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Early Confucianism is a System for Social-Functional Influence and Probably Does Not Represent a Normative Ethical Theory

Ryan Nichols[1]

Abstract To the question "What normative ethical theory does early Confucianism best represent?" researchers in the history of early Confucian philosophy respond with more than half a dozen different answers. They include sentimentalism, amoralism, pragmatism, Kantianism, Aristotelian virtue theory, care ethics, and role ethics. The lack of consensus is concerning, as three considerations make clear. First, fully trained, often leading, scholars advocate each of the theories. Second, nearly all participants in the debate believe that the central feature of early Confucianism is its moral thought. However, these normative ethical theories are logically inconsistent with one another, the third point. The entailment is unavoidable: the majority of scholars of early Confucian normative ethics must be incorrect about their attributions of a normative theory to early Confucianism. It would appear, then, that we need a new *dao* 道 or pathway for the study of early Confucian moral thought. One alternative is to adopt an immersively interdisciplinary research methodology that pivots on the recognition that early Confucianism is a social-functional system the governing purpose of which is to influence cultural leaders.

Keywords Social functionalism · Interdisciplinary · Confucianism · Ethical theory · Dead end

1 The Xunantunich Corpus and its Theology

Researchers found a large set of codices in an ancient Mayan dig in Xunantunich, present-day Belize. The Xunantunich manuscripts consist of hundreds of codices, or a:mat͡ɬ,

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made from Mesoamerican bark cloth. These codices in turn contain hundreds of thousands of Mayan glyphs. Their contents overlap considerably and contain many cross-references. Dating and subsequent research suggest that these historically continuous codices form key sources of subsequent Mayan culture.

Humanities communities were abuzz with news of these codices in the century after their finding. Pioneering scholars in fields such as history, South American studies, literature, classics, religion, and philosophy vied as interpreters of the Xunantunich tradition. A small cycle of translations into several languages began. This ignited feisty debate about the quality of the works, their contents, and which academic departments ought to stake the primary claim to Xunantunich studies. Small numbers of historians of philosophy developed training in Mayan and expertise in the historical period. Another century later and the number of scholars examining this tradition had grown considerably. Edited collections of the source texts emerged. Later critical editions appeared along with many more entrants into the translation cycle.

A cross-disciplinary consensus developed that Xunantunich authors placed religious concerns at the center of their web of belief. In the decades following the publication of critical editions of the a͡:matɬ, scholars produced a bevy of conflicting interpretations of the religious commitments in the Xunantunich codices. One set of historians and philosophers argued that its authors believe in one and only one God. While members of this group began debating in detail what sort of properties the God of the Xunantunich school possesses, another set of scholars argued that the authors do not believe in "God," but in many small gods. Another set argued that the authors are atheists who disavow belief in God—and in gods. A fourth argued that the authors are pantheists, a fifth that the authors were panentheists.

Gradually a status quo of chummy dialogue over close readings of texts and individual glyphs cropped up. The boon in Xunantunich studies prompted proliferation of varieties of interpretations of the tradition's religious system. Interpreters created new, unfamiliar metaphysical categories with which to make sense of the Xunantunich authors' religious commitments. Generations of graduate students were minted, themselves minting new graduate students trained to maintain their professors' interpretations. At conferences today one can witness the pride with which Xunantunich scholars trace their philosophical genealogy going back several generations.

In the intervening time, the debate has been supplemented by the discovery of additional manuscripts and fragments at a few other minor Mayan sites from Guatemala, up through Belize, and into the Yucatán. Yet well-trained members of the scholarly community still lack unanimity on the fundamental metaphysics of the Xunantunich religious system. Rather than recognizing this state of affairs as something to be overcome, scholars describe the situation as a "gold mine." In practice, this is so. Offering multiple, mutually inconsistent interpretations, each with ever more subtle twists, perpetuates a status quo favorable to major participants due to a variety of practical reasons.

This takes us up to the present. Avoiding further subtleties about the Xunantunich codices or their scholarly interpretation, we can imagine philosophical bystanders making the following argument about the state of affairs just described.

(1) Sets of experts trained in Xunantunich thought, knowledgeable about the historical context of the Mayan culture, skilled at the use of philosophical positions

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in theology and philosophy of religion, variously interpret the Xunantunich codices as most representative of the following systems of religious philosophy: monotheism, pantheism, polytheism, atheism, and panentheism.

(2) Theological theories of monotheism, pantheism, polytheism, atheism, and panentheism are mutually inconsistent such that, if one of the theories is true, the others are all false.

(3) Therefore, from 1 and 2, it follows that the majority of sets of experts are incorrect in their interpretation of the fundamental facts about the Xunantunich authors' religious philosophy.

(4) If 3, then the philosophical study of Xunantunich religious philosophy forms an academic cul-de-sac.

Premise 1 is true by hypothesis. Premise 2 states the obvious. Premise 3 follows deductively from 1 and 2. Premise 3 would be true even if only a simple majority of 50.1% of trained experts erroneously interpreted Xunantunich texts. But in fact the state of affairs is probably much worse than this.

What gives this dead end special play in the minds of many analytic philosophers is that *the majority of well-trained interpreters of Xunantunich texts are incorrect on matters that they themselves regard as the most important feature of Xunantunich thought*. The disagreement is not whether the texts say that the God of the Xunantunich people is in time or exists eternally, or whether the gods of the Xunantunich created the world ex nihilo or not. The lack of consensus concerns a much more fundamental metaphysical issue: whether the Xunantunich believe that *God* exists, that *gods* exist, the *natural world is* a god, that *each part* of the natural world is god, or that *there are no supernatural beings whatsoever*. Xunantunich scholars have for generations been studying what are considered—both by them and by the authors whose work they study—to be *the most important commitments of these texts*. However, they lack rudimentary consensus on just this issue.

2 The Early Confucian Corpus and its Normative Ethics

The parallel argument below challenges a widespread methodological commitment found in early Confucian scholarship. Specifically, the argument involves interpretations of early Confucian texts—typically the *Analects* and the *Mencius*—according to which these texts are interpreted to represent a normative principle or principles familiar from Western ethical theory. This argument harbors abundant potential for misunderstanding, hence the allegory. To make matters worse, biases of my own might affect my argumentation. Despite these hazards, I continue in an effort to clarify my meaning to open minds on the presupposition that all fellow travelers through early Confucian texts seek to gain as much valuable knowledge of them as possible. After all, most of us have devoted years of our lives to their study.

Please consider the following argument:

(1') Sets of experts trained in classical Chinese, knowledgeable about the historical context of early China, and skilled at the use of normative ethical theories variously interpret core texts of early Confucianism as most representative of

the following: Aristotelian virtue theory, Kantian deontological ethics, consequentialism, care ethics, character consequentialism, and role ethics.

