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# A GENEALOGY OF EARLY CONFUCIAN MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

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The project is to traverse with quite novel questions, and as though with new eyes, the enormous, distant, and so well hidden land of morality—of morality that has actually existed, actually been lived.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Preface § 7 (Nietzsche 1989 [1887], p. 21)

## *Goals, Methods, Context*

This essay offers a contribution to the consilience of the humanities, social sciences, and life sciences in accord with naturalism (in a spirit closer to Slingerland 2008 than Wilson 1998). Human beings have a shared nature produced by evolutionary history and modified by culture, where ‘culture’ refers to “information capable of affecting individuals’ behavior that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission” (Richerson and Boyd 2005, p. 5). Naturalism makes two central commitments in ethics: to an empirical rather than an a priori method of inquiry, and to the blurring of various disciplinary boundaries within the academy (Flanagan et al. 2008, p. 5). Research in anthropology, psychology, evolutionary theory, cultural history, religion, literature, and philosophy affords opportunities to enhance our understanding of humanity if the threads of this research are woven together well. Within philosophical circles features of ‘experimental’ (Knobe and Nichols 2008) and ‘empirical’ (Prinz 2008) philosophy represent this new research program, of which this is a part.

This essay advocates a form of interdisciplinarity that appreciates the bidirectional influences between biology and culture. Biological norms constrain and condition behavior and cognition. Culture causally influences psychology and biology, too, even though some evolutionary scientists underappreciate this direction of fit. Despite this, examples of culture’s influence on psychology—and biology—are persuasive, as well-worn explanations of the origins of lactose absorption show (Simoons 1969, 1970).

Uncertainty about conclusions concerning the mechanisms and scope of the evolutionary and biological influences on culture will be with us for some time to come. Yet to adopt a skepticism about results from the empirical research program at this juncture, or to dismiss the value of naturalistic study of the Early Confucian culture of the mind, is insular and unphilosophical. As experimental philosophers have recently put the point, “many of the deepest questions of philosophy can only be

properly addressed by immersing oneself in the messy, contingent, highly variable truths about how human beings really are" (Knobe and Nichols 2008, p. 3).

Empirical and experimental philosophy embraces the utility and importance of multidirectional explanations by a genealogical method that aims to understand the content, origins, and transmission of aspects of moral psychology and philosophy through interdisciplinary research. Consider Jesse Prinz's remarks on the nature of genealogical explanations of moral norms:

[B]iologically based behaviors pertaining to kindness, fairness, and reciprocity are culturally malleable and insufficient to guide our behavior without cultural elaboration. I think culture makes two contributions. First, it converts these behaviors into moral norms, by grounding them in moral emotions. Second, it takes the biologically based norms that have highly stereotyped, and limited, behavioral effects in our primate cousins and alters them into culturally specific instructions for what we should do to whom. (Prinz 2008, p. 277)

This is consonant with the use of the term 'genealogy of morals' by Flanagan, Wong, and Sarkissian, which they gloss in methodological terms: a genealogy of morals "asks how moral sensibilities, moral values, moral norms, and so on, originate and how they develop" (Flanagan et al., 2008, p. 9). My goal here is to interpret the *Analects'* and the *Mencius'* discussions of moral psychology, considering research describing biological dispositions and cognitive behavioral systems that underlie psychology.

Something like this is already afoot in the Chinese philosophy community. Donald Munro and Bongrae Seok recently used a genealogical method in their work in the history of philosophy of Early Confucian texts. Munro (2002a, 2002b, 2005) interprets Early and Neo-Confucianism through a consideration of evolutionary psychology.<sup>1</sup> Seok (2008) interprets Mencius in light of research in cognitive science.<sup>2</sup> Their work raises a number of unaddressed methodological issues. Are Munro and Seok (i) *interpreting* the meaning of Early Confucian texts with research in the mind sciences, (ii) *explaining* why the texts have survived so long and been so widely followed, (iii) *justifying* the truthfulness of these texts' teachings about human nature, morality, or mind, or (iv) *using* Early Confucian texts to increase the justification for inductive generalizations in evolutionary psychology and cognitive science? One might read their work and remain uncertain which of these goals they primarily endorse, or come away with the conclusion that, in Munro's case, he endorses all of them. Yet to dismiss their research on account of a lack of precise statements of goals is unjustified for reasons that need not be addressed.

This essay aims to understand how the Early Confucianism represented in the *Analects* and the *Mencius* converted biological and evolutionary norms into social and moral norms. Focus is on the *relationships between* the texts and the evolutionary norms. If achieved, this goal illuminates the meanings of the texts in question, but the interdisciplinary method used does not restrict an account of the meaning of the texts to an account of the meanings of their individual sentences (or sentence-like units). The concern to reveal sentence-meanings through nothing other than detailed

linguistic, historiographic, or historical research is disciplinarily entrenched in the history of philosophy, Western or Eastern. To understand the meaning of the *Mencius*' discussion of the moral status of Shun's relation to his father, it helps to understand what the *Mencius* means by *xiao* 孝. Understanding the historiographic etymology of this term as found on oracle bones in the Shang and understanding changes to its meaning affected in Zhou documents are helpful steps. So is understanding something about Shun's relationship to his father, stepmother, and stepbrother, as well as other biographical details attributed to him.

