

Resolute Agency in Confucian Role Ethics

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Abstract:

This dissertation philosophically reconstructs a Si-Meng lineage (思孟學派) of Confucian role ethics and engages in intercultural explorations of non-foundational and *resolute agency* in ameliorating ethical and political discourse. A family-centric, focus-field dynamic of persons is presupposed in historical and philosophical reconstruction of this living tradition of Confucian role ethics. The guiding idea of "resolute agency" (*shendu* 慎獨) is explored in a metaethical conceptual constellation within a *qi* 氣-based correlative cosmology and relational ontology of persons, understood as role-encumbered becomings, rather than discrete metaphysical entities or foundational subjects of ethical-political discourse. Drawing upon recent developments in pragmatism, hermeneutic phenomenology, and other philosophical movements that attempt to think through creative *agency*, without positing foundational, discrete subjects, this dissertation situates a reconstructed Si-Meng conception of "resolute agency" within larger intercultural comparative philosophical conversations in order to expand the interpretive horizons available to co-creative participants in an intergenerational communicating community of "*tian* commanding" (*tianming* 天命) exemplary ethical inquirers striving to realize provisional and disclosive moral truths in experience.

Key Words: Agency, *Ars Contextualis*, Axiology, Becoming, Confucianism, Correlative Thinking, *dao* 道, *de* 德, Disclosive Theory of Truth, *shendu* 慎獨, Somaesthetics, Relational Conception of Persons, Role Ethics, *ming* 命, *tian* 天, *xin* 心, *xing* 性, *zhen* 真, *zhi* 知.

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Introduction

The writing of this dissertation has been a real adventure. The decision to embark upon this particular project of reconstructing a Si-Meng lineage (思孟學派) of Confucian role ethical thinking for intervening critically in present ethical and metaethical discourse was not made from any autonomous position of liberal choice. Rather this topic has been slowly but surely coming into focus for me as a result of being a unique participant in the University of Hawaii's historically distinctive philosophy department and as an emergent contributor to an ongoing intergenerational conversation of comparative philosophy. All of the esteemed teachers, fellow students, and friendly colleagues I've come to know during the course of my PhD program have been instrumental (in a deeply Deweyan sense) in helping me to think through the vital importance of ethically concerning oneself with the various levels of "selving"—that is, processes of becoming a distinctive self in a relational field of unique embodiment. As I reflect upon my experience as a graduate student and teacher, happening alongside of many other family commitments and social associations, living as a unique member of multiple interpretive communities, I find no way of making sense of my particular narrative or how I became interested in the particular subject-matter of this dissertation without appealing directly to a felt transactional sense of my embodied aspiration for integrity or ethical self-in-the-making. Often feeling like I might be in a similar boat with David Hume especially when he speaks about turning inward to seek a true self, but could find nothing other than a series of fleeting impressions, I would differ however insofar as my felt impressions are never just atomized sense data

given to a solipsistic theatre of the mind, but are always alive with richly emotional content and relationally-constituted narrative meanings that preclude the possibility of understanding anything that 'I' think, say, or do as being somehow the product of an autonomous, rational, subjective consciousness or some metaphysically given faculty of discrete *will* power.

Perhaps then these sorts of philosophical reflections on my own narrative becoming are an integral part of the reasons that have drawn me to exploring the Si-Meng lineage conceptual cluster of thinking about persons as role-focused becomings or as ritual vessels of *qi* 氣 embodiment. My personal philosophical inclinations towards pragmatism, agential realism, and Confucian philosophy—striving to be sinologically informed especially with ongoing developments in archaeological excavations and intertextual interpretations—obviously has brought me to this particular constellation of themes and working arguments in this dissertation. But it has truly been a process of "focusing the familiar" (*zhongyong* 中庸) for me as I've patiently and methodically worked to realize theoretical insights through my embodied personal experience. I think the emerging picture of a Si-Meng lineage of early Confucian role ethics is the most apt to describe a fully relational conception of persons while still articulating a richly "internal" language of creative agency. The idea of critical amelioration and "individually" located moral agency can be articulated without appealing to some transcendent or metaphysically vacuous conception of persons that appeals to supernatural or non-relational phenomenon in conceiving of creativity, agency, and persons in the world. A richly realist and vibrantly materialist conception of persons is presupposed

throughout my philosophical reconstruction of Si-Meng Confucian role ethics and I see nothing in any of the texts I work with to challenge this basic theoretical orientation.

I'm now convinced that my unique narrative selving process has brought me to this very juncture of a transactionally realized potential—the past, present, and future are all open for revisionary readings and imaginative reconstructions here—and I will invite the reader to the conclusion of this dissertation to see where this all might lead going forward. In what follows, I will briefly outline each section and provide some synoptical comments to help guide the reader through this work and hopefully begin to provoke some imaginative responses for making better use of this text.

Chapter One "Reconstructing Si-Meng Confucian Role Ethics: Thinking Through Ethical Agency Beyond Foundational Individualism" sets the stage for the major themes and theoretical stances of this dissertation. The main focus in this chapter initially is to simply introduce this particular historical-philosophical lineage of Si-Meng Confucianism. And then next to begin to offer some interwoven bits of convincing evidence for thinking that this tradition still has much to offer us in advancing contemporary inter-cultural philosophical discursive formations, especially regarding reconstructing a non-foundational, yet pragmatically realist conception of embodied *ethical* agency.¹

¹ Throughout this dissertation I will be using, unless otherwise indicated, the terms 'ethical' and 'moral' interchangeably. Since I think a compelling argument can be made for thinking that in the Confucian tradition there is no stand alone field of axiological inquiry that has solely to do with pristinely moral obligations, I will frequently just be talking about *creative agency* without adding the qualifier 'ethical'. In fact, since it is far from obvious that we can make any rigid distinction between

Part 1.1 argues for the unavoidability of making generalizations in contextualizing any philosophical texts from an unfamiliar linguistic and cultural background. I argue that it is always theoretically optimal to employ a method of *ars contextualis* in working through complex philosophical translations. We shouldn't assume that we can adequately approach any text with hermeneutic innocence and we especially need to avoid committing what A.N. Whitehead called the "fallacy of the perfect dictionary."² There are never simple correspondences between philosophically weighty terms in respective conceptual clusters found within distinct cultural matrices of meaning that are employed to make discursively visible working conceptions of *ethical* agency. This section focuses on the importance of responsibly articulating working conceptual clusters within horizons of inter-cultural interpretation to productively enter into hermeneutic circles of progressive understanding. Drawing on Henry Rosemont's anti-individualist and sinologically sensitive interpretations of Confucian thinking about "encumbered" role-bearing persons, I show how a distinctively Confucian "conceptual cluster" is always operative in any attempt at philosophical *ars contextualis*. Moreover, it is only through putting our inevitably circularly formed conceptual clusters at risk in a lived hermeneutical project of self-understanding that we can hope to realize a more

fact/value or even prudential, aesthetic, moral, etc. *oughts* in experience set against the horizon of Confucian ritually constructed space of reasons, it would seem that speaking of Confucian ethics (virtues, roles, or integrative approaches) is a semantic and philosophical redundancy—see for example the phrase "Confucian role ethics" (*rujia jiaose lunli daode* 儒家角色倫理道德) as it has a double redundancy with "roles" being used twice and "ethics" being repeated as role-patterning (*lunli* 倫理) and the creative focusing of pluralistically located fields of power (*dao de* 道德).

² See A.N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, "Lecture 9" (p.235). The fallacy occurs as follows: "There is an insistent presupposition continually sterilizing philosophic thought. It is the belief, the very natural belief, that mankind has consciously entertained all the fundamental ideas which are applicable to its experience. Further it is held that human language, in single words or in phrases, explicitly expresses these ideas."

responsible and responsive set of productive generalizations in approaching these texts and the unfamiliar philosophical contexts that they emerge from. Having made these general interpretive points, I then go on to initiate an inter-cultural comparative project that might be able provoke theoretical advance within current debates surrounding the very possibility and nature of *non-foundational agential realism* in ethics and political theory. In beginning to articulate a reconstructing Si-Meng conceptual cluster to approach a critically transformative, non-foundational, and ritually-constructed thinking through embodied ethical agency, I focus quite a bit upon the central Si-Meng concept of "resolute agency" (*shendu* 慎獨). I take this phrase to refer to a kind of ethical *epoche* in Si-Meng discourse that opens up productive possibilities for imaginative fantasy variation in realizing unique potential and agentially participating in performative and transformative role-taking in ritually constructed creative spaces of interpretation and transformative praxis.

In part 1.2, I focus on the two central philosophical personae or "Masters" (*zi* 子)—Zisizi 子思子 and Mengzi 孟子. I view these two figures as important conceptual persona who obviously shape the texts associated with their names in a way that exceeds the simple, single-source "author function" in many philosophical traditions. But as inheritors of a distinctively Confucian way of thinking about embodied ethical agency, these conceptual persona continue to contribute to the living tradition of Confucian "way-making" *daotong* 道統. While raising some of the multitude of interpretive problems associated with reading received texts and hermeneutic traditions in light of recently excavated silk and bamboo manuscripts

from pre-Imperial times, I begin to articulate what is so distinctive, philosophically speaking, about the Si-Meng lineage that has so many interpreters positing a distinctive "lineage" (*jia* 家) that bears their shared signature. Building upon some of the best interpretive and sinological work being done in recent years, I attempt to express the Si-Meng lineage with four distinctive features: (1) relational internalism; (2) embodied ethical agency; (3) interpersonal affectivity; and (4) musical flourishing. Without wishing to offer a reductive analysis of this complex philosophical lineage of historical Confucian role ethics, by employing these four interrelated themes of interpretation I believe we can begin to bring into clearer focus some of the unique ways that this lineage can be involved in a reconstructing historical tradition, a re-reading of an emergent textual corpus, and continue to play a vital role in giving rise to a living "way-making tradition" (*daotong* 道統) of Confucianism as a sort of "portable tradition"³ in the late modern world.

Section 1.3 takes the form of a brief introduction to John Dewey's call for a *reconstruction* in philosophy. What this phrase signaled for Dewey was nothing less than a working faith in creative democracy as way of life. In highlighting some of the most remarkable passages of Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), I show how a move away from systematic abstraction to concretely embodied

³ For the idea of Confucianism as "portable tradition" in the late modern world see Robert Neville's *Boston Confucianism*. I tend to agree that we can often export Confucianism from its original Chinese cultural-linguistic context to do impressive theoretical work in non-indigenous cultural contexts. However, I am not so sanguine about the possibility of carrying out such cultural exporting without a careful and nuanced conversation putting the background philosophical assumptions or deep cultural grammar at risk in an encounter with particular texts, thinkers, and lineage traditions of Confucianism. Otherwise, how could the tradition do any substantive transformative theoretical work and not just be co-opted within a familiar set of substance-based ontology or foundationally individualistic assumptions about persons that is so prevalent in the globalizing (Western) late modern period of (neo)liberal Capitalist dynamics.

concepts deployed to cultivate a critical, pragmatic intelligence in natural and social experience can be used not just in the context of "American" philosophy, but has real enduring value in terms of approaching the reconstructing of a Si-Meng lineage as a truly live option for ethical and political theory—especially when it comes to adumbrating a non-foundational conception of embodied ethical agency in a creatively democratic (political and religious) context.

Section 1.4 covers the Si-Meng dynamic of *relational internalism*. The proliferation of "internalist" language in Si-Meng texts (both received and unearthed) has had interpreters engaged in philosophical disputes regarding how to best understand correlative concepts like "intrinsic" *nei* 內 and "extrinsic" *wai* 外 in various contexts.⁴ Should we for example understand the "central" or "inner" heartminding (*zhongxin* 中心) to refer to an ontologically discrete and foundational subject of moral discourse? Or is it better understood pragmatically as a process of *relational becoming* and as an emergent site of agential dynamism insistently foregrounding entangled and embodied agency against a fringe background of ecstatically natural experience and *tian* 天 stipulated roles? I wish to argue for the latter, correlative reading of persons as irreducibly processual in nature. Embodied narrative processes, beginning in inchoate "matter-energy" (*qi* 氣) configurations and hopefully consummating in ethically resolute patterns (*li* 理) of personal

⁴ Sometimes *nei* 內 and *wai* 外 are used to point to a distinction between family relationships and governing social contexts. For example in the *Mengzi* it is suggested that "relational flourishing" (*ren* 仁) is the virtuosic method for realizing harmonious family reverence in parent-child relationships (*fuzi* 父子); and "optimal appropriateness" (*yi* 義) is the virtuosic method for realizing deferential respect in governing social arrangements between rulers and ministers (*jun chen* 君臣). While this clearly points to a functional distinction between "inner" and "outer" spaces of appearance it does not indicate what modern liberal theory would recognize as a public/private dichotomy.

commitments and role-focused responsibility, are all we have to work with in the theoretical framework of Si-Meng agential realism. To help in the process of carrying out what might be a rather profound conceptual gestalt shift in thinking through agency and relational "internalism", I draw significantly upon Thomas Kasulis' comparative philosophical work and his "cultural metaphysics" that employs concepts of *intimacy* and *integrity* as a bi-polar spectrum of cultural-discursive formations signaling radically distinctive modes of ethical attention and respective centers of axiological conceptual clusters.

Section 1.5 carefully considers the "somaesthetic" dimensions of Si-Meng thinking about ethical agency. By way of contrast with a traditionally Nietzschean diagnosis of Western philosophical grammar, implying an all pervasive denigration of bodily experience, Si-Meng thinking advertises a vital conception of embodied agency that is free from problematic reliance upon any transcendent, metaphysical notions or a One-behind-the-Many cultural gestalt. Si-Meng somaesthetics offers a process-oriented and *transactional* conception of persons as embodying their non-fungible roles and relationally thick experiences of personal responsibility over a lifetime.

Section 1.6 continues to develop a robustly relational ontology of persons by thinking through transactionally emergent *affects* (i.e. non-dual experience of embodied emotions and pre-conceptual feelings) in the role that *qing* 情 plays in moral perception and ethical decision-making in Si-Meng discourse. Moving away from received Cartesian prejudices involving a disembodied intellect capable of rationally determining principles for autonomous choices undergirding moral

conduct, a pragmatically embodied and atmospherically affect saturated sense of ethical agency is developed here in critical dialogue with a reconstructed Si-Meng Confucianism. The work of the contemporary comparative philosopher Bongrae Seok is introduced and explored for its ameliorative potential in developing a neuroethically informed and morally viable mode of focus-field thinking in a non-foundationalist, pragmatically imaginative theoretical context.

The last section (1.7) of chapter one introduces the concept of "joyous/musical flourishing" (*yue/le* 樂) as a guiding pole star for organizing the conceptual cluster or *ethical constellation* of a reconstructed Si-Meng theory. By introducing the binomial pairing "ritual propriety and music" (*liyue* 禮樂) as a central component of the Confucian ethical project, I emphasize the improvisational and creatively concerted dimensions of Confucian role ethics to work against the prejudice that roles and rituals can only serve to stifle individual creativity through the proliferation of patriarchal, classist, and other oppressive social and individual habits. In considering the way "musicality/joy" (樂) is used in several *Analects* passages and how it continues to develop as a fecund ethical concept in Si-Meng thinking, I highlight a non-foundational, concerted sense of improvisational agency that can serve as an imaginatively realized ethical ideal (i.e. an "ends-in-view"). To strive to transform the everyday, secular world into sacred experience through ritual practice and musical flourishing is not to rest passively in the traditional hierarchical structures of social and familial living, but is rather to strive with imagination to make the most of our shared experiences together in families and ethically emergent (i.e. 'ritually constructed') communicating communities. This

kind of making the most of our natural and social ingredients is offered as an alternative to certain theories of ontological and ethical *perfectionism*. Such stultifying post-Rawlsian theories of perfectionism are critiqued here, but the dismissive anti-perfectionist theoretical stance usually presupposed by classical and more recent versions of political liberalism is not given the last word. Moving away from foundational subjectivity to a concerted, embodied and improvised ethical agency is a major theoretical takeaway of this concluding section to chapter one.

Chapter two "'Way-making Begins with Feeling' (*dao shi yu qing*)道始於情—The Role of Affect in Si-Meng Moral Theory" continues the project of reconstructing Si-Meng Confucian role ethics in an inter-cultural comparative philosophical conversation with some recent trends in metaethics and practical theories of ethical agency. The chapter begins by drawing a distinction between systemic completeness and "non-ideal" approaches to moral and political theory. By putting Si-Meng Confucian role ethics into a productive conversation with pragmatism, phenomenology, affect theory, moral sentimentalism and other recent trends in Anglophone analytic and more continental developments in metaethical and ethical-political theorizing, I highlight the continued significance that this particular living tradition has towards contributing to our tasks of thinking more robustly relationally in conceiving of our role-focused responsibilities. In reconstructing Si-Meng texts, thinkers, and tradition I believe we can do better justice to non-ideal theorizing about embodied ethical agency without having to posit fictitious moral entities like foundational subjectivities or autonomously discrete bearers of human rights and moral obligations.