(2') Normative ethical theories listed in Premise 1 are mutually inconsistent such that, if one of the theories is true, the others are false.

(3') Therefore, if 1' and 2', then the majority of sets of experts are incorrect in their interpretation of early Confucian normative ethical theory.

(4') If 3', it is highly likely that the philosophical study of early Confucian normative ethical theory forms an academic cul-de-sac.

2.1 The Early Confucian Corpus and its Normative Ethics: Premise 1'

The justification for Premise 1' will appear obvious to experts in the field who keep up with the secondary literature regarding Confucianism's moral thought, in other words, readers of *Dao*. But before entering into explicit justification of 1', a few preliminaries.

First, even if the argument above is valid and sound, interpretations of early Confucian texts using Western normative ethical theories maintain considerable value. Interpreting early Confucian ethics as representative of care ethics or virtue theory facilitates cross-cultural understanding, provides bridges between traditions of thought, and illuminates the meanings of Eastern and Western texts through comparisons and contrasts. Second, the Western ethical theories referred to in 1' are poorly differentiated, especially as they are applied to early Confucianism. Their application and their necessary conditions are subject to changing philosophical intuitions and *a priori* commitments that vary across region and over time. Perusing theoretical work on normative ethical theory one finds scores of arguments that one ethical theory is reducible to another, for example, that care ethics is reducible to virtue theory (Slote 1998, 2001). This will be taken by some as suggestive of the fact that the comparativist metaphilosophy underlying interpretations of Confucian moral thought are potentially problematic. But here I am neither concerned with broad methodological challenges to comparative philosophy nor with objections to contemporary history of early Confucian moral thought based on its anachronism or anaculturalism. The present problem can be identified with more precision.

Turning to the justification of 1', perhaps the most common interpretation of Confucianism as an ethical theory, and the one needing the least defense, sets Confucianism in the camp of *virtue theory*, especially Aristotelian virtue theory (Hamburger 1956; Mahood 1974; Chong 1998). In Justin Tiwald's opinion, sources interpreting early Confucian texts as endorsing virtue theory include Stephen Angle, Chong Kim-chong, Philip Ivanhoe, May Sim, Bryan Van Norden, Lee Yearley, and Yu Jiyuan (Tiwald 2010: 55). Tiwald writes that virtue ethics is, for historians of Confucian philosophy, a "philosophical gold mine that we've only begun to tap" (Tiwald 2010: 55). While I would take issue with implications of the metaphor, no one can disagree with Tiwald's point that virtue theoretic interpretations of early Confucian texts have soared in popularity and saturate venues publishing scholarship about early Confucianism.

Prominent scholars who argue that early Confucianism represents a kind of Aristotelian virtue theory sometimes recognize a lack of fit between Aristotelian virtue theory and early Confucianism. This prompts unusual workarounds stretching the

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content of Aristotelian virtue theory in different directions. Bryan Van Norden, for example, posits "thick" and "thin" conceptual differences to bridge *prima facie* incommensurable traditions (Van Norden 2012: 16–17; see Angle 2009). Philip Ivanhoe distinguishes between sub-species of virtue ethical theories. One he calls a "virtue ethics of flourishing" and another a "virtue ethics of sentiments." He says that if we bracket the virtue ethics of sentiments, Mencian Confucianism qualifies as a virtue ethics of the flourishing kind (Ivanhoe 2013). The distinctions, typologies and too-subtle taxonomies routinely deployed in interpretations of early Confucian virtue theory suggest to impartial observers that philosophers are straining to force square pegs into round holes.

Some, including D. C. Lau, suggest that Confucianism represents *Kantian Deontological Ethics* (Lau 1979: 50). In Chinese language commentary on early Confucian texts, the Kantian interpretation is widely represented due to the influence of Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 and, through him, Tu Weiming 杜維明 and others. Other historians of Confucianism come to related conclusions. Sandra Wawrytko says the most important normative ethical principle in Confucianism and Kantianism is a shared one pertaining to value and respect. Interpreting Confucianism in terms of Kantian ethics is best able to identify the "one thread" that Confucius says draws together his philosophical system (Wawrytko 1982: 238, about *Analects* 4.15). She writes, "In the terminology of ethics, Confucius exemplifies a deontological or rule-oriented approach, as is borne out in the *Analects*" (Wawrytko 1982: 243). Lee Ming-huei not only argues that Confucianism is a form of deontological ethics but also that virtue ethics interpretations of Confucianism appear so incoherent that "the strategy to interpret Confucianism with [virtue ethics] can only make things go from bad to worse" (Lee 2013: 48, 52). Julia Ching writes that "Kantian ethics bears a definite resemblance to Confucianism, with its own dual virtues of integrity or faithfulness to oneself (*chung* [忠]) and reciprocity (*shu* [恕])" (Ching 1978: 166; see also Cheng 2006: 3). Numbers of others make a similar interpretive case.

Placing emphasis on *Mencius* over *Analects*, Im Manyul and others have argued that certain key parts of Confucianism best represent a form of *consequentialism*. Among other sources, Im appeals to subtle features of *Mencius* 6B4 where Mencius is portrayed as correcting Song Keng 宋牼. Song Keng is about to attempt to negotiate a peaceful resolution between two groups about to go to war by explaining to the rulers involved that war is not to their benefit (*qi bu li ye* 其不利也) when Mencius intervenes with a caution. Convincing rulers to act for their benefit will bring about undesirable consequences in the long term. Im argues that Mencius appeals to a consequentialist principle to argue that one ought not to act for the sake of benefit. On top of this, Mencius then says that one ought to act from propriety and benevolence because doing so brings about good consequences (Im 2011; see also Cai 1987). These represent some major considerations in favor of Im's and others' perspective that Mencian-inspired Confucianism is best represented with a Consequentialist interpretation.

Henry Rosemont argues early Confucianism is best understandable as a form of *care ethics* (Rosemont 1997), a broad interpretation articulated and defended in detail by Li Chenyang (Li 1994, 2002, 2008). Rosemont and Li have been joined in this effort by a group of additional commentators (Pang-White 2009, 2011; Dalmiya 2009; Luo 2007). This interpretation begins with a recognition that *ren* 仁, used 105 times in the *Analects*, is the most important ethical concept in early Confucianism. Confucianism is

sometimes referred to with the term *renxue* 仁學 for that matter. On numbers of occasions in the *Analects* and the *Mencius* authors refer to *ren* as a benevolent affection and also as a type of virtue. On the basis of close consideration of these passages, including *Analects* 17.22 and *Mencius* 2A6, Li recommends understanding *ren* as "caring" (Li 1994: 73). This compares closely with feminist care ethics because in it too "the highest ideal of morality is caring" (Li 1994: 74), an insight drawn from Carol Gilligan. In her book about women's ethics, *In a Different Voice*, Gillian concludes that "morality, for these women, centers on care" (Gilligan 1982: 125). Li's argument concludes that Confucianism is best represented as a care ethics.