Yet a complete understanding of the *Mencius* on Shun and filial piety also requires knowledge of the biocultural context of the text's contents. This includes an understanding of the evolutionary value of strong kin-relations, the origins of moral sentiments we have toward kin and non-kin, the natural and the cultural history of the transformation of these sentiments into moral commitments, an appreciation of the relationship between these evolutionary factors and their cultural instantiation in the *Mencius*, the role of patrilocality and patrilineality in the establishment of filial piety as the principal virtue, and more. For the reason that the genealogical method seeks to gain and apply knowledge of the biocultural context to problems in the history of philosophy, the genealogical method falls within the methodological boundaries of the history of philosophy. As such, an interdisciplinary genealogical method appears necessary (not sufficient) to acquire a complete interpretation of Early Confucian texts.

### *Fitness, Adaptive Social Instincts, and Origins of Moral Emotions*

A genealogical interpretation of Early Confucian morality considers teachings about emotions especially important. 'Emotions' refers to complex, adaptive event systems that include appraisals, physiological processes, action tendencies, subjective feelings and response behaviors (Clark 1992, pp. 84 ff.). Human emotions originated in social instincts, as Darwin recognized.<sup>3</sup> Social instincts are adaptations. 'Adaptation' refers to a trait selected for in ancestral populations because its possession increased fitness. Darwin illustrates the concepts of *adaptation* and *fitness* when writing about speciation and finch beak morphologies on the Galapagos. Darwin observed finches with a variety of beaks, each useful in the occupation of a small niche in the islands' ecologies (Darwin 1903 [1845], p. 456). When one's genes yield behavior that benefits one's genetic kin, say by passing on to one's offspring a thicker beak than is possessed by competitors, those genes are coding for behavior that increases the probability that copies of the gene will make it into subsequent generations. A thicker beak opens nuts a thinner beak cannot.

This is fitness, but it comes in two forms, reproductive and inclusive. An organism O is *reproductively fit* with respect to competitors C in an environment E if and only if O is more likely to leave greater numbers of offspring in E than is C. Emotions are adaptations because their possession in humans increased fitness. An organism promotes *inclusive fitness* not by reproduction but by performing behaviors that increase the reproductive fitness of its genetic kin. An aunt feels affection for her nieces and

nephews and so distributes her resources for the benefit of the bodily health of her brother's children. This increases her inclusive fitness since the genes of these children contain copies of her genes. Evolutionary hypotheses suggest patterns of emotional experience and behavior that contain partiality to kin in proportion to the degree of genetic relatedness ( $r$ -value) between the actor and the recipient of the action. So, to say that social instincts and the emotions to which they gave rise are *adaptations* is to say that possession of these capacities has in the past typically increased reproductive or inclusive fitness.

Emotions yield increases in reproductive and inclusive fitness in countless ways within four general domains: group living, survival and somatic interests, sex and mating, and parenting and kinship (see Lazarus 1991, pp. 51 ff., for the evolutionary origins of emotions in sensorimotor reflexes and physiological drives; see Plutchik 1980, pp. 74 ff., on the anticipatory function of emotions). Experiences of the primary emotions increase animals' rates of survival (and so of fitness) because they provide what Joseph LeDoux refers to as "quick and dirty" representations (LeDoux 1996, pp. 163 ff.). For example, fear is an embodied appraisal that represents a particular temporal and causal relationship—a threatening one—between the environment and the agent (Prinz 2004). Fear and the primary emotions are adaptive in countless other contexts due to their complexity, plasticity, and signaling efficiency.

Human culture uses the adaptive, fitness-enhancing effects of emotions. Dan Sperber has shown that stories passed down in oral traditions better preserve emotional content than they do other content (Sperber 1996, pp. 74–75). Shaun Nichols argues for an 'Affective Resonance' hypothesis according to which "Normative prohibitions against action X will be more likely to survive if action X elicits (or is easily led to elicit) negative affect" (Nichols 2004, p. 129). His historical studies on norms of etiquette and manners confirm that those norms most likely to survive strongly correlate with affective experience. This hypothesis draws together biological norms, emotions, and culture by explaining ways in which customs and rituals—think of *li* 禮—are retained by virtue of their correlation with affective experience.

In ancestral human populations, emotional experience focuses on familial (*ipso facto* familiar) relations, and in terms of evolutionary psychology the degree of genetic relatedness has high predictive value. Consider a historic study of ground squirrels' warning calls. Sighting a bird of prey causes a startle response and fear ('proto-fear' for the pedants) in ground squirrels. A warning call alerts other squirrels within earshot to the proximity of a predator but the warning call endangers the caller by signaling its location to the predator. Giving a warning call appears to be fitness sacrificing since it benefits others' survival while lowering the probability that the caller will reproduce. This appeared perplexing until Robert Trivers explained that the frequency of warning calls in proximity to the caller's own kin is considerably higher than the frequency of warning calls in proximity to non-kin (Trivers 1985, p. 110). Once danger is observed and fear experienced the animal can evade the predator without endangering itself by fleeing silently, without any call. When in proximity to kin the animal's interest is in issuing warning calls since doing so in-

creases its inclusive fitness. Natural selection has selected the capacity to experience emotions that promote inclusive fitness.

Laws expressing patterns of adaptive behavior that exhibit helping possess special importance in the context of a genealogical interpretation of moral teachings. *Helping behavior* refers to behavior that benefits another individual, and is contrasted with harming behavior. Helping behavior is neither necessarily fitness sacrificing nor necessarily altruistic. *Fitness sacrificing behavior* refers to behavior that advances another individual's reproductive fitness *at the expense of one's own reproductive fitness*. *Altruism* refers to action with the *intention of benefiting* another individual. This set of distinctions borrowed from Richard Joyce (2006, pp. 13–14) clarifies misnomers about altruism. Commonly definitions of altruism range over all three features mentioned here (as in Munro 2005). Such a construal yields a misconception about the evolutionary explanation of what is commonly described as 'altruism,' namely that altruistic behavior is fitness sacrificing and is therefore difficult to reconcile with evolutionary generalizations.