In section 2.1, the reconstructed Si-Meng discourse enters into a sustained conversation with metaethical positions that can be broadly characterized as "sentimentalist" in nature. I argue that Si-Meng insights into the equiprimordiality of *expressed* and *perceived* values can elucidate debates between expressivists and projectivists in a post-Humean space of metaethical reasons. I also take a stance on the cognitivist/non-cognitivist debate in recent analytic metaethics by placing reconstructed Si-Meng thinking in the same camp as certain neo-pragmatists who embrace the epithet *pragmatic moral realists*. The crux of the issue here is doing justice to our ethical intuitions regarding the shared significance of ethical values without having to posit some pre-ordained, a priori realm of transcendental reasons. We *realize* our value-laden pluriverse as *true* just insofar as we are capable of recognizing the *relational potentials* and *role-focused responsibilities* honeycombing our experience as we strive with imagination to bring these to ameliorative fruition in the context of shared embodiment of culture and a richly narratively configured conception of human persons in the most concrete and immediate context of family-centric ethically interpretive communities.

In section 2.2, I consider the importance of "feeling" (*qing* 情) as an embodied moral sensibility (or source of "good taste") and as an experience of ethically disclosive affectivity. I begin by considering some recent sinological disputes regarding the semantic and philosophical valence of the term *qing* 情 in early Chinese (i.e. pre-Buddhist) texts. The curious fact that the term can be used to refer to both fact and value realms—that is, the way we feel about things and the way things are—in an ambiguous semantic and intertextual register is, I argue,

revelatory of a philosophical truth regarding the *conceptual common sense* or *deep philosophical grammar* of a distinctively pre-Qin intellectual discourse that doesn't separate out subjective/objective, mind/body, reason/sentiment poles of embodied experience-in-the-world. Several strategies for getting the most out of an intercultural hermeneutical conversation here are introduced and advocated for future philosophical practice as a way of life. While the phrase "way-making begins in felt experience" is taken from the excavated *Guodian* 郭店 corpus, this section draws most heavily from the *Mengzi* to argue for a non-dualistic and non-foundational conception of Confucian *feeling* (*qing* 情). A metaethical theory of perception that both tracks truth and reveals imaginatively realized potentials of ameliorative flourishing in the context of role-focused responsibilities.

The second half of this section deals with Cheng Chung-ying's theory of onto-hermeneutics in the context of interpreting recently excavated Si-Meng texts. By putting Heideggerian, Spinozan, and Deleuzean thinking in conversation with the Si-Meng Guodian corpus we can realize a richly onto-hermeneutic conversation regarding the role of feeling in realizing creative ethical agency in a world of pure becoming.

In section 2.3, I introduce the thinking of the classical pragmatists William James and John Dewey on the centrality of affect in the pragmatic task of ameliorating lived experience. I consider the so-called James-Lange theory of emotions, which puts embodied experience before subjective inwardness, in developing a process- and relationally-oriented moral psychology of persons. By taking biology seriously James was able to overcome any residual idealism haunting

psychology and philosophy of mind. Furthermore, by fully countenancing cultural conditions, James didn't succumb to any simplistic reductionism or mechanistic behaviorism, but robustly theorizes our unique status as biological-cum-cultural agents of *creative change*—by this I just mean *ameliorative transformation* or *immanently intelligent design*. James' later theory of *pure experience* serves as a productive conceptual bridge by which to approach the rather uncanny set of somaesthetic assumptions of the Si-Meng philosophical corpus. John Dewey's "atmospheric quality" approach to conceptualizing ethically-expressive emotions is introduced to further highlight the importance of taking a staunchly somaesthetic stance regarding the cultivation of *embodied virtuosic agency* (*de* 德) in a richly aesthetic and creatively democratic project of "commanding situations" (*tianming* 天命) within Confucian role ethics. The neo-pragmatism of Richard Shusterman's somaesthetic approach and Hilary Putnam's version of pragmatic moral realism are employed to find further productive resonance with the reconstructed tradition of non-ideal moral theory disclosed by this reconstruction of Si-Meng role ethics.

In section 2.4, I put the Si-Meng Confucian role ethical discourse in critical conversation with the metaethical position of Michael Slote's moral sentimentalism. The major issue is the question of moral *truth* in the context of a broadly conceived *expressivist* or *pragmatic moral realist* stance that takes affect and feeling as basic ingredients or normative *sources*. By understanding family-centric relational affects as sources of ethical normativity in our embodied experience we can come to see how the moral values that richly saturate our experience are more than just conventional constructions or habitual customs of perception, but have a deep and

directive quality that makes them potentially more real than scientifically verifiable actual entities or ordinal "natural complexes" like DNA, quarks, and the like. In this section it is also argued that Michael Slote's version of moral sentimentalism is overly reliant upon certain 19th century Eurocentric assumptions that atomize both persons and percepts in an empirical tradition of moral psychology. By reading Slote's post-Humean thinking alongside of certain Si-Meng texts, I problematize this dichotomy presupposed between felt, subjective values and objective moral truths. I argue for this non-dual reconstruction by introducing the deeply relational presuppositions of the embodied moral psychology found in Si-Meng somaesthetic thinking about non-foundational moral agency.

In section 2.5, I offer a close reading of the excavated "Nature Emerges from Commanding Conditions" *XingZiMingChu* 《性自命出》 to further develop the non-ideal theorizing of our deeply embodied and relationally thick creative moral agency in the contexts of our immediately felt affects as experienced in the family-centric, ritually-constructed, and *tian*-commanding interpreting communities (viz., the past, present, and future community of role ethical inquirers). In this section, I argue for a sensible moral realism grounded in a pragmatic conception of relational agency and role-focused responsibility that does full justice to our potentials to *realize* value in "commanding conditions" (*tianming* 天命)—both by perceiving and responding to ethical vocations and by creatively realizing novel situations of emergent value configurations. The Guodian texts are mined largely for their power in moving us away from foundational or ontologically essentialist understandings of individuals and getting us to think in a more *agentially realist* way about persons in

the relationally thick contexts of family-centric interpreting communities. The role of affect, especially 'anxious concern' (*you* 憂) and 'resolute agency' (*shen* 慎), is considered within the relationally "internalist" thinking of Si-Meng role ethics in thinking through our embodied experience of creative moral agency.

Chapter three ""Resolute Agency" (*shendu* 慎獨) as a Non-Foundational Ground for Agential Realism in Confucian Role Ethics explores the central Si-Meng idea of "resolute agency" (*shendu* 慎獨) as an embodied ethical practice or "skillful means" (*gongfu* 功夫) aimed at realizing creative agency. Since there is no fundamental practical or ontological difference between aesthetic, ethical, political, and religious values within Confucian role ethics, we don't need to differentiate between different modalities of agency, but instead we can focus on the more pressing problem of realizing the kinds of discursive-material conditions of creative *tian*-participation presupposed by Si-Meng texts. The chapter opens by problematizing the foundationally individualistic assumptions that haunts most modern readers in their reading of many early Chinese texts. It is argued that the erstwhile "two world" metaphysical presuppositions of substance ontology should be replaced with deeply relational and correlative philosophical presuppositions of a *qi* 氣 cosmology. Such a cultural paradigm shift is foregrounded in order to assist newcomers to this way of thinking in their initial attempts at *ars contextualis* within this open-ended, but historico-culturally commanding community of role ethical inquirers.

Section 3.1 deals with "commanding moral/vital energies" (note how the productive conceptual ambiguity of *ming* 命 defies any simple translation schema) in role ethical thinking. By contextualizing the Si-Meng lineage in the context of Warring States philosophical history we can begin to see the emergence of certain conceptual clusters providing a coherent theory of agency presupposing a transactionally embodied moral sociology, which is pronouncedly not just a reductionist psychology, of persons. Drawing upon the best work of contemporary interpreters of the recent Si-Meng affiliated archeological finds— scholars such as Pang Pu, Chen Lai, Liang Tao, Scott Cook, et. al—I aim to reveal the outlines of a conceptual clustering that is philosophically unique to the Si-Meng lineage of Confucianism. Several hermeneutical issues and some important caveats are presented here before returning to the philosophical task of reconstructing a viable Si-Meng conception of creative agency for addressing our present moral problems and pressing ethical predicaments.

In section 3.2, I consider the role that performative somaesthetics and moral physiognomy plays in the Si-Meng corpus. The importance of relational thinking and non-foundational conceptions of ethically exemplary persons is explored here in what might be termed the entirely "superficial" phenomenology of a Si-Meng *qi-based* somaesthetic discourse. The middle chapters of the *Analects* that focus on the demeanor, dress, comportment, and ritualized style of Confucius are compared with the discourse surrounding physiognomy in the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*. And taking creative agency as a somaesthetically imagined ends-in-view, or as an embodied ethical ideal, is how I make sense of the moral physiognomy discourse in Si-Meng

thinking about ethically exemplary persons. Without presupposing "ideal theory" in the sense of an abstract conception of autonomous persons making rationally grounded choices about the good life, Si-Meng role-focused thinking and feeling can critically identify and transform coercive ritual practices and role expectations via an practices made evident within a pragmatically realist stance regarding resolute agency.

In section 3.3, the concept of *role-focused responsibility* is further explored in the context of Si-Meng "democratic" experience. Exemplarist thinking in ethics is taken up as a basic framework here by which to understand moral education and the power of non-verbal suasion in achieving *relational amelioration*—replacing the still common preoccupation with autonomous individuals. The recovered *Guodian* corpus of texts is used as a hermeneutical resource as I critically re-read the *Mengzi* in light of these texts and after *Xunzi's* (misplaced) criticism of supposed Si-Meng moral "hypocrisy", that the *Xunzi* takes to be latent in the "Five Modes of Proper Conduct" thesis and concomitant focus on bodily expression or moral "physiognomy." In this section, I show how the *Xunzi* and *Mengzi* actually share a large body of somaesthetic philosophical presuppositions regarding human nature, ethical potential and the relational dynamics of ritually-constituted selving processes in a fluid boundary of role ethical interpretive community. The embodied concept of "resolute agency" (*shendu* 慎獨) is a shared semantic and philosophical resource for both the *Xunzi* and *Mengzi* in terms of making sense of human becoming in a ritually, role-focused moral theory. I show how the ritually-constructed "externalist" stance of the *Xunzi* and the relationally "internalist"

position found in the *Mengzi* share a certain set of somaesthetic presuppositions regarding "overcoming the self with ritual" (*kejifuli* 克己復禮), and both of these well-known strands of early Confucianism take *unique potential* and *plurisingular agency* seriously by highlighting the importance of "self love" (*ziai* 自愛) in the family-centric, relational contexts of "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨).

The final section of chapter three deals with a non-foundational conception of agential realism found in the work of feminist philosopher of science Karen Barad. Barad's ethically and politically salient theory of quantum entanglement is a powerful resource in ongoing projects of thinking through agential realism and in reconstructing Si-Meng role ethics. By introducing the *paradoxical*—from the standpoint of traditionally *representationalist* epistemology and logics—perspective of *agential realism*, wherein we can talk about relations without foundational relations and where things can simultaneously be *both* wholly discursive *and* completely materialist, we are provided with a fecund hermeneutic vista from which to apply creative agency to current material-discursive formations in the interwoven domains of science, ethics, politics, and religion. The section begins with a plea to rethink the stale stereotypes of a static and conservative Confucianism by focusing instead upon the non-foundationalist features of a tradition that always has to rethink creative agency in the ever shifting contexts of family-centric matrices of relationships and role-focused responsibilities. It is argued here that Karen Barad's quantum thinking about agential realism has great inter-cultural comparative potential in sparking conversations that may lead to further hermeneutic entanglements, hopefully culminating in a more stable and richly democratic (*viz.*,

pluralistic and radically inclusive) realizations of non-foundational, post-patriarchal, post-totalitarian, post-colonial and post-anthropocentric agency.

Chapter four, "Comparative Philosophy, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: A Methodological Interlude," functions as a kind of theoretical caesura by productively interrupting the theoretical flow of this dissertation somewhat to take a critically reflective moment to consider some basic issues at play in the closely related fields of phenomenology and hermeneutics. In exploring these two traditions, particularly in the way that Paul Ricoeur has brought them together in an ethically holistic way, I consider how philosophical hermeneutics can assist those of us engaged in projects of amelioratively reconstructing both philosophical and cultural Confucianism. Such musings will be particularly relevant to the Si-Meng lineage going forward in addressing equity and justice in class, race and gender roles and redressing other historically oppressive *abuses* of nominally Confucian 'patterns of deferential relationality' (*li* 禮). Considering one's self as another, Ricoeur's ethical demand, can only be achieved in phenomenologically attuned and hermeneutically sensitive processes of relational amelioration. Processes that take the tacit inequalities operative at the level of material-discursive formation at least as seriously as the more readily obvious patterns of systemic coercion and violent exclusion in social and political life.

Section 4.1 simply introduces phenomenology and hermeneutics as two distinct fields of philosophy and considers how a non-foundationalist approach to thinking about ethics and relational psychology might be an optimal way of

metaethically situating this reconstruction of a Si-Meng lineage of Confucian role ethics.

Section 4.2 discusses how Paul Ricoeur and others depart from a traditionally Husserlian tendency to seek ontological and epistemic foundations in projects of phenomenology as a rigorous science of the mind and embodied experience. I also show here how a kind of ethical *epoche*—or what we might wish to term a ritual-practice of "bracketing" for purposes of realizing greater resolution in role-focused imaginative potential—can be achieved in the *gongfu* of Si-Meng embodied and imaginative practices of realizing "resolute agency" (*shendu* 慎獨). Such non-foundationalism in thinking through ethical agency is compared to the ethical thinking of neo- and classical pragmatism after taking into account Wilfred Sellars epistemological critique of the "myth of the given." Finally, William James and John Dewey's radically empirical metaphysics of experience are reconsidered in the wake of Richard Rorty's "linguistic turn" in deconstructing any concept of pre-cultural "experience" taken to be independent of power and cultural politics. The need for a gestalt shift away from foundational individualism in thinking about ethics and politics is made even more evident here in comparing this reconstructed Si-Meng Confucianism with pragmatism and hermeneutic phenomenology. In fact, the Si-Meng lineage of thinking can offer more than just a confirmation of our pragmatist, non-foundationalist sensibilities in epistemology, ethics, and political theorizing. The embodied, critical hermeneutic practice of "resolute agency" provides a way of thinking about role-focused responsibility and agency without having to confess a purely negative protestant epistemology—an epistemology that

requires a belief in some kind of radical depravity in our capacities for moral perception and cultivation. It is argued here that even after disabusing ourselves of the myth of the given, we can still speak productively about ethical and metaethical theoretical and practical *sources of agency*.

Section 4.3 continues to explore Ricouerean hermeneutics in comparative conversation with Si-Meng thinking. The ethical-political questions of critique and belonging are brought up in the context of talking about the juxtaposed options of *faith* and *suspicion* vis-a-vis textual and contextually focused interpretations of traditions. Specific concerns about discrimination and role-focused justice is considered in light of contemporary feminist readings of Confucianism—both as a cultural set of practices and as basic philosophical presuppositions for a living tradition of texts, thinkers and interpretive possibilities.

Section 4.4 continues to think through the fore-structures of Si-Meng Confucian understanding in a living philosophical-religious tradition of "gathering way-making" (*daotong* 道統). I introduce some reconstructed Si-Meng translations of passages from the "Expansive Learning" (*Daxue* 大學) to show the kind of attractive metaethical presuppositions about roles, persons, and responsibilities can be derived for present projects of identifying and transforming oppressive structures of relationality.

Chapter five "The Significance of 'Resolute Becoming' *Shendu* and the Recovery of its "True" Meaning in Si-Meng Hermeneutics" attempts to bring to consummatory (dis)closure this project of reconstructing Si-Meng theory of non-foundational agency. Culminating this sustained conversation with historical and

contemporary movements in comparative philosophy a holistically relational, role-focused conception of persons in hermeneutically horizontal contexts of family centric thinking can be articulated in ethical, political and religious fields of discourse. A non-foundational, role-focused conception of persons only permits a somaesthetically nuanced hermeneutics wherein affect and responsibility are mutually entailing in ongoing projects of clarifying and expanding interpretive communities (both real and imagined) as ritually constructed (*li* 禮) spaces of meaningful appearance.

Section 5.1 returns to the received interpretive glosses about *shen du* 慎獨 as having predominantly a spatial and psychological connotation of private inwardness. While not wanting to entirely jettison the complex hermeneutical maneuvers of significant Confucian commentarial contributors like Zheng Xuan and Zhu Xi, I do wish to problematize the ways in which their interpretive glosses have been used to promote bad readings of Confucianism as overly-rigid and self-sacrificially ascetic in terms of positing a big Other to surveil every thought, speech, and action in a purely inward disciplinary space of private consciousness. The recently excavated Guodian materials lend support to a reconstructing Si-Meng reading of *shendu* as a kind of ethical *epoche* wherein imaginative variation and creative "role-taking" or role-focusing" is made possible to critically reimagine and transform ritually stipulated social and familial roles. Indeed, it is only through our role-focused selves, taken from a vast field of constantly shifting relationality with more or less settled biological and cultural rhythms of presentation, that we can hope to achieve any degree of creative agency in our "encumbered" (but not determined) ritual webs of

entanglement. By taking seriously an embodied conception of agency within a *qi* 氣 correlative cosmology, I present an intertextual hermeneutic to re-read *shendu* 慎獨 in the *Zhongyong* and *Daxue* that lends itself to a non-foundationalist conception of self and role-focused dynamic of creative agency, moving away from the seemingly more existentially private readings of the Han and Song commentators. Following recent developments in post-structuralist affect theory in Anglophone philosophy we might ask how to say "new materialism" in pre-Qin Chinese? And the answer would no doubt be a very old name for some very old ways of thinking.