Some authors, such as Philip Ivanhoe, fashion new normative ethical theories with which to understand early Confucianism. Ivanhoe dubs his theory *character consequentialism*. He writes that "character consequentialism" is "an ethical theory concerned with the effects actions have upon the cultivation of virtues and which concentrates on certain psychological goods … as the source of more general social virtues." This issues into a principle for action: "the way to maximize the good is to maximize the number of virtuous individuals in society." Ivanhoe highlights several unique features of this theory. Character consequentialism "concentrates on the future fruits rather than the immediate results of actions." This theory highlights "goods" that are typically absent in Western ethical theories. For example, character consequentialism "includes and places great emphasis upon the psychological good associated with certain unique human relationships, particularly kinship relationships." Not only did the Confucians create a theory unfamiliar to the West, but it "avoids some serious difficulties commonly associated with certain Western forms of consequentialism" (Ivanhoe 1991: 55–56). Referring to the value of kinship, Ivanhoe remarks that early Confucian character consequentialism solves problems about exceptions to consequentialist principles (often referred to in consequentialist literature as "side-constraints") that ethically permit self-directed and kin-directed attention and indulgence (Ivanhoe 1991: 64–65). (Even if Ivanhoe's claims that Confucianism's character consequentialism has vastly improved upon consequentialist theorizing from Mill to Kagan are incredulous and absurd, the point stands that, according to Ivanhoe, Confucianism represents character consequentialism.)

Each of these theories, with the exception of character consequentialism, receives critical discussion in the secondary literature, and responses to those criticisms by proponents. Though a bit player on the field of normative ethical theories, the care ethics interpretation of early Confucianism, for example, has been advocated by and challenged by multiple scholars (Star 2002; Yuan 2002; Herr 2003). The play received by advocates and detractors of these theories indicates that early Confucian scholars take seriously these normative ethical interpretations. This provides additional support for Premise 1'.

We have now cited and quoted from a set of experts across early Confucianism who study its moral thought, principally using the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. Subsets of these experts were shown to argue that early Confucianism is represented as each of the following: virtue theory, Kantian deontological ethics, consequentialism, and less familiar theories including care ethics and character consequentialism. (Confucian role ethics is discussed shortly.) On the strength of the foregoing case, Premise 1' is unambiguously true.

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2.2 The Early Confucian Corpus and its Normative Ethics: Objection to Premise 1'

The easy way out of this argument, it might be thought, is an objection to Premise 1' to the effect that different scholars are highlighting different *parts* of texts or *different* texts. The objection continues as follows:

> Since different parts of texts are regarded as representing consequentialism than are regarded as representing Kantian deontological ethics, then interpreters are not arguing that the same part of a text is both consequentialist and Kantian. But unless they are found to be interpreting *the same part* of the same text as representative of two mutually exclusive normative ethical theories, the interpreters are not offering inconsistent interpretations.
>
> So Premise 1' is strictly speaking false. It should instead read: 1" Sets of experts trained in classical Chinese, knowledgeable about the historical context of early China, and skilled at the use of normative ethical theories interpret *different parts* of core texts of early Confucianism as most representative of the following: virtue theory, Kantian deontological ethics, consequentialism, care ethics, and role ethics
>
> But this Premise 1", along with 2', does *not* warrant an inference to 3'. Therefore, the argument is invalid.

While this objection may call for a rethink of the structure of the argument, the conclusion still stands, as will be obvious with a bit of reflection.

Suppose Im interprets one part of the *Mencius* as representative of consequentialism. Suppose Angle interprets another part of the *Mencius* as representative of human rights ethics. Suppose Li interprets another part of the *Mencius* as representative of care ethics. Suppose Ames and Van Norden and Mou interpret yet other parts as representative of role ethics, Aristotelian virtue ethics, and Kantian deontological ethics. For the sake of argument, let us grant the assumption that none of the passages in the *Mencius* cited by one of these authors in support of their interpretation is cited by any of the other authors in support of theirs.

How does this affect the argument above? Premise 2' remains true of course, since it is *a priori* true. But Premise 3' might appear vulnerable. This is because, for example, if Im's interpretation of *Mencius* 6B4 as representative of consequentialism is correct, it does not imply that Li's interpretation of *Mencius* 2A6 as representative of care ethics is false. However, the hidden costs to pay for this objection to the argument are steep indeed. *This objection to P1' yields two unfortunate implications for which I reject that objection.*

First, to bring about the state of affairs whereby each is focusing on text-parts that vindicate his and only his interpretation, historians of Chinese thought talk past one another. From a point of view outside the early Confucian scholarly community, this objection threatens to sow even greater confusion about what is early Confucian ethics. Discovering a coherent theory that explains the preponderance of textual evidence in a given book provides a conceptual unity to the work. Having half a dozen scholars find textual evidence for half a dozen mutually inconsistent normative ethical theories in

various parts of texts raises methodological questions about the overall aim of such interpretations. Consider the metaphilosophical implications of this state of affairs. Suppose that scholars aim to interpret early Confucianism's *text-parts* as representative of a given Western ethical theory. The scholarly community as a whole publishes hundreds of interpretive articles using half a dozen or more normative ethical theories with which to interpret a variety of text-parts. In this case, historians of philosophy appear to adopt loose or exploratory standards of interpretation much more familiar from literary scholarship than philosophy. The upshot of endorsing the methodological and philosophical standards presupposed in the above objection is that the scholarly community's methods will appear more, not less, dubious than they do at the present time.

Second and more damaging, consider that the purpose of this objection to Premise 1' is to block the inference to 3', namely that *the majority of sets of experts are incorrect in their interpretation of early Confucian normative ethical theory*. This objection might indeed block the inference to 3', but what price is paid to infer that experts are not incorrect? This objection shifts the burden of the theoretical confusion in the secondary literature squarely onto the backs of the original Confucian authors themselves. Now it is Mencius who must bear the blame for affirming half a dozen mutually incompatible ethical principles within his single book. This appears unfair to Mencius, Confucius, and Xunzi 荀子, who are brilliant thinkers. This objection will play directly into the hands of thinkers across the academy skeptical of the philosophical pedigree of early Confucian primary texts.