Biologists appeal to two explanations to account for helping behavior and altruistic behavior: inclusive fitness and reciprocal altruism. We've discussed inclusive fitness above. *Reciprocal altruism* describes the behavior of A to B that appears to be fitness sacrificing but that results in helping behavior on the part of B to the advantage of A. According to Frans de Waal reciprocal altruism is a term that describes social exchanges (i) that are costly to the performer but beneficial to the recipient, (ii) on which there is a time lag between giving and receiving, and (iii) on which giving is contingent on receiving (De Waal 1996, p. 24). The two parties needn't be genetically related—or even of the same species. (Sober and Wilson [1999] propose that group selection also accounts for forms of altruism like human ultra-sociality.)

This section described in brief, simple terms the genealogical origin of moral emotions in social instincts, and suggested that these instincts and the emotions to which they gave rise are adaptations. Emotions are adaptations because their possession increases reproductive and inclusive fitness and is a *sine qua non* of reciprocal altruism in social groups. The next section reveals that *Analects* and *Mencius* implicitly appeal to the naturalness of emotions in their efforts to ground their moral psychologies.

### *The Centrality of Emotion in the Analects and the Mencius*

The *Analects* and the *Mencius* give a prominent place to emotions in moral psychology and self-cultivation in ways consistent with the naturalistic, evolutionary perspective just described. In this respect these texts anticipate many hallmarks of contemporary work on emotions (see Haidt 2001).

In the only comment about human nature in the *Analects*, the character 'Confucius' is reported to have said, "By nature (*xing* 性) people are similar; they diverge as the result of practice (*xi* 習)" (17.2). (Note Brooks and Brooks date *Analects* 17 to c. 270 [1998, p. 171].) Practice takes shape as social learning and conditioning through

ritual. Great individuals do not possess special innate capacities that others lack (though see 11.4, 16.9, and 17.3). Confucius' moral psychology drives his moral philosophy because virtuous, benevolent behavior arises from the self-cultivation of moral emotions associated with filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and respect for elders (*ti* 梯). Study of the origins of moral virtues in the *Analects* begins with an understanding of 1.2: "Master You said, 'A young person who is filial and respectful of his elders rarely becomes the kind of person who is inclined to defy his superiors. . . . The gentleman applies himself to the roots. Once the roots are firmly established, the Way will grow.' Might we not say that filial piety and respect for elders constitute the root of Goodness?" (1.2 and Slingerland 2003, p. 1; see *Mencius* 4A11).

One must possess the proper cognitive *and* affective states in order to exemplify the virtues of filial piety and respect. Early Confucian thinkers do not clearly distinguish between faculties of reason and emotion. Roger Ames and David Hall have labored to show that the correlate of 'mind' is typically *xin* 心, which "refers indifferently to activities we would classify as thinking, judging, and feeling, and arguably reflects all three modalities of the [Platonic] tripartite model in an undissected form" (1998, p. 29). Whether or not their claim receives full justification from pre-Qin texts, at least the differentiation between emotive and cognitive faculties is much less clear in Early Confucian texts than in corresponding texts in the Early Western tradition. Among the rich implications of Ames and Hall's account of the Early Confucian conception of mind, the most important here is that emotions of 'heart-minds' are both cognitive and affective.

We have independent textual evidence that this is so. Consider reverence (*jing* 敬). Reverence is regarded as the emotional source of the virtue of filial piety. *Analects* 2.6 contains the most famous use of the term. Confucius berates those who think that filial piety merely refers to behavior: "Ziyou asked about being filial. The Master said, 'Nowadays for a man to be filial means no more than that he is able to provide his parents with food. Even hounds and horses are, in some way, provided with food. If a man shows no reverence, where is the difference?'" (2.6; Lau 1992, p. 13). The source of the virtue of filial piety is a reverential state of the heart-mind that has emotional and cognitive content. It is not enough to act virtuous; the gentleman (*junzi* 君子) must also cherish (*huai* 懷) virtue. Confucius' insistence that we cultivate our emotions in the effort to be virtuous informs his teachings on disparate issues including developing emotional sincerity when relating with family members (1.2), when playing and listening to music (3.23), when performing rituals (3.3), when governing the people (4.13), et cetera. Concerning the Confucian *dao* 道, *Analects* 6.20 reads: "To be fond of it is better than merely to know it, and to find joy in it is better than merely to be fond of it" (6.20; Lau 1992, p. 51).

*Mencius* expands considerably on the *Analects'* discussion of moral emotions, their sources, and their effects. First, *Mencius* describes the natural origins of moral emotions in his renowned discussion of 'sprouts' (*duan* 端), a metaphor borrowed from *Analects* 1.2. *Mencius* regards the possession of pro-social emotions as so important that it becomes definitive of membership in our species. *Without* feelings of compassion one is "not human," but *with* feelings of compassion one can become

virtuous: “The feeling of compassion is the sprout of benevolence. The feeling of disdain is the sprout of righteousness. The feeling of deference is the sprout of propriety. The feeling of approval and disapproval is the sprout of wisdom” (2A6; Van Norden 2008, p. 46; see Lau 1970, p. 73). These feelings (*xin* 心) are the sprouts of correspondent virtues.

The metaphor—one of Mencius’ favorites (see Allan 1997)—strikes readers due to its naturalistic character. The ‘sprout’ metaphor tethers the psychology of human morality *simultaneously to nature and to culture*—specifically agriculture, presumably the most important form of culture in our species’ brief history. Knowledge of agricultural practices is not innate. It requires social transmission and learning. Mencius offers his readers no divine spark familiar from Socrates, no soul or *sensus divinitatus* from Christianity, and no transcendental understanding for the intuition of moral truths. Moral virtues are grown from natural emotions and tended by family (see below).