In section 5.2 I offer a reconstructing Si-Meng theory of agency that in some ways goes beyond metaphysics to an immediate experience of semiotic engagement (firstness, secondness, thirdness). Without positing a "myth of the given" (Sellars) to initiate phenomenological or speculative metaphysics, we can still do much in way of contextualizing (through foregrounding some uncommon cultural assumptions) the Si-Meng discourse in conversation with some of John Dewey's writings on time, individuality, and relational selving. I put a reconstructing Si-Meng conceptual cluster regarding creative agency in critical conversation with Dewey's dynamic notion of *creative individual potential* found in his seminal "Time and Individuality" (1940) essay.

In section 5.3 I consider the terms "true-ing" or "resolution" (*shen* 慎) and "creativity" or "unique transforming" (*du* 獨) not only in the more readily obvious Si-Meng corpus of texts, but also in the received *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi*. By providing some extra-lineage background, a better case can be made for a dynamic reading of *shendu* 慎獨 as a most basic way of expressing the importance of embodied

thinking-feeling and cultivating critical intelligence to realize more effective strategies for optimizing appropriateness (*yi* 義) and realizing creative agency (*cheng* 誠) throughout the ordinary course of our lives (*zhongyong* 中庸). The idea of "self [reflexive] love" (*ziai* 自愛) advertised by Yan Hui and Kongzi as the height of ethical realization in the *Xunzi* is perhaps another way to say *shendu* 慎獨. And despite the frequent polemic criticisms leveled at the Si-Meng Confucians within the *Xunzi* text, a few passages in particular stand out as bearing a remarkable similarity in terms of theorizing a ritually constructed and somaesthetically imaginative *self*—a process notion without any transcendent metaphysical foundations.

Moving even farther away from the Si-Meng lineage, at least speaking from a post-Han period standardization of texts, lineages and traditions, certain passages in early Daoist writings seem to indicate a shared horizon of meanings for both *shen* 慎 and *du* 獨. I focus on several passages from the *Zhuangzi* to articulate a pragmatic, anti-representationalist approach to thinking about "truth" as "true-ing" or a process of continually adjusting to transforming experience in a somaesthetically ameliorative manner.

In section 5.4 I introduce the method of "rhythmanalysis" developed by the neo-marxist thinker Henri Lefebvre and his collaborators. Simply put, rhythmanalysis is a method that is embodied and pragmatic. As a theoretical stance it takes the lived body as a "tool" of attunement to both perceive and transform biosocial rhythms. Rhythms are a basic unit of *measurement* and can be considered dynamic, provisional forms that exist biologically, culturally, politically, ritually,

musically, religiously, and so on. As an everyday theoretical tool, rhythmanalysis offers a most helpful general framework to highlight and critically engage with the role-focused conception of agency found in Si-Meng texts. The work of reconstructing Si-Meng thinking while beginning with a complex process of sinological and archaeological knowledge, must expand to deal critically with received prejudices and coercive role identities developed over time in the name of Confucian orthodoxy. Rhythmanalysis allows us a somaesthetically nuanced way to think relationally about how to optimally realize more fluid and enabling role-focused responsibilities in the present age. By doing away with any comforting metaphysical illusions of an autonomous subject capable of grounding liberal conceptions of choice in ethical and political matters, we are confronted with a rhythmanalytic agent who can with greater or lesser degrees of grace, tact and power transform through ethically selective attention or "resolution" the particular relationships (*de* 德 focus) that they find themselves in-habiting (*qizhi* 氣質 given habit energy) as a result of ritually stipulated role-expectations (*dao* 道 field).

In section 5.5 I present William James' classic conception of the stream of consciousness and a focus-fringe model of selective attention. I see James as an important pragmatic founder of focus-field thinking. He pushed against the Western tradition of metaphysical realism and substance ontology by criticizing "block-universe" thinking in its various modalities. In developing a more process-oriented conception of consciousness, James was keen to observe the ethical and religious implications of his thinking by exploring the ways that an often overlooked fringe creativity can creatively burst upon the more or less settled habituated person,

allowing for dramatic and dynamic experiences of "conversion" or invigorated agency in self-stylized projects of ameliorative selective attention. This Jamesian approach to considering the importance of selective attention in the field of conscious experience is conceptually akin to a reconstructing Si-Meng discourse that regards creative agency to be a process emerging from embodied, role-relational practices of "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨).

In section 5.6 I consider several recent approaches to focus-field thinking to make better sense of early Confucian discourse. In surveying some of the more important recent literature on the subject, I show how a metaphor of focus-field thinking (wherein part-whole mereology is replaced with a holographic understanding of constitutive correlative becoming), can be enhanced with a hermeneutic narrative approach to interpreting decentered selving processes. My theoretical position is that a dynamic focus-field model of agency is the optimal way of reconstructing Si-Meng ethical discourse. We can learn a lot from this particular lineage of Confucian thinking about non-foundational socially situated selving. Perhaps most importantly it requires that we strive with imagination and strenuous moral effort to transform oppressive structures and role-identities from within taking into full account the material-discursive practices that make such identities possible to begin with. We cannot expect some sort of "magical bullet" solution of idealized, abstract theorizing to appear and liberate us as autonomous subjects from all social suffering. More realistically and responsibly, we need to start where we find ourselves—always already in a historically conditioned horizon of roles and rituals—and work democratically together in horizontal hermeneutic communities

of interpretation. All we can hope for is performing more virtuosically with what we have available and striving with imagination to partner wherever strategically desirable with others engaged in similar projects to critically transform and ethically expand role-focused selving and ritually-realized experiences of embodied responsibility.

The conclusion of this dissertation is presented more as a prolegomena for further research using this reconstructing Si-Meng paradigm of role-focused thinking. Thus it should not be read as adumbrating any definitive theoretical statements of achieved systematic completeness. Rather, it should invite a growing community of interpreters to work together in creating ever more semiotically dense and expansive shared sign and symbol systems of horizontal and democratic achievement in *tian* 天 commanding communities of interpretation.

Chapter One— Reconstructing Si-Meng Confucian Role Ethics: Thinking Through Ethical Agency Beyond Foundational Individualism

I. The Need for a Philosophical Translation as *Ars Contextualis*

The project of becoming fully human, or at least of realizing one's utmost capabilities as a unique and human person with an ethically efficacious sense of personal creativity, is at the center of Confucian thinking about ethics, politics, and religiosity. While the Confucian tradition is best approached from a hermeneutical standpoint that attempts to do full justice to the inter-relatedness of dynamic conceptual clusters as opposed to an analytically reductive systematicity of clear and distinct ideas, we still might wish to enter into the complex processes of interwoven horizontal hermeneutical circles with a culturally and linguistically unfamiliar tradition via a particular philosophical phrase or concept instead of attempting to reconstruct a working glossary at every single moment of interpretation.

In this work, I have set out to philosophically explore and hermeneutically appreciate a most important phrase in the Si-Meng lineage of early Ruist¹ thinking about ethical agency. In the correlative cosmology of early Chinese thinking about

¹ In this dissertation I typically follow contemporary anglophone trends in rendering Ruism (*rujia* 儒家) as "Confucianism." While certainly bearing the stigmata of a post-colonial interpretation, I don't agree with Lionel Jensen that "Confucianism" was entirely "manufactured" by Jesuits and subsequent colonizers. See Jensen *Manufacturing Confucianism*. I think the term *rujia* in Chinese despite not explicitly mentioning Confucius really points to a feature of the "genteel" (*ru* 儒) tradition of scholarly learning-service creatively transmitted by exemplary persons in some way or another related to Master Kong (*Kongzi* 孔子) himself. I also would take serious issue with contemporary writers who would doubt the legitimacy of received sources in detecting a historical philosophical persona like Confucius or other early Confucian thinkers. For a rather egregious error on the side of "doubting antiquity" see Michael Hunter's recent *Confucius Beyond the Analects* (2017) wherein he doubts that Confucius was a historical figure at all. While it is certain that "Confucius" becomes a hermeneutic repository for wisdom or a kind of corporate person spread throughout traditional time and space, it is taking it too far to decide we are in a position to doubt the authenticity of historico-philosophical revelatory texts like the *Analects*.

personal becoming, the phrase that will be a unifying thread throughout this dissertation is "authoritative persons must be ever so careful (or resolute) about their unique personal becoming" *junzi bi shen qi du ye* 君子必慎其獨也.² This is an important phrase in early Confucian ethics and reveals much about a relational moral psychology that deals most directly with the question of human becoming and tasks of realizing resolute ethical agency in transactional contexts of embodied roles and existential relationships.

The task of putting oneself into productive *conversation* with a *living tradition* like Confucianism is a most complicated hermeneutical affair to be sure. In order to simplify somewhat the task of realizing an effective conversation over time with a living tradition that *both* puts our personal being into question *and* submits the established semiotic patterns and evaluative structures of the tradition itself to critical scrutiny in future-oriented projects of ameliorative reconstruction, I have decided to focus on this particularly important conceptual cluster by situating it within a broader conceptual constellation discoverable within some central texts traditionally and more recently associated with the Si-Meng lineage³ of Confucianism.

² Throughout this dissertation the reader will notice that I translate this phrase variously as "caring about personal uniqueness", "resolute singularity", "remaining vigilant about one's unique relational potential", or more succinctly as "resolution" or "resolute becoming." Part of this variation has to do with context and although I wanted to avoid having too unwieldy a set of possible English translations for this central Si-Meng concept, I think this can serve as a paradigmatic case highlighting the importance of inter-cultural comparative philosophy and the need for "philosophical translations" and responsible *ars contextualis*, because there is no simple one-to-one correspondence or equivalent term available in the English *parole* to capture the complex scope of Si-Meng Confucian *langue* out of which this conceptual cluster emerges.

³ The construction of a Si-Meng identity is a very complicated hermeneutical affair as it involves both received texts and commentarial tradition as well as several recently recovered texts from archeological discoveries. The Si-Meng lineage (*simeng jia* 思孟家 or *simeng xuepai* 思孟學派) refers

First of all, we will be exploring the evolution of this phrase in its earliest appearances (in both received and recently excavated archaeological texts) as part of the *Wuxing* 《五行》 (*Five Modes of Proper Conduct*). Secondly, we will be examining this notion of "resolute agency" *shendu* 慎獨 and related concepts like "creative integrity" (*cheng* 誠), "naturing" (*xing* 性), "heartminding" (*xin* 心), and "moral virtuosity" (*de* 德) in the *Zhongyong* 《中庸》 (*Focusing the Familiar*) and discovering how these important Confucian ideals play a role in our warranted interpretive glosses of received Si-Meng texts and of the important question of understanding the interpretive stance of *relational internalism*. Finally, we will be taking a close look at the *Mengzi* 《孟子》 with the goal of further deepening our understanding of how this text develops a robust notion of relationally constituted personhood and creative embodied agency unfolding within a process-oriented, correlative cosmology.

In *Against Individualism: A Confucian rethinking of the foundations of morality, politics, family, and religion*, Henry Rosemont argues that a pervasive and mischievous "ideology" of foundational individualism dominates so much current thinking about ethics, economics, politics, and global human rights discourse. Rosemont argues that, at least since the initiation of the enlightenment project in the West, a pernicious ideology that celebrates human beings as "free and

to the collection of writing and influential thinking of the philosophers Zisizi 子思子 (483-402 BCE) and Mengzi 孟子 (372-289 BCE). Zisizi was a grandson of Confucius and Mengzi was traditionally said to have studied under Zisizi or one of his disciples (門人). The construction of a Si-Meng "philosophical identity" is largely an *ex post facto* project carried about by later inheritors of the Ruist tradition of ethical philosophy (e.g. the Tang-Song dynasty invention of an orthodox/orthopraxic tradition of a transmission of learning from the exemplary Sage rulers through Confucius and his disciples into the present day—the so-called "Transmission of the Way" (*daotong* 道統)

autonomous, rights-holding, rational individuals (usually adding "self-interested" to the list) with appropriate moralities, political constitutions and legal systems to support both the overall ideology and the economic system [of Capitalism]" serves to shape the dominant discourse about what is politically possible and ethically desirable in current geopolitical configurations. Building on the work of Herbert Fingarette⁴, the analytic philosopher of ordinary language and pragmatic behaviorism, Rosemont presents a powerful critique of this all-too-pervasive ideology of individualism using the idea of more or less distinctive, but always porously entangled, idea of (inter)culturally patterned "conceptual clusters":

Every culture has a vocabulary denoting core concepts for describing, analyzing and evaluating human conduct, long ago as well as today. In contemporary English that vocabulary tends to cluster around the term "morals" and includes such other terms as "freedom," "ought," "rights," "liberty," "reason," "obligation," "choice," "dilemma," "evil," "objective/subjective," "right/wrong," "individual," "duty" and several related terms. Without these terms a discussion of moral issues could not take place. Unfortunately for any and all efforts to speed read the Analects for its moral insights, none of these terms clustered around the concept of "morals" has a close lexical equivalent in classical Chinese, and hence, in a very significant sense, Confucius should not be described as a "moral philosopher" in the contemporary English meaning of that expression, for imposing our current concept-cluster on his text will only eventuate in seeing him as a well-meaning preacher at best, as a muddled or hopelessly naive thinker at worst.⁵

The need to carry out a cultural gestalt shift in moral thinking away from "rights-possessing individuals" to "role-bearing persons", that is, from theoretically unencumbered autonomous selves to relationally *encumbered* processes of becoming more fully human (i.e. an ethically robust selving process in a horizontal

⁴ See his *Confucianism: The Secular as Sacred*.

⁵ Henry Rosemont Jr., *A Readers Guide to the Analects*, p.17.

community of creative democratic interpretation), is made evident by Rosemont in referencing the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness* present in any thinking that presupposes substantive selves in isolation from their communal and familial narrative formations. In considering unique human persons as generic instantiations of a distinct natural or ontological kind (human being), such a misplaced naturalism leaves us with a debilitating normative deficit in addressing real world problems and predicaments that are most currently pressing—massive poverty, gross inequality, radical environmental degradation, climate chaos, possibility of nuclear holocaust, increasing xenophobic and racial hatred, cruelty, violence, and the horrifying list goes on. These symptoms of social disease are representative of deep ethical predicaments that we can only hope to resolve if the regnant ideology of individualism is replaced with something more amenable to a thoroughly relational thinking about persons in the non-ideal contexts of their precarious, vulnerable, and ethically adventurous lives.⁶

Advocates for non-foundationalist and anti-individualist approaches to Confucian philosophy like Henry Rosemont and Herbert Fingarette at times seem to suggest that anything even remotely resembling the familiar conceptual cluster of the regnant ideology of individualism and liberal morality cannot be found in early Confucian sources. Thus we might wish to argue that there is no such thing as Confucian "morality" because for the Confucians, experience is shot through with *responsibility* of a thoroughly pluralistic nature—and since there is no discretely and

⁶ For the distinction between *problems* that can be solved as in a social engineering project and *predicaments* that can only be "resolved" with changing basic cultural presuppositions see Peter Herschok's *Buddhism in the Public Sphere: Reorienting Global Interdependence* (2010), p.180.

distinctively *moral* realm of discourse from which we can clearly identify a purely ethical sense of *ought* or *should* from other forms of axiological prescription, the idea of a purportedly foundational subject of onto-ethical discourse is illusory and superfluous. So why even speak of Confucian "ethics" at all?

Indeed, it doesn't seem possible that we can conceptually demarcate a *moral* ought say from a prudential, aesthetic, biological, or some other type of *normative claim* made on persons in their holistic experience as persons in early Confucian discourse in terms of embodiment, familial embeddedness, social belonging, and so on. We might find support for such a strong comparative philosophical claim, regarding the inappropriateness of speaking of a distinct domain of Confucian *ethical* philosophy following the trend in some analytic circles of moral philosophy that emerges in the wake of J.L. Mackie's claim that most modern moral philosophy rests upon a fundamental category mistake.⁷ While it may not lend itself to easy understanding for those enmeshed in societies and traditions that clearly demarcate an "ethical" realm of specialization in philosophy and religion, we may wish to argue that taking the conceptual gestalt shift offered by Confucian role ethics⁸ seriously then we might have to begin speaking about personal responsibility and political participation *without ethics* as a distinctive domain of discourse. This goes even further than the neo-pragmatist insistence that we think of *ethics without principles*

⁷ I'm thinking of Elizabeth Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" and Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* in analytic Anglo-American moral philosophy that both argue that the search for moral foundations in the form of systematic theories emerges in the enlightenment from a sort of category mistake in thinking about persons outside of the value contexts created by specific cultural practices and religious institutions (i.e. "traditions").

⁸ Roger Ames has suggested that in Chinese the phrase Confucian role ethics (儒家角色倫理學) is redundant, because the idea of "role ethics" is contained in the concept of "bringing optimal patterning to roles and relations" (*Junli* 倫理) which is the binomial character pairing used to translate "ethics" in the modern period.

(e.g. Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam), in advocating a culturally located and resolutely embodied practical wisdom that seamlessly integrates aesthetic-ethical-political value considerations without the hyphenated disciplinary assumptions. Taking a cue from Richard Shusterman's somaesthetic stance, we might say that Confucian role ethics allows us to be doubly neo-pragmatic by taking a bodily turn after the linguistic turn, thereby fully embracing the pluralistic ontology of pure experience and the epistemological-axiological stance of radical empiricism. At least we could make good sense of responsibility without ethics as pointing towards an ameliorative vision of a future informed more by a non-ideal, anti-foundationalist view of persons as irreducibly relational projects.