2.3 The Early Confucian Corpus and its Normative Ethics: Remaining Premises

Given the definitions of moral obligation that each theory produces, and logical relationships between those definitions, Premise 2' is true *a priori*. (Note that 2' itself is not a statement about the use of the theories by early Confucian scholars but rather a statement about the logical entailments of the theories' conceptions of moral obligation.) Safely assume that each theory at play in 2' offers a definition of "moral obligation" or "right action." To appreciate the importance of the logical incompatibility of these theories, consider illustrations of their (approximate) definitions of moral obligation as follows. Consequentialism implies that the morally obligatory action for a person at a time is that action that maximizes utility for the most number of creatures. Virtue ethics implies that a morally obligatory action for a person at a time is the action that a virtuous agent would do in the same circumstances. Kantianism would imply that a morally obligatory action for a person at a time is the action that accords with a deontological principle. Role ethics would imply that a morally obligatory action for a person at a time is the action that best accords with the constraints and privileges of the role one occupies in a specific social context. Care ethics implies that that the morally obligatory action is the action that arises out of experiences of empathy and compassion and a sense of social interdependence, and so on.

This brings us to a defense of Premise 2'. The normative ethical theories under discussion imply logically inconsistent definitions of morally obligatory action. If a moral obligation is what consequentialism says it is, then a moral obligation is by definition *not* what care ethics says it is. *If one of the definitions above is true, then all the others are false*. Therefore, 2' is true.

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Now consider the inference from 1' and 2' to 3'. This forms a deductively valid entailment. Despite this, some readers may respond to this inference with a shrug. After all, scholars who interpret early Confucianism so as to represent a normative ethical theory mentioned in Premise 1' do not write as though the theories are mutually inconsistent. In other words, they do not write as though Premise 2' were true. This marks one reason for the inference to 4'—that it is highly likely that the philosophical study of early Confucian normative ethical theory forms an academic cul-de-sac—into the argument. Without it, scholars will greet 1' through 3' with unresponsive languor. Suppose contrary to the argument that the inference to 4' is unjustified or invalid. *Even if this is true, the majority of historians of early Confucian philosophy who advocate a position about Confucianism's normative ethical theory are mistaken on the basis of 1'–3' alone.* This is simply to note that the intermediate conclusion of 3' marks an important conclusion independent of the stronger 4'.

What of 4'? There are two reasons why one might infer 4' and put the point in that way. The difference between the two reasons is of special importance for any conclusion about philosophical method in the study of Confucianism. The first places blame on the original authors of the early Confucian texts, while the second places blame on scholars of these texts.

For some people the reason for inferring 4' from 3' arises through the belief that the original authors of early Confucian primary texts exhibit thinking that is so muddy and unclear that the early Confucian texts cannot support rigorous philosophical reflection on the normative ethics represented therein. Let us refer to this as the *Blame the Authors* inference. This objection appears to play on the minds of many analytic philosophers and historians of philosophy working outside Eastern traditions. The justification for the Blame the Authors inference can be stated in the voice of this subset of philosophers as follows:

> Since experts interpret the ethics found in works of Early Confucianism in half a dozen mutually inconsistent ways, we infer that the original authors of these primary texts were rather sloppy thinkers. These texts offer no sustained effort at construction of a consistent answer to core ethical questions such as "What is right?", "What is valuable?", or "Why be moral?", let alone responses to challenging objections to purported answers. Primary texts reveal little evidence of argumentation or prolonged reason-giving. Instead we find remarks about how not to eat, fatherly advice to students, and comments about how Confucius climbs into a carriage. (He "stood squarely and grasped the mounting-cord" [*Analects* 10.26].) The *Analects* and the *Mencius* are diffuse and meandering, anecdotal and narrative, and these texts lack systematic structure and logical rigor. Therefore, it follows that Confucius and Mencius are probably feeble-minded philosophers, if philosophers at all.

I repudiate this objection with all my heart.

The *second* reason for the inference to 4' is quite different. It begins with an explicit denial of the first reason by affirming that Confucius and Mencius are brilliant—geniuses even—and not a sloppy let alone dim-witted pair of thinkers. The second reason for 4' has little to do with Confucius and everything to do with the scholarly work itself. As a consequence of this point, let us refer to this inference as the *Blame the*

Scholars inference. I need not put this alternate justification for the same inference into any voice but my own.

According to the Blame the Scholars inference, the state of affairs described in 3' is polemical because historians of Chinese philosophy either fundamentally misunderstand one of the most important facts about early Confucianism, or they write as if they do. Whatever its causes, early Confucian historians of philosophy avoid reckoning with the truths of Premises 1' and 2'. Scholars of early Confucian moral thought rest content with the status quo even though the majority of scholars must be incorrect about early Confucianism's normative ethical theory. In the resulting academic context, progress on Confucian moral philosophy is difficult to imagine. The interpretive state of affairs is unproductive of knowledge and entrenched. I submit this qualifies as a scholarly dead end.

3 Previous Traffic out of the Cul-de-sac

For most scholars of early Confucianism, the foregoing will not much matter. Of more importance is the practical: publish, get my graduate students jobs, and more generally *influence*. Justin Tiwald's remarks about virtue theory being a "philosophical gold mine that we've only begun to tap" aptly if unintentionally suggest that virtue theory represents the most malleable of philosophical metals, impressionable and pliant (Tiwald 2010: 55). Irrespective of whether scholars *have* theoretical training in contemporary normative ethics, little training of that kind is needed in order to drive a virtue theory into early Confucian textual territory. The consensus about a given interpretation's necessary conditions is insubstantial, as is consensus about the conditions of its falsifiability. As a result, metaphilosophical standards remain low on virtue theory interpretations.

From the practical point of view, perhaps there is little desire and less need for reflection on the metaphilosophical questions that I am urging us to consider. The excitement of the Gold Rush might capture the popularity of virtue theoretic interpretations of the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. If virtue ethics is a gold mine and the rush is on, then scholars have a disincentive to stop and map any landscape but the claims that they have staked, and perhaps those of their neighbors. Nonetheless, some philosophers have signposted warnings about this dead end. Arthur Hummel aptly observed that in China "the subject of ethics or the discussion of ethical problems seldom degenerated into cant or became a hackneyed topic of conversation. It was everybody's business. It concerned living issues and actual situations, and therefore could not easily be smothered in dogma, or evaporate in platitudes or philosophical theory" (Hummel 1952: 601). Roger Ames expressed concern that some commentators overstate the similarity between Confucian and Western ethical thought, thereby undermining Chinese philosophy as a genuine alternative to Western thinking (Ames 2001). Chad Hansen argued that at its roots Confucianism lacks any concept of human freedom sufficient to sustain moral responsibility. "[T]he usual approach to comparative philosophy involves finding parallel philosophical concepts, issues, problems, and theories in two cultures" but "this approach yields little result" and "a new approach is required" (Hansen 1972: 169). His argument contended that traditional aims of comparative philosophy yield no interesting knowledge when applied to Confucian moral thought. He advocated what could be

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called a methodology of *contrastive* philosophy, which aimed to illuminate differences between traditions. Alasdair MacIntyre discusses this form of commensurability with a tone of skepticism about the comparative philosophical project (MacIntyre 1991).

