a particular conception of the human being, which takes humans to be relational persons, i.e., ontologically constituted, existentially experienced, and epistemologically explicated only through their various and numerous roles and relations with specific others. According to role ethics interpretation, early Confucians see humans as a continuous and largely consistent, but never finalized result of an on-going process of interactions. This makes relations both logically and existentially prior to persons, which eventually are shaped out of these relations.

Role ethics interpretation claims that because of this unique view of the human, early Confucian key terms tend to be situation- rather than agency-centred. If this position is correct, it would mean that individualized character traits – or "virtues" – are only derivative and secondary categories in early Confucian ethics, which would make virtue ethics reading of early Confucians inaccurate and misleading at times. This approach is mainly endorsed in the works of Roger T. Ames (2010; 2011) and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (2013; 2004; 1991a; 1991b; 1991c), as well as in their common publications and translations (Ames and Rosemont 2011; 1998; Rosemont and Ames 2009). Some elements of role ethics approach to early Confucians can be also found in the collaborative work of Roger Ames and David Hall (Hall and Ames 1987; 1998). A similar position on similar grounds is taken by Chan Sin yee (1993), who calls early Confucianism a "relationship-role ethics" or simply "role-ethics", and Nuyen (2009), who calls early Confucianism a "role-based ethics".

[40] In Chinese speaking academia several events were already organized at the most prestigious Philosophy Departments to specifically discuss ideas of role ethics approach to early Confucianism: Ch'ien Mu (Qian Mu) Lectures at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2008; an academic workshop at the People's University of China in 2011; an international conference at Shandong University in 2013. The Chinese neologism for the term "role ethics" – *juésè lúnlǐxué* 角色倫理學 – is gaining popularity among Chinese readers, as several books and articles of role ethics proponents, and even their English translations of *Lunyu* and *Xiaojing* were translated back into Chinese.

Chan argues that both duties and virtues that Confucian ethics gives primacy to all are “rooted” in the roles. Nuyen’s argument is similar and he also points out to the unique concept of the human in early Confucian writings that does not fit the vision of the human being purported by virtue or rule-based ethics.

In this Part, I will, firstly, provide an explanation of the scholarly background both in the studies of Chinese thought and in modern moral philosophy against which the role ethics approach was formed, and I will provide the exposition of basic philosophical assumptions that support role ethics approach. Secondly, I will provide a critical analysis and explanation of Confucian role ethics. My claim throughout this chapter is that labelling Confucian role ethics as a behaviorist, pragmatist, or existentialist interpretation of Confucianism is not justified, as the focal point of Confucian role ethics is the relational concept of the human that proponents of Confucian role ethics find in early Confucian ethical writings and explicate in their interpretation of early Confucian thought as well as in their critique of deontological and utilitarian ethics. Such basis for Confucian role ethics interpretation enables it to tackle the two biggest problems that weaken Confucian virtue ethics, as was argued in the Part 1: the incommensurability challenge on a methodological level, and a reduction of the relational nature of early Confucian ethics on practical level.

2.1 Background and methodology of Confucian role ethics

2.1.1 Impulses for alternative interpretation of early Confucians

There is a line of thought in role ethics approach that is similar to Confucian virtue ethics approach in its interpretation of early Confucian thought. On the one hand, role ethics agrees with Confucian virtue ethics approach that early Confucians do not formulate abstract principles to be followed by people in order for their acts to be ethically praiseworthy. There

are passages in early Confucian texts that formulate seemingly strong prescripts for its adepts, like the one often called the "Golden Rule" of Confucianism: "Zigong asked, 'Is there one expression that can be acted upon until the end of one's days?' The Master replied, 'There is *shù* 恕: do not impose on others what you yourself do not want'"[41] (LY 15.25). Role ethics proponents claim that such sayings are at best seen as generalizations intended to sum up life experience, rather than *a priori* formulated rule, which has to be rationally applied and followed in choosing one's conduct.

On the other hand, role ethics agrees with virtue ethics approach in that early Confucians do not concentrate their attention on the rightness or wrongness of specific actions, but are promoting an ethical vision that seeks to cultivate a particular type of ethically praiseworthy human. Early Confucians, of course, discuss and evaluate intentions and outcomes of actions, but these concerns are overshadowed by the emphasis on a more general ideal of the cultivation of the human – *xiūshēn* 修身. But here the similarities between role ethics and virtue ethics approaches to early Confucian ethical thought come to an end, as role ethics proponents do not agree that the *xiūshēn* 修身 ideal is limited to the cultivation of individual character traits and, even more so, that specific character trait, that is "virtue", can be seen as the central and organizing notion of early Confucian ethical thought. To sum up, role ethics interpretation is in line with virtue ethics approach to the extent that both are critical towards a consequentialist or deontological reading of early Confucians. At the same time role ethics proponents are positioning themselves strongly in opposition to virtue ethics. According to Ames and Rosemont,

> While the vocabulary of virtue ethics for describing the early Confucian vision of the moral life (*dǎo* 道) is superior to those linked to Kantian or utilitarian principle-based ethical theories, that vocabulary too, forces Master and his followers more into the mold of Western philosophical discourse than they ought to be placed, in our opinion, and hence makes it

[41] 子貢問曰：「有一言而可以終身行之者乎？」子曰：「其恕乎！己所不欲，勿施於人。」(*CTP*)

> difficult to see the Confucian vision as a genuine *alternative* to those with which we are most familiar (Ames and Rosemont 2011, 17; italics in original) .

This quote reveals a major concern of Confucian role ethics proponents, which is crucial in understanding their position – that is, the discontent of Ames and Rosemont with the state and the methodology of contemporary scholarship on Chinese thinking and comparative philosophy more generally.

As argued in the previous Part, the surge of virtue ethics in the West and application of this framework to Confucian thinking in the last couple of decades has clearly contributed to more and more philosophy departments in European and North American universities teaching not only introductory but also specialized courses on various schools and thinkers in Chinese tradition. However, Confucian role ethics proponents maintain that even the virtue ethics interpretation – despite all its strengths – continues the old tendency of comparative scholarship to approach non-Western materials from "a strongly Western perspective" (Rosemont 1991b, 83). The problem with this approach is that it forces a certain Western framework as an ultimate reference point in deciding what counts as relevant questions to be asked, as well as what are the valid ways of investigating these questions, and what counts as well-founded answers to the questions posed. We saw this claim at the heart of MacIntyre's incommensurability challenge (see MacIntyre 1991). Thus from a Confucian role ethics perspective, Confucian virtue ethics must also be seen as an interpretation that "forces" upon Chinese thinkers such terminology that is alien to them and very likely does not allow the vision presented in early Confucian texts to fully unfold (Rosemont 1991b, 81). This position of role ethics is stated right at the outset of their interpretation as an attempt to take Confucian ethics "on its own terms" (Ames 2011, 23).

As I am arguing in the next chapter, Ames and Rosemont do not suggest the "objective" view from neutral position. Philosophical issues will always be argued from some particular position, be it Kantian, Aristotelian, Confucian, or any other. The biggest concern of Ames and Rosemont is that the Western

perspective is dominating overwhelmingly. Similarly, Shun Kwong-loi has drawn attention to the fact that comparative philosophy treats Chinese and Western traditions exclusively from the positions and assumptions of one, but not the other. Shun maintains that there is "the obvious asymmetry in the way in which Chinese and Western philosophical traditions are brought together" (Shun 2009, 470). According to Shun, there are many studies that approach Chinese thought from a Western philosophical perspective, for example, asking if Confucianism is a form of virtue ethics, or if Mozi is a utilitarian, or whether Zhuangzi 莊子 is a relativist or a skeptic. The asymmetry that Shun refers to stems from the fact that there are very few academic works that attempt to approach Western philosophical thought by invoking frameworks, concepts, or issues from the Chinese intellectual tradition. Such a situation could be justified only in the case if Chinese texts that touch upon ethical matters would not contain challenging questions and interesting insights. But Shun Kwong-loi strongly believes that it is not the case. In Shun's words, "Given that Chinese ethical traditions are no less rich in insights and resources compared to Western ethical traditions, or at least many of us would so believe, this asymmetry is deeply puzzling" (Shun 2009, 470). This asymmetry is even more "perplexing", as Shun notes, because the tendency to study Chinese thought using a Western philosophical framework is a common practice in Chinese language publications as well. Shun points out, that "we see engaged discussions of such questions as whether Mozi is a utilitarian, but not whether John Stuart Mill is a Moist or endorses *jiān'ài* 兼愛" (Shun 2009, 472).

This position of Shun Kwong-loi is very similar to the one that strengthens Ames's and Rosemont's commitment to find or to formulate new terminology for explaining early Confucian ethical thought and for showing its relevance for the contemporary world, rather than relying on some ready-made and well established terminology from the Western tradition to do the job. Ames and Rosemont also describe contemporary comparative philosophy as being in the state of "unfortunate asymmetry" (Ames and Rosemont 2011, 18). A little bit differently from Shun, for Ames and Rosemont this asymmetry is

evident not that much in the lack of studies that interpret European ideas against the traditional Chinese frameworks or concepts, but more in the language, in which Chinese ideas or thinkers are evaluated in many of the works of comparative philosophers. Ames and Rosemont point out that even in the works of comparative philosophers that think very highly about Confucianism, one reoccurring motive is that some vital aspects, fundamental ideas or concepts have been "missing," "ignored," or "lacking" in Confucian thought. As Ames and Rosemont put it,

> In virtually all these comparisons, something always seems to be missing in Confucianism. But we never seem to see converse statements such as "The concept of sage *is lacking* in Aristotelian ethics," or "the centrality of ritual for human flourishing *is missing* in Aristotle," or "Kant, Mill and others … appear *to ignore* the importance of the exemplary person (*jūnzǐ* 君子)," and so on. Why not? (Ames and Rosemont 2011, 18; italics in original)

Recently the approaches in comparative scholarship have been changing somewhat. We have already quoted Sim (2007, 2) who allows that by bringing Kongzi and Aristotle head-to-head, the weaknesses of the latter, not only the former, can be reveled and remedied. Stephen Angle also points out in his comment on Confucian role ethics that it is already possible to find in the literature passages where, for example, Aristotle's "problems" are also noted by comparative philosophers, but he, too, generally agrees that complaints about asymmetry in comparative philosophy are valid (see Angle 2012).

When presenting the role ethics interpretation, Ames and Rosemont point out how allegiance to Christian or Western philosophical terminology has hurt Western understanding and appreciation of early Chinese thinking. According to Ames and Rosemont, translators of classical Chinese canons "have employed in their translations a large number of key terms that have been central in the history of Western philosophy, with the result that the Chinese texts seem to be little more than naïve versions of what Western thinkers have

been doing for the past twenty-five centuries" (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 310-1). Ames and Rosemont maintain that this culminates in disregard of much of the intellectual heritage specific to early Chinese. This kind of attitude stems from the deceptive sense of familiarity with the Chinese civilization that a Western reader gets once Chinese classical texts are rendered in a well-known technical philosophical vocabulary of Western tradition.