In what follows it will become readily obvious that many of my philosophical proclivities are largely aligned with what Roger Ames and David Hall have dubbed an "aesthetic order" of thinking.⁹ Ames and Hall claim that an aesthetic as juxtaposed with a reductively rational-logical ordering of experience "begins with the uniqueness of the one thing and assesses this particular as contributing to the balanced complexity of its context."¹⁰ They also suggest that because an aesthetic ordering of a correlative cosmology "celebrates the disclosure of insistent particularity of each detail in tension with the consequent unity of these specific details, plurality must be conceived as prior to unity."¹¹ I am in wholehearted agreement that the best way to approach the early Ruist tradition of thinking about

⁹ See *Thinking Through Confucius* (1987), p.136. "The concepts of aesthetic and logical order are inversely related. Aesthetic order presses in the direction of particularity and uniqueness; logical order toward generality and absolute substitutability."

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

unique human becoming within the vital context of socially embodied roles and lived relationships is with a general hermeneutic framework or "*ars contextualis*"—that is approaching all interpretive schemes with a non-reductive, holistic, pluralistic "aesthetic order" in mind. Thus it probably will not be all that surprising that throughout the course of this dissertation I will be drawing upon recent developments in the task of philosophical thinking like philosophical hermeneutics, non-foundationalist phenomenology, (neo)pragmatism, and process metaphysics to elucidate productive resonances found within these anti-rationalistic protestant reformations in Western philosophy and indigenous Confucian concepts relating to the core phrase "resolute agency"¹² (*shendu* 慎獨) at the heart of the conceptual cluster of Si-Meng Confucian role ethics.

II. Reconstructing a Si-Meng Lineage of Confucian Role Ethics

Kong Ji 孔伋 (483-402 BCE), was the grandson of Confucius (551-479 BCE), and is better known by his "style" name Zisizi 子思子 or "Master" Zisi. His name is traditionally associated with the authorship of the *Zhongyong* and with three other

¹² In the process of working on this dissertation I have frequently changed my mind on how to optimally translate the phrase *shendu* 慎獨. "Caring for personal uniqueness," "concernful becoming," "resolute human potential," "resolute ritual transformation," etc. have all been suggested or tried at various points. I will still be using various methods to translate the term throughout, because as like many key concepts in early Chinese philosophy a productive vagueness suffuses its philosophical aura. At one point I had decided on, whenever possible, employing the expression "concerning creativity" as a consistently clear way to translate this phrase. I came across this translation scheme when reading John Berthrong's *Concerning Creativity* (SUNY, 1998) a book that deals with Whitehead, Neville, and Zhu Xi. I don't think Berthrong had in mind this particular expression that actually does play a central role in Zhu Xi's neo-Confucian hermeneutics, but it works quite well in terms of capturing the gerundively engaged ethical focus brought to bear on situations of emergent personal becoming and "creative" (*cheng* 誠) ethical-political transformations. After all it is the non-foundational relational potential of persons (*du* 獨) that is the agentially charged *material* through which creative integration of natural experience as ethically consummatory and religiously disclosive happens. But since this phrase is ungrammatical and somewhat misleading in English I will be using the phrase "resolute becoming/agency" consistently as it calls forth the focus-field dynamic of relational selving in the Si-Meng presuppositions.

documents that were compiled together as the *Record of Ritual Propriety* (*Liji* 禮記): "A Record of the Gnomon" (*biaoji* 表記)," "The Black Robes (*ziyi* 緇衣)," and "A Record of the Dike (*fangji* 坊記)." The received tradition makes mention of a text known as the *Zisizi* 《子思子》 but we don't have any extant versions and many scholars think that the fragments that we do have are either inauthentic attributions or a forgery. However, with the recovery of recently excavated archaeological materials the presumed *Zisizi* corpus of writing has been significantly enhanced. Some contemporary interpreters, like Li Xueqin, even go so far as to claim that several of the Jingmen Guodian Bamboo finds are chapters of a previously lost *Zisizi* text. For our present purposes we will be focusing primarily on two core *Zisizi* documents—*The Five Modes of Virtuosic Conduct* (*Wuxing* 五行) and the *Focusing the Familiar* (*Zhongyong* 中庸). While we may occasionally appeal to a text attributed or associated with presumed *Zisizi* authorship, it will behoove us to focus on these two texts more or less exclusively as they most clearly reveal some of the central features of Si-Meng Confucian thinking and simplify our task of thinking through this reconstructed lineage.

Mengzi (372-289 BCE) is traditionally thought to be a direct disciple of *Zisizi*. While this is perhaps not objective intellectual history, we can say with a high degree of confidence that the authors of the *Mengzi* were certainly philosophically influenced by *Zisizi*'s thinking. Xunzi (310-235 BCE) places these two thinkers together in a critical gesture against what he took to be a superficial and hypocritical form of pseudo-Confucian teaching:

Emulating the former kings in broad outline yet incognizant of their traditions; boastful and ambitious nonetheless, [yet] sundry and scattered in learning and experience; creating a doctrine on the basis of archaic things and calling it the "five conducts" (*wu xing* 五行), unorthodox to the extreme and lacking any correspondence, abstruse and incomprehensible, cryptic and unintelligible; and thereupon adorning their words and lending reverence to their doctrine, saying: "These are truly the words of the former gentleman (Confucius)!"—Zi Si sang the lead in this, and Meng Ke chimed along . . .¹³

Some commentators have thought that the term *wu xing* 五行 here referred to the naturalistic *yin-yang* cosmology of the Han dynasty or the so-called "Five Phases"—water, fire, wood, metal, and earth (水火木金土) and it was for many a longstanding mystery as to what such purely naturalist speculations had to do with the moral psychological thinking of either Zisizi or Mengzi. According to the Tang dynasty commentator Yang Liang, the "five conducts" here were indicative of the "five constancies" (*wu chang* 五常) or "virtuosities" of "relational virtuosity, optimal appropriateness, ritual practice, wisdom, and trust" (*ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, *zhi* 知, and *xin* 信). But it wasn't until Pang Pu and others were able to interpret the passage in light of the Guodian Bamboo strips containing the *Wuxing* that the mystery was put to rest. In any event, it is clear that at least by the time of Xunzi that it was customary to associate the thinking of Zisizi and Mengzi together as one harmoniously coherent philosophical lineage—the so-called *Si-Meng lineage* 思孟家.

While the task of grouping together historical documents under the heading of a specific lineage of thinkers is profoundly difficult and requires a great deal of

¹³略法先王而不知其統，（猶）然而（猶）材劇志大，聞見雜博。案往舊造說，謂之五行，甚辟違而無類，幽隱而無說，閉約而無解。案飾其辭，而祇敬之，曰：此真先君子之言也。子思唱之，孟軻和之。"Fei shi'er zi 非十二子, Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie*, p. 94 [Modified translation of Scott Cook from his "Consummate Artistry and Moral Virtuosity: The "Wu xing 五行" Essay and its Aesthetic Implications."

sinological and philological expertise, we must recognize that such hermeneutical activity can never approach a wholly objective science. What we can reasonably anticipate to achieve though, is building upon the best scholarship available to us in an attempt to reconstruct a coherent vision of *philosophical order* from the assumed Si-Meng corpus of writings—drawing from them a conceptual cluster or certain "family resemblances" that might serve as a unifying thread elucidating and guiding the text's most edifying conceptual clustering. For our present purposes, I will attempt to bracket as much as possible the complex questions of authorial intent and textual attribution as emerging in the field of sinological philology and attempt to focus as directly as possible upon the relevant *philosophical* implications of the Si-Meng lineage for Confucian role ethical thinking.

I wish to argue that the Si-Meng tradition can be effectively summarized using the following fourfold schema of representation:

- 1) *Relational Internalism*
- 2) *Embodied Agency*
- 3) *Interpersonal Affectivity*
- 4) *Musical Flourishing*

Before turning to the historical and philosophical "reconstruction" of each of these characteristic features of Si-Meng lineage of Confucian role ethics, I want to first present John Dewey's pragmatic call for a *reconstruction* [of and in] *philosophy*. What Dewey's radical proposal amounts to is to take the cultivation of creative intelligence out of the murky and unproductive waters of the historical "problems of philosophers" and turn instead to the everyday problems of human persons in

families and communicating communities, seeking a more full and stable realization of values that might make *this* life worth living.

III. John Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy*

In 1920 John Dewey published a systematic diagnosis of the problems with Greco-Medieval European philosophy and argued for the importance of carrying out a reconstruction in philosophical thinking that would seek to bring the methods and functional concepts of previous philosophies down to a democratically oriented planet earth upon which these working concepts could then effect real amelioration. Dewey articulates his holistic and even religious conception of democracy as an ideal way of life in suggesting that although "[d]emocracy has many meanings" its moral meaning, "is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements" and this meaning "shall be the contribution they make to the all-round growth of every member of society."¹⁴

Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy* can be read as a sustained argument for shifting the emphasis of philosophical inquiry from the epistemologically rarefied search for an existentially disengaged, purely theoretical or contemplative knowledge to a more pragmatically focused sense of engaged, experimental inquiry and the cultivation of *intelligence* in practice. For Dewey the quest for certainty should be replaced with a pursuit of pragmatic truths. But "truth" for Dewey is always an adverbial, gerundive, and contextual affair and never a separate totalizing formation transcending historical, embodied experience. Dewey wishes to move our philosophical thinking away from the pure epistemic subject of a *cogito* to the

¹⁴ Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Henry Holt, 1920), p.86.

vitality engaged field of agency in realizing ourselves as socially-embedded and role-encumbered *dramatis personae*. Dewey even suggests that instead of thinking of human nature as exemplifying the "rational animal" we consider humankind instead as a sort of "dramatized animal."¹⁵

Dewey highlights the importance of culture and "tradition" in thinking-in-context of communicating communities as opposed to any kind of disengaged epistemic spectator "view from Nowhere" characterized by introspective "reflective" thinking:

Tradition thus formed becomes a kind of norm to which individual fancy and suggestion conform. An abiding framework conceiving life grows up into which individuals are inducted by education. Both unconsciously and by definite social requirement individual memories are assimilated to group memory or tradition and individual fancies are accommodated to the body of beliefs characteristic of a community.¹⁶

Dewey proposes a "genetic method" to clear up the conceptual confusion and ethical-political inertia created by centuries of Graeco-Medieval thinking about persons as foundational individuals—that is, as rational subjects of epistemology and as *will*-ing participants in ethical-political systems of distortingly idealized social contracts. For Dewey the *genetic method* "is a more effective way of undermining this [rationalistic and foundationally individualist] type of philosophic theorizing than any attempt at logical refutation could be."¹⁷

The *genetic method* is not merely meant to tell an intellectual history of certain pervasive ideas and undergirding presuppositions in a particular cultural milieu, but similar to a Nietzschean *genealogical* approach, the telling of a history of

¹⁵ Dewey, *ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.24.

the present can serve to diagnose certain philosophical-cum-physiological pathologies and disclose depth dynamics of perniciously operative hierarchies of coercive power. Dewey, perhaps more than a Nietzschean model of self-overcoming of and through nihilism would allow, is rather sanguine about the possibility of achieving an "ordered and intelligent happiness" within historically realized communicating communities—understood here not just as Habermasian ideal speech conditions but as a more basically embodied practice of optimizing discursive fields of personal and social disclosure in natural-historical communities. After having fully understood and transformed the reigning philosophical grammar or intellectual "common sense" in a localized community of interpretation, Dewey wishes to replace grand metaphysical narratives or culturally reified ethnonationalist mythologies with localized and piecemeal attempts at democratic amelioration of shared experience through the preservation and creative realization of *intelligent practice*:

That which may be pretentiously unreal when it is formulated in metaphysical distinctions becomes intensely significant when connected with the drama of the struggle of social beliefs and ideals. Philosophy which surrenders its somewhat barren monopoly of dealings with Ultimate and Absolute Reality will find a compensation in enlightening the moral forces which move mankind and in contributing to the aspirations of men to attain to a more ordered and intelligent happiness.¹⁸

Dewey professes that to realize intelligent practice is to realize a creative agency in situations of natural complexity. Deweyan experimentalism is inherently naturalistic in that it attempts to "respect matter" as opposed to denigrating the lived body of natural-social experience. For Dewey to "respect matter" means to

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.26-27.

"respect the conditions of achievement; conditions which hinder and obstruct and which have to be changed, conditions which help and further and which can be used to modify obstructions and attain ends." And it is only when we as a culture or a communicating community of engaged ethical inquirers have "learned to pay sincere and persistent regard to matter, to the conditions upon which depends negatively and positively the success of all endeavor" that we might hope to express a "sincere and fruitful respect for ends and purposes."¹⁹ Understanding the naturalistic background undergirding any means-end continua in experience—in other words, recognizing the irreducible coherence of social intelligence and material practices—is to be well on the way to realizing creative agency in the world. While to "profess to have an aim and then neglect the means of its execution is self-delusion of the most dangerous sort."²⁰ Dewey rejects any simplistic and false dichotomies between moral materialisms that deny creative ethical agency (theories like Spencerian social evolutionism) and moral idealisms or "sentimental" theories that profess lofty ideals without a pragmatic respect for a continuity of means-end thinking in socially embodied intelligence.

Suggesting a pragmatic naturalism as a viable middle way between the two extremes of reductive materialism and sentimental idealism, Dewey calls for a return to the "true *stuff* of experience" in realizing collective democratic agency:

The true 'stuff' of experience is recognized to be adaptive courses of actions, habits, active functions, connections of doing and undergoing; sensori-motor co-ordinations. Experience carries principles of connection and organization within itself. These [a priori Neo-Kantian] principles are none the worse because they are vital and practical rather than epistemological....this

¹⁹ Ibid., p.72.

²⁰ Ibid.

organization intrinsic to life renders unnecessary a super-natural and super-empirical synthesis. It affords the basis and material for a positive evolution of intelligence as an organizing factor within experience.²¹

Instead of seeking ahistorical, transcendental sources of meaning and value via a disengaged theoretical "use" of rational intellect, Dewey urges us to re-envision moral philosophers instead as "moral artists" who make good use of narratives and exercise our powers of imagination in projects of to "reconstruction" in experience along more ordered, intelligent, and ultimately happy lines.

For Dewey the only moral value that isn't open to revision is *growth*. Dewey obviously understands moral growth here not in merely quantitative terms. We can't measure Gross Domestic Happiness the same way we might calculate Gross Domestic Product for example. Dewey envisions growth within a naturalistic metaphysics of persons as emerging out of role-encumbered interpretive communities. For Dewey *growth* as an ethical value is just ordered, progressive change over time. The ethical aim of pragmatic agency is to realize intelligence in ameliorating situations. *Agency* must be applied to concrete situations and "signifies nothing less than that the world or any part of it as it presents itself at a given time is accepted or acquiesced in only as *material* for change...precisely as the carpenter, say, accepts things" and is not to be understood along passive lines as mere acceptance but as an active, adapting *designer* who "notes things not just as objects in themselves, but with reference to what he wants to do to them and with them; to the end he has in mind."²²

²¹ Ibid., p.91.

²² Ibid., pp.114-115.

Pragmatic moral inquiry is protected from the "vexatious and wasteful conflict between naturalism and humanism" because "inquiry, discovery take the same place in morals that they have come to occupy in sciences of nature." And for Dewey theories of truth, validation, demonstration "become experimental, a matter of consequences."²³ Dewey's experimental theory of pragmatic ethical agency can be productively characterized with the following four themes:

- 1) *Adaptability*: "Moral life is protected from falling into formalism and rigid repetition. It is rendered flexible, vital, growing."²⁴
- 2) *Attentiveness*: Every (moral) situation deserves "the same *intelligent attention*."²⁵
- 3) *Situationalism*: Dewey suggests that a reconstructed experimentalism "*destroys* the root of Phariseeism"—there is no one size fits all morality.
- 4) *Evolutionary Intelligence*: For Dewey "the process of growth, of improvement and progress, rather than the static outcome and result, becomes the significant thing." And "Not health as an end fixed once and for all, but the needed improvement in health—a continual process—is the end and good." All "active process of transforming the existent situation. Not perfection as a final goal, but the ever-enduring *process of perfecting*, maturing, refining is the aim in living . . . directions of change in the *quality* of experience. Growth itself is the only moral 'end'."²⁶

Adaptability, attentiveness, situationalism, and evolutionary intelligence are in some sense just four kindred ways of talking about *non-foundational ameliorism*

²³ Ibid., p.174.

²⁴ Ibid., p.175.

²⁵ Ibid., p.176. I believe Dewey's notion of ethical attention resonates profoundly with the Si-Meng Confucian appreciation of "resolute becoming" *shendu* 慎獨.

²⁶ Ibid., p.177.

as a basic ethical orientation. Without positing a traditional teleological ethics of perfectionism, we have instead the idea of *endless perfecting* in concrete situations and in the context of our embodied roles and relationships that narratively shape us over the course of a lifetime. Dewey defines *meliorism* as "the belief that the specific conditions which exist at one moment, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good, in any event may be bettered. It encourages intelligence to study the positive means of good and the obstructions to their realization, and to put forth endeavor for the improvement of conditions."²⁷ It is *growing* "or continuous reconstruction of experience" that is the "only end."²⁸

The ideal as an end-in-view of democracy is made accessible to ordinary experience in the form of what the moral imagination can conjure up in reverently thinking about "the all-around growth of every member of society."²⁹ Dewey is able to avoid the Scylla of classically liberal atomism and the Charybdis of social conformism/determinism (both of which rest upon foundationally individual assumptions about persons and society as being nothing more than an aggregated collectivity of discrete individuals) by steering us into the waters of an organic conception of persons wherein "society and individuals are correlative, organic to one another, society requiring the service and subordination of individuals and at the same time existing to serve them."³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., p.178.