These *philosophers'* signposts hint that there may be something methodologically amiss about interpreting early Confucianism in terms of Western moral theories. Cross-cultural cognitive *psychologists'* results also anticipate the situation described in Premise 1'. To take a single relevant example, psychologists show that East Asians (and by extension East Asian texts and people influenced by them) have what is described as a high tolerance for contradiction. East Asians are more comfortable holding contradictory beliefs than are Westerners. PENG Kaiping and Richard Nisbett show that Chinese participants endorsed both sides of an argument that American subjects believed to be incompatible, and that Chinese participants preferred parables that affirmed contradictions at higher rates than Westerners (Peng and Nisbett 1999). East Asians are less likely to use formal reasoning and logic than Westerners, and are more likely to use intuitive reasoning than Westerners (Norenzayan, Smith, Kim, and Nisbett 2002). G. E. R. Lloyd illuminates how these differences in cognitive style have played out in, for example, the progress of science in ancient Greece and ancient China (Lloyd 1996) and in the cultural structure of knowledge (Lloyd 2011). According to the argument above, early Confucian texts are interpreted as representative of half a dozen mutually inconsistent normative ethical theories. This is just what we might expect given these and related psychological results.

Guided by philosophers' and psychologists' signposts, a new *dao* 道 proposed below attempts to turn out of this scholarly dead end. Its first step represents a simple metaphilosophical commitment: *the principal aim of early Confucian authors is to positively influence people and, through them, to change society for the better.* We can call this the *influence principle*. If one takes account of the social context of the Warring States (475–221 BCE), the influence principle not only makes good sense but offers itself as an obvious component in a reasonable hermeneutic for early Confucian texts. Theory-building, truth-seeking, and knowledge-loving are down on the early Confucian's list of priorities. With a society in tatters, high rates of social distrust and between-group violence, early Confucians during and after the Warring States period had a keen sense of themselves as thinkers for social change. Confucius was far too intelligent a thinker to believe that the most effective means of influencing people's behavior was by focusing on changing their cognition. Insofar as Confucius (and the many subsequent editors and redactors of the *Analects*) wanted to nudge Chinese society toward peace and prosperity, Confucians realized that they needed to influence emotions, behaviors, and cognitions.

Commentators on early Confucian texts make an unstated assumption that their authors propose *theories*. The truth of the influence principle does not entail that these commentators are mistaken on this point, but it does raise the probability that this presupposition is mistaken. Normative ethical theories are abstract, hypercognized sets of intellectual commitments that bear little relation to behavior or emotion. To most people this fact will be abundantly obvious. It was to Confucius. Developing and articulating theories will not change societies for the good. Confucius did not develop, or intend to develop, a normative ethical theory. Why pretend as if he did? Appreciating the role of the aim of early Confucianism to *influence* gets us to the trailhead of this

new pathway. Through the tracks thin out, here we find someone waiting for us—the Amesian pragmatist.

4 Sharing Ways, Parting Ways: Pragmatism, Role Ethics, and the Interdisciplinary Pathway

Pragmatist interpretations have brought philosophers closer to certain home truths about early Confucian moral thought than others. Roger Ames's pragmatist application to Confucian moral thought, the exclusive concern of this section, articulates a metaphilosophy for early Confucianism that accords well with the influence principle. Much about Ames's role ethics is unclear—the theoretical scaffolding, normative principles, implications on behavior. A few features of the theory are discernible. Confucian role ethics presupposes an open-ended, ongoing process of "human becoming," which requires cultivation of emotions and entails a relational, rather than an individualistic, conception of persons (Ames 2011: 88). Relationality takes shape in forms of traditional virtues as well as some non-traditional traits of character. For example, "The integrative nature of the moral experience means that a socially responsive 'sense of shame' (*chi* 恥) is of high value in Confucian culture" (Ames 2011: 172; see *Analects* 8.4 and 2.3). But it appears that virtues recommended by role ethics are relative. "*Ren* for this person is going to be different from *ren* for that person.… There is no template, no formula, no ideal" (Ames 2011: 178). Role ethics, and the pragmatism from which it springs, is not plausible. Yet Amesian pragmatist interpretations of early Confucian moral thought present several concrete advantages over other normative ethical interpretations.

First, due to its nontheoretic emphasis, a pragmatist interpretation can make sense of the diversity of ethical guidance represented in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. The Kantian interpretation of the *Mencius*, for example, must contend with certain passages highlighted by the consequentialist interpretation—and vice versa—in a never-ending conflict of consistency. If Confucius is represented as a pragmatist philosopher, then perhaps he has practical reasons for being inconsistent, for example, because different students need different moral insights. Confucius is not a theory-builder. So the pragmatist does not regard it as evidence against his theory that Confucius affirms a contradiction, for example.

Second, the pragmatist interpretation is able to avoid (but often, in point of fact, does *not* avoid) applying anachronistic and culturally hegemonic Western ideas in its interpretations of Confucian texts. For most Western thinkers approaching Confucianism, the operative concern is the avoidance of importing culturally inappropriate tropes from Western thought. Ames insists on not making this mistake and urges interpreters to become aware of the potentially anachronistic trends in historical Chinese commentary on early Confucianism. Ames and Hall write that they aim to "understand Confucius's philosophy *in situ* rather than as filtered through a supervening tradition which has not always remained true to its principal transmitter" (Hall and Ames 1984: 3). Presumably it is with this in mind that Ames has explored Confucian thought by attending closely to the etymologies of characters—from his "Getting it Right: On Saving Confucius from the Confucians" to his book *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hall and Ames 1984; Ames 2011). Methodologies like Ames's

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pragmatism that emphasize close readings and word meanings avoid many pitfalls of culturally hegemonic perspectives on the interpretive trail. His role-based normative ethics is apparently tailored for Confucianism rather than applied anaculturally or anachronistically.