Mencius’ responses to others’ objections to Confucius compose the second set of sources of the *Mencius*’ discussion of the origins of emotions. Due to competition for influence in the attention space of the sixth through fourth centuries B.C.E., Mencius needed to respond to attacks on Confucianism by rival philosophers, including Mozi 墨子. Mencius says that Mozi’s attempts to fix right action in terms of benefits (*li* 利) to others fail to motivate us. As well as being a theoretical disagreement, the conflict between Mencius and Mozi arises over practical issues like burial rituals (3A5; see Shun 1991). Mozi advocates simple, inexpensive burial rituals for a parent, but Mencius disagrees (as does Confucius before him, at *Analects* 17.21; see Liu 2003 and 2006, and Zhu 2002). Instead of Mozi’s universal love (*jianai* 兼愛), Mencius describes a partial love for kin. This partial love takes the form of ‘intimate concern’ for one’s parents (*qinqin* 親親), which is a manifestation of benevolence (*ren* 仁) (6B3 and 7A15). This emotion leads to deep mourning for parents, which is appropriate and filial (3A2), and which yields naturally to the practice of rites (*li* 禮). Mencius begins the debate by identifying a special emotion felt toward close genetic kin, in this case one’s parents, and explains the psychological transformation of that sentiment into other emotions and ritual behavior. This line of reasoning culminates in Mencius’ repudiation of Mozi’s moral judgment about the wrongness (due to extravagance) of Confucian burial practices (3A5).

Mencius’ commitment to the genealogical origin of moral emotions in our human natures clashes with the theory of another interlocutor, Gaozi 告子. As represented in the *Mencius*, Gaozi says that, at the least, righteousness (*yi* 義) is external to human nature and formed through socialization. Three points of contrast with Gaozi illuminate the genealogical interpretation of the *Mencius* on offer. First, rather than describing efforts at achieving one’s destiny (*ming* 命) through the overcoming of one’s biological nature, one achieves one’s destiny through the fulfillment of one’s biological nature (*Mencius* 7B24). Second, Mencius uses botanical and agricultural metaphors to illustrate self-cultivation and self-formation. Gaozi describes human nature in woodworking metaphors to insist that it must be fabricated via work on raw ingredients, like bowls being hollowed out of willow wood. In contrast Mencius says

one needn't do violence to human natures to make people virtuous. The present point allows readers to appreciate the dialectical significance of Mencius' use of the term 'sprouts' (*duan* 端) to refer to moral inclinations produced by one's nature and tended by one's family. Agriculture metaphorically represents the process needed for the cultivation of self (see 2A6, 6A8, 6A9, and 2A2). The case of the Farmer of Song 宋 (2A2) shows that parental effort in fostering proper moral emotions in children mustn't overpower the natural development of human nature. Since moral emotions develop normally and naturally, parents need only provide for their nurturance.<sup>4</sup>

Third, Mencius recognizes that our biology produces shared moral and psychological capacities that don't change significantly from culture to culture. We can call this 'human nature.' He says: "As far as what is genuinely in him is concerned, a man is capable of becoming good. That is what I mean by good. The heart of compassion is possessed by all men alike; likewise the heart of shame, the heart of respect, and the heart of right and wrong" (6A6; Lau 1970, p. 247). The *content* of that shared nature includes capacities for moral emotions like compassion, shame, and respect (Bloom 1997, p. 24; Munro 2005, p. 55; see also Bloom 1994 and Ivanhoe 2000). From the vantage point of a naturalistic interpretation attentive to the genealogy of morals in Early Confucianism, Irene Bloom's remarks take on new interest. She says Mencius' account of human nature

is fundamentally biological—biological in the sense that it does not trivialize the physical body or biological needs but is attentive, as biological thought has characteristically been, to the interdependence among the parts of an individual, the internal organization within the individual, the natural phenomenon of growth, development, and maturation, and the physical and social circumstances necessary for and conducive to such development. (Bloom 1997, p. 24)

This point captures the way the texts we have examined in this section support a genealogical interpretation of the *Analects* and the *Mencius*.

This section has showed the centrality of emotions in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, described these texts' development of emotions as features of our human natures, and suggested ways in which authors of these texts tied the cultivation of emotions with moral practice. The next section applies these lessons to what these texts say about emotions for kin.

### *Moral Emotions for Kin*

Central to a genealogy of moral emotions are our emotions for kin. Richard Joyce asks, "If human reproductive fitness was enhanced by a proclivity for helping family members (the degree of help being roughly proportional to the degree of relatedness), what might the process of natural selection have done to our brains in order to accomplish this?" (Joyce 2006, p. 47). The answer: natural selection would have selected for the development of modules that produce emotions like love for kin. According to inductive generalizations from evolutionary psychology, we expect to feel more for and behave more generously toward our close rather than our distant kin.

This provides important groundwork for Liu Qingping's fascinating, persuasive series of papers arguing that filial piety is the preeminent virtue of Early Confucianism.

Early Confucian obligations to kin are sustained through the development of a suite of kin-directed emotions including parent-love, reverence, and respect. This is Confucius' meaning when he says that filial piety and respect for elders are the two roots of goodness (*Analects* 1.2). Filial piety is a dominant virtue in the tradition, and its ramifications extend from the cultural shaping of emotional experience to infanticide and population dynamics in historical China (Ebrey 2006, pp. 370 ff.). The *Analects* and the *Mencius* offer countless examples of filial piety in practice including Confucius' discussion with Zai Wo about the proper mourning period for one's father (17.21) and Mencius' discussion of Zeng Zi's filiality in feeding and deceiving his father (4A19). Unifying both cases, sons give valuable resources to or make extensive sacrifices for very close kin out of special feelings for them (a point captured well by Antonio Cua [1984, p. 228]).