²⁸ Ibid., p.184.

²⁹ Ibid., p.186.

³⁰ Ibid., p.187. Sor-Hoon Tan has adroitly considered the importance of Dewey's thinking in navigating the extremes of social conformism and autonomous individualism for projects aimed at a reconstruction of "Confucian democracy" in both liberal and a-liberal cultural-political contexts. See

Dewey offers a vision of what it would mean to think about persons beyond the metaphysical tradition of substance dualism and foundational individualism inherited from the regnant Greco-Medieval philosophical grammar. In a fully reconstructed pragmatic vein, Dewey writes:

When the self is regarded as something complete within itself, then it is readily argued that only internal moralistic changes are of importance in general reform. Institutional changes are said to be merely external. They may add conveniences and comforts to life, but they cannot effect moral improvements. The result is to throw the burden for social improvement upon free-will in its most impossible form. Moreover, social and economic passivity are encouraged. Individuals are led to concentrate in moral introspection upon their own vices and virtues, and to neglect the character of the environment. Morals withdraw from active concern with detailed economic and political conditions. Let us perfect ourselves within, and in due season changes in society will come of themselves is the teaching. And while saints are engaged in introspection, burly sinners run the world. But when *self-hood is perceived to be an active process* it is also seen that social modifications are the only means of the creation of changed personalities. Institutions are viewed in their *educative effect*: — with reference to the types of individuals they foster. The interest in objective reform of economic and political conditions are identified. And inquiry into the meaning of social arrangements gets definite point and direction. We are led to ask what the specific stimulating, fostering and nurturing power of each specific social arrangement may be. *The old-time separation between politics and morals is abolished at its root.*³¹

It is only by reconstructing thinking and feeling in a relationally holistic way, at "the root", that we can hope to realize more effective creative agency in democratic practices of *ars contextualis*. Dewey wants to give a new sense to the well-worn concept of "Freedom" not as the exercise of individual autonomy but as the wholehearted participation in the ameliorative transformation of entangled webs of interpretive communities critically extending from families into various layers of

her *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* (2003), especially her treatment of "individuality and organic sociality" pp.52-62.

³¹ Ibid., p.196.

social-political community context. For Dewey, the "long-time controversy between rights and duties, law and freedom is another version of the strife between the Individual and Society as fixed concepts. . . Freedom for an individual means growth, ready change when modification is required."³²

With this understanding of Deweyan reconstruction in and of philosophy in mind let us transition back to our own reconstructing of Si-Meng thinking as a distinct and viable philosophical lineage of Confucian role ethics capable of amelioratively intervening in contemporary global ethical, political, and religious discourse.

IV. Relational Internalism

A central theme of Si-Meng discourse is the proper way of becoming consummately human (*rendao* 人道) inevitably involves processes deeply rooted in our interpersonal experience of relationships and the values at play in our admiration for exemplary persons and their performative virtuosic conduct (*de* 德) disclosed in place-based historical-cultural contexts. We always already find ourselves "thrown" into such horizons of intergenerational narrative belonging.³³ The *Zhongyong* reminds us that "proper way-making is never far off" (*dao bu yuan ren* 道不遠人) or wholly transcendent of our narratively embedded relational

³² Ibid., p.207.

³³ I use the Heideggerian term "thrownness" here with some reticence because the vision of unique human becomings on offer in Confucian Role Ethics has a much more optimistic sense of human belonging in family (not merely biological but understood as a cultural-ethical achievement and idealization of the human experience). However, the aspect of "thrownness" as pointing to our always indeterminate sense of non-autonomous facticity does a nice job of capturing the overall fragility of the process of exercising solicitude over one's relational nexus of transactional becoming and hints at the limitations that any ethico-political project drawing upon the resources of CRE would inevitably face as a matter of fact.

contexts and thus creative way-making as role-focused agency cannot be abandoned for even a moment. Resolutely attending to personal cultivation in fields of relational becoming implies that the "virtuosic powers" (*de* 德) variously identified as threefold (*ren* 仁, *zhi* 智, *yong* 勇) in the *Zhongyong*, fourfold (*ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, *zhi* 智) in the *Mengzi*, and fivefold (*ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, *zhi* 智, *sheng* 聖) in the "Five Modes of Proper Conduct" *Wuxing* are viewed, by the Si-Meng tradition, as *intrinsic* to the development of our personal experience. There is no need to posit some transcendent onto-teleological source of values as the root (*ben* 本) is single-sourced within an interpretive horizon achieved within the natural complexes of family and social institutions.

The concept of "intrinsic" (*nei* 內) is pervasive in Si-Meng discourse and is frequently contrasted with the "extrinsic" (*wai* 外).³⁴ Since I choose to read the Si-Meng texts as devoid of a sharp ontological dichotomy between a supposedly purely inward psychologism and an objective world or things-in-themselves, I think that the best way to understand these terms is to employ a correlative cosmological framework that presupposes a pragmatic distinction between a "private", because more *intrinsic* to the process of becoming a unique human person, and a "public" realm, because more *extrinsic* to the process of becoming a relationally distinct site of deference within a role-governed social ontology of persons. A driving problematic of this dissertation is to reconstruct a Si-Meng conception of ethically

³⁴ There is considerable debate as to how to understand this conceptual pairing in received texts like the *Mengzi* and *Zhongyong*. Some recently excavated texts point to a conceptual evolution from a simple spatial boundary threshold marked by the "household gates", to a more metaphysical construction of agency as sourced from within embodied experience or derived from externally imposed norms.

experiential *internalism* within a thoroughly correlative cosmology.³⁵ Certain ways of thinking about values would require the positing of some superordinate source of transcendent principles that come to unilaterally direct or conduct natural experience via an external imposition of some predetermined teleological order of being. Such an ontotheological or "supernatural" way of conceiving axiological sources has certainly been part of the philosophical "common sense" in Western philosophy. Such thinking depends upon a substance ontology and accompanying philosophical grammar that expresses itself in terms of essentialized substances and their corresponding attributes. In a world defined by the interaction of static, discrete substances (Reality) and our subjective perception of changing phenomena (Appearance), values are transcendentally grounded in a One-behind-the-many metaphysical narrative. Such transcendent values are then conceived as either purely subjective expressions of value preference or as objective perceptions of some sort of "queer" *qualia* as moral epiphenomena. In a thoroughly *relational cosmology* however, we avoid the false dichotomy between hard-headed reductionism and tender-minded mystification. For correlative thinking the philosophical grammar of discrete substances and accidental appearances finds no interpretive traction. In the speculative metaphysics presupposed by pre-Qin correlative thinkers, the predominant conceptual clusters offer allusively reference fluid processes and relatively stable events and a rhythm of experience punctuated with the "flights and perchings" of consummatory disclosure. It is

³⁵ I generally prefer to employ the term relational 'cosmology' instead of 'ontology' because of the decidedly a-metaphysical assumptions of the early Chinese philosophical tradition. See my review of *Chinese Metaphysics and its Problems* (Cambridge 2015) "Chinese Metaphysics: A New Name for some Old Ways of Thinking" in *China Review International* (2017).

important to understand how the problem of indexical or illustrative reference or "pointing" to exemplary figures can be explained within a correlative cosmology of dynamic transactional becoming punctuated with the ethico-aesthetic consummations of certain celebrated personalities and their virtuosic achievements. I argue that a certain form of exemplarism will be an optimal way to approach Confucian Role ethics. In the Si-Meng role ethical vision, the admirable exemplarity of persons (real and imagined) gets situated within a disclosive horizon of *tian* 天 engendered role-focused agency.³⁶

In the 1998 Gilbert Ryle lectures, published later as *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference*, Thomas Kasulis draws a most helpful distinction between an intimacy and integrity orientation. He suggests that "we might find it helpful to watch for certain general patterns that might have heuristic value" as it will "aid our concern for the possibilities and limitations of cross-cultural analysis, communication, and cooperation."³⁷ While recognizing that "generalizations are always distortions," Kasulis still distinguishes between what he sees to be two fundamentally divergent cultural modes of disclosing values in embodied experience. He focuses on two "recursive cultural patterns"—*intimacy* and *integrity*—showing how they respectively generate "very different cultural understanding[s] of fact and value, of what-is and what-should-be, by reiterating this pattern over and over again into ever more complex theoretical

³⁶ For more on exemplarist readings of Confucianism see Tim Connolly's *The Foundations of Confucian Ethics* (Forthcoming) and Amy Olberding's *Moral Exemplars in the Analects: The Good Person is That* (2013).

³⁷ Thomas Kasulis, *Intimacy or Integrity*, p.5

manifestations."³⁸ By exploring "two essentially different ways of relating" as juxtaposed "cultural gestalts" Kasulis provides a most useful heuristic for thinking through cultural difference and deep philosophical grammar.

Etymology can be philosophically revealing. *Intimus* means either "what is innermost" or "a close friend." And the verb "*intimare*" means "to make known" and "putting this together, we can say that the root meaning of intimacy is something like 'making known to a close friend what is innermost.'"³⁹ Thus, intimacy always involves an "inseparability, a belonging together, a sharing"—an interpretive perspective that involves what we might call a primacy of internal relations over external relatedness. Kasulis characterizes an intimacy orientation with five features:

- 1) Intimacy is objective, but *personal* rather than public.
- 2) In an intimate relation, *self and other belong together* in a way that does not sharply distinguish the two.
- 3) Intimate knowledge has an *affective dimension*.
- 4) Intimacy is *somatic* as well as psychological.
- 5) Intimacy's ground is not generally self-conscious, reflective, or self-illuminating.⁴⁰

An integrity orientation, on the other hand, derives from the Latin "*integritas*" related to "*integer*," meaning an indivisible whole. Kasulis reminds us that we call whole numbers "integers" because they are not fractionalized and

³⁸ Ibid., p.11.

³⁹ Ibid., p.24.

⁴⁰ Ibid..

"integer" is probably related to "in" + "tegere" or "in" + "tangere," that is, "not" + "touch-able." So that which has integrity is "untouched, uncorrupted, pure." A person of integrity will not sell out. And the integrity of a ship's hull will keep it afloat. In short, the etymological meaning of integrity suggests "being whole, indivisible, and inviolable."⁴¹ And in more or less direct opposition to an intimacy orientation an integrity orientation clusters around the following five features:

- 1) Objectivity as *public* verifiability.
- 2) *External* over internal relations.
- 3) Knowledge as *ideally* empty of affect.
- 4) The *intellectual and psychological* as distinct from the somatic.
- 5) Knowledge as *reflective and self-conscious* of its own grounds.

Kasulis' approach is most helpful in providing framework for orienting our thinking about deep philosophical grammar and localized patterns of cultural difference. We could then claim that that a Si-Meng cultural orientation is decidedly biased in favor of an intimacy cultural gestalt. However, we might also wish to push beyond *describing* cultural difference and critically ponder the value of one or another basic orientation in *prescribing* possible cultural embodiment.

Indeed, a major focus of this dissertation is to ask whether or not it is possible to creatively "integrate" the best of both an intimacy and integrity orientation while avoiding the pernicious aspects of what both cultural-metaphysical extremes are capable of carrying out in the service of distorting ideologies and coercively imposed value horizons. Si-Meng thinking about "resolute

⁴¹ Ibid., p.25.

becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨) and agential "creativity" (*cheng* 誠) can offer a way around the seeming impasse of a metaphysical bifurcation and pernicious relativism that would essentialize these fundamental differences in cultural orientation. Such essentializing bifurcation is precisely what John Dewey warned against in the inaugural issue of *Philosophy East and West* as "cultural block universes" standing in confrontational and incommensurable relationships to each other on a global stage of intercultural comparative philosophy:

To adapt a phrase of William James, there are no "cultural block universes" and the hope of free men everywhere is to prevent any such "cultural block universes" from ever arising and fixing themselves upon all mankind or any portion of mankind. To the extent that your journal can keep the idea open and working that there are "*specific* philosophical relationships" to be explored in the West and in the East and between the West and East you will, I think, be contributing most fruitfully and dynamically to the enlightenment and betterment of the human estate.⁴²

But this doesn't mean that we shouldn't be up front about drawing productive generalizations regarding the basic presuppositions and deep philosophical grammar implicit in uniquely located cultures of interpretation (thinkers, texts, and traditions). We can't do productive comparative philosophy amongst or "in-between" traditions, if we don't first attempt to get clear about the common philosophical grammar and background presuppositions shaping the conceptual clusters operative in any encounter with thinkers and texts in the *contexts* of their enabling traditions.

⁴² John Dewey, "On Philosophical Synthesis" *PEW* 1 (April 1951: 3).

V. Embodied Ethical Agency

Within the context of Si-Meng thinking embodiment plays a vital role in conceptualizing categories of moral psychology. The prevalence of embodied moral phenomenology and embodied root-metaphors in Si-Meng texts should alert us to the fact that within the naturalistic assumptions of this tradition there is no space for purely theoretical or abstract discourse about ethical judgment or moral reflection. All thinking is irremediably a sort of "someaesthetics"⁴³ or thinking-through-the-body for the Si-Meng Confucians.

Friedrich Nietzsche has argued convincingly that a certain "philosophy of grammar" structures all thinking due to inevitable linguistic and cultural specificity:

The strange family resemblance of all Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing is explained easily enough. Where there is an affinity of languages, it cannot fail, owing to the *common philosophy of grammar*—I mean, owing to the unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions—that everything is prepared at the outset for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems; just as the way seems barred against certain other possibilities of world-interpretation.⁴⁴

The idea presented here is that our various modes of "world-interpretation" are grown out of the historical development of "philosophical systems" driven in large part, if not entirely, by the "unconscious domination" of an *embodied* mode of world disclosure or a deep philosophy of grammar. Our sedimented habits and deeply ingrained patterns of conduct and bodily comportment have their own moral inertia. An inertia that is, at least in part, influenced by deep cultural

⁴³ See Richard Shusterman's *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (2012) for a definition of this new name for some very old ways of thinking about philosophy as an embodied practice of enhancing the quality of life as opposed to some priestly-valued rejection of vitality in favor of some purely rational preparation for death.

⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 19.

presuppositions that operate unconsciously and pervasively in enacting agency and disclosive world-interpretation. It is important to note that Nietzsche here is *not* arguing for a kind of hard linguistic determinism (*a la* Sapir-Whorf hypothesis). For despite our thrownness in a culturally encoded philosophical grammar, we can still think or say virtually anything within the play of differences available within any natural language complex. What Nietzsche is proscribing is that any given cultural context inevitably does influence *how* and *what* we can possibly think and do when we engage in philosophical reflection as that "uncommonly stubborn attempt to think clearly."⁴⁵

William James has similarly suggested that "our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent time. They form one great stage of equilibrium in the human mind's development, the stage of common sense."⁴⁶ James further argued that this philosophical common sense is operative at the level of our basic thinking about: "things, kinds, sameness or difference, minds, bodies, subjects and attributes, causal influence, the fancied, the real," and so on. In considering the philosophical common sense as adumbrated by the pragmatist pioneer, Roger Ames sounds a critical endorsement of this "generalizing" without "essentializing" way of thinking:

Although we might be properly critical of James for taking the familiar categories of our own common sense—indeed, the default vocabulary of a metaphysical realism—as definitive of the "human mind" without taking genuine cultural differences into account, his basic point about the thickness of culture is still well made. Sedimented across the centuries into our ways

⁴⁵ How William James defined philosophy at one point. See *Pragmatism* (1907).

⁴⁶ William James, *Pragmatism*, p. 76.

of thinking and living is a persistent deep stratum, an abiding internal impulse that grounds more apparent changes. To be sure, this "common sense" has itself always been vulnerable to the ineluctable process of change, but relatively speaking, it is also resilient and enduring.⁴⁷

Indeed, one of the most resilient and enduring modes of philosophical common sense in the modern West has been a presumption of an ontological difference to explain agency—the ubiquity of mind/body dualism. When James' suggests that this dualistic way of thinking is the "discovery of exceedingly remote ancestors" we should inquire as to how far back he would have us take this genealogy of culturally embodied concepts. We might want to read James against James himself in problematizing an overly Eurocentric conception of the pervasiveness of philosophical "common sense."⁴⁸

At least since Plato's *Phaedrus* it has been customary to think of the lived *soma* as an more or less inert container for an agentially active individual *psyche*, theoretically at least, capable of existing independently of any materially embodied structure. By the modern period Rene Descartes' methodological dualism of mind/body (*res cogitans* and *res extensa*) further served to entrench this mode of philosophical common sense within the emerging modern Western philosophical imaginaire. Gilbert Ryle took these sorts of dualistic metaphysics of persons as paradigmatic instances of a fundamental "category mistake" in thinking and initiated a critique in analytic philosophy of mind that has helped to release the grip that this cultural common sense has held for so long.

⁴⁷ Roger Ames, *Role Ethics*, p.43.