According to Ames and Rosemont, "when an alternative philosophical tradition is made familiar and, at the same time, is adjudicated on the basis of Western standards of evidence that are foreign to it, it can only be an inferior variation on a Western theme" (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 312). This conviction can explain why Ames and Rosemont are consistently avoiding Western technical philosophical terminology in their translations and explications of early Confucian writings. They criticize the translation of *dé* 德 as "virtue", *yì* 義 as "morality", or "righteousness", and even presenting Kongzi as a "moral philosopher" (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 53). Many early Confucian key terms have found new and unfamiliar formulations in Ames and Rosemont's English translations. A couple translations especially stand out, for example, Ames's and Rosemont's rendition of *rén* 仁 as "authoritative conduct" or, derivatively, "authoritative person" was seen by many as too novel and itself requiring clarification (Rosemont and Ames 2009, 82-3). Similarly, the translation of *chéng* 誠 as "creativity", instead of more conventional translations of the term as "sincerity" or "integrity" (see Ames and Hall 2001, 30-5), was also noted as a conspicuous novelty by many reviewers and some have expressed reservations about the translation (Ni 2004, 196; Sivin 2004, 170). However, the main methodological objective of Ames and Rosemont is clear. It is to avoid deceptive feeling of familiarity with Chinese term, thus trying to attain the context and connotations of the original *Chinese* term, rather than succumbing to connotations present in the English *translation* of it.

A vivid illustration of this situation is the reminiscence of an American philosopher Herbert Fingarette, where he retells his initial impression after encountering Confucian texts. Fingarette explains his strong initial discontent with seemingly prosaic and parochial sayings recorded in the *Lunyu*, which seemed irrelevant to contemporary philosopher (Fingarette 2008, 1). Despite this unpromising first encounter, Fingarette's perception of Kongzi eventually changed radically, as he learned to read the *Analects* in its original language rather than secondary sources. Fingarette explains that he not only came to see the "profound insight" of Kongzi into the questions of human nature, but also realized that certain Confucian insights "are close in substance and spirit to various recent philosophical developments" (ibid.). As a result, Fingarette has provided one of the most well known and widely read Western interpretations of some key Confucian notions, such as *rén* 仁, *jūnzǐ* 君子, and, most noticeably, *lǐ* 禮.

The commitment to take early Confucian thought "in its own terms", and the encouragement of other philosophers to do so, permeates the translations and scholarly investigations of Ames and Rosemont (see Ames 2011, 32 and throughout the text; Ames and Rosemont 1998, 314). It is also one of the crucial arguments for their refusal to accept the virtue ethics interpretation of early Confucians that is largely presented in Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian vocabulary, despite important points of agreement between the two interpretations (see Ames and Rosemont 2011, 17).

Ames and Rosemont's suggested framework of Confucian role ethics has to be seen in this light as an attempt to make comparative philosophy more balanced. Thus, for Ames and Rosemont, to reduce to a possible minimum the use of technical vocabulary of traditional and established Western philosophical systems in translations and interpretations of non-Western materials is a deliberate methodological choice. In the previous part we quoted MacIntyre, who claimed that in order to have a valid comparative philosophy "what the Aristotelian will have had to provide for his or her own use will be a history of Confucianism written and understood from a Confucian point of

view (MacIntyre 1991, 117). Very much in the spirit of this claim, Ames and Rosemont present their interpretation as the way for contemporary Western readers to learn the language of early Confucian thinkers to the point where they would be able to conceptualize and analyze problematic issues of their own time and place, creatively using Chinese concepts as well as Western. That explains why Ames' first book-length study devoted to role ethics has a subtitle "A Vocabulary" (see Ames 2011) and why Ames and Rosemont spend so much time and effort to present and explicate the key Confucian concepts in their translations of early Confucian classics (see Ames and Rosemont 1998, 20-66; Rosemont and Ames 2009, 64-92).

The attempt to introduce original early Chinese terminology without rendering it in more familiar Western terminology is already evident in the title of one of the earlier works of Roger Ames written together with David Hall – *Thinking Through Confucius*. Here the authors suggest engaging "exercise in *thinking* using Kongzi's philosophy as medium" (see Hall and Ames 1987, 6). The same intent is evident in Henry Rosemont's attempts to find the language that not only would capture concerns for human dignity, that in the West are usually expressed in the human right discourse, but that would also originate from Chinese intellectual tradition (see Rosemont 2004).

Another reason for Ames and Rosemont's refusal to see early Confucians as a form of virtue ethics – or any other Western philosophical system – is their strongly expressed belief that Western thought needs an unfamiliar alternative in order to be able to cope with its internal problems. According to Ames and Rosemont, staying within Western philosophical discourse in the investigations of early Confucian thinking "makes it difficult to see the Confucian vision as a genuine *alternative* to those with which we are most familiar" (Ames and Rosemont 2011, 17). However, Ames and Rosemont do not present their search for an alternative as an attempt to shift entirely from one mode of thinking to another, supposedly superior one, or to find the objectively defined truth in one or the other system of thought. For Ames and Rosemont the "alternative" that early Confucian thinking has to offer to us lies in the

possibility to reformulate questions that are troubling our own culture (see Rosemont 1988, 66).

According to Rosemont, comparative philosophers have been addressing nonwestern materials too often with a question – "to what extent do these texts suggest answers to philosophical questions that vex us?" (Rosemont 1988, 66) Even if similar questions have been addressed in a useful manner in the past, this does not give us enough distance to question our own most fundamental presuppositions. Thus Rosemont suggests we take one more step back and to focus our attention on our conceptual frameworks, in which we formulate our concerns. In Rosemont's own words,

> [W]e must allow the other their otherness, and, without in any way surrendering rationality, nevertheless allow for the possibility not only that we don't have all the answers, but also that we may not have been asking all the questions in as universal a vocabulary as has hitherto been presupposed (Rosemont 2004, 51).

As Rosemont explains his intentions, he does not want "to imply that the early Confucian writings are the be-all and end-all for finding answers to the multiplicity of questions" that we are facing (Rosemont 1991b, 92). Rosemont uses the metaphor of a mirror to highlight the idea that study of other cultures has to lead to the increased capability to understand ones own culture: "the more openly and deeply we look through a window into another culture the more it becomes a mirror of our own" (Rosemont 1991a, 7). In a similar way, Hall and Ames, for example, stress that they choose to concentrate on differences between Western and Chinese philosophies not only because they believe "difference is more interesting than similarity", but because "precisely this recognition of significant differences that provides an opportunity for mutual enrichment by suggesting alternative responses to problems that resist satisfactory resolution within a single culture" (Hall and Ames 1987, 5). Both Ames and Rosemont are suggesting that true alternatives in thinking come not from abandoning the present views and abruptly shifting to new ones, but

rather that this alternative comes from within a continuous process of inquiry: "to what extent do these [non-Western] texts suggest that we should be asking very different philosophical questions?" (Rosemont 1988, 66) Thus the job of comparative philosophers should not be limited to pondering over the "Procrustean questions", to borrow Goldin's expression (Goldin 2005, 3), the ones that are taken from Western perspective, formulated with Western terminology, deemed as universal and then imposed over non-Western materials. The merit of comparative philosophers should come from their ability to widen and deepen the scope of the ethical realm that we can register and reflect over, and eventually make this understanding a part of our daily life.

To sum up, we have identified the prevailing asymmetry in comparative ethics as one of the major impulses for the formulation of role ethics approach to early Confucianism. Yet another impulse for this approach is Ames and Rosemont's expressed hope that early Confucian thought could serve as one of the main resources for "revitalizing" contemporary philosophy. However, it is outside the scope of the present dissertation to pursue Confucian role ethics suggestions and implications that their position has in the field of contemporary ethics. Now we can turn to a more detailed analysis of Confucian role ethics methodology in approaching early Confucian ethics. In the next section we will explicate the main presuppositions of role ethics in interpreting early Confucian thought.

2.1.2 Interpretative context for understanding early Confucianism

The complex nature of understanding and interpreting linguistic and non-linguistic expressions, as well as many difficulties that interpreters of intellectual traditions must face, are well acknowledged in Western philosophy. It is evident in the rich hermeneutic tradition, which emerges as an important part of Biblical studies during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, then incorporates the study of ancient and classical studies, and, in the 20th century,

goes through philosophical and ontological turns in the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer to become a way of inquiry into human life and existence in general (see Ramberg and Gjesdal 2013).

Intercultural studies also recognize a wide variety of possible pitfalls that await scholars reading and interpreting texts, cultures, and civilizations distant and very different from their own. *Orientalism* by Edward W. Said has been a seminal study in this regard since it was first published in 1978. In this book Said sums up Western academic disciplines aimed at exploring and understanding Asian cultures under the name of "Orientalism" and critically remarks that "Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine" (Said 2003, 42). Said supports his criticism by exposing how much the objects of Western academic and cultural interest in the Middle East were, to a large degree, constructions of Western minds exercising "cultural strength" of colonial and post-colonial political and economic powers. According to Said, in the minds of the late 19th and early 20th century European political and academic elite, the relation between West and East was expressed in various, but overlapping terms, which presented the idea that:

> The Oriental lived in a different but thoroughly organized world of his own, a world with its own national, cultural, and epistemological boundaries and principles of internal coherence. Yet what gave the Oriental's world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West (Said 2003, 40).

The situation is not different in Chinese studies[42] and, as we were arguing in the previous section, the dominance of Western terminology not only has

[42] This claim could be extended to all inter-cultural and comparative studies of non-Western cultures. For example, Beinorius (2012) provides a detailed case analysis of how the "epistemic violence" of Western academic set-up in Indian studies results in the neglect of vital parts of Indian culture, such as practices of astrology and divination, because they are deemed as "pseudo-scientific" (ibid, 158).

created asymmetry in how Chinese and Western philosophical traditions are compared and evaluated, but also was one of the main reasons behind the formation of the role ethics interpretation of early Confucian thought.