Confucian advocacy of filial piety seems to conform to a law-like generalization about inclusive fitness: risk-taking behavior and resource allocation are proportional to genetic relatedness. In the *Analects*' familiar case of the Duke of She, a son conceals the theft of his father (13.18; Lau 1992, p. 127). If a son violates standards of impartiality to preserve the public innocence of the father, the son preserves his father's opportunities for a satisfying future and safeguards the son's own position in his father's eyes. In the patrilineal Confucian tradition the son's receipt of resources given him by his father will eventually set the son's own social standing and by extension his reproductive opportunities. Concealment of the *son's* crimes by the *father* is also explicitly recommended in 13.18, making this form of *yi* 義 transitive. When fathers disregard standards of impartiality they successfully preserve the public perception of the son's innocence and avoid his public shame. When a father conceals crimes of his son, the father increases his son's opportunities to give the father more grandchildren. Objective, impartial justice comes a distant second to the father's interest in seeing his line not only preserved but preserved with social standing. The diminished importance of impartial morality covaries with the influence of kin-directed emotions in a moral psychology founded on adaptive, fitness-enhancing processes.

(This does not imply that sourcing filial piety in fitness-enhancing emotions for kin, as is being done here, is sufficient to explain its large influence in the Confucian tradition. Indeed, inclusive fitness predicts an asymmetric resource exchange from father to son and son to father that will lead to parent-offspring conflict. From a gene's-eye point of view, sons' fitness interests in caring for their fathers are significantly less important than sons' fitness interests in caring for their own offspring. Toppling this evolutionary asymmetry and emphasizing the duties of children to fathers is the best explanation for Confucianism affording filial piety status as the highest virtue. This complex, fascinating story of cultural evolution represents Confucianism's signal success, one analyzed in a companion paper.)

The theme of concealing the wrongdoing of kinsfolk through acts of extreme partiality appears in Mencius' discussion of Shun. Shun, who eventually became

emperor, was filial and had *ren*. Yet his family attempted to murder him twice. A disciple asks Mencius what Shun ought to do with Shun's father Gusuo if his father were to commit murder within his kingdom. Mencius answers, "Shun looked upon casting aside the Empire as no more than discarding a worn shoe. He would have secretly carried the old man on his back and fled to the edge of the Sea and lived there happily, never giving a thought to the Empire" (7A35; Lau 1970, p. 303). The disciple also asks Mencius what Shun ought to do with his brother Xiang, who attempted to murder him and continued to run amok when Shun was emperor. Rather than punish Xiang, Shun ought to appoint him to a minor fiefdom in the kingdom. Mencius says:

A benevolent [*ren* 仁] man never harbors anger or nurses a grudge against a brother. All he does is to love [*ai* 愛] him. Because he loves him, he wishes him to enjoy rank; because he loves him, he wishes him to enjoy wealth. To enfeoff him [Xiang] in Yu Pi was to let him enjoy wealth and rank. If as Emperor he were to allow his brother to be a nobody, could that be described as loving him? (5A3; Lau 1970, pp. 140–141)

Since Shun is *ren*, Shun would express his familial love for his brother Xiang by refraining from punishing him and giving Xiang his own fiefdom. Mencius justifies his praise of Shun as being a model of 'great filiality' in contrast to sages Yu and Yao because Shun served his parents better than they did (see *Mencius* 3A4 and Lau 1970, pp. 111–121; 3B9 and Lau 1970, pp. 138–145; and 4A28 and Lau 1970, pp. 168–171).

In Confucius' case of the Duke of She and in Mencius' case of Emperor Shun the emotional force of high genetic relatedness swamps any concern with impartiality. This appears to be accurate as a description of human behavior. Evolutionary anthropologists have performed meta-analyses on field studies to address questions about moral behavior toward kin and non-kin. The results indicate a lopsided preference for helping kin in all number of circumstances (Essock-Vitale and McGuire 1980). Even in cases in which one's empathic attachment to non-kin friends is substantially greater than to kin, one typically engages in costlier helping behavior for kin. Kinship thus trumps other psychological predictors of helping behavior (Kruger 2003, p. 122).

*Mencius* portrays the emotional bonds between immediate family members as leading to a widening circle of moral emotions. "There are no young children who do not naturally love their parents, and when they grow up will not respect their elder brothers. Loving one's parents is benevolence; respecting one's elders is rightness. What is left to be done is simply the extension (*tui* 推) of these to the whole Empire" (7A15 and Lau 1970, p. 148; see also 7A45 and Lau 1970, p. 156). Mencius draws each circle as having an apt *feeling* and an apt *object*. In the first circle of care one loves one's family; in the second one feels humanity or benevolence for human beings; in the last one feels kindness to all living creatures.

Evolutionary biologists and psychologists also endorse inductive generalizations about the role of the emotions felt toward family in one's emotional network. De Waal states his conclusions about emotion and altruism by using a metaphor that resembles these passages from the *Mencius*: "The circle of altruism and moral obliga-

tion widens to extended family, clan, and group, up to and including tribe and nation. Benevolence decreases with increasing distance between people" (De Waal 1996, p. 212). This surprising similarity is explicable on the basis of their shared presuppositions about the naturalness—and, De Wall would add, the evolutionary history—of the emotions.