⁴⁸ For a critical look at the pernicious aspects of Jamesian cultural chauvinism and cultural interpretation see Samir Chopra's "The Worst Sentence James Ever Wrote" <https://samirchopra.com/2017/11/14/the-worst-sentence-william-james-ever-wrote/#comment-93648> (Accessed 4/20/18)

In a similar vein of "paradigm shifting" protestant critique, William James offers an analogy of "climate" to illustrate the redundancy of dualistic thinking in positing a superordinate substance like "soul" or "self" or "mind" to explain the phenomenon of agency as a superordinate process guiding our "stream of consciousness":

The low thermometer to-day, for instance, is supposed to come from something called the "climate." Climate is really only the name for a certain group of days, but it is treated as if it lay *behind* the day, and in general we place the name, as if it were a being, behind the facts it is the name of. But the phenomenal properties of things ... do not inhere in anything. They adhere, or cohere, rather, with each other, and the notion of a substance inaccessible to us, which we think accounts for such cohesion by supporting it, as cement might support pieces of a mosaic, must be abandoned. The fact of the bare cohesion itself is all the notion of the substance signifies. Behind that fact is nothing.⁴⁹

Instead of thinking in terms of a transcendent One-behind-the-many model or Reality/appearance set of dualistic categories, in the reconstructed Si-Meng thinking offered here the "Confucian alternative to locating personal identity in some superordinate soul or self or mind is to find this same coherence in the achieved coordination and integration of one's conduct expressed through one's *embodied* roles and relations."⁵⁰

Indeed, we might wish to speak of a Si-Meng somaesthetics⁵¹ that aims to cultivate an ethical mode of concentration on and through the body that enhances the quality of our experience by opening us up to the potentials for personal growth inherent in our embodied experience with and for others in vitally significant

⁴⁹ William James, *Pragmatism*, p.42.

⁵⁰ Roger Ames, *Role Ethics*, p.103.

⁵¹ "Somaesthetics" is a neologism coined by Richard Shusterman to refer to philosophical thinking through the body—both for its potential to critically ameliorate our thinking and for its promise to enhance our lived experience through cultivating better modes of embodied living and self-use.

relationships. In reflecting on our embodied, relational and irreducibly narrative disclosure of ethical agency and personhood, Roger Ames argues that "physically, socially, and religiously, our bodies are a specific matrix of nested relations and functions, and are invariably a collaboration between our persons and our many environments. . . "Nobody" and no "body"—not the vital, the social, or the carnal bodies—do anything by themselves."⁵² Moreover, in the Confucian tradition, "we might correlate 'body' (*ti* 體) and its cognate character 'achieved propriety in one's roles and relations' (*li* 禮) by arguing that they express two ways of looking at the same phenomenon: That is, they reference 'a living body' and 'embodied living' respectively."⁵³

Ti 體 is just one character amongst many in a conceptual cluster bearing a family resemblance to some post-metaphysical pragmatist conceptions of lived embodiment. Other terms include "lived body/ritually performative person" (*shen* 身), "mortal coil" (*qu* 區), "embodied self" (*ji* 己), etc.⁵⁴ The correlative cosmological and philosophically cognate relationship between "embodiment" (*ti* 體) and "ritual practice" (*li* 禮) is clearly born out in foundational texts like the *Book of Rites*:

Now the great corpus of ritual proprieties (*li zhi dati* 禮之大體) is embodied (*ti* 體) in the heavens and the earth, emulates the four seasons, takes *yin* and *yang* as its standard, comports with human feeling, and is thus called "ritual

⁵² *Role Ethics*, p.109.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ See Deborah Sommer's insightful article "Boundaries of the *Ti* Body." *Asia Major* (Third Series), 21(1). Here she defines the *ti*-body relationally in analogical fashion with the propagation of vegetable roots/rhizomes as a "polysemous corpus of indeterminate extent that can be partitioned into subtler units, each of which is often analogous to the whole and shares a fundamental consubstantiality and common identity with that whole....When a *ti* body is fragmented into parts (literally or conceptually), each part retains, in certain aspects, a kind of wholeness or becomes a simulacra of the larger entity of which it is a constituent."

practice" (*li* 禮). As for those who would denigrate these proprieties, they have no idea where such things come from.⁵⁵

While it might be entirely appropriate to jettison any foundational notion of personal "identity" when working within this process-oriented conceptual cluster of Confucian terms for embodiment, we can still speak of a relationally integrated and role-focused experiential and intersubjective nexus of *ethical embodiment* that abides through changing temporal transformations and significant narrative transitions:

The communal *shen* 身 body is diffused in the dynamic family and communal roles and relations that constitutes it, and just as the *ti* 體 body does not carry with it a superordinate notion of "self" or "soul"—some ghost in the machine—likewise, achieved propriety in living one's roles and relations (*li* 禮) that complements this body in constituting one's person is also primordial. That is, the quality of one's conduct is not mediated by or reduplicated in some notion of a discrete "agent" or "character" that would isolate and locate persons outside of the concrete patterns of their social and natural relations. Instead, the identity of persons lies in the achieved amalgamation, the integration, and the sustained coherence of their continuing habits of conduct within the embodied roles that constitute them.⁵⁶

As we will continue to disclose throughout this exploration of Si-Meng thinking on the creative integration of personal experience and the inward transformation of selving processes to realize effective agency in the world, ritually-refined embodiment plays a vital role.

⁵⁵ D.C. Lau (1992). *Liji* 50.1/174/18: 凡禮之大體，體天地，法四時，則陰陽，順人情，故謂之禮。毗之者是不知禮之所由生也。

⁵⁶ *Role Ethics*, p.111. I want to suggest that while we should as much as possible jettison notions of a discrete "subjectivity" as a One-behind-the-Many metaphysics of persons, that an embodied sense of *agency* realized in a relational context of correlative cosmology and aesthetic holism is still a viable way of thinking about non-foundational and non-ideal moral psychology.

VI. Relational Ontology of Persons and Transactional Affect

Affect theory has come to replace obsolete and dualistic ways of conceptualizing emotional experience within some supposedly purely inward and private theater of the mind with no inherent intentional structure or object-oriented ontology. Cartesian solipsism views the emotional life of persons as epistemically external to the "theater of the rational mind" and such thinking about emotion has been perpetuated in the common sense of Western modernity. Within traditional Cartesian assumptions it is held that we "have" or subjectively "experience" emotions in the same way that we might perceive images projected onto a diaphanous screen of consciousness. As such, emotions are utterly unreliable in terms of epistemic and ontological disclosure. The fact/value dichotomy so central to so much of the Cartesian-inspired project of Enlightenment modernity—the pervasive separation of "what-is" from "what-ought-to-be" as non-overlapping domains of discourse—has its roots in this denigration of affective experience as *mere appearance*. We might trace this intellectual tendency back to a certain Greek (Platonic-Stoic) way of thinking that separates pure thinking from the messy experience of embodied emotions. Or we might trace this genealogy to a Pauline Christianity that radically distrusts anything emerging from the "flesh" as contradistinctive from a presumably holy "spirit." In any case, we can be sure that within the philosophical "common sense" inherited from the Western

Enlightenment project, a persistent dualism haunts our thinking regarding the divorced cognitive and affective domains of personal experience.⁵⁷

In the process-oriented, correlative cosmology from which Si-Meng thinking emerges the philosophical grammar and cultural context is very different. The closest conceptual correlate with the English word "emotion" is *qing* 情 which can mean something like the "essential *facts* about a thing or a situation" and "how experience is felt or disclosed through less than wholly manifest or obvious dimensions of situations." In his book *Embodied Moral Psychology and Confucian Philosophy*, Bongrae Seok outlines the semantic valence of *qing* 情 and raises some pressing questions about the significance this term has within Confucian ethical thinking:

In Chinese philosophy, emotion is typically notated as *qing* (情) but qing is not necessarily affective, expressive, or irrational inner subjective states. In many Chinese philosophical texts, qing is explained (a) ontologically as the true nature of the world and the human being, (b) epistemologically as the way the mind (not as a distant observer but as a close resonator) understands the world, (c) axiologically as the positive sense of harmony or commitment to higher moral values. If qing is more than private inner episodes and feelings, what is qing and why is it important in Confucian moral philosophy and moral psychology?⁵⁸

Seok goes on to answer his own question by showing that *qing* 情 is best understood as a *dynamic and open field of embodied emotion* which unifies the multiple

⁵⁷ Of course certain counter-trends exist alongside Cartesian dualism. For instance, the Spinozan legacy of thinking in terms of an *affectivity* that is organically related to the natural order of things and is capable of growth or diminution insofar as it is actively or passively construed, all stands in stark contrast to the epistemically inert Cartesian subject tracking perceptual and emotional experience mysteriously interacting from within the pineal gland.

⁵⁸ Bongrae Seok, *Embodied Moral Psychology and Confucian Philosophy* (Lexington, 2013), p. 123.

interpretations of *qing* along a fact-value dialectical spectrum.⁵⁹ Part of the confusion for translating interpreters arises from expressions like "nature of things" *wu zhi qing* 物之情 (*Mencius*, 3A4) which lead Angus Graham (1989) and others to gloss *qing* as the necessary and sufficient conditions for something being the kind of thing that it is. The problem with essentialist interpretations, wherein *qing* = *eidos*, is that when applied to passages that explicitly relate *qing* to the embodied moral emotions we might think the Si-Meng authors are identifying the essential traits of a *universal* human nature. It would be an instance of a category mistake according to Graham⁶⁰ though to view the *qing* 情 of insentient creatures or situations as any different from the *qing* of human beings. Graham's process-intrinsic "essentialist" reading of *qing* is given further credence by the intimate correlation that the term has with "natural tendencies" or "inherent dispositions" (*xing* 性) in so much pre-Qin discourse.

The unprovenanced Shanghai Museum version of the Chu 楚 bamboo slips "Natural Tendencies Emerge from Conditions" (*Xingziming Chu* 《性自命出》) is titled "Discourse on Natural Tendencies and Affectivity" (*Xingqing Lun* 《性情論》),

⁵⁹ "In sum there are three major semantic dimensions of *qing*. First, *qing* means the nature of things. It is parallel but contrasted with *xing*, which is restricted to the essential and identifying features of existence. Second, *qing* also means the direct and vivid sensation of the way things progress or evolve in particular conditions of situations or environments. Third, *qing* means the affective side of the human psyche, the feeling we have about events occurring in and outside of us." (Ibid., p.126) I would take issue with Seok's characterization of the third dimension of *qing*. Insofar as there is no ontological gap between the psychological inside and phenomenal outside of our experience on a Si-Meng account of *relational internalism*, it is therefore inappropriate to speak of a divide here.

⁶⁰ I of course apply the term "essentialist" to A.C. Graham in a very limited sense only to refer to his insistence that the term always means something like situational disposition in pre-Qin sources. Professor Graham's groundbreaking work in early Chinese philosophy (especially in the Inner Chapters of the Zhuangzi and in the Neo-Confucianism of the Cheng brothers) of course problematizes any substantialist or metaphysically essentialist reading of indigenous Chinese traditions in favor of a more dynamically process-oriented view of things.

and Confucian thinkers have been consistently interested in exploring the dynamic relationship between "natural tendencies" and relational "affect" in various contexts. Indeed, Mengzi seems to view *xing* 性 and *qing* 情 as virtually interchangeable in his debate with Gaozi (*Mengzi* 6A6) who held that the "nature" *xing* 性 of human persons was ethically ambivalent at best (*xing wushan wu bushan* 性無善無不善). Mengzi's response to this Gaozian challenge is to respond that as far as human *qing* 情 goes it is certainly *capable* of acting ethically efficaciously (*nairuo qi qing* 乃若其情則可以為善).

The *Xunzi* also connects *xing* and *qing* at various points: "*xing* is what *tian* accomplishes and *qing* is *xing*'s material foundation" (性者天之就也 情者性之質也).⁶¹ In the same chapter, *Xunzi* explicitly connects "natural tendencies" with embodied emotions: "*xing*'s love, hate, joy, anger, sadness, and pleasure are called *qing*" (性之好惡喜怒哀樂謂之情). And in the *Liyun* (禮運) chapter of the *Liji* (禮記) we find expressions such as "human *qing* is a field" (人情以為田) and "human *qing* is the sage king's field" (故人情者 聖王之田也). In reference to such passages, Seok reminds us that in contrast "to the private theater of Cartesian mind, this open field [of interpersonal affectivity]" is "publicly accessible" and capable of cultivation.⁶²

Indeed, the various dimensions of affective experience (*qing* 情) can be unified in this metaphor of a *transactional field of interpersonal disclosure* (as juxtaposed to a statically given mirror metaphor of subjective representation):

⁶¹ *Xunzi*, Chapter 22, Rectification of Names 正名篇.

⁶² Seok, p.135.

This interactive and open nature of qing is probably understood better in the metaphor of field. Qing is an open space (field) where the world is felt directly and engaged interactively. It is not an enclosed theater where the world is only translated or, at best, transplanted. As qing is cultivated and properly governed, it is tuned to the world and it presents the world to us because it is the embodied feeling that gives us the direct sense of what the given situation really means to us. As far as we live in this world, we cannot be neutral and cool to the world; we are inescapably emotional to and interactive with the world because the world is not a physical location but a meaningful place to us. From this perspective of embodiment and interaction, different meanings of qing can be coherently understood.⁶³

In Si-Meng texts a great emphasis placed upon the vital significance of affectivity (*qing* 情) in coming to know an interpersonally disclosive world of shared experience and common values. Indeed, *qing* 情 is "'what something really is' in the sense that the unmediated experience itself resides in affective transactions that become selective and abstract when reduced to the cognitive structures of language" and "is important in understanding the radically contextualized and perspectival nature of creativity itself."⁶⁴

VII. Musical Flourishing Beyond Ethical Perfectionism

Confucian philosophy celebrates the ritual refinement and transformative musical flourishing (*liyue zhidu* 禮樂制度) on offer within a disclosive, intergenerational communicating community (*tianming* 天命). The binomial or contrapuntal pairing of "ritual practice" (*li* 禮) and "musical flourishing" (*yue/le* 樂) suggests a deeply somaesthetic correlative *yinyang* disclosive relationship. For every aspect of our lives that we attempt to provide aesthetico-ethical order to by drawing upon culturally available patterns of deferential conduct and ritual

⁶³ Ibid., p.139.

⁶⁴ Hall and Ames, *Zhongyong* "Glossary", pp.73-74.

propriety, there is always an opportunity for realizing consummatory experiences of inspired living together. The pervasive prejudice regarding the Confucian ritualization of natural experience as involving soul stifling of individuality through oppressive hierarchies of patriarchal and elitist coercion can be put at risk when we consider the important role that "musical flourishing" has always played, and continues to play, in concert with "ritual practice" *li* 禮 and "optimal appropriateness" *yi* 義.

Confucius himself celebrated a work of musical creation and choreography attributed to the paragon of filial virtue, the former sage-king Shun, known as the "Shao" (韶) dance, a work that he said was "both thoroughly beautiful and thoroughly edifying" (盡美矣，又盡善也). In witnessing the performance of this dance, Confucius experienced a profound transformation of his embodied perceptual habits:

The Master heard [a musical performance of] "Shao" while in Qi, and for three months he was unaware of the taste of meat. He said, "I never imagined the making of music could reach such heights!"⁶⁵

The ideal on offer here is that a realization of an aesthetically consummatory experience can lead to morally edifying transformation. Such depth transformation in the somaesthetic rhythm of Confucius' *standard of taste* so affected him that the gustatory delights were incomparable with the persistent quality of musical flourishing atmospherically pervading his embodied experience. The ethical distinction between the "great body" (*dati* 大體) and "minute body" (*xiaoti* 小體) in

⁶⁵ 子在齊聞韶，三月不知肉味，曰：「不圖為樂之至於斯也。」 *Analects* 3.25 and 7.13.

the *Mengzi* resonates with this passage. The focus of Confucius' sensibility was so altered by his experience of the *Shao* performance that he could no longer value the individualized realm of ordinary sensory experience (色食性也) in the same way. The experience of the simultaneously beautiful and ethically edifying work of music and dance was apparently capable of eliciting such an attunement of Confucius' affective and ethical perceptions that an atmospheric quality of aesthetic and ethical import continued to exert an irresistible influence on his somaesthetic disposition for quite some time.

This type of total absorption in the aesthetic process culminating in a consummatory experience and opening up into realms of ethical and personal growth is also made manifest in *Analects* 6.20 wherein "musical flourishing" (*yao* 樂) is used as a verb signifying a profound, encompassing immersion in some subject-matter or morally problematic situation or predicament. In approaching the proper ways of becoming consummately human (*dao* 道):

Knowing it propositionally is not as good as taking delight in it. Taking delight in it is not as good as disclosing [musical] joy in it (*yao zhi zhe* 樂之者).⁶⁶

This kind of deep affective attunement not different from musical appreciation is indicative of a kind of aesthetic holism wherein persons are taken up into processes of aesthetic and ethical cultivation and culmination in experiences of relational and disclosive consummation. The composition and performance of music has its own standards of integrity and excellence that celebrate the unique particularity of

⁶⁶ 知之者不如好之者。好之者不如樂之者。

individual performers and their instruments in the context of an achieved collaborative harmony that is not oppressive of unique individuality:

Confucius spoke with the Music Master of Lu. He said: "Music can be realized. At its inception it is important to harmonize together. As the performance proceeds it is to be pure with distinct elements spontaneously coming together without interruption. This is how music achieves consummation."⁶⁷

What is important to note here is the organic conception of spontaneous harmony presupposed as distinguished from a coercive, external imposition of order onto the unique particulars of the musical ensemble.