However, the crucial point for understanding role ethics position is to acknowledge that Ames and Rosemont do not suggest taking up any sort of "neutral" or "objective" standpoint from nowhere to read, understand, and interpret early Confucian texts. According to Rosemont, "no comparative scholar can come to another culture as a *tabula rasa*. One need not be committed to relativistic theses to admit that pure (culture-free) objectivity is a myth" (Rosemont 1991b, 83). Ames and Rosemont argue that there is no "neutral" position for a thinker or an interpreter, thus every translation is an interpretation (see Ames and Rosemont 1998, 279). Accordingly, every interpretation rests on certain assumptions that are deeply rooted and expressed in our languages. As Ames and Rosemont point out, "there are *presuppositions* underlying all discourse about the world, about beliefs, and about attitudes, which are sedimented into the specific grammars of the languages in which these discourses take place" (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 20). On this point Ames and Rosemont seem to be in full agreement with many prominent Western philosophers of the 20th century, such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hilary Putnam, Ludwig Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations*, and others, who have argued that it is impossible for us to think independently from our cultural horizons and from our inherited or acquired language games.

We can neither fully escape our presuppositions with which we encounter the other culture, thinker, or text, nor are we passive hostages to our own presuppositions. We can do something about it. We "need to identify and elaborate some of these presuppositions" (Ames and Rosemont 2011, 20). On another occasion Ames suggests:

> We must be self-conscious of what we bring to the enterprise of exploring another cultural tradition. … This self-consciousness in interpretation is not to distort the Chinese philosophical tradition and its process cosmology, but to endorse its fundamental premises" (Ames 2011, 22).

The suggestion of Ames and Rosemont is not to get rid of presuppositions, but to be aware of them and to elaborate on the proper ones. Thus, the role ethics interpretation of early Confucianism begins from the attempt to locate, to explicate, and to creatively engage the linguistic and intellectual environment, in which Confucian thought and terminology are deeply embedded. Furthermore, role ethics proponents do not suggest taking particular Confucian thinkers, texts, and particular notions as self-contained entities in their own right. It would be a mistake to assume that the entire meaning of the term, the expression, or the text can be found within the bounds of the entity in question. Understanding the meaning of the term, the text, or the thinker would require from the reader access to the surrounding context of the historical and cultural background, rival or supporting texts, or to the closely knit together concept cluster of a given tradition in which a particular term is used. According to role ethics proponents, only against such "an interpretive context for understanding Confucianism" (Ames 2011, 41-85) are we able to take Confucianism "in its own words". By doing so we can hope to not only to get closer to the actual significance of the text, but also to fully appreciate a fresh perspective that early Confucianism can offer for a contemporary thinker, who is a product of the environment very different from that of Kongzi and his disciples.

What, according to Confucian role ethics interpretation, are these assumptions that enable us to hear early Confucians speaking in their own words? Here Ames and Rosemont argue their cases through slightly different directions. Ames's basic assumption is more content oriented and is formulated as an "interpretive context" of cultural ideas, that is, the set of core convictions that underlie a wide range of both common *and* differing believes, arguments, and positions within one culture. Rosemont's argument is more structural and proceeds from the statement on the nature and function of the core terminology in any given philosophical system. Rosemont's basic assumption is that the core terms in any coherent philosophical system do not dwell in isolation, but rather function in tightly interwoven sets that Rosemont calls "concept clusters" (Rosemont 1991b, 74; and throughout Rosemont's publications).

According to Rosemont, none of the terms in any of the concept clusters can be fully explained or adequately understood without any recourse to other members of that particular concept cluster. I don't mean to contrast these two directions, as they are complementary; however I will address them separately.

There is a consistent line of argument in Ames's work since his early collaboration with David Hall (Hall and Ames 1987), through his co-authored translations with Rosemont (Ames and Rosemont 1998) and to his latest monograph (Ames 2011). Ames maintains that the early Chinese world of thought before Buddhist influences can be characterized as based on the "presumption of radical immanence" (Hall and Ames 1987, 12) and on "correlative thinking" (Ames 2011, 41ff). Both of these characterizations are stating the same basic idea but from different directions and they also result in many related claims.

In Ames's view, early Chinese thought rests on "presumption of radical immanence", as it precludes the notion of strict transcendence, which Hall and Ames explain as follows: "a principle, *A*, is transcendent with respect to that, *B*, which it serves as principle if the meaning or import of *B* cannot be fully analyzed and explained without recourse to *A*, but reverse is not true" (Hall and Ames 1987, 13). To put this claim in different words, it means that for early Chinese there can be no entity that would be independent from all the other entities in the world, while at the same time influencing them. There are no autonomous and self-sufficient entities in early Chinese thought to the extent that if some entity exists at all, it exists because of its relation, through its relation, and as its relation to other entities. Thus a number of familiar notions and ideas that seemed to be natural and self-evident in different Western thought systems – Platonic *eidos*, Aristotelian Unmoved Mover, Judeo-Christian God Creator – become irrelevant or even misleading, if one tries to conceptualize early Chinese thought (Hall and Ames 1987, 13-4).

As part of their argument, Hall and Ames point out that even the world creation myth is absent from early Chinese thought and very likely reaches

China very late through its intellectual ties with Indian Buddhism[43]. It then means that for early Chinese there can be no *creatio ex nihilo* (ibid, 16) – things don't come from nothing and don't vanish into nothing. Rather they are constantly coming to the fore and becoming present (*yǒu* 有 or *cún* 存) in their interactions[44]. Thus Hall and Ames are inviting the contemporary Western reader to imagine a world of constant process and becoming (Ames and Hall 2001, 25), one that "eschews any notion of discreteness" (ibid). It means that in such a worldview even seemingly stable physical objects are perceived as events in their cycle of interaction with other objects-events. Such a world is by no means chaotic, but its order is naturally arising (*zìrán* 自然) and constantly re-creating (*shēngshēng* 生生) itself from interactive relatedness of all myriad of things (*wànwù* 萬物). It is an "autogenerative world" (Ames 2011, 157). Hall and Ames (1987, 16) call this type of order that is achieved in the creation of new patterns an "aesthetic" order and contrast it to the "rational" or "logical" order that is achieved by application of an antecedent pattern. And thus we have roughly recounted this "correlative thinking" that, according to Ames, forms "a shared and unifying common sense" (Ames 2011, 41) of early Chinese. In the next section we will see all this vocabulary of constant aesthetic creativity of new patterns from emerging new situations, process of becoming, non-separateness, and correlativeness conjoin in Ames's depiction of the early Confucian understanding of human.

Rosemont's methodological approach to comparative philosophy is also consistently stated throughout his writings (see Rosemont 1976; 1986; 1991a; 1991b; 2004; 2013). As I have mentioned, Rosemont's methodological stance is more linguistically oriented. Rosemont suggests that every culture has a core set of interrelated concepts that are used for describing and evaluating humans and their conduct. These concepts are so closely interwoven together, that it makes it impossible to fully understand one concept without taking into

[43] Goldin (2008) has offered a direct critique of this view.

[44] Elsewhere I have argued that not only early Chinese, but also 12th century Chinese thinker Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) had a similar understanding of existence of things (*wù* 物) in the world (Silius 2010a).

account all other members of the same set. Equally, it is impossible to adequately use one concept without invoking the connotations stemming from interrelations of the concept with others within that particular set. Rosemont calls such a set of interrelated core concepts a “concept cluster”. Every culture has its own unique concept cluster, but even within one culture, as times and epochs change, one might find changing concept clusters. According to Rosemont, traditional Indian accounts of human life will use terms like “*dharma*”, “*samsara*”, “*moksha*”, “*karma*”, “*Brahman*”, and others; in the Western culture, contemporary English ethical discourse will use “moral”, “freedom”, “ought”, “rights”, “obligation”, “reason”, “dilemma”, “motivation”, and others. However, in the same Western culture, but in Medieval and Renaissance English, that concept cluster would include “liegeful”, “varlet”, “sake”, “shent”, “chivalric”, “villain”, and others (Rosemont 2013, 17-9). Thus in Rosemont’s treatment, concepts do not float independently from other concepts and a shared cultural context that unifies them, thus making them meaningful.

This methodological stance has important implications for comparative philosophy and inter-cultural studies. Rosemont indicates that in order to adequately understand any given culture we have to try hard to locate that core concept cluster, to make it clear how concepts within the cluster interrelate, and learn to employ these concepts correctly not each by its own way, but as a concept cluster (Rosemont 2013, 18). Furthermore, if we accept Rosemont’s methodological stance, once we come to translate a concept or explicate its meaning, what we have to do is to translate and explicate it with and within its concept cluster. Thus intercultural translation has to be a translation of concept clusters and not of isolated terms. To translate a single and isolated term or to find an equivalent of such a term in another language or culture might also have a significant importance and be useful for some specific purposes. However, such an undertaking will not be representative, if we attempt to explain the inner workings of the whole cultural or philosophical system.

Although Ames and Rosemont, according to our analysis, present their methodological approaches somehow differently, there is a strong unifying theme between their accounts – it is the all-pervasive correlativeness of world phenomena. This approach also suggests specific ways of investigation. If correlativeness of world objects, humans, or concepts is taken as a constitutive part of these phenomena, it is much likely that synthesis rather than analysis will dominate the investigation. Similarly, if correlativeness is understood as constitutive rather than accidental, the explanation of the entity in question will tend to explicate (outward direction; from Latin *explicāre* "to unravel") rather than define (inward direction; from Latin *dēfinīre* "to limit") its meaning. Here I do not mean to disqualify either synthetic or analytic approaches, and neither am I suggesting that Ames and Rosemont are doing this. Both analysis and synthesis are limited in their use. Kant has pointed this out precisely:

> But since in a *continuous* quantum the regress from the whole to its possible parts, and in an *infinite* quantum the progress from the parts to the given whole, find no end, in the one case the analysis and in the other case the synthesis will be impossible of completion; the whole cannot, in conformity with the laws of intuition, be apprehended by an exhaustive division of parts, nor the complex by an exhaustive summation (Kant 1929, 36-7)

Therefore, an adequate investigation probably needs both analysis and synthesis used interchangeably, though it is likely that different assumptions of different thinkers will put more stress on one direction of explanation rather than the other. It is not necessary for our purposes to go deeper into discussion about different directions of explanation. However, I want to highlight the point that the stress on correlativeness seen in methodological approaches of Ames and Rosemont will be reflected in their explication of early Confucian ethics and the central theme of their interpretation – the concept of human in early Confucian writings.

Another common characteristic unite Ames's and Rosemont's methodological suggestions to investigate early Confucian thought through

“interpretative context” and “concept clusters”. Ames and Rosemont both present their points by sharply contrasting early Chinese positions with the mainstream Western philosophical orientations. Ames and Hall claim that the dominant pattern of early Chinese thought is significantly different from the dominant pattern in the West. Thus in their analysis early Chinese thought is associated with “aesthetical order”, while dominant Western is associated with the “logical” or “rational” order (Hall and Ames 1987). In similarly contrastive terms, Rosemont claims that, because we cannot find in early Chinese terminological counterparts for most if not all concepts in the concept cluster of contemporary English terminology of moral philosophy, “it is fundamentally misguided to see Confucius as moral philosopher” (Rosemont 1986, 205).