Third, a key component of the pragmatist's metaphilosophy vis-a-vis Confucian ethics sets it apart from the status quo. Ames and Hall write:

> In China, where ideas, perceived as dispositions to act, have direct consequences upon the psychological, social, and political circumstances, the need to nurture, censor, discipline, and control ideological expression is far greater than in the West, where ideas, disjoined from dispositions and sundered from direct practical import, allow for a rather empty and inefficacious freedom of thought and expression. (Hall and Ames 1995: 157)

Not only are they correct on this point, but this insight should be taken to constrain the attribution of theories to early Confucians. In contrast with the historic West and its emphasis on scientific rationality, Chinese thought maintained "a social and cultural stability persisting over two millennia" (Hall and Ames 1995: 132). If securing social stability is not merely a by-product but rather the major purpose of early Confucianism, then this ought to pivot our interpretation of early Confucianism.

Fourth, the pragmatist interpretation is comfortable in the recognition of the contingency of early Confucian ways of thinking. Ames and Hall write, "It is by no means an inevitable consequence of the human 'mind' or 'experience' or 'language' that we, or the Chinese, came to build the culture we in fact have built" (Hall and Ames 1995: 11). They add, "Instead of appealing to ethnocentric notions of 'universal reason' or 'objective principles,' we engage them as artifacts" (Hall and Ames 1995: 141). The pragmatist appears to avoid putting a square peg into a round hole. Early Confucian thought emerged from Chinese culture as a historically contingent worldview aiming to influence behavior; it was not designed as a theoretical construct directed to point to moral truths.

For these reasons I find myself having happily shared the same trail for many a mile with the pragmatist. Yet my path departs from the Amesian pragmatist's at an obtuse angle for the following reasons (see also Ihara and Nichols 2012). First, fellow hikers will know what I mean when I say that some trails have been given the wrong name. Dark Meadow trail in the South Cascades is about the brightest spot in the Dark Divide Roadless Area, for example. The Amesian pragmatist interpretation of early Confucian ethics is often diffuse, unclear, and hard to understand. Ames's and collaborators' language appears obfuscatory, jargon-filled, and difficult to penetrate. This arises whether Ames is situating the pragmatist's metaphilosophy in the midst of "transcendental monism, transcendental pluralism, and interpretative pluralism" (Hall and Ames 1995: 144) or describing Confucianism itself. Worse, Ames baptizes this lack of clarity to make it into a virtue. He writes, "the reinstatement of the vague and inarticulate" is essential for wisdom (Ames 2011: 15). This state of affairs is unbecoming not only because this writing is alleged to represent *pragmatism* but also because this writing is alleged to represent *Confucianism*.

Second, Amesian pragmatist interpretations of Confucian moral thought emphasize the strong ties between the historical texts and applied outcomes on behavior, including

long-term social stability. Despite this metaphilosophical commitment, Ames and others consistently discuss the mental representations of early Confucians *apart from their influence on behavior*. Ames makes a habit of telling his readers what is not going on (or what is) in the Chinese mind or in Chinese culture. He makes sweeping generalizations. With David Hall, Ames writes, "Chinese culture is not shaped by any appeal to universal categories defining human nature and establishing 'the unity of mankind'" (Hall and Ames 1995: 90). Generalizations themselves distract many interlocutors at junctures like this but they are not the problem here. Generalizations are not necessarily unjustified. Instead, if the influence principle represents an apt hermeneutic in this context, then discussing early Confucians' beliefs about "correlative cosmology" risks leading readers astray. The pragmatist has not clearly developed clear influences of correlative cosmology on behavior and emotion. Though pragmatist interpretations may pay lip service to the influence principle, they often do not carry this through by theorizing or hypothesizing about how early Confucianism was in fact influential.

Third, Amesian pragmatist interpretations of Confucian moral thought begin by emphasizing their intent on avoiding anachronistic and culturally hegemonic comparisons. In practice, though, Ames spends a lot of time between comparative and contrastive philosophy. Examples of Ames framing early Confucianism either in the foreground or the background of Western theories abound. For example, consider that "China is characteristically 'Heraclitean'" (Hall and Ames 1995: 40), or that "China had not endorsed any physis/nomos or reason/rhetoric dualities" (Hall and Ames 1995: 65). Is China Heraclitean? Raising this question exhibits a penchant for comparative philosophy, *not* cultural hegemony. However, answering this comparativist question produces no practical knowledge and takes us no closer to the end of our trail—hardly an outcome sanctioned by pragmatism or Confucianism.

Fourth, many of the intriguing claims affirmed by pragmatist interpreters are untestable and dubious. In addition, this gives the impression that pragmatists believe that different standards of argumentation apply to them than apply to other interpreters. Ames and Hall write, for example, "What is achieved in the West by dialectical accommodations of distinctive viewpoints is realized in China by institutionalized 'vagueness'" (Hall and Ames 1995: 104). That sort of touchstone statement is so diffuse as to be neither true nor false. This feature of Amesian pragmatism prevents easy application of univocal philosophical standards of argument and truth to the evaluation of the pragmatist's work. Ames also eschews application of "universal reason." Suppose we were to criticize his presentation of role ethics of early Confucianism by arguing that Ames commits a false dilemma fallacy when he writes in *Confucian Role Ethics*, "the only thing more dangerous than striving to make responsible cultural generalizations is failing to make them" (Ames 2011: 23). Since Ames appears to believe that different standards of argumentation apply to pragmatists (including Confucian pragmatists), it is not clear that he would concur that this is fallacious (see Ihara and Nichols 2012). Lacking univocal standards for argumentation or truth, however, makes the Amesian pragmatist a fickle, irascible hiking partner.

Lastly, a surprising feature of Amesian pragmatism is its antiscientism, which sets it far away from the primary tradition of American pragmatism. This attitude can be found in a number of contexts (e.g., see Hall and Ames 1995: xx–xxi). Science is the single common language easily accessible to people of different cultures and languages.

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Not only this, but only with science can we understand how early Confucianism was or was not influential. Ames's strange antiscientism sits oddly with Deweyian commitments to science and to the role of science for communication between disciplines. This problem appears in his interpretation of early Confucianism as role ethics because he neglects to draw from relevant cross-cultural and social psychology to confirm or deny his hypothetical claims about role-based ethical behavior in China.

Ames has understood the heart of early Confucian moral thought with more subtlety and depth than almost anyone else. However, his work is rather too subtle and far too theoretical as an interpretation of Confucius, the arch-pragmatist and cultural transmitter. Amesian pragmatism has moved beyond the cul-de-sac of the normative ethical theories, even if it gets stuck in a slot canyon and does not know it.