Having developed a brief account of the utility of emotions for kin in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, we now turn to their account of emotions for non-kin.

### *Moral Emotions for Non-kin: Empathy and Reciprocal Altruism*

Evolutionary biologists, anthropologists, primatologists, and others suggest that as the size of ancestral primate groups increased, norms arose that increased empathy directed toward non-kin group members. The cognitive-behavioral modules selected for in the human mind allowed ancestors to modulate and govern interests borne of reproductive and inclusive fitness in a way that generated helping behavior to non-kin. In effect this describes results of evolutionary psychology's study of the Mencian concept of *tui* 推, the extension of favorable emotions from kin to non-kin. This extension is accomplished through emphasis on reciprocal altruism and bargaining strategies like 'tit-for-tat.' But emotions for and helping behaviors toward non-kin only cause increases in one's fitness if they enhance reciprocally altruistic behavior or group-selected behavior. Emotions leading to these behaviors are selected for and are the sorts of emotions developed in a moral psychology in tune with our actual human nature. Such a moral psychology will contain important discussion about the modules to signal and receive emotions suited for social stability, praise, and punishment. We find just such features in Early Confucian moral psychology. (Discussion of shame is left for another occasion.)

Martin Hoffman says that empathy is "the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible" (2000, p. 3). If I feel empathy for a fellow tribe member in need, I am made more likely to engage in helping and altruistic behavior toward the person. This behavior is premised on the fact that the person with whom I share valuable meat is made more likely to engage in reciprocal helping behavior. Individual interests are pitted against the interests of others. Capacities for empathy were selected because they assisted in the negotiation of these competing interests. These drives give rise to their own behavioral norms, but culture takes these drives and modulates them by cultivating and managing these feelings for non-kin. Christopher Boehm writes:

[T]he research on the natural history and social behaviour of our non-human primate relatives illustrates how both our capacity and tendency to pursue our independent interests and our capacity and tendency to pursue shared interests are natural and important, at least from a biological point of view. . . . [A] moral system *emerged* out of the interaction of the two sets of interests. (Boehm 2000, p. 19)

Culturally sanctioned customs and rituals facilitate the emergence of this moral system. If social environments reward cooperative behavior or punish uncooperative behavior, selection may favor genetically transmitted social instincts that predispose

people to cooperate within large social groupings (Boyd and Richerson 2005, p. 215). Cooperative behavior reduces inter-group conflicts and victimization and promotes health and survival. Humans operationalize empathy and other positive emotions in behavior through rituals of food sharing, reciprocal exchange, gift giving, managing behavioral expectations, conflict resolution, protective intervention, and exogamous marriage. The main theoretical model for understanding the mechanisms at work in the development of a tendency to feel positive emotions for non-kin involves exchanges of empathy. (See Coplan and Goldie 2011 for the best interdisciplinary discussions of research on empathy.)<sup>5</sup>

Despite the high partiality for kin present in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, both encourage forms of empathy for non-kin. The character of Confucius says to Zeng that there is one thread binding together his teachings, about which Zeng says, “The way of the Master consists in doing one’s best (*zhong* 忠) and in using oneself as a measure to gauge the likes and dislikes of others (*shu* 恕). That is all” (*Analects* 4.15; Lau 1992, p. 33). Though *shu* is a pivotal term, the lack of unanimity in its translation is well documented (see Van Norden 2001, pp. 223 ff., and Ivanhoe 1990). Slingerland translates *shu* as “understanding” and glosses it this way: “the ability to, by means of imaginatively putting oneself in the place of another, know when it is appropriate or ‘right’ (*yi*) to bend or suspend the dictates of role-specific duty” (2003, pp. 34–35). To represent the self-other complex required in empathetic sharing in accord with *shu*, Rodney Taylor and Howard Choy translate the term as “reciprocity or empathy” (2005, pp. 526–527). Future naturalistic interpretations of Early Confucianism will focus on the meaning of *shu* and its operationalization in Confucian cultural history.

The emotion of empathy for non-kin is the building block of morality and it leads to many forms of reciprocal behavior. But it is constrained by one’s own reproductive, somatic, and inclusive fitness interests, since being too empathetic, especially to non-kin, can reduce fitness. This is why the call to be *shu* is explicitly conjoined with a simple, stable evolutionary strategy to balance the interests of self and other, which is called ‘tit-for-tat.’ Tit-for-tat originally modeled iterated prisoner’s dilemmas (Rapaport, in Axelrod 1981). Not coincidentally it is the most operationalized human moral principle across place and time (Skyrms 1996, p. 21). Tit-for-tat predicts an ethics of reciprocity since it recommends antagonistic behavior in response to antagonism and generous behavior in response to generosity: only if I am harmed do I cause harm, and only if I am given to do I give back.

Clearly the *Analects* and the *Mencius* stop short of formally codifying the tit-for-tat heuristic. Though inadequate, texts relevant to this model are suggestive and worth noting. Early Confucian texts bear a general resemblance to tit-for-tat and include veiled appeals to enlightened self-interest (in contrast to Mozi’s direct appeals to self-interest). These appeals are veiled in the sense that Confucius and Mencius frequently employ language strategically for purposes of social engineering, as Steven Geisz has elegantly shown (Geisz 2008). In Early Confucianism an analogue of tit-for-tat takes shape in the ‘passive’ or ‘negative’ Golden Rule found here: “Zigong asked, ‘Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct throughout one’s life?’