It is crucial to note that these claims, for both Ames and Rosemont, are denoting the initial position from which investigation and argumentation have to proceed, but not their final conclusion, and definitely not the evaluation of Chinese or Western positions. Ames is carefully stressing that the generalizations he argues for are “always provisional” and have to be constantly modified, as imposing onto early Chinese thought some essential and unchanging generic assumptions would “violate the premises of the underlying Chinese process cosmology” (Ames 2011, 23). For Rosemont, on the other hand, refusal to see Kongzi as moral philosopher is not a verdict with intention to disqualify him from the ethical discourse, but rather an invitation to master an early Confucian concept cluster, which “is coherent, consistent, and capable of placing many recurrent philosophical issues in less culture-bound perspectives than they have hitherto been viewed” (Rosemont 1976, 50).

Thus far we have discussed the background that has fostered Confucian role ethics formation, and we have suggested that the apparent asymmetry in comparative literature, when Chinese philosophy is discussed exclusively from various Western philosophical conceptual frameworks and evaluated against Western philosophical (and religious) systems as the reference point, has urged the attempt to interpret early Confucianism from within Chinese intellectual

tradition. We also have indicated that in Confucian role ethics there is a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the current state of contemporary Western moral philosophy; therefore, early Confucian ethics taken "on its own terms" is seen as a possible alternative to Western approaches. However, because the object of this dissertation is the controversy over the nature of early Confucian ethics, we will not pursue the question what is the philosophical position of Confucian role ethics to the most pressing question in contemporary ethics. In addition, in this section we have also indicated some commonalities in Ames's and Rosemont's methodological stances, namely the emphasis of correlativeness and contrasting rhetoric.

The methodological stance of Ames and Rosemont allows them to escape the incommensurability challenge that virtue ethics interpretation stumbles upon by the virtue of explicitly relying on the conceptual apparatus of non-Chinese origins. Role ethics interpretation argues that we have to start the investigation from engaging the *Chinese* interpretational context – the correlative cosmology. While this methodological stance has obvious advantages, it seems it also raises at least one methodological difficulty. Cultures incorporate numerous voices within its tradition and these voices very often may differ radically. Now, if we will assume a broad interpretational context for all Chinese materials *before* we start investigate and interpret it, will we be able to register such conflicting voices within the tradition? How so? In other words, what methodological tools should be used in order to avoid a forceful homogenization of the culture under investigation, once we assume a single shared interpretational context for it? To be sure, the proponents of role ethics interpretation do not negate the diversity within Chinese culture (see, for example, Ames and Rosemont 1998, 20). Ames stresses on many occasions that he is looking for an interpretational context that grounds both agreements *and* disagreements within Chinese tradition. Rosemont notices in his exchange with Fingarette that Mengzi may have had not just a major difference with Kongzi, but a "five-star general one" (Rosemont 1978, 518). Ames notices a

similar line of critique in Michael Puett, but answers only with a rhetorical question:

> How does the claim that people who have a shared language, culture, and history are likely to have some common philosophical assumptions preclude not only possibility but also the probability that they also have important differences? (Ames 2011, 27)

However, Ames also points out an important problem of his critics – that the critique of the supposed homogenization of Chinese culture and the refusal to account for some underlying assumptions within it, often leads to the conclusion that particular parts of Chinese tradition are explicable as "proto-Christian", "proto-Aristotelian", "proto-utilitarian", and so on. Is it not a fall to a much cruder form of homogenization? Ames's rebuke may not give us the answer if a methodological safety-catch exists to prevent the possible pitfalls of assuming the broad interpretational context, but it does explain why Ames and Rosemont claim that the only thing more dangerous than making broad generalizations in cultural comparisons is the reductionism that results from not doing so (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 20).

Discussion of the methodological approaches toward comparative philosophy was important to see, if on this methodological level Confucian role ethics do not face the incommensurability problem, which is weakening Confucian virtue ethics interpretation. Here we have discovered that on a methodological level, both Ames and Rosemont, although arguing from slightly different directions, maintain that we would come to see and understand early Confucian ethics more adequately if we would approach it from within Chinese tradition. For Ames it means investigating early Confucians against the interpretative context of correlative thought; for Rosemont it means translating and explicating early Confucian concept cluster in its entirety, rather than looking for Western equivalents for separate concepts. Thus on a theoretical level there seems to be no explicit reliance in role ethics approach on any non-Chinese materials in their explication of early

Confucian ethical sensibilities. In this sense, role ethics approach is immune to a methodological challenge of incommensurability thesis. To be sure, it does not mean that role ethics approach does not face difficulties in understanding the tradition that is different from and, possibly, incommensurable with their own. But if they do, then it is a matter of comparative practise rather than of theoretical assumptions.

Looking from a slightly different perspective, even if Ames and Rosemont do not explicitly invoke any specific Western philosophical frameworks in their methodological assumptions, it could still be the case that in their actual explication of early Confucian thought they are indeed changing Aristotelian (or rather neo-Aristotelian) virtue ethics framework with some other originally Western thought system. This question is especially acute, as critics of Ames and Rosemont have suggested some similarities of their interpretation of early Confucian ethics (or parts thereof) with Western philosophers or philosophical systems. Wilson (1995, 265n.3) has suggested that at least the conception of the sage as an authentic innovator in Ames's and Hall's interpretation of Kongzi comes from a "certain reading of Friedrich Nietzsche together with elements of Martin Heidegger's thought" (ibid)[45], while Slingerland suggested that Ames's and Hall's interpretation resembles Sartrean existentialism (Slingerland 2001, 97); Møllgaard (2005) associates Ames's position with Rorty's neo-pragmatism. Indeed, in response to Møllgaard's challenge Ames himself asks:

> In our attempt to get past earlier putatively reductive readings of the Chinese corpus are we not in fact just substituting one Western philosophical reading of these texts for another? Are we not "rescuing" the Chinese tradition … only to overwrite it with our own pragmatic, process assumptions? (Ames 2011, 36)

[45] Roetz (1998, 112) also charges Hall and Ames with falsely making Kongzi into Nietzsche's forerunner.

In order to address these questions now we turn to the analysis of actual explication of early Confucian ethics through the Confucian role ethics approach. Our goal will be not only to explicate what is new in Confucian role ethics interpretation when compared with Confucian virtue ethics approach, but also to assess what grounds this new reading of early Confucians and if it does not fall to these same problems as we were claiming Confucian virtue ethics does.

2.2 Confucian role ethics interpretation of early Confucian ethics

2.2.1 Relationships as foundation of early Confucian ethics

One of the main themes in Western explications of early Confucian thought, besides noting its primarily practical emphasis and apparent disregard of rationally discovered and formulated universal principles, was the importance that early Confucians (and this goes well beyond the early stages of Confucianism) conceded to human relations. For many Western thinkers, both past and present, an outstanding characteristic of Confucian thought is the fundamental value that Confucians put on human interrelatedness and, first of all, on familial bonds.

This Confucian concern for familial relations seemingly oversteps just narrow daily practical concerns, and turns family and terms denoting familial roles into a broadly implemented cultural "root" metaphor that permeates religion, politics, and ethics (see Giskin and Walsh 2001). Native Chinese religious practises from ancient times until now are unimaginable without ancestral worship; officials in imperial China used to be called *fùmǔ* 父母 ("father and mother") of the people, and emperors – *tiānzǐ* 天子, that is, "son of *tiān* (heaven)". Even in the modern Chinese language, the character for "family" *jiā* 家 appears as a compound in words denoting a closely related group of people. For example, schools of thought are called families, as in

rújiā 儒家 for "Confucianism" (literally, "family of *rú*-scholars"). The word for "state" or "country" is expressed as "country-family" (*guójiā* 國家). However, the most unusual, perhaps, for Western ears is the use of the character "family" *jiā* 家 in words denoting what we take as a singular discrete person: "a painter" is *huàjiā* 畫家 (literally, "painting-family"), and one of the personal pronouns that denotes singular "she", "he", or "I", as well as plural "they" is *rénjiā* 人家 (literally, "human-family")[46].

The importance of familial relations in early Chinese ethical thought is well illustrated in the fact that one of the core terms in early Confucianism is *xiào* 孝, which is most commonly translated into English as "filial piety", and which is translated by Confucian role ethics as "family reverence". How much attention to the term was given by early Confucians is evident from one of the classical Confucian canons – *Xiaojing*, or "The Classic of Family Reverence" – which is dedicated entirely to the explication of the term. Western translators and interpreters have also acknowledged the importance of the term. For example, in his translation of *Lunyu* Legge sums up one passage as stating that "filial piety and fraternal submission are the foundation of all virtuous practise" (Legge 2001, vol.1, 138). The importance of the term for Confucian and more broadly Chinese ethics is not lost until today. Just recently a compendium of the ongoing debate among Chinese and also Western scholars, whether *xiào* 孝 has had more positive or negative impact onto Chinese ethical outlook, has been edited by Guo (2004). Among Western scholarship, the continuing attention to *xiào* 孝 and its place in Chinese ethics, both past and present, can be seen in such editions as Ikels (2004), Chan and Tan (2004).

Even if the central place of human relations and family seem to be well acknowledged, in the Western philosophical explanations of early Confucian ethics, this familial relationality usually gets sidelined after the initial mentioning of its supposed centrality. After all, as we have seen in Part 1, in

[46] For similar explication of familial terms in Chinese culture, see Ames's introduction to Giskin and Walsh (2001) and "Translators' Preface" in Rosemont and Ames (2009).

the virtue ethics approach to early Confucian ethics, "virtue", or its Chinese equivalent *dé* 德, understood primarily as character disposition, is placed as the focal point of early Confucian ethics. Alan Chan (2011) provides a detailed study of three early Chinese texts that discuss *dé* 德 from late tenth to fourth century BC, which he associates with early Confucian thinking. In this study Chan concentrates on the notion of *dé* 德 with the intention to highlight socio-political concerns that, according to him, unite most early interpretations of *dé* 德. Chan claims that "to understand *de*, it is necessary to go beyond specific virtues to see how they are situated in a larger scheme of roles and responsibilities" (Chan 2011, 145), because these early texts suggest that "the basis of virtue lies in kinship ties, which generate bonds and obligations that shape the social and ethical landscape" (ibid, 142). Generally, Chan endorses reading of *dé* 德 as "virtue", but he also acknowledges the relative disregard of relational and familial aspects of early Chinese ethics in contemporary studies. Chan suggests that "the place of *roles and duties* and "Heaven" as a locus of spirituality probably should not be dismissed altogether in contemporary interpretations of Confucian virtue" (Chan 2011, 147; emphasis added). I take Chan's suggestion to be similar in spirit to Fingarette's warning not to psychologize early Chinese terminology, as Chan here reminds of the importance of roles and "Heaven", that is, seemingly "external" factors in a discussion of virtue.