5 Landmarks Along the Ridgeline Between Confucianism and the Disciplines

According to the *influence principle*, the primary aim of the early Confucian writers, editors, and redactors was to influence people so as to increase the probability that Chinese society would overcome the violence and disorder of pre-imperial China to achieve peace and stability. The aim of their recorded reflections about morality is neither to believe the true and disbelieve the false nor to construct a theoretical architecture of mutually supporting ethical commitments about right action. So the most obvious means of understanding early Confucianism on its own terms is as a standalone social-functional memeplex, if you will. Early Confucianism operates as a system of instructions for quasi-normative scripts to guide behavior, emotion, and cognition. The pathway for study of early Confucian texts recommended in this section separates from previous trails on both this point and two of its implications, as follows.

The first is that an immersively interdisciplinary approach focuses on *understanding the tradition in terms of the tradition's own goals*. Shining light on early Confucian moral reflections through prisms of Western normative ethical theory fails to do this. The second implication is that, by taking seriously the aims of early Confucians, we can *properly appreciate the genius of the tradition and its founders*. Envisioning Confucius and Mencius as a pair of theory-makers with roughly the same goals as an Aristotle or a Kant unavoidably and unjustly diminishes their reputation. An immersively interdisciplinary approach appears uniquely able to document the unparalleled influence, genius, and majesty of early Confucianism moral thought.

Suppose we assess the success of a cultural system by calculating the multiple of the chronological length of its regional hegemony, the total number of members of its system through history, and the depth of its cultural encoding in behavior, cognition, and emotion. If so, Confucianism is the most successful culture in human history. Given the dead-end argument above, the question "how has it achieved this status?" is methodologically appropriate in ways that the question "which normative ethical theory does Confucius endorse?" is not. Only on an interdisciplinary pathway is an answer to this question given.

While I describe an immersively interdisciplinary method as a *new* pathway for the study of early Confucianism, it is new only to the majority of scholars of early Confucianism. Perhaps Edward Slingerland's pioneering work is the most important

in this connection. His four books and several influential articles have paved the way for humanities scholars—especially for humanities scholars of the Chinese world—to appreciate and implement an interdisciplinary paradigm of study. This ranges from an application of cognitive metaphor theory to investigation of *wuwei* 無為 (Slingerland 2007), through a set of collected papers (Slingerland 2008) and a co-edited volume containing inspiring, practical examples of how humanists integrate scientific methods into cutting-edge research (Slingerland and Collard 2012) on to a popular book that shows the psychological value of insights from early China (Slingerland 2014). Hagop Sarkissian and Seok Bongrae, both in a series of papers and in a recent book, have deftly explored the shared terrain of early Confucianism, cognitive science, and experimental philosophy (Sarkissian 2010a, 2010b; Seok 2006, 2007, 2008, 2013). Brian Bruya's work, in recent edited collections and in papers, has developed a number of new connections between early Confucian thought, cognitive science, and analytic philosophy on issues about agency, action, and attention (Bruya 2010a, 2010b, 2015). The list of trailblazers—Donald Munro immediately comes to mind, for example—could go on.

What not only makes possible but uniquely recommends an immersively interdisciplinary approach to early Confucianism is the fact that Confucianism's primary aim is influencing people. One cannot employ this method to texts whose narrow aim is truth by *a priori* argument. Given this, we face two broad questions. First, *how* have early Confucians and their intellectual descendants transmitted this tradition through space and time? Second, which cultural contents were transmitted successfully?

Early Confucians and their followers employed a set of efficient techniques for the tradition's cultural transmission. This included language, redaction of texts, pedagogy and examination systems. Work of Chad Hansen and Steven Geisz shows that through "strategic language" (Geisz's term), not oppositional argument, early Confucians communicated in order to change emotion and behavior. They argue that early Confucianism was much less interested in truth than it was in influence (Hansen 1985, 2000; Geisz 2008). The history of the authorship and editorship of Confucian classics, including the *Analects* itself, reveals efforts at influence and control over readers' thoughts by generations of Confucians (Brooks and Brooks 1998). The effects of the learning environments prescribed by early Confucian texts indicate emphasis on pedagogical values of obedience and deference, as documented aptly in Bai Limin's *Shaping the Ideal Child* (Bai 2005). Donald Munro and Amy Olberding bring these insights together in helpful ways with work on leadership, education, and modeling in Confucianism (Munro 1975; Olberding 2012).

The severe but semi-egalitarian admission system for the mandarinate and the subsequent imperial examination system (and the *gaokao* 高考 for that matter) represent an extreme form of cultural transmission guided by the state and affecting millions upon millions of people and their families through history (Elman 1991, 2000). *De facto* requirements for educational success in the culture created by early Confucianism included years of extreme didactic self-priming with Confucian classics. Rare successful pupils merited sizable gains in social status and wealth for themselves and their families.

Early Confucianism contributed to the design of systems of transmission essential for its sweeping historical influence over generations in the most populous nation on earth. However, these assertions about influence can be articulated more formally

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through compelling though challenging research on cultural transmission theory including Richard Boyd's and Peter Richerson's work on mechanisms of cultural transmission (Boyd and Richerson 1988; Richerson and Boyd 2005). As such these claims are testable. Mechanisms of cultural transmission function as path-building tools in the history of a culture. Understanding the multiform systems of cultural transmission emplaced by early Confucianism in Chinese history provides essential background information for the remarkable interdisciplinary story of early Confucian influence.

A number of Confucian landmarks have been seen from interdisciplinary trails. For example, we know ways that early Confucian moral psychology makes use of social instincts (Nichols 2011). We can discuss the *Analects's* and the *Mencius's* reflections about emotions by examining findings in psychology. In the near future researchers will thoroughly develop these insights by building on social intuitionism (Haidt 2001) or impression management theory (Schlenker 1980). Observing intersecting features of the landscapes of social psychology and Confucianism support a reunderstanding of the texts and their influence.

We are far away from the cul-de-sac, but this sort of research does not necessarily represent *immersive* interdisciplinarity at work. Drawing from historians or linguists to inform our understanding of the influence of early Confucianism as represented in the history of the Imperial examination system is pathbreaking. Progress gets slower as we move from intra-humanities interdisciplinarity to immersive interdisciplinarity. Immersive interdisciplinarity represents the thoroughgoing exploration of contents of texts by using multiple approaches from a variety of disciplines outside the humanities. This is best conveyed with an example. Consider early Confucianism's influence upon the management of behavior toward kin. Portrayals of paragons of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) in early Confucianism couple with cultural and institutional embodiment of this virtue in early China (Keightley 1990; Lewis 2007) to provide information about *how early Chinese culture altered biological norms of inclusive fitness*. Filial piety emerges in early texts as a morally plastic obedience yielding special obligations from offspring to parents in the Confucian diaspora. This contrasts with traditional Confucian interpretations of filial piety but corresponds with recent provocative work in philosophy reevaluating the virtue and its effects (Liu 2003, 2009).