The Master said, 'It is perhaps the word *shu*. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire'" (*Analects* 15.24). This passage resembles 4.15 but with the addition of a formal statement about the implementation of *shu*. This passive rule forestalls the altruistic allocation of resources to a much greater degree than the positive Golden Rule. According to the positive form, I am obligated actively to serve others if I wish to be served. According to the passive form, even if I wish to be served I am not obligated to serve others. My obligations are obligations of noninterference. The Confucian rule better represents our natural self-concern, and for these reasons is more apt in an evolutionary explanation.

Mencius' discussion of empathy for non-kin does not take on the formality of Confucius'. Rather than craft sentimental rules or behavioral rules, Mencius uses paradigmatic cases to illustrate the appropriateness of certain emotions. The 'child by the well' parable in the *Mencius* illustrates the presence of such emotions and the profound motivational force they have on behavior:

Suppose a man were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child. From this it can be seen that whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human. . . . (2A6; Lau 1970, p. 38)

Mencius uses this incident—involving empathy directed at a non-kin child—to conclude that whoever lacks compassion is not human. By setting this insight in the context of the genealogy of these emotions we overcome undue criticisms of the *Analects* and the *Mencius* as asserting little more than a clan-based, kin-centered morality.<sup>6</sup>

Mencius uses this parable to respond to the challenges presented by the impartial consequentialism of Mozi and the ethical egoism of Yang Zhu. About Yang Zhu Mencius writes: "Yang Zhu advocates everyone for himself, which amounts to a denial of one's prince" (3B9; Lau 1970, p. 141). In another passage Mencius clarifies the role of emotions for non-kin in a way that both supports the primacy of partiality to kin and recognizes that these emotions can be extended successfully to non-kin in many contexts. At 3A5 Mencius gives voice to a Mohist extrapolation from the case of the drowning child. Yi Zhi, a Mohist, remarks: "The Confucians praised the ancient rulers for acting 'as if they were tending to a newborn babe.' What does this saying mean? In my opinion, it means that there should be no gradations in love [*ai* 愛], though the practice of it begins with one's parents [*qin* 親]." Yi Zhi argues that emotions originally directed at kin should be broadened and applied in accord with 'universal love' (*ai you cha deng* 愛有差等). Mencius responds:

"Does Yi Zhi truly believe," said Mencius, "that a man loves his brother's son no more than his neighbor's newborn babe? He is singling out a special feature in a certain case: when the newborn creeps toward a well it is not its fault. Moreover, when Heaven produces things, it gives them a single basis, yet Yi Zhi tries to give them a dual one. This accounts for his belief." (3A5; Lau 1970, pp. 62–63)

The term “single basis” refers to the feeling of love for family, which Mohists allegedly pervert by denying gradations in love created by nature. Love is not universal or impartial; it is biased toward kin. When faced with a choice about saving a brother’s child or a neighbor’s child, Mencius takes it as axiomatic and uncontroversial that one’s duty is to save one’s nephew. Whalen Lai comments: “Having posted the ‘child in peril’ parable as a case of natural compassion shown to *any* child, Mencius now seems to declare [it] a ‘special case’ that should *not* be so freely universalized. Under more normal or less urgent circumstances, one would not love all children equally. One naturally loves a nephew more than a neighbour’s child. So much is clear” (Lai 1991, p. 55).

Mencius’ subtle awareness of the competing emotional demands on his moral psychology constrains him from designating as equally important the emotions for kin and the emotions for non-kin. But neither Mencius nor Confucius neglects the value and moral status of emotions for non-kin. They ground their accounts of the moral emotions for non-kin in the solid foundations of our emotions for close kin.

### *From Moral Emotions to Moral Virtues*

This essay does not argue for the thesis that the authors of the *Mencius* and the *Analects* espouse a naturalism about moral value in the sense of the ‘naturalism’ articulated by Flanagan et al. (2008), even though this appears to be true. These authors’ accounts of the moral emotions indicate that they arrive at their theory of moral value through observation about what sorts of feelings lead to behaviors that improve inclusive fitness, enhance reciprocal altruism, and further group identity. This predicts a corresponding diminution of the role of reason in Early Confucianism’s advocacy of its moral philosophy, which others find to be true.<sup>7</sup> Confucius and Mencius use observed patterns of behavior among kin to extrapolate moral principles since these patterns of behavior guide human moral action. One might object on the grounds that authors, editors, and redactors of the *Mencius* and the *Analects* commit the naturalistic fallacy or unjustifiably favor morality to kin over morality to non-kin.

This latter point receives considerable discussion. Consider a passage in which Mencius explains that certain actions directed at close kin provide the content for accompanying virtues:

Mencius said, “The content of benevolence [*ren* 仁] is the serving of one’s parents; the content of dutifulness [*yi* 義] is obedience [*shuncong* 順從] to one’s elder brothers; the content of wisdom [*zhi* 智] is to understand these two and to hold fast to them; the content of the rites [*li* 禮] is the regulation and adornment of them.” (4A27; Lau 1970, p. 87)

In 2A6 Mencius explains the *origin* or ‘sprout’ of benevolence as being the feeling of compassion. Here he discusses the *content* of the virtue of benevolence (*ren* 仁): serving kin. So 2A6 and 4A27 together make a *chronological* point about the stages of moral development and a *conceptual* point about benevolence and duty (*yi* 義).