Reasons why family relations and relationality in general tend to slip away from the Western philosophical treatments of early Confucian ethics can be explained by the status of family in Western philosophical systems that were employed as interpretational frameworks for early Confucians. Obviously, Western moral philosophers have not ignored or dismissed an empirical fact that humans are social beings, and that human interactions influence human lives and their characters. Aristotle's description of humans as *zoon politikon* is but one widely quoted example of how in the Western philosophical tradition human sociability is accounted for. However, scholars of early Chinese thought

notice a substantial difference between Aristotle and Kongzi regarding the meaning and significance of relationality. Rosemont and Ames indicate that sociability for Western thinkers usually has "not been seen as the essence of our humanity, or, at the more abstract level, as being of compelling value" (Rosemont and Ames 2009, 36). Regarding Aristotle, Rosemont and Ames point out that some of the *arête* that Aristotle champions most – temperance, courage, and wisdom, for example – "may be cultivated in solitude" (ibid 42). Rosemont and Ames claim that according to Confucian role ethics interpretation early Confucians are more radical in this regard, as they do not see the possibility of flourishing in solitude. In the next section we will also provide evidence from early Confucian texts that concrete roles and relationships are seen as constitutive parts of humanity itself.

This difference in the significance of relationality, and family more particularly, is also registered by the proponents of Confucian virtue ethics. Van Norden pointed out that "Aristotle regarded the family as merely a necessary *means* to facilitate true human flourishing (rather than a *constituent* of flourishing)" (Van Norden 2007, 122). Similarly, Sim shows that for Aristotle the individual human being is much more closely interwoven into community, as for Aristotle there is no tension between the good of community and the good of individual "as there is for so many contemporary ethicians" (Sim 2007, 14). On the other hand, she notes:

> It is sometimes difficult to see how Aristotle's soul doctrine and his metaphysics of substance can fully accommodate this ethical insight. The problem becomes even more acute when we broaden the issue to include that supramoral intellectual virtue of *theoria* (ibid).

Here Sim acknowledges these same difficulties that Confucian role ethics hold to be some of the most important reasons not to interpret early Confucians through an Aristotelian framework. For Aristotle relation is necessary, but secondary: "that which is the thing in itself – that is, the being – is prior by nature to any relation it has (for this is like an offshoot and accident of the

being)" (Aristotle 2011, 1096a21). This characteristic of Aristotelian thought is of fundamental importance, as in early Confucian thinking, both in ontological and in ethical domains, there are and cannot be "thing in itself" prior to any relation. For early Chinese, the existence (or, better yet, "presence" *yǒu* 有) of things, following the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經), is a function of the relation between universal cosmic modes of *yīn* 陰 and *yáng* 陽. Neither one of these modes can exist or be thought of on its own, as they denote parts of a single cycle and not separate substances. Equally so in the ethical realm, according to role ethics interpretation, relationality is taken by early Confucians as the primary reality. If for early Confucians ethical life is essentially relational, Aristotelian system (and proponents of Confucian role ethics would say all other major Western moral philosophies) allows there to be spheres in ethical life where a human being can flourish on his or her own.

Thus both Confucian virtue ethics and Confucian role ethics seem to agree that early Confucians stress the importance of relations, and that on this account early Confucian vision is very different from any of its possible Western counterparts. However, once virtue ethics interpretation gets to a more detailed explication of early Confucian ethics, the relational character and primacy of family roles tend to be sidelined, as an individual virtue *dé* 德 is presupposed to take up a central place. Consider this characterization of Kongzi's ethics by Ivanhoe, who argues that we should see early Confucians as advocating a "distinctive form of virtue ethics" (Ivanhoe 2008, 45):

> At the heart of Kongzi's conception of the proper life for human beings – the "Way" (*dǎo* 道) – is a model of a harmonious and happy family, one whose different members each contribute to the welfare and flourishing of the whole, according to their role-specific obligations. These obligations – serving as a mother, a father, an elder brother, etc. – and the practices and norms associated with them were the primary guides to the moral life. In this sense, the family served as the basic paradigm for the well-lived life.

> However, the moral life did not end with the family. One had roles to fulfill in society as well (Ivanhoe 2002, 1).

As we can see, in these introductory remarks of what is "at the heart" of Kongzi's understanding of proper life and what are his "primary guides" to the moral life, there are no indications of the centrality of character dispositions. However, Ivanhoe still argues that *virtue* ethics is an appropriate framework to reveal the nature of early Confucian ethics, with a qualification that it is a "distinctive form of virtue ethics". It could be argued that precisely the above-mentioned centrality of role-specific obligations in early Confucian thought is what Ivanhoe means by Confucians advocating a "distinctive" form of virtue ethics. However, the problem with this argument, is that if we concentrate on the "distinctiveness" of Confucian virtue ethics, which we find in the centrality of role-specific obligations and the primary importance of relationality and familial bonds, then we are weakening the explanatory power of the virtue ethics framework. In other words, the specific nature of early Confucian ethical vision, in such case, would be explained not by a "virtue ethics" framework, but by additional explication of what that distinctiveness of Confucian virtue ethics consist from[47]. In this case virtue ethics framework would appear to be a very thin indeed, providing, as Tiwald (2010, 57) has suggested, a "something of a catch-all category" that is meant as "a convenient label for any character-oriented position that stands outside purer forms of consequentialism and rule-deontology" (ibid.). However, such a strategy would not only fail to explain much about the content and distinctiveness of early Confucian ethics, as there is no strongly expressed tendency to group it with "purer forms" of consequentialism and rule-deontology. It would also strengthen questions of why early Confucians have to be drawn into this alien (to them) dichotomy between agent-centered and act-centered ethical theories.

[47] In Silius (2010b) I have made a similar argument that another often used specification of early Confucian thought as "Confucian humanism" is an ill-constructed term, as the positive explanatory content of the term (what it *is*) comes almost exclusively from the predicate, whereas the substantial part of the term necessitates the range of negative explanations (what it is *not*), in order to preclude false associations of "Confucian humanism" with particular ideas of different forms of "humanisms" in the Western tradition.

Here we can see the reason why proponents of Confucian role ethics formulate their interpretation primarily in opposition to Confucian virtue ethics, despite the significant amount of their shared understanding about early Confucian ethics. For Ames and Rosemont it is a strategic choice that helps to bring their own interpretation into clearer focus (Rosemont and Ames 2009, 41). But at the same time it helps to bring early Confucian ethics into clearer focus, by placing its distinctiveness at the heart of their interpretative framework, rather than leaving it to the secondary explanations. Proponents of Confucian role ethics believe that we can find such an explanatory framework for interpreting early Confucian ethics, in which both the more general relationality of humans and, more practically, family bonds would always stand at the centre and be a unifying theme of early Confucian ethical vision. Ames and Rosemont formulate their suggestion as follows:

> We will claim that (1) early (pre-Buddhist) Confucianism is best described as a role ethics; (2) this role ethics is *sui generis* in both philosophy and religion, East and West; (3) it embodies first, a specific vision of human beings as relational persons constituted by the roles they live rather than as individual selves; and (4) it embodies as well a specific vision of the moral life that takes family feeling as the entry point for developing a consummate moral competence and a religious sensibility grounded in this world (Ames and Rosemont 2011, 17).

What are the main elements of this Confucian role ethics model and how does this interpretational scheme change a contemporary reader's perspective of early Confucian texts? Some of the elements of Confucian role ethics we already see in the formulation above. Ames and Rosemont's claim that Confucian role ethics is a *sui generis* ethical vision is not meant to discourage Western readers from looking for and acknowledging analogies between early Confucian ethics and our own. Ames and Rosemont point out that they do not want to portray early Chinese as exotic and radically different, as "many different Chinese held many different beliefs and attitudes, and great many of them have Western counterparts" (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 20). After all,

one reoccurring theme in Ames and Rosemont's Confucian role ethics is that this ethical visions and the concept of the human that it promotes is potentially more appealing to a greater number of contemporary people across various ethnic, religious, and cultural boundaries, which could not be the case if early Confucian ethics would be radically different. The *sui generis* claim is intended by Ames and Rosemont to point out that early Confucian ethics in its entirety has no counterparts in any other philosophical system taken also in its entirety; therefore, an explanation of early Confucian ethics through another already existing philosophical *system* will not do justice to neither of systems involved.

In this regard, it should be noted that there is a certain amount of tension between the content of Ames and Rosemont's claims and the way this content is laid out. A contrastive rhetoric that Ames and Rosemont has chosen to present Confucian role ethics might overshadow their more ecumenical message of cross-cultural appeal of early Confucian ethics[48]. For example, to the question that entitles their recent article – were the early Confucians virtuous? – Ames and Rosemont respond negatively. Their claim is that the ultimate goal in early Confucian ethics can not be reduced to the development of individual character traits, and that the flourishing relations from which a unique person emerges is the central concern of early Confucians. The negation that early Confucians were virtuous is obviously a rhetoric choice, thought-out and justifiable, employed as a way to separate two philosophical outlooks, but it might take a patient reader to see the purpose of such rhetoric and the intentions behind it.

Another salient characteristic of Confucian role ethics is the suggestion of Ames and Rosemont to take the *centrality* of family bonds in early Confucianism as a philosophically important point for the explication of nature of early Confucian ethics. As it was demonstrated before, Confucian virtue ethics did not neglect importance of family for early Confucians. However, the

[48] In my estimation, the best explication by proponents of Confucian role ethics of this ecumenical potential in early Confucian ethical vision can be found in Rosemont (2001).

attempts to incorporate *xiào* 孝 as integral part of Confucian virtue ethics interpretation have usually been limited to an explanation of the term as *one* of the members in a Confucian list of virtues (see Ivanhoe 2007). This approach to *xiào* 孝 raises similar problems as presented in Part 1: the psychologization of the term that comes with an aretaic reading of early Confucian core terminology. In addition, it does not reflect in any way the specific, let alone the central, place of *xiào* 孝 among other early Confucian cardinal "virtues", especially because *rén* 仁, *lǐ* 禮, *yì* 義, and many other terms are mentioned and discussed much more often in the most studied early Confucian texts. A telling situation is that in philosophical interpretations of early Confucian writings as form of virtue ethics studies of *xiào* 孝 are rare, Ivanhoe's (2007) article being an exception in general trend.