Explicit discussions of filial piety in *Analects* 13.18 about the Duke of She 葉 and in *Mencius* 7A35 about Emperor Shun 舜 simultaneously reaffirm filial piety as morally plastic obedience to fathers and its importance to the early Confucian tradition. Pre-Qin 秦 texts such as the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) describe parents as taking control of the most important life-decisions of children, like mating and courtship. *Xiao* 孝 in the pre-Qin canon is the most discussed virtue (contrary to Luo 2007). It represents morally plastic obedience to parents rather than an impartial virtue. If this interpretation is correct and if early Confucianism's principal aim is to influence, then we can form testable hypotheses about its effects in the contemporary Confucian diaspora.

What makes this an especially fertile area for immersive interdisciplinary study is the fact that *evolutionary biology documents behaviors that predict most human societies will exhibit relatively little filial piety.* Parent-offspring conflict theory says that *ceteris paribus*, in species that sexually reproduce, in which offspring have different genes than either parent, offspring will come into sharp conflict with parents regarding important life decisions (Trivers 1974). This represents a hypothesis of theoretical biology, but one which has been repeatedly tested and confirmed. With this

in hand, we can turn to evolutionary psychology. Experiments confirm hypotheses about asymmetries in offspring mate preferences in our species (Apostolou 2007, 2008, 2009). To put it mildly, parents typically have preferences about who their daughter or son should marry that are *not* shared by their daughter or son. Parent-offspring conflict theory raises a compelling question: do parents in the Confucian diaspora experience significantly *lower* rates of parent-offspring conflict than parents from other cultures? Only if the influence principle marks the correct pathway for interpreting early Confucianism would we expect an affirmative answer. Immersive interdisciplinarity working in this area generates a novel, testable hypothesis. *Given the influence of early Confucianism, yes, we expect parents in the Confucian diaspora to experience lower rates of parent-offspring conflict than parents in other cultures.*

However, do data confirm this hypothesis? What data are relevant? While we had been sharing our *dao* with the evolutionary psychologist for some time, it now joins the cross-cultural psychologist's path for a spell. Cross-cultural data of several types show that offspring in Confucian diaspora cultures more frequently obey their parents about their most important life-choices—whom to marry and how to court a mate—than offspring elsewhere in the world (Buss et al. 1990; Buunk, Park, and Dubbs 2008; Buunk, Park, and Duncan 2009). The best explanation for the outlier status of residents in the Confucian diaspora with respect to their low rates of parent-offspring conflict involves appeal to Confucian cultural inheritance and to early Confucianism's influence on our natural moral systems. To make a long story short, the influence of early Confucianism on subsequent Chinese populations played an integral role in pushing contemporary East Asian populations into their status as the most filial people on the planet. (For the complete version of this story of the influence of early Confucian filial piety see Nichols 2013.)

Talk of interdisciplinarity often induces anxiety in humanists. One might think that the philosopher is useless on this pathway. This is false. *Immersive interdisciplinary research in this context would not be possible were it not for the special knowledge of historians of early Confucian thought.* First, their knowledge of the cultural tradition allows formulation of an accurate hypothesis in the first place, one sensitive to the textual contents of the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. Second, cross-cultural psychologists and evolutionary psychologists do not often read one another's work, let alone cultural history or philosophy. This represents a wide crevasse, and philosophers are the bridge-builders here (e.g., see Prinz 2014). Third, psychologists and scientists rarely understand the depth and breadth of early Confucianism's methods of cultural transmission.

On top of these essential contributions, philosophers contextualize and monitor results of interdisciplinary scientists. Scientists often attempt to explain the outlier status of East Asians with no appeal to cultural sources at all, which has met with sharp criticism, as it should. In a model example of immersively interdisciplinary philosophical work, Seok Bongrae aptly and critically challenges psychologist Richard Nisbett and colleagues' explanation of results indicating that East Asians have a relatively high tolerance for contradiction. In "Change, Contradiction, and Overconfidence: Chinese Philosophy and Cognitive Peculiarities of Asians" Seok contends that Nisbett's appeal to a vague principle of change fails to explain the data. He then engages Nisbett in great detail in order to argue for his own novel explanation of the experimental results, an explanation having to do with holism rather than change (Seok 2007). Seok takes his efforts far beyond hand-waving concerns about the bane of reductionism to

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marshal specific texts from the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), the *Mencius*, and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 to provide textual evidence about holism for his reinterpretation of Nisbett's results.

Seok Bongrae saw the need for a response only because he was up on the ridgeline between the disciplines. Down in the cul-de-sac, the utility of critical engagement with conclusions from scientists about Chinese thought is invisible. But this need is great. Consider the research of a set of prominent evolutionary biologists, psychologists, and ecologists who have converged on a variable to explain sweeping patterns of cross-cultural difference, including collectivism and individualism, through history and across geographic region. That variable is *pathogen load*. Fincher and colleagues describe collectivism, found at high rates in historical East Asia and allegedly caused by high pathogen load, as a "behavioral immune system" that effectively keeps outsiders out (Fincher, Thornhill, Murray, and Schaller 2008). Evolutionary data modelers like Corey Fincher, Randy Thornhill and collaborators exhibit no knowledge of the causal power of East Asian cultures and institutions. For them the explanatory landscape is flat because it is leveled by evolution. An interdisciplinary research team has partially called the results of Fincher and colleagues into question on the grounds that it did not adequately test the influence of a particular feature of culture to explain collectivism (Hruschka and Henrich 2013). However, we ought not leave this job to scientists alone.

In the spate of books by psychologists, sociologists and self-declared experts attempting to figure out "the Chinese mind," an accurate understanding of the heart of the tradition is reliably absent. The important takeaway from this observation is that *the work of sinologists, historians, and philosophers specializing in early China and Confucianism is essential for the production of good interdisciplinary research* purporting to explain how cross-cultural differences got that way. Only with the help of humanist experts can we as a scholarly community demonstrate with a high probability the cultural influence of early Confucianism.

Like the religion scholars of Xunantunich culture, in another century early Confucian historians of philosophy will still be writing normative ethical interpretations of the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. Instead, please consider joining us on our path. This is undiscovered country and the company would be most welcome.

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Q1. Please check the suggested running page title if appropriate.
Q2. Gillian 1982 has been changed to Gilligan 1982 as per the reference list. Please check if okay.
Q3. Buunk, Park, and Dubs 2008 has been changed to Buunk, Park, and Dubbs 2008 as per the reference list. Please check if okay.
Q4. Yu (1990) was not cited anywhere in the text. Please provide a citation. Alternatively, delete the item from the list.