This gets spun in sympathetic and critical ways in the literature. David Wong adopts an optimistic attitude by arguing that the dependence of virtues upon kin-

emotions is a necessary feature of any useful human ethics and is one that can be built upon positively. Wong says the theory presupposes that feelings of “love must begin in the family” (1989, p. 255). Though Confucianism recognizes the “equal moral worth of human beings,” this does not come at the expense of recognizing that the sources of the moral emotions motivate us “to give priority to those particular people who stand in special relationships to us. An ethics that cannot accommodate this motivation risks irrelevance as an ethic for *human beings*” (1989, pp. 255, 260). Liu Qingping adopts a critical attitude to describe the role of virtues of impartiality in Confucian moral theory as dependent upon virtues of partiality: “Confucius and Mencius always place such great emphasis on blood ties and kinship bonds that they prefer to sacrifice everything for filial piety and brotherly duty, as if anything else, such as propriety, truthfulness, justice, the empire, the people, or even humaneness itself, by contrast, seems to be unimportant” (Liu 2003, p. 235). Kin-emotions and kin-directed helping behavior are developmentally and behaviorally prioritized in the context of the Confucian *dao* of self-cultivation. The implicit allegiance to the evolutionary roots of our moral emotions for kin as found in Early Confucianism has led Liu to argue that Early Confucian “consanguineous affection” has “brought about a series of deleterious effects in the daily life of the Chinese people, of which we must keep sober consciousness with a critical eye” (Liu 2006, p. 185). This empirical point requires justificatory data that social scientists must gather. Furthermore final judgment on filial piety’s influence on Chinese culture must include placing its many positive effects on the opposite scale. But caveats aside, Liu’s provocative inference is very well-argued and has the ring of truth. But the present point is this: Early Confucian moral psychology and its grounding of moral emotions in emotions for kin will be much better understood and more accurately appraised if we make use of a genealogical method and its accompanying interpretation.

## Notes

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1 – Munro says, “These *evolutionary* or *ultimate* causes try to explain how such patterns of behavior contribute to the reproductive success of the individuals or groups in a species.” He rightly notes that such explanations are “sometimes speculative but often powerful” (Munro 2005, p. xiv). According to Munro the

Early Confucian tradition is “an additional source of information about human social behavior that does not flow from any scientist. . . . The historical texts in which Chinese theories of human nature are described have answers to questions and evidence for them. That evidence has some validity for questions about human social behavior, just as archaeological artifacts may. . . . So our empirical observations in such cases may include the study of pre-modern texts” (p. xv). Munro rightly envisions his research as serving several distinct evidential purposes, though he inadequately distinguishes between them.

- 2 – Seok proposes to “analyze Mencius’ moral philosophy from the perspective of faculty psychology” (Seok 2008, p. 51). Seok remarks on the logical relationship between the propositions about cognitive science and mental architecture (he cites Pylyshyn and Fodor) and propositions asserted in the *Mencius*, but he refrains from explaining and justifying his method of analysis. It appears to have three distinct but overlapping components. First Seok *redescribes* aspects of the *Mencius* in the terms of cognitive science. For example, “Mencius’s moral philosophy can be regarded as a theory of innate and domain-specific moral faculties” (2008, p. 55). A bit later he simply says that Mencius’ “Four Beginnings are domain-specific emotions” (2008, p. 56; my emphasis). Second Seok uses *Mencius* as a source of data with which to *increase justification* for hypotheses in cognitive science. For example, Mencius’ discussion of one’s reaction to a child poised to fall into a well supports the claim that moral belief and behavior emerges genealogically from emotions (2008, p. 58). In this way Seok is interested in the meaning of the text and the truth of its statements about the mental faculties. Third Seok stresses that the moral faculties discussed in the *Mencius* are “shared by all human beings as universal characteristics with minimal contribution from the environment” (2008, p. 55). Seok *universally generalizes* from data in the *Mencius* to attribute properties to all members of our species.
- 3 – In *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* Darwin uses the language of identity to describe the relation between the ‘moral sense’ and social instincts: “[T]he moral sense is fundamentally identical with the social instincts. . . . [These instincts have] certainly been developed for the general good of the community. The term, general good, may be defined as the means by which the greatest possible number of individuals can be reared in full vigour and health, with all their faculties perfect, under the conditions to which they are exposed” (Darwin 1981, 1.3, p. 98). This remark self-consciously adopts language familiar from the Scottish moral-sense theorists, and Darwin appeals to Adam Smith as an authority. However implausible is the identity claim, the origins of our capacity for moral feelings does rest in the social instincts of our ancestors (Collier and Stingl 1993, p. 8; De Waal 1996, p. 87).
- 4 – Some scholars exhibit concern that Mencius makes moral formation too easy by use of these metaphors; see Munro 2005, p. 28, and Slingerland 2007. For the relation between this metaphor, Mencius’ theory of moral motivation, and perfectionism, see Im 1999.

- 5 – Starting with Russell Church’s 1959 paper, “Emotional Reactions of Rats to the Pain of Others” (Church 1959), biologists have found remarkable examples of strong forms of fitness-sacrificing behavior that are best explained by appeal to empathy rather than to fear (avoiding risky fights) or status-seeking. For example, Rhesus monkeys refuse to pull a chain that delivers them food if doing so shocks another monkey; one monkey did without food for twelve days to prevent its companion from being shocked (Masserman et al. 1964).
- 6 – This is an accusation found at Russell 1922, p. 40. In turn, some argue that the importance of this passage for an interpretation of Mencius as advocating an impartial ethics of care is vastly overrated by Mencius’ advocates; see Star 2002.
- 7 – The strength of Mencius’ commitment to the emotions as the genealogical source of moral behavior diminishes Mencius’ use of rational argumentation in a moral context. As Chenyang Li remarks, “Mencius . . . appealed directly to human feelings to justify moral virtues. When there was already a strong feeling for something, there was hardly any need for philosophical justification to convince people of its value” (Li 1997, pp. 221–222). This thought represents Darwin’s musings about the origins of morality well (see above).

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