Confucian role ethics interpretation, on the other hand, by suggesting the centrality of roles for early Confucian ethics, present *xiào* 孝 (the family reverence) as the "entry point for moral competence" (Rosemont and Ames 2009, 54). Here Confucian role ethics highlights the situational and particularistic nature of the term. Such explanation of *xiào* 孝 maintains the centrality of family in early Confucian ethics, as from all our possible roles, that of a child comes first. Our whole complex web of future ethical relations, inclinations, dispositions, actions, and evaluations grows from our primary role as child. Thus *xiào* 孝 for early Confucians is central, because it is the beginning, the root from which the whole tree grows[49]. *Lunyu* describes it in precisely these words: "As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect the root of authoritative conduct (*rén* 仁)[50]" (LY 1.2). The centrality and philosophical significance of *xiào* 孝 for early Confucian ethics is once more highlighted by the proponents of Confucian role ethics in Rosemont and

[49] A similar line of argument can be found in Chan Sin yee's description of Confucian ethics as "role-ethics" (Chan 1993, 27).
[50] 孝弟也者，其為仁之本與！(*CTP*)

Ames's translation and philosophical explication of the *Xiaojing* (Rosemont and Ames 2009).

Another major implication of Confucian role ethics suggestion that is not explicitly stated in their above quoted formulation involves treatment of core terminology of early Confucian ethics. However, later I will argue that this characteristic of Confucian role ethics is integrated in their claim that their interpretation embodies "a specific vision of human beings as relational persons constituted by the roles they live rather than as individual selves" (Ames and Rosemont 2011, 17). Ames and Rosemont's claim that early Confucian ethics is better labeled, if some label is needed, as "role" rather than "virtue" ethics, also means that they treat the core terminology of early Confucians as mainly describing and evaluating human *correlations* and not only and merely human *characters*.

In other words, in role ethics interpretation early Confucian key terminology is explained as more situation- rather than agent-centred. *Zhōng* 忠, for example, is translated as "doing one's utmost" (the conventional translation adopted by many Confucian virtue ethics proponents – "loyalty/loyal"). *Shàn* 善 is explained as relational "good to" or "good for" or "good with" or "good in", and only derivatively and abstractly "good", which is the conventional rendition of the term (see Ames and Rosemont 1998, 57-8). *Yì* 義 in Confucian role ethics interpretation is rendered as "appropriate", instead of the often seen "righteousness" or "rightness"; *dé* 德, instead of being universalized and abstract "virtue", here is signifying "what we can do and be, if we 'realize (*zhi*)' the most from our personal qualities and careers as contextualized members of a specific community" (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 57). Such reading does not exclude personal qualities from the definitions of these terms, but rather places the person in his or her context and highlighting the primacy of the person's interactions in a complicated web of relationships, from which any personal identity is formed.

What follows from Confucian role ethics position, is that taking early Confucian core terminology as the list of "virtues" leads to a reductionist reading of much more multifaceted terms, as ethical value is being placed in a discrete person's character disposition, which is seen as antecedent to any action. According to this view, if a person consistently feels, thinks, and acts from and according to that personal disposition, that person can be praised for having ethical virtue and being a virtuous person. In the most extreme cases, even the action according to and from virtue is not necessary and is treated as accidental, because virtue in the Aristotelian framework is possessed, not enacted. According to Aristotle, "possession of virtue seems actually compatible with being asleep, or with lifelong inactivity" (Aristotle 2011, 1095b33). This seems to be in the sharpest contrast to the use of early Confucian core terminology.

Let's take *xiào* 孝 as an example. In the famous passage from *Lunyu* 2.7, Kongzi laments the panegyric use of *xiào* 孝 in regard to those people who "are able to provide for their parents". Kongzi clearly thinks that the bare and empty behavior of providing material goods is not enough, as he points out, that "even dogs and horses are given that much care. If you don't respect your parents, what is the difference?"[51] (LY 2.7) This passage is often quoted by Confucian virtue ethics proponents as evidence that some "inner" disposition is required by Kongzi, *ergo*, Kongzi advocates a form of virtue ethics. However, the important point here is that for Kongzi, no attitude, and no disposition would be enough to call anybody *xiào* 孝 either. One *has to provide* for one's parents *with due respect* in order for *xiào* 孝 to take place. Both the action and the attitude are empty and sterile without each other. In other words, there is no abstract *xiào* 孝 apart from *xiào*-ing in an appropriate place, time, and company. Thus *xiào* 孝, just as most other early Confucian core terminology used in ethical characterisations and evaluations, is something to be enacted, not possessed. And it is difficult to imagine Kongzi allowing, even for

[51] 子曰：「今之孝者，是謂能養。至於犬馬，皆能有養；不敬，何以別乎？」(*CTP*)

argument's sake, that *being xiào* 孝 would be compatible with lifelong inactivity.

Furthermore, according to Confucian role ethics interpretation, the core ethical terminology of early Confucians refer to even more complicated set of correlatives. As Rosemont points out, "in order to *be* a friend, I must *have* a friend" (Rosemont 1991, 73). The importance of this seemingly simple and obvious statement is easy to overlook. However, it further complicates the attempt to understand early Confucian terminology exclusively in aretaic terms. Let us return back to *xiào* 孝 and *Lunyu* 2.7. What Rosemont draws our attention to is that in cases like *Lunyu* 2.7, in order for there to be *xiào* 孝, one needs not only to provide for one's parents and to do it with appropriate attitude, one needs also to have *parents* that are *in need*. It might be the case that we learn *xiào* 孝 as kids, but we truly have chance to enact and make *xiào* 孝 present only once we grow up *and* our parents grow old. Thus, it seems that *xiào* 孝 describes and evaluates not only an individual person's dispositions, actions, but also a whole social and natural context in which the particular correlation takes place.

This might look as a disturbing picture, as one's ethical qualities and worth do not any longer rest solely in one's own "inner" qualities. Other humans become not accidental, or at best, helpful, but *constitutive* of my own ethical cultivation. In early Confucian ethics, such constitutive importance of others, far from denying one's personal responsibility and active participation, requires more of it. As Kongzi explains to his student:

> Authoritative persons [*rén* 仁] establish others in seeking establish themselves and promote others in seeking to get there themselves. Correlating one's conduct with those near at hand can be said to be the method of becoming an authoritative person [*rén* 仁][52] (LY 6.30).

[52]夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲達而達人。能近取譬，可謂仁之方也已。(*CTP*)

In the tale of a legendary emperor Shun 舜, who is often depicted as the paragon of *xiào* 孝, we find more support for the claim that early Confucian core ethical terminology is referring to the whole human being as the focus of a complex correlative field, rather than to mere character dispositions of a discrete individual. Shun is praised because he behaves "as devoted son and brother should" (Guo n.d.). But what makes the enactment of *xiào* 孝 in Shun's case exceptional is the environment, to which Shun belongs:

> His father, Gu Sou [瞽叟], is unreasonable, and harsh. His step-mother is petty by nature, and constantly abuses and scolds her son. Shun's step-brother, Xiang [象], is arrogant and lazy. He is jealous of his older brother and wants to do him in. Living in such a family, Shun manages to not resent them (ibid).

Here we can see that the description of Shun as *xiào* 孝 refers not only to Shun's character disposition and his actions; it is also intensified by the environment, part of which Shun is. Thus, according to Confucian role ethics interpretation, when *xiào* 孝 is ascribed to Shun, it is far from implying that Shun possesses Aristotelian-like "virtue" of *xiào* 孝, which can stay intact in his sleep or lifelong inactivity. In Confucian role ethics interpretation, what this attribute *xiào* 孝 denotes is the entirety of correlation that is brought to a particular focus by Shun, rather than Shun's individual character traits.

So far it could have appeared that Confucian role ethics posits a vision of human that would be close to Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. However, the refusal to confine human qualities within a discrete individual would amount to negating existence of any human qualities, only *if* human is understood as a discrete individual. Ames and Rosemont (2011, 17) maintain that Confucian role ethics embodies "specific vision of human beings as relational persons constituted by the roles they live rather than as individual selves". This vision of the human being has to be explicated in greater detail, as I claim that precisely this is a focal point for all disagreements between

Confucian virtue and role interpretations. In the next section I will, firstly, explicate the Confucian role ethics understanding of a human as the totality of one's lived roles and relations. I will reconstruct and explicate the notion of "role" in Confucian role ethics. Then I will provide textual analysis of some early Confucian conceptualizations of a human.

2.2.2 Understanding of human in Confucian role ethics

The Confucian role ethics interpretation is more radical than the Confucian virtue ethics because it not only investigates the nature of early Confucian ethics, but also raises a more basic challenge and questions the concept of a human in early Confucian thought. Ames and Rosemont claim that early Confucian ethics embodies a specific vision of human beings, which challenges one of the most widespread ideas endorsed by many Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers – the notion of the human being as a rational, autonomous, free individual self. Ames and Rosemont find the prototype of the specific view of human being that is employed and developed in Confucian role ethics interpretation in the texts of early Confucianism. They often sum up this Confucian view of the human with a quote from Fingarette: "For Confucius, unless there are at least two human beings, there can be no human beings" (Fingarette, quoted from Rosemont and Ames 2009, 81).

Confucian role ethics interpretation maintains that, in sharp contrast to this vision, the concept cluster of modern moral theories (mainly utilitarian and deontological, but also, to a large degree, the neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics) shows a predominance of the *foundational individualism*. According to this view it is possible, at least theoretically, to give a full account of an entity without any reference to interrelations of this entity. In other words, it is a view that there are self-sufficient entities. This individualism is called foundational because these autonomous individual entities are given primacy over any interaction or relation that they may or may not form.

The individualistic understanding of a human in deontological and utilitarian ethics is obvious in their formulation of a human as a free, rational, autonomous individual self. Aristotle's vision of a human, however, at first seems as fairly social. Accordingly, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics provided strong criticism of the notion of a human as an "unencumbered self", pointing out to the importance of cultural and social context for identity formation (see, for example, Sandel 1984). But, as Irwin (1980, 36) claims, Aristotle's ethics can hardly be separated from his view of human nature, the essential part of which is the notion of soul (*psyche*). Thus, Ames and Rosemont stress Aristotle's "individuating language of potentiality (*dunamis*) and actuality (*energeia*)" (Rosemont and Ames 2009, 41) that pervades Aristotle's notion of soul (*psyche*). The previously quoted idea of Aristotle that the substance by its nature always is prior to relationship further strengthens the claim that the pervasiveness of individualistic understanding of a human has its roots not only in the Enlightenment, but also in the notions of substance and soul in Aristotle.

While Ames and Rosemont are certainly correct that the individualistic notion of a human dominates current philosophical, political, economical, educational, and social domains, it is worth mentioning that there is a noticeable trend in contemporary Western philosophy, psychology, and ethics that explicitly criticizes the current understanding and is attempting to formulate a more relational concept of a person. These attempts are probably complicated by the unfortunate distinction between "individualism" and "collectivism" that has dominated the political arena of the 20th century globally. Widespread understanding of this distinction as an ultimate alternative, together with the clear hints provided by the history of the pitfalls of both, has prompted Western thinkers of the 20th and 21st centuries to look for alternatives. In the early 50's of the last century, Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz anticipated the bankruptcy and inevitable collapse of both individualist and collectivist philosophies, and expressed in literary style the hope for an alternative: "It will be on the corpses of these worldviews that the

third vision of man will be born: man in relation to another man, a concrete man, I in relation to you and him" (Gombrowicz 1988, 20).