Scott Cook highlights an "involuntary" sense of intentionality in thinking through Confucian notions of aesthetic and ethical value realization: "In contrasting Chinese artistic/literary theory with its Western counterpart, recent discussions have tended to focus on the relative lack of a notion of "voluntary" creation in the former. Often cited in this regard is the "Great Preface" to the *Book of Odes* (*Shi* "Daxu" 詩大序), which drawing upon both the *Mencius* and a theory of musical creation found in the *Yue Ji* 樂記 (*Record of Music*), describes poetry's expression of "intention" (*zhi* 志) in terms of "sentiments/affections" (*qing* 情) being "stirred within" (*dong yu zhong* 動於中) and taking "form in words" (*xing yu yan* 形於言), and, eventually being drawn out into song (*yongge* 詠歌) and, *unconsciously*, danced and stamped with hands and feet (*buzhi shou zhi wu zhi zu zhi ta zhi* 不知手之舞之足之踏之). As the *Yue Ji* and earlier texts put it, these sentiments are "touched off by external things" (*gan yu wu er dong* 感於物而動), and the vocal "sounds" (*sheng* 聲)

⁶⁷*Analects* 3.23. 子語魯大師樂。曰：「樂其可知也：始作，翕如也；從之，純如也，皦如也，繹如也，以成。」

and expressive "music" (*yin* 音) that take form as a result invariably reveal to the perceptive listener the true nature of those sentiments and the stimuli that first stirred them into existence."⁶⁸

In a similar vein of thinking, Stephen Owen argues for a non-intentionalist reading of Chinese poetic creativity: "[The English word] 'Intention' is voluntary; a moment's reflection will reveal how deeply the notion of 'intention' is implicated in the Western concern with free will. *Chih* [zhi 志] may have a level of the voluntary, but the concept privileges the involuntary origins of any act of volition: *chih* occurs because one is stirred by something in the external world. One may have the 'intention' to express one's *chih*. . . in a certain way. But for one who 'understands language'. . . the *chih* perceived in reading the *shih* will be true *chih*, whether or not that is what the writer 'intends' to be revealed."⁶⁹ The idea in both these passages is that we do well to avoid the intentional fallacy when reading early Chinese philosophical or literary texts or appreciating the musical metaphors implicit therein. There is a pervasive and consistent pattern of privileging situational agency over discrete agency in the Confucian tradition of role ethical thought.

In a persuasive reading of various commentaries of the *Book of Poetry*, Martin Kern has suggested that we avoid the intentional fallacy altogether in understanding the phrase *shi zuo* 詩作, usually understood as the "author" by taking it to mean that the "poem" itself auto-generates or spontaneously emerges within an ethically problematic or political predicament. The affectively charged atmosphere

⁶⁸ Scott Cook (2000), p.14.

⁶⁹ Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1992), p.28.

of ethical critique and poetic sensibility are intertwined leading to this Confucian theory of auto-poiesis.⁷⁰ Many familiar philosophical conundrums and concepts of an ontologically libertarian free-will or an abstract conception of individual-based character traits, that is, the individually located, psychologized 'Virtues', are best left behind when approaching reconstructing Confucian ethical thinkers within their own terms. We can of course, and should, continue to speak and advocate for an achieved political freedom or embodied sense of genuine agency. However, we do better not to presuppose textual interpretations that necessitate the positing of some superordinate conception of abstract, individualistic agency or a transcendent ideal of aretaic character.

In this dissertation, we will be using the idea of *musical flourishing* to highlight the ways in which disparate fields of experience are focally unified as personally embodied consummatory events that always disclosively open up into further experiences of edifying growth and meaningfully ethical resolution. Musical metaphors serve us the best in terms of offering up sonorous images of effortless and exemplary concerted action. Instead of thinking of ethical agency as the unilateral exercise of some abstract conception of character or a bundle of psychologically reified traits, it is better to think of the virtuosic musical performer in drawing analogies with ethical experience. One who has so thoroughly

⁷⁰ See Martin Kern, "Speaking of Poetry: Pattern and Argument in the 'Kongzi shilun'." In *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China*, ed. Dirk Meyer and Joachim Gentz, pp.175-200. Leiden: Brill, 2015. See also "Shuo 'Shi': 'Kongzi shilun' zhi wenli yu yili" 《詩》：《孔子詩論》之文理與義理 [Speaking of Poetry: Pattern and Argument in the *Kongzi shilun*]. *Wenxue yichan* [Literary Heritage] 2012.3: 17-25. Kern references Foucault's dictum that the author function is a kind of "functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses: (...) The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning." See Foucault "What is an 'Author'?" (1969).

internalized an effective and excellent repertoire of embodied skills and dispositions and can effortlessly act (*wu wei* 無為) to realize role virtuosity with and for others in their *concerted* performance of their ethical lives is what we point to when we point to exemplary figures in the living tradition of Confucian role ethics.

Perfectionism as a theoretical stance in moral and political philosophy at the minimum refers to a position that seeks the highest good for human experience independent of hedonistic or subjective desire satisfaction considerations. In terms of a developmental theory of value, perfectionism can be demarcated along clear conceptual lines as either *human nature perfectionism* or *objective goods perfectionism*. Since objective goods perfectionism makes dubious metaphysical claims about value in a natural and social ontology of persons, I will only be focusing on issues relating to *human nature perfectionism*. Briefly put, human nature perfectionism takes a developmental view of persons and posits a monistic (teleological) or pluralistic (pragmatic) value schema to be realized more or less fully in a life.

In the renewal of political liberalism as a viable theoretical option, Rawls expressed criticism of both monistic and pluralistic forms of perfectionism in ethics and political theory, due to a doubt that liberal neutrality (and respect for personal dignity and autonomy) can not be preserved alongside of a communitarian or state-based commitment to promoting perfectionist goods in society. In response certain thinkers like Stanley Cavell and Naiko Saito offered responses to political liberalism and its supposed value neutrality, by offering what they call "Emersonian

perfectionism."⁷¹ Emersonian perfectionism promotes consummatory experience in private projects of self-creation, but is thoroughly pluralistic and doesn't permit authoritarian or patronizing social-political projects or legislation that seeks to realize a specific, one-size-fits-all conception of the good, even in a developmental model of human nature in process.

I wish to argue that the theoretical language of perfectionism in value theory, even in its most liberal and pragmatic Emersonian forms, has a hard time jettisoning its Platonic-Aristotelian inheritance of a metaphysical teleology. How can we think perfection without an a priori value schema that is being approximated in experience? One way is to highlight the centrality of improvisation and constitutive performativity that a Confucian role ethical approach to moral and political theory would certainly allow for. If the central question of Confucian ethics can be summed up by asking the very concrete question about two beloved exemplars in the tradition, then the *musical flourishing* (*le/yue* 樂) model gives us a way to articulate more personal (but not private) projects of creative value realization (a kind of perfectionism without teleology), while simultaneously remaining fair (but not neutral) in adjudicating questions of shared, public and communitarian regimes of value. The problematic I have in mind here is akin to the question that Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi became recognized for as part of their civil service examinations in the Northern Song dynasty—a question that has clear conceptual antecedents in the Si-Meng lineage of thinking, "*Where* is the joy/musical flourishing of Confucius and Yan

⁷¹ See Stanley Cavell *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (University of Chicago, 1991) and Naiko Saito *The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson* (Fordham, 2005).

Hui located?" (尋孔顏樂處，所樂何事?). I will try to keep this question on the fringe of my thinking as we continue exploring a reconstructing Si-Meng lineage of role ethical thinking.

Chapter 2: "Way-making Begins with Feeling" (*dao shi yu qing*)道始於情—The Role of Affect in Si-Meng Moral Theory

This chapter will further explore the central importance of morally charged affectivity and ethically embodied feelings within Si-Meng thinking and its concomitant derivation of a non-ideal or pragmatic moral "theory"¹ capable of addressing complex ethical and political problems in the pluralistic, multi-cultural context of the current global geopolitical configuration. Drawing upon a very broadly conceived Western tradition of moral sentimentalism, with its roots stretching back to David Hume, Adam Smith, and in the writings of the Epicureans and Stoics, we will be using this theoretical stance as a kind of inter-cultural conceptual bridge to approach some of the uncanny set of Si-Meng assumptions regarding embodied ethical agency in a transactional cosmological context marked by radical correlativity, irreducible relational entanglements and the possibility of realizing optimally calibrated moral deliberations in ordinary critical praxis. Within such a transactional, relational perspective—one that always attempts to do justice to the insistent particularity and relational uniqueness of narratively constituted

¹ Throughout this dissertation we will be exploring ideas and arguments from classical and contemporary sources in Confucian role ethics, with the aim of articulating a viable and ameliorative moral "theory" for dealing with the complexities of 21st century ethical and political conundrums. I place "theory" in scare quotes only to indicate that since I am a convinced and committed axiological pluralist, but pragmatic moral realist, I cannot hope to develop an exhaustively systematic approach to ranking a hierarchy of universally accepted human valuing schemata, leading to an algorithmic approach to rational decision theory in ethical deliberation. The most that we can legitimately hope for is to develop a comprehensive and convincing moral *vision* that assists us in the messy, but inevitable, process of ranking our own personal scheme of normative valuation in an existentially-practical orientation of conduct. In fact, we can probably replace the word "theory" with "vision" in most contexts without losing any clarity. William James (see *Pragmatism*) says that a person's moral-spiritual imaginative "vision" or "temperament" is the most important thing and that all logical-philosophical systems are just tailored to suit our primordial temperaments.

persons—it is better that we jettison the language of "sentimentalism" altogether in favor of an *affect theory* discourse in metaethical and normative ethical theorizing.²

I. Confucian Metaethics and Pragmatic Moral Realism

In this chapter an important metaethical issue surrounding both the traditions of moral sentimentalism and ethical affect theory, will be explored. Namely the debate between the "projectivists/expressivists" on the one hand (e.g. Simon Blackburn's "quasi-Realism") and the "perceptualist" position on the other (e.g. John McDowell and David Wiggins' "sensible subjectivism" or "secondary property realism").³ This important debate within recent metaethical theorizing derives its working vocabulary and philosophical grammar largely from a broadly conceived tradition of *moral sentimentalism*, and can I argue, be given greater pragmatic resolution and conceptual clarity if we realize that both sides of this metaethical debate regarding the epistemological and metaphysical status of *moral values* is still working within the parochially conceived eighteenth-century Eurocentric assumptions regarding ontological bifurcation between purportedly *objective*, universal rationality and a supposedly *subjective* structure of sentiment capable of detecting and/or projecting moral validity. The classical Eurocentric

² See for example, *Affect Theory Reader* (Duke University Press, 2009) and *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* (Open Humanities Press, 2013). Of course, Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* is a *locus classicus* for employing affect discourse in discussions of ethics. I would also like to mention the centrality of affectional discourse in the tradition of American pragmatism. See for example William James' "The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience" (1905). The puritan minister Jonathan Edwards also placed the affections front and center in deciding questions of axiological significance. See his *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* (1746).

³ See Simon Blackburn, "How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist" pp.166-81 from *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and his *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (OUP, 1998). For the expressivist position see John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," pp. 110-29 from Ted Honderich, *Morality & Objectivity* (Routledge, 1985) and David Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism?," pp.185-211 from *Needs, Values, Truth*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

stance regarding moral sentimentalism, despite being decidedly anti-rationalistic in nature, still presupposes some kind of ontological-experiential dichotomy that emerges within a corresponding framework of foundationally individualistic assumptions regarding ethical subjectivity and a libertarian moral psychology (e.g. faculty psychology of the *Will*). By reconsidering this metaethical debate within a hermeneutical fusion of horizons opened up by a nuanced cross-cultural exploration of Si-Meng inspired Confucian role ethics, we can begin to get over any lingering metaphysical dichotomies that lead to an interpretive impasse or an intractable situation regarding the formation of normative ethical theory. Positions that would either prioritize the *projection* or *expression* of moral preferences and subjective values or prefer to valorize instead an actual or quasi-objective *perception* of moral facts can be overcome in the interpretive framework opened up by a fusion or expansion of horizons made possible by a sustained dialogue with Si-Meng thinking.⁴ Within a somaesthetically holistic and pragmatically pluralistic background of our reconstructed Si-Meng Confucian role ethical assumptions, we can offer instead a robust account of ethical value perception that resonates quite profoundly with what Hilary Putnam and Sami Philström have dubbed a kind of “pragmatic moral realism”⁵—a metaethical position wherein fact/value, is/ought, reason/sentiment dichotomies are all shown to rest on a fundamental category

⁴ Of course this debate is not really novel to the 18th century. It can be understood as a particular instance of the so-called “Euthyphro dilemma”. See Plato’s *Euthyphro* wherein the Socratic question is posed as to whether something is good because the god’s approve of it, or the god’s approval is derivative of something being good independent of an internalist standard of evaluation.

⁵ See Hilary Putnam “A defense of internal realism” pp.30-42 in *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990) and “Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity” pp.151-181 in *Words and Life*, ed. James Conant (Harvard University Press, 1994). Also for a compelling development of Putnam’s neo-pragmatism and realist thinking in ethics see Sami Philstrom’s *Pragmatic Moral Realism: A Transcendental Defense* (Brill, 2005).

mistake. We do better to jettison any philosophical grammar that presupposes a reductive analysis of distinct modalities of experience such as an ontologically shielded "subjective" and "objective" domain of discourse that references a defunct and outdated epistemology and ethically pernicious moral psychology. What we ought to embrace is a pragmatically non-analytic and pluralistically non-reductive vocabulary or, in other words, a *yinyang* "aspectual" discourse regarding unique persons as complex achievements of a particular focus of a more or less diffuse field of relationality and an embodied ethical agency that creatively construes emergent axiological values in our ordinary experience.

What I will be proposing here is that we approach non-ideal ethical theory with a pragmatic understanding of *moral realism*—an understanding that is decidedly pluralist and fallibilist in orientation and thereby capable of encompassing the tragic dimensions (non-ideal) and non-foundational views of our embodied ethical experience.⁶ What needs to be prefaced here is that it is precisely a *realist* orientation that does the work we want in our non-ideal theorizing about ethical and political ideals. This is what Nancy Fraser has dubbed the "abnormal" conditions of theorizing about justice.⁷ Because all of our normative deliberations

⁶ While many critics of pragmatist ethics (a Deweyan brand in particular) have pointed out that a supposedly over-optimistic and naive "social engineering" approach to ethically problematic situations has led to an impoverished sense of the ethical and political in classical pragmatist writings on the subject. While I would take issue with any reading that reduces Dewey's situational logic to mere social tinkering, I think we also do well to recognize other sources of classical pragmatic ethics on theorizing the tragic dimensions of experience. See for example W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Blackfolk* (1903). For a contemporary reading that deals with the problem of the tragic in pragmatist ethics see Colin Koopman's "Contesting Injustice: Why Pragmatist Political Thought Needs Du Bois" in *Pragmatism and Justice* (2017).

⁷ See Nancy Fraser, "Abnormal Justice" in *Pragmatism and Justice* (2017) where she argues that in a post-Westphalian arrangement of nation-states and a neoliberal economic order it becomes increasingly impossible to presuppose an shared or commensurable set of axiological discourse

regarding value prioritizations and all of our ethically salient *pointing* out exemplary persons (and their relationally virtuosic excellences) within traditions of moral significance are inherently truth-tracking, we have to speak in terms of a pragmatic moral realism. We don't just "perceive" (in a purely subjective sense) a set of ethically salient primary or secondary qualities—values that are nothing more than mere figments of either subjective or intersubjective imagination. Rather, when we are "expressing" our deeply held value preferences that serve to organize our very persons into unique configurations of role ethical energies (*zhongxin* 中心) that are capable of exerting profound influence by "commanding" a real ethical order of things, it makes perfectly good sense to presuppose an ethical-political *truth of the matter* (*tianming* 天命). "Commanding situations" (*tianming* 天命) is here understood in terms of better and worse ways of realizing our becoming uniquely creative human persons through embodied ethical agency within concrete situations that are charged with role ethical normativity and dynamically configured relational responsibilities. We should consider a Confucian role ethical theory as a distinctively moral realist position because, as an ethical stance, it is fundamentally rooted within a pragmatic orientation regarding value realization and the *disclosure* of matrices of responsibility. *Ethical truth* is what happens to our web of beliefs and corresponding styles of conduct in an emergent world that we come to *perceive* as rife with *affective-imagined potentialities* that honeycomb our uniquely embodied experiences and personal narratives. As intimations of ameliorative futurity, the

when it comes to answering the "who", "what", and "how" questions of justice when so much dissensus exists in terms of even identifying global or transnational movements to recognize and represent so many state, non-state, and stateless actors and subjects.

ethical horizons of possible becoming are always yet to be realized versions of ourselves-in-vital-relationships with and for others in the contexts of ethical reality and truth as a "democracy to come."⁸

II. *Qing* 情 as embodied moral feeling

In order to provide a more nuanced theoretical articulation of our ethical experience regarding the so far undefended claim that Si-Meng Confucianism offers a radical alternative to certain 18th century Eurocentric notions of moral psychology and ethical epistemology, I will need to flesh out a bit the notion of "feelings" *qing* 情 in early Chinese philosophical discourse and to situate this distinctive notion of moral *feelings* in a metaethical framework that presupposes relational human becoming and embodied ethical agency over any foundationalist notions of individual autonomy, purely private notions of the will as a distinct faculty, or any reified conceptions of virtue and character. *Qing* 情 truly elides any fact/value dichotomy insofar as the concept exhibits a proliferation of polysemy in a conceptual polarity spanning from "affections", "feelings" all the way to "the way things are" or the "facts" of a "situation." This semantic curiosity can reveal to us some of the deeper philosophical divergences and cultural differences marking the conceptual grammar that distinguishes a stereotypically Eurocentric way of knowing as valorizing disengaged and disembodied theoretical observation (*episteme/theoria*) in contrast to a more Chinese way of *realizing* (*zhi* 知)

⁸ The phrase originated with Jacques Derrida in his "messianic without messianism" reading of a marxian theoretical inheritance. See his *Spectres of Marx* (1995). More recently Fred Dallmayr has written about "democracy to come" as a politics of "relational praxis" and ongoing struggle to realize the creative potentials of persons with a "weak ontology" (Vattimo) but strong democratic faith. See Dallmayr *Democracy to Come: Politics as Relational Praxis* (2017).

atmospherically saturated value-worlds in embodied processes of mapping productive correlations in natural experience (*zhidao* 知道, *lijie* 理解, *tihui* 體會). The significance of affect in Confucian role ethical discourse or "moral epistemology" (perhaps better here would be something like *zhi* 知-ology with the connotations of 道 *dao* replacing the ontotheological semantic associations regarding etymology of a rationally transcendent *logos*) does not operate under assumptions that would allow for a strict reason/sentiment dichotomy. The recognition of this fact can be particularly helpful in leading us towards a more holistic and transactional way of understanding moral knowledge and ethical perception.