A similar sentiment is felt in Gergen's critique of the view of ourselves as "bounded beings, the essential "me" dwelling behind the eyeballs" and his attempt to characterize persons "as embedded within multiple relationships", so that "we all carry many different voices, each born of a specific history of relationship" (Gergen 2009, xiii; xxv). A fundamentally relational nature of "care theory" is evident in the writings of Gilligan (1993) and Noddings (2002). They both talk about their respective projects as "relational ethics" and stress that it "transcends the age-old opposition between selfishness and selflessness" (Gilligan 1993, xix), and enables one to "recognize the contributions of the cared-for as well as those of carers in maintaining the relation" (Noddings 2002, 6). Building on his previous work, in a very recent article Kellenberger (2013) provides a detailed argument that "human relationships are deeper than moral principles or moral rules; human relationships generate and fashion moral principles" (Kellenberger 2013, 1). These positions resonate well with the early Confucian vision as presented by Confucian role ethics, and it highlights the relevance of the controversy over the nature of early Confucian ethics for contemporary discussions on the understanding and conceptualization of person and, through this, for a broad range of other topics in moral philosophy.

Let us now take a closer look at the understanding of the human in early Confucian texts as presented by Confucian role ethics interpretation. Here the primacy of relationality in early Confucian thought is entrenched and further developed in a notion of a human that explains humans as totality of one's lived roles and relations. Rosemont formulates it as follows:

> For early Confucians, there can be no me in isolation, to be considered in abstraction: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others. Moreover, these roles are interconnected in that the relations in which I stand to some people affect directly the relations in which I stand with others, to the extent that it would be misleading to say that I "play" or

> "perform" these roles; on the contrary, for Confucius I *am* my roles (Rosemont 1991a, 72).

An important moment to note in this description is that there is no strict identity of a human preceding all range of the *lived* familial and communal roles. Any meaningful identity is a *post hoc* abstraction from the continuous process of negotiation and correlation. Rosemont and Ames stress that for Kongzi and early Confucians, once all the layers of one's social relations are "peeled away", there is no individual in a form of "soul" or "self" that would remain (Rosemont and Ames 2009, 11).

Two key terms have to be taken into account in this formulation, that is, "relations" and "roles". The understanding of the human that Confucian role ethics interpretation presents as arising from early Confucian writings can not be fully grasped without noticing the importance of each. "Relationship" here is seen as a dyadic correlation that is the primary reality, and it is always concrete, lived, experienced, and intimate. In this early Confucian role ethics presentation of the human, there can be no "role" that constitutes a person without there being a natural relation that grounds this role. "Role", on the other hand, is important in Confucian role ethics model of a human as it is a culturally specific framework, which structures various relations, makes them identifiable, and provides them with normative content and a basis for ethical evaluation. Both notions of "relations" and "roles" as discussed above are incorporated into a single notion widely used in early Chinese writings – *lún* 倫. All the various roles (*lún* 倫) that, according to Confucian role ethics explication, have to be lived, not merely performed (Rosemont 1991a, 72; Ames 2011, 96), are further unified and aesthetically ordered into a complicated fabric of communal co-existence that could be called an ethical ordering, and that in early Confucian terms is called *lǐ* 禮 "ritual propriety".

As relationship is an achievement term (relationships grow, develop, and blossom, or, on the contrary, wither and terminate), in this view of a human, one *becomes* truly human by making the most from every relation. In this view,

one develops one's personality not that much by concentrating on the development of one's private dispositions, but rather by engaging in new, meaningful relationships. At the same time, one makes one's personality robust by creatively integrating (*chéng* 誠) all one's relations into a harmonious whole. Ames sums up this Confucian view of a human by saying that in this Confucian vision, the human is best understood as a human *becoming* rather than a human *being* (Ames 2011, 87ff). As the result, in this view of a human, the question of "self-identity" has to be reformulated in terms of "continuity" – not only in terms of a person's continuity through time, but also in terms of her or his continuity across individual boundaries.

According to this Confucian relational concept of the human, relationships are not formed by ready-given autonomous individuals, but rather the other way around – particular people are constituted, shaped and understood only in and through relationships. In the *Lunyu* we can find support for the idea that when Kongzi wants to understand a particular person, the direction of his look is aimed at this person's relations: "The Master said: Watch their actions, observe their motives, examine wherein they dwell content; won't you know what kind of person they are?"[53] (LY 2.10) Even the process of self-understanding, according to the *Lunyu*, requires not so much an examination of one's inner motives or emotional constitution, but more the observation of how one is interacting in one's relationships:

> Master Zeng said: "Daily I examine my person on three counts. In my undertakings on behalf other people, have I failed to do my utmost (*zhōng* 忠)? In my interactions with colleagues and friends, have I failed to make good on my word (*xìn* 信)? In what has been passed on to me, have I failed to carry it into practice?[54] (LY 1.4)

As the Confucian role ethics interpretation centers on the notion of "role", we have to take a closer look at the meaning of this notion. One of the possible

[53]子曰：「視其所以，觀其所由，察其所安。人焉廋哉？」(*CTP*)
[54]曾子曰：「吾日三省吾身：為人謀而不忠乎？與朋友交而不信乎？傳不習乎？」(*CTP*)

criticisms for Confucian role ethics interpretation could be making case that there is not one single equivalent in classical Chinese of the notion of "role" as it is used by Ames and Rosemont. After all, in contemporary Chinese language philosophical literature the "role" of Confucian role ethics interpretation is translated (*not* by Ames and Rosemont themselves, but by their Chinese translators) not with some early Confucian term, but with neologism *juésè* 角色 (this is the Chinese term that Wen 2012 compares with an English "role" in Confucian role ethics). It is unlikely that it is a good choice, because it translates "role" as a more ordinary English notion, than the specific concept used by Ames and Rosemont in Confucian role ethics interpretation. Thus, what early Confucian term does the term "role" refer to, as it is understood in Confucian role ethics interpretation? Ames suggests the term *lún* 倫 and provides insightful etymological and semantic analysis of the term and its cognates (Ames 2011, 97). Let us examine how Ames and Rosemont are using the notion of "role", and if we can find support for their reading in the early Confucian texts.

There are several important characteristics of the notion of "role" (*lún* 倫) as used by Ames and Rosemont. Firstly, as it was pointed out, in Ames's and Rosemont's usage, "roles" are generalized archetypical relations, social traits that in Confucian role ethics become a source of normativity and a basis for ethical evaluation. Different attitude, behavior, and style of performance are required from that same person depending on his or here lived role (*lún* 倫)[55]. As every person simultaneously lives numerous roles (*lún* 倫) in relation to different people and under the different circumstances, it requires a developed ethical "ear"[56] in order to sense a complex situation and to timely (*shí* 時) actualize (*chéng* 誠) an appropriate (*yì* 義) set of the role-informed attitudes and actions (*lún* 倫) that enable the consummate correlation (*rén* 仁). Thus

[55] Similarly, Nuyen (2009) and Chan (1993) argue that in early Confucian thought moral obligations, duties, and virtues come with and are derived from social positions or roles.

[56] When Kongzi describes his lifelong personal development, he points out as one of the ultimate achievements the fact that from sixty his "ear was attuned" (六十而耳順; LY 2.4).

Mengzi indicates that when one sees one's sister-in-law drowning, one should not cling to the prohibition for men and women not to touch each other if they are not husband and wife, but to rush to help the fellow human in need (*Mengzi* 4A17). Mengzi also speculated approvingly that the legendary king Shun would have had abandoned his position as a state's leader and submerged into his role as a son to take his delinquent father onto his shoulders and carried him away from inevitable apprehension (*Mengzi* 7A35).

Early Confucians do not seem to endow the notions that Confucian virtue ethics interpretation reads as aretaic terms with primary and absolute value so that the feeling and actions stemming from that "virtue" could be evaluated as "good" under any circumstances. In *Lunyu* 8.2 we find an illustration of the idea that even such praiseworthy qualities as "courage" or "candour" in actuality play out as reprehensible qualities of "rowdiness" and "rudeness" respectively, if a proper communal set-up (*lǐ* 禮) that gives sense to the whole situation is not in place. Thus, if Shun's actions in the above mentioned hypothetical incident with his father are praised, the same Shun would probably be denounced for the same set of actions and attitudes, if the person whom he has carried away from the reach of the justice would have been his friend instead of father, because with one's friends one has to be "critical and demanding"[57] (see LY 13.28). Similarly, when asked why exemplary persons (*jūnzǐ* 君子) do not take over the education of their sons, Mengzi has pointed out that the role of an educator might require such attitudes and actions that if these would come from the parent they could be hurtful to son and would end up in conflict between father and son (see *Mengzi* 4A18).

The full appreciation of the role (*lún* 倫) as a source and criteria of normativity changes the perspective on how persons and their actions are evaluated in different circumstances. In this view person does not stand apart of her natural and human environment, therefore the object of moral evaluation changes with the changing circumstances (note that the change here is always a

[57]朋友切切、偲偲 (*CTP*)

continuous process, never radical or establishing an entirely new entity). This can be illustrated with the translation and interpretation of a well-known passage from *Lunyu*:

> The Master said: "While a person's father is still alive, observe what he intends; when his father dies, observe what he does. A person who for three years refrains from reforming the ways (*dào* 道) of his late father can be called a filial son (*xiào* 孝)"[58] (LY 1.11)

As Ames and Rosemont (1998, 280) indicate, many readings of this passage have implied that Kongzi's objectives here are to maintain the *status quo*, the old ways of the antiquity and the elders. Other passages in *Lunyu* contradict a view of Kongzi as a rigid supporter of the *status quo*[59], thus a more careful reading of the cited passage has to be sought. One has to take into account that although Kongzi refers to numerically that same person under different circumstances, but nevertheless the person is not qualitatively the same. While person's father is still alive, that person is a beneficiary of the parent-child relation (*lún* 倫) and has to respond to the parent's – the benefactor's – initiatives. Kongzi seems to assume that in this situation father's actions are obvious for the son, however in order to adequately assess how well father lives out his role, Kongzi advises for the son to seek out the less obvious; that is, Kongzi suggests to fathom his father's intentions (*zhì* 志). But once the father is dead, the role of the person has to change. Most probably the son has to take over his father's responsibilities and stand in the role of the father, the benefactor engaging with one's own beneficiaries. Now Kongzi seems to assume that the "fatherly" intentions stemming from this new position in the father role (*lún* 倫) are obvious for that person. What might be less obvious for someone being in a new position is how to realize these intentions in a daily live. Kongzi advises to see (to recall) what were the deeds (*xíng* 行) of one's father, thus learning how to live out one's "fatherly" intentions. In such reading

[58] 子曰：「父在，觀其志；父沒，觀其行；三年無改於父之道，可謂孝矣。」(*CTP*)
[59] See LY 2.11, 9.3, 11.4, 17.21.

Kongzi's suggestion to refrain from changing the ways of one's late father for three years appears to be a caution not to act from a mere name of a role, not to perform it as some additional part to one's personality, but to first turn it into an integral part of one's personality. Once the role of the father becomes a lived experience, it might turn out to be lived in somehow reformed ways.

The second important characteristic of the "role" (*lún* 倫) in Confucian role ethics interpretation is the radically particular nature of the *lún* 倫 role. Although roles are terms generalized from concrete relationships, the proponents of Confucian role ethics maintain that roles are still more concrete and meaningful and in this sense different from universal and abstract principles of deontologists and utilitarians, and from universal and abstract *aretai* in virtue ethics. Strictly speaking, there is no universal way of being a good friend or a good student; therefore "roles" in Confucian role ethics are always specific – not "*a* father", but "*this* father", "*her* father". This explains why Kongzi sometimes gives different answers to different students, although the question that students raised was the same (see LY 11.22). The generalized notion of a role gives us a rough model, an approximate direction for the course of interaction, but practical fulfillment of it is always personal and unique.

We have already pointed out that both notions of "relation" and "role" are united in Confucian concept of *lún* 倫. The third important characteristic of "role" (*lún* 倫) in early Confucian context is that role is always dyadic, so it is always a function of correlation. *Lún* 倫 is both the concrete *relation* between two humans and the *role* that structures and facilitates that relation. In this sense, "role" as used in Confucian role ethics interpretation is very different from how this term is used in contemporary social theories. Chan (1993, 27) also notes that the Confucian notion of "roles" does not focus on the occupational or social roles, but it is based on the concrete and intimate human relationships. This is an important point, because it once more reiterates the early Confucian thesis of the fundamentally correlative nature of a human

among all other phenomena in the world. On the other hand it makes ethical matters truly dialogical. As Rosemont points out, according to the early Confucian vision of a human, "I do not achieve my own identity, am not solely responsible for becoming who I am" (Rosemont 1991a, 73). In a dyadic relationship, a person can not define one's role in solitude, as it needs confirmation from the other member of the dyadic role relationship. I can call myself "teacher", but if there is no one who follows my instructions without coercion, I am not *living* the role of a teacher, but merely playing it. Thus implementation of one's role and, respectively, becoming human in this early Confucian vision requires a good deal of interpersonal negotiation. In Rosemont's words, "personhood, identity, in this sense, is basically conferred on us, just as we basically contribute to conferring it on others" (ibid).

As we have seen from the above discussion, Ames and Rosemont present their interpretation of early Confucians as an alternative to the Confucian virtue ethics, and in their recent article they answer negatively to the question "were early Confucian virtuous?" I was arguing before that this is a rhetorical choice of Ames and Rosemont, and I would like to expand a little bit on this point. So do Ames and Rosemont intend to negate human character or character traits? I don't think so, and I don't think that the notion of the human as the totality of one's lived roles and relations requires such negation. It does not seem that in the Confucian role ethics interpretation, the notions of a human's character – or virtue that we ascribe to a particular person – have to be abandoned. If seen as always a provisional generalization, these notions can be useful for some particular purposes. What Confucian role ethics interpretation goes against, is considering a character or a virtue as the most fundamental part of ethical thinking and the source of normativity, because in their view virtue is only secondary. Virtue is an outcome of flourishing relations, and it is recognizable only in relations. Thus for early Confucians, to cultivate oneself doesn't mean to work exclusively with one's individual self and one's dispositions. As *Lunyu* says, "authoritative persons establish others

in seeking to establish themselves and promote others in seeking to get there themselves"[60] (LY 6.30).

In other words, virtue – or character more generally – is not present before some kind of relation takes place. If I can reasonably describe another person as lacking in wisdom, courage, or friendliness, according to role ethics view of a person, I am at the same time bound to admit that I, very likely, also lack wisdom to educate; I, too, lack strength to encourage; I, too, lack goodwill to befriend. As Ames puts it: "The teacher and the student become consummate teacher and student together, or not at all" (Ames 2011, 180). We find similar expression in *Lunyu*: "The exemplary person (*jūnzǐ* 君子) helps to bring out the best in others, but does not help to bring out the worst. The petty person does just the opposite"[61] (LY 12.16).

When we look at early Confucian texts, we see much of the content of the notion of "role" in Confucian role ethics interpretation present in the early Confucian term *lún* 倫. Most importantly, it seems that *lún* 倫 for early Confucians was a crucial notion in discussions on what is a human. The discussions on what makes human a human were known in early China as "human-beast controversy" (*rén shòu zhī biàn* 人獸之辯). In these discussions humans where characterized in opposition to beasts; and *lún* 倫 appears to be one of the main characteristic that constitutes the fundamental difference between human and non-human. For example in the *Mengzi* we read:

> What distinguishes people from the brutes is ever so slight, and where the common run of people are apt to lose this quality, exemplary persons dwell on it and preserve it. Shun was wise to the way of all things and had real insight into human roles and relationships. He acted upon his moral habits to be consummatory and appropriate in his conduct rather than

[60] 夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲達而達人。(*CTP*)
[61] 子曰：「君子成人之美，不成人之惡。小人反是。」(*CTP*)

> merely doing what is deemed consummatory and appropriate[62] (*Mengzi* 4B19, quoted from Ames 2011, 146; also see 3B9.9).

And just like in Ames's and Rosemont's understanding of "role", *lún* 倫 and specific expressions of it in early Confucian writings serve as a normative source that provides guidelines, according to which one can structure one's correlations. Thus both education and self-cultivation are concurrent with social roles. The *Mengzi* thus explains what the legendary ruler Shun was doing, in order not to let people become beast-like:

> The sage King [Shun 舜] … appointed Xie [契] as the Minister of Education whose duty was to teach the people human relationships: love [*qīn* 親] between father and son, duty [*yì* 義] between ruler and subject, distinction [*bié* 別] between husband and wife, precedence [*xù* 序] of the old over the young, and faith [*xìn* 信] between friends[63] (*Mengzi* 3A4).

To sum up, we have argued that at the centre of Confucian role ethics interpretation there is a specific notion of the human that is fundamentally relational. The human in this view is constituted, shaped, and recognized only through his or her interrelations with others as the totality of one's lived roles and relations. On the one hand, this vision of the human requires one to see human identity, qualities, and actions in early Confucian ethics not as solitarily constructed, but as shared in common participation. By formulating this relational notion of human, constituted by the roles and relations, as the centre of early Confucian ethics, proponents of Confucian role ethics interpretation not only maintain the emphasis on the practical orientation of early Confucians, but also consistently stress the relational nature of early Confucian ethics, and the centrality of family relations.

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[62] 人之所以異於禽於獸者幾希，庶民去之，君子存之。舜明於庶物，察於人倫，由仁義行，非行仁義也。(*CTP*)

[63] 舜...使契為司徒，教以人倫：父子有親，君臣有義，夫婦有別，長幼有序，朋友有信。(*CTP*)

CONCLUSIONS

In the current philosophical controversy on the nature of early Confucian ethics, proponents of Confucian role ethics interpretation provide a credible alternative to the now most prevalent Confucian virtue ethics interpretation. Confucian role ethics interpretation places the relational concept of a human as the totality of one's lived roles and relations, at the centre of their explication of early Confucian ethics, and thus successfully tackles both major pitfalls that weaken Confucian virtue ethics interpretation. This thesis is supported by the following conclusions from the presented research:

1. A major factor for the formation of Confucian virtue ethics interpretation was the establishment of Aristotelian virtue ethics in Western moral philosophy. This framework has allowed scholars to explain exclusively the practical orientation and the apparent disinterest in formulating abstract, universal principles in early Confucian ethics as a coherent and philosophically interesting position that in specific cases is relevant to the contemporary discussions in moral philosophy. Confucian virtue ethics is grounded on the argument that the early Confucian counterpart of the term "virtue" (*arête*) can be found in *dé* 德, and that the core ethical terminology in early Confucian ethical writings can be adequately rendered into aretaic notions.

2. This position raises two main problems that significantly weaken Confucian virtue ethics: from methodological side, the use of an Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian framework makes this interpretation vulnerable to the incommensurability challenge, to which no satisfactory response from Confucian virtue ethics was provided. The analysis of the content of this interpretation has revealed a second major problem: the marginalization of relational aspects of early Confucian ethics, which results from the reduction of core early Confucian ethical terminology into aretaic notions.

3. On the other hand, formulation of Confucian role ethics interpretation is triggered, in a large degree, by the asymmetry in the current comparative

philosophy that shows up in the prevailing tendency to take Western philosophical frameworks as the reference point in elucidating and evaluating non-Western thought systems. Confucian role ethics interpretation is grounded on the relational concept of a human reconstructed and developed by Confucian role ethics from early Confucian texts. Such a concept of the human renders the core ethical terminology of early Confucians in exclusively relational terms, which has induced new English translations for most of the core ethical concepts of early Confucians. At the same time, developing the concept of human as constituted by her roles and relations has helped Confucian role ethics interpretation to argue for the philosophical relevance of the *Xiaojing* (*The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence*), which was previously largely neglected by Western philosophical interpretations of early Confucian ethics.

4. On the methodological level Confucian role ethics does not employ a non-Chinese philosophical system, but argues that taking into account early Chinese correlative cosmology as the interpretative context could help to elucidate early Confucian ethics. Thus, the incommensurability problem is substantially softened in Confucian role ethics, because it is grounded in the relational concept of the human – as the totality of one's lived roles and relations – that is developed from the early Confucian ethical writings and not in any Western philosophical framework. The analysis of the content of Confucian role ethics has revealed that both the practical orientation and the relational aspects of early Confucian ethics are naturally integrated within the relational concept of human and the Confucian notion of role (*lún* 倫), on which the concept of human is based.

If the above analysis and conclusions are correct, this new and coming Confucian role ethics interpretation merits further research and development in order to fully reveal the importance (and the limitations) of the relationality and the familial or communal roles for early Confucian ethics. More importantly, the relational concept of a human suggested by the Confucian role ethics interpretation could also enhance the ongoing contemporary

philosophical discussions on the scope and nature of ethics and the notion of the human being.

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TLS – Thesaurus Linguae Sericae, <http://tls.uni-hd.de>.