It will be illuminating here for us to explore passages from the relevant Guodian corpus of textual materials in order to begin to reveal the wide-ranging semantic valence of *qing*. For example, in the text "(Moral) Nature Emerges from Conditions" *Xingzimingchu* 《性自命出》 or "Discourse on Nature and Feeling" *Xingqinglun* 《性情論》⁹ begins with the ontologically and existentially suggestive passage that "moral way-making emerges from feeling (*qing*)" (*daoshiyuqing* 道始於情).

The opening lines provide a phenomenological description of what it is like to ethically evaluate some situation as a biologically and culturally conditioned (*xing* 性) human person:

⁹ These are two names for the more or less identical Chu 楚 text discovered in the Guodian tombs and the unprovenanced Shanghai museum version respectively.

Although human persons have a biocultural inheritance/nature (*xing* 性) their "heartminding" (*xin* 心) activity is without fixed intentionality. Intentionality (*zhi* 志) depends upon processes of emerging events in experience (*wu* 物). Intentional action depends upon desire, and what we desire depends upon habit (*xi* 習). Affective energies (*qi* 氣) of happiness, anger, longing, and sadness are a matter of nature naturing (*xing* 性). The expression of these feelings outwardly manifested is a matter of situations (*wu* 物) calling them forth. Nature emerges from conditions (*xingzimingchu* 性自命出) and conditions derive from our "commanding biocultural legacy" (*tian* 天). Authoritative way-making begins with feelings (*qing* 情) and feelings emerge from naturing (*xing* 性). If in beginning one remains close to feeling, consummating one will be close to optimal appropriateness (*yi* 義). Realizing authentic feelings one can set out upon the existential path of authoritative way-making; realizing optimal appropriateness one can vitally internalize the process of authoritative way-making.¹⁰

We can see from this passage how a Si-Meng conception of transactionally embodied moral psychology thinks through the emergence of ethically salient natural emotions as a mode of attunement to qualitative dimensions of embodied experience. This is a type of holistic thinking that emerges *parri passu* with the very commanding feelings we have within concrete situations. The ethically salient affects that undergird our more cognitively defined intentional stances of ethical evaluation emerge from a "fringe" background of correlative processes of becoming more fully human. In other words, how we feel about situations determines more or less how we will imaginatively ameliorate our situated experience so as to realize relational flourishing via the enacting of a non-coercive, non-foundational ethical agency. Here, in the context of a reconstructed, non-ideal ethical theorizing, we don't begin with a rationally-deterministic, foundational individualism or some fully

¹⁰凡人虽有性，心亡奠志，待物而后作，待悦而后行，待口而后奠。喜怒哀悲之气，性也。及其见于外，则物取之也。性自命出，命自天降。道始于情，情生于性。始者近情，终者近义。知情者能出之，知义者能内（入）之。(Strip 1)

formed autonomous psychological subjectivity; rather, we *must* begin in the midst of embodied and relationally "thick" experiences of complex and dynamically realized situations where *feeling* (which is always had within the context of an interpretive community) is all we have to work with in developing a non-coercive and ameliorative conception of ethical agency that can be creatively realized in the narrative courses of our lives.

Confucian role ethics, with its robustly somaesthetic presuppositions regarding the holistic realization of persons through non-coercive ethical agency, offers us a truly live option of non-ideal theory to navigate the complexities of ethical and political experience without having to rely upon the ontological fiction of foundational subjectivity or the pernicious ethical-political idea of an absolute sovereignty. By focusing upon Si-Meng thinking here we can bypass any fool's errand of ethical-political theorizing that would attempt to identify an autonomous *individual* or rationally foundational *subject* and then try to isolate particular character traits or identify rationally-ordered principles by which to determine ideal modes of conduct, social-political structures, or perfectly systemic conceptions of abstract justice. Instead, Confucian role ethics always begins where we find ourselves by considering agency, action, and ethical situations in a holistic manner without reducing the complexity of our embodied *habitus*—seeing us always already as a *socius* emerging from ritually interpretive communities.

Beginning with "affect" *qing* 情, a concept that elides any fact/value dichotomy in ethics and ontology, Confucian ethical thinking avoids pernicious psychologizing of the identifiably moral emotions as either merely subjective

expressions of preference or as a solipsistic construction of ethical facts and norms cut whole cloth out of a supposedly pre-determined, fixed objective axiological order of being. What Confucian role ethics offers us is a non-foundational, naturalistic account of moral affect developed within a *qi* 氣-based correlative cosmology. By avoiding both psychological and physiological reductionist accounts of ethical sensibility, and by remaining firmly rooted in a correlative cosmology or "commanding" *tian* 天-based ecstatically naturalistic account of persons, Confucian somaesthetics provides a dynamic and transactional account of human nature (*renxing* 人性) and creative conduct.

A model of disengaged rationality, so familiar to the Western ontotheological tradition of ethics, stands in stark contrast to the embodied practices of personal cultivation within Confucian role ethics. However, we should be careful not to consider Confucian role ethics and its corresponding somaesthetic presuppositions and embodied practices as an antipodal "Other" to a supposedly pristine Western Reason—or some other totally fictitious, because ontologically foundational, "moral sense." Such an antipodal rendering would presuppose the possibility of disentangling fact from value in a purported realm of objectivity as distinct from a domain of purely subjective experience. The existentially embodied activity of "heartminding" (*xin* 心) or "feeling" (*qing* 情) our way about the blooming-buzzing confusion of a value-laden pluriverse, is in an affair that does not allow for a clear distinction to be drawn between the epistemic "knowing" and evaluative "feeling" of persons, things, and events in this temporally flowing and always transforming

world.¹¹ The vital function of embodied heartminding is to creatively “think” (*si* 思) creative integrity (*cheng* 誠), and this brings with it the possibility of intuitively *responding* (as distinct from merely reacting) to situations in ethically imaginative and morally ameliorative ways—this is the vital source from which all uniquely personal and generally shared ethical responsibilities in Confucian role ethics flows.

Mengzi refers to the holistically, correlative fringe background of relationally determined responsibility and the pervasive atmospheric feelings associated with a prospective, aspirational realization of ethical *belonging* to the meaningful fabric of dynamic role-focused relationality and *tian* 天-inspired co-creativity by highlighting “creative integrity” (*cheng* 誠) in our lived-body/unique personhood (*shen* 身):

Mengzi said: “The myriad events all belong with me. There is no greater joy than reflecting upon my lived-body/unique person and realizing this truth. There is nothing closer to seeking relational virtuosity (*ren* 仁) than strenuously acting to realize empathic imagination (*shu* 恕).¹²”

We can unproblematically read this passage pragmatically as referring to the aspirational, or prospective, consummation of a relationally flourishing person in a pluralistic, interdependent correlative cosmology. But we can also, I would contend, read it ontologically (not retrospectively referring to an *a priori*, antecedent system of meaningful contextualization, but as referencing a *ground* or *root* (*ben* 本) of background fringe relationality that provides the conditions for the possibility of

¹¹ See for example *Analects* 6.14 : “To know it is not as good as liking it. To like it is not as good as taking deep joy in it.”

子曰：「知之者不如好之者，好之者不如樂之者。」

¹² 孟子曰：「萬物皆備於我矣。反身而誠，樂莫大焉。強恕而行，求仁莫近焉。」 *Mengzi* 7A4.

realizing a resolute ethical focus and achieved practical agency that takes empathic concern and relational flourishing as ontologically basic.

In another important passage describing the vital importance of realizing "creative integrity" in one's lived-body/unique person, Mengzi situates the process of *cheng*-based cultivation in a nested hierarchy of familial, sociopolitical, and cosmological orders of relationality:

Mengzi said, "When dwelling in a position of potential beneficiary but not obtaining the confidence of the benefactors, the people cannot be ethicopolitically ordered. There is consummate way-making when it comes to obtaining the confidence of benefactors. Not having the trust of friends, one cannot obtain the confidence of benefactors. There is a way of cultivating trust in friends; if serving one's familial intimates without joy, there cannot be trust with friends. Realizing joy in family has a consummate way; intra-specting¹³ upon the lived-body and not realizing creative integrity, there is no way of achieving joy in family relationships. There is consummate way-making when it comes to realizing creative integrity in one's body-person; not practicing enlightenment of moral efficacy, one cannot realize creative integrity in their body-person. Creative integrity is the way-making of *tian*. Thinking about how to realize creative integrity is the way-making of human persons. Realizing optimal creative integrity but not affecting transformation of the ethicopolitical order has never happened. Without realizing creative integrity it is not possible to affectively transform anything at all.¹⁴

This passage highlights the social and familial embeddedness of human persons and their potential efficacy in terms of ameliorating the dynamically configured ethicopolitical orders (i.e. creative integrity/ethical agency) of which they are a part.

¹³ I borrow the neologism "intraspection" from Roger Ames. He wishes to identify with it a process of personally inward directed, resolute ethical focus that doesn't presuppose a foundational subject familiar to psychological egoism (introspection), but focuses instead on the in-between-ness of our vital, existential relationships (hence the *intra*-spection).

¹⁴ 孟子曰：「居下位而不獲於上，民不可得而治也。獲於上有道：不信於友，弗獲於上矣；信於友有道：事親弗悅，弗信於友矣；悅親有道：反身不誠，不悅於親矣；誠身有道：不明乎善，不誠其身矣。是故誠者，天之道也；思誠者，人之道也。至誠而不動者，未之有也；不誠，未有能動者也。」

It is important to note that the "creative integrity" of persons is directly associated with realizing enlightenment in "relational efficacy" (*mingshan* 明善) and in bringing joy/happiness to family members (*yueqin* 悅親).

It is also significant that in other contexts Mengzi considers our realized moral "natures" (*xing* 性) in the dynamic contexts of embodied feelings and relationally-constituted affects. For example, in *Mengzi* 6A6 there is a discussion between Mengzi and his disciple Gongduzi about the purported Gaozian position regarding the ethical indeterminacy (or vacuity) of our *tian*-commanding natures:

Gongduzi said: "Gaozi says, "our nature is originally not efficacious or non-
efficacious" or "our nature can be made to be efficacious and it can be made
to be non-
efficacious; for example, under Kings Wen and Wu the people were
inclined towards moral efficacy, but under You and Li the people were given
over to violent tendencies." He also said, "there is those who are good by
nature and those who are bad by nature; for example, Shun had the Blind
Man Gu Sou as a father and the tyrant Zhou had his brothers and the upright
ministers Wei Zhao and Wangzi Bi Gan, but he still turned out awful. Today
you talk about our moral "natures" being efficacious, what do you mean by
this?"¹⁵

Here Gongduzi expresses a kind of moral skepticism regarding the inherent capacity of human persons to recognize or discover ethical truth in unique situations based in a proper orientation and effective growth potential of interdependent ethical agents in a correlative web of ethicopolitical becoming. Mengzi's response is important in that it situates our capacity for moral efficacy in an ecstatically naturalistic vein of thinking:

¹⁵公都子曰：「告子曰：『性無善無不善也。』或曰：『性可以為善，可以為不善；是故文武興，則民好善；幽厲興，則民好暴。』或曰：『有性善，有性不善；是故以堯為君而有象，以瞽瞍為父而有舜；以紂為兄之子且以為君，而有微子啟、王子比干。』今日『性善』，然則彼皆非與？」

Mengzi said, "as for our feelings (*qing* 情), these can certainly be made efficacious. This is what I mean by [our natures] being morally efficacious. If one is acting non-efficaciously this is not the fault of one's given embodied potential (*cai* 才). Everyone has the feelings (lit. "heartminding" *xin* 心) of empathy and commiseration. Everyone has the feelings of shame and disgust. Everyone has the feelings of deferential respect and reverence. Everyone has the feelings of right and wrong. The feelings of empathy and commiseration [when cultivated and appropriately extended] realize consummate conduct (*ren* 仁). The feelings of shame and disgust [when cultivated and appropriately extended] realize optimal appropriateness (*yi* 義). The feelings of deferential respect and reverence [when cultivated and appropriately extended] realize ritual propriety (*li* 禮). The feelings of right and wrong [when cultivated and appropriately extended] realize moral wisdom (*zhi* 智). Consummate conduct, optimal appropriateness, ritual propriety, and moral wisdom are not artificially attached to me from without (*fei you waidingwoye* 非由外鑠我也), I have them inherently. They are realized spontaneously without conscious effort. Thus it is said, "seeking it one gets it, relinquishing it one loses it." Even though some would seem to be better or worse in an entirely non-calculable quantitative sense [of moral potential] when it comes to the embodied affective potential (*cai* 才) of persons it is truly inexhaustible. The *Book of Poetry* says, "Tian gave birth to the teeming multitudes, and every thing/event has its corresponding standard. For the masses to take hold of this ethical truth, their moral virtuosity would be of the utmost power." Kongzi said, "Whoever composed this poem certainly knows about way-making! Because every situation has a standard, and the people can take hold of this truth, it is said that their ethical virtuosity is ever so powerful."¹⁶

Mengzi responds by defending a version of ecstatically naturalistic moral realism that recognizes the situationally-dependent and relationally-constituted ethical potential of persons as being theoretically salient in determining the normative features and axiological realities of things as they unfold in the course of our

¹⁶孟子曰：「乃若其情，則可以為善矣，乃所謂善也。若夫為不善，非才之罪也。惻隱之心，人皆有之；羞惡之心，人皆有之；恭敬之心，人皆有之；是非之心，人皆有之。惻隱之心，仁也；羞惡之心，義也；恭敬之心，禮也；是非之心，智也。仁義禮智，非由外鑠我也，我固有之也，弗思耳矣。故曰：『求則得之，舍則失之。』或相倍蓰而無算者，不能盡其才者也。《詩》曰：『天生蒸民，有物有則。民之秉夷，好是懿德。』孔子曰：『為此詩者，其知道乎！故有物必有則，民之秉夷也，故好是懿德。』」

interdependent experiences of becoming capable of realizing creative ethical agency in the uniquely situated worlds that we inhabit.

Mengzi continues to challenge the moral relativist or ethical skeptic by offering a "good bad example" alongside of an analogical argument employing the ecological flourishing of Ox Mountain. In effect, we can learn about moral potential only by considering the vital importance that ethical "nourishment" (*yang* 養) has in the context of the multiple *failures* to become fully human as part of unique families and historically given communities of stipulated sociopolitical roles and relationships:

Mengzi said, "The foliage on Ox Mountain was once ever so luxuriant. Because it was in the suburbs of a great Kingdom, with the axes and hatchets continually cutting, how could it still be luxuriant? Even with its rhythmic breathing (i.e. nurturing rest) of night and day and the irrigation from rain and dew, it is not that it doesn't still have new sprouts springing forth. But with the grazing of the ox and sheep the hillsides appear totally denuded and barren. People see the denuded and barren state and think that it has always been this way. But is this the true "nature" (*xing* 性) of the mountain? If one has the phenomenological description of being a human person, is it possible to be without the feelings of consummate conduct and optimal appropriateness? Having lost their inherent heartminding (*liangxin* 良心), is like the mountain after the onset of the axes and hatchets. Daily being denuded, how could the mountain possibly maintain its original luxuriant beauty? Losing the nourishing effect of rhythmic breathing with day and night, the cultivation of morning moral energy (*pingdan zhi qi* 平旦之氣), and because his likes and dislikes were originally ever so comparable to ordinary persons by only a slight difference in innate moral ability (其好惡與人相近也者幾希), but with daily artificial effort to the contrary one's original moral capacity dries up like a dead tree. Having a moral nature like a dead tree, and not having the sufficient effects of resting nourishment and night moral energies (*ye qi* 夜氣), he becomes indistinguishable from a brute. People observe his brutishness and can't even fathom that he once had moral potential. Is this the original situation (lit. 'feelings' *qing* 情) of human persons? For anything, if it receives proper nourishment it will grow, but if it doesn't it will perish. Kongzi said, "practicing vigilance it is preserved. Being

absent-minded it is lost. Coming in and out without any fixed time, no one knows its provenance." Was he not talking about heartminding?¹⁷

It is only by “reflecting on things close at hand” (*jinsi* 近思)—in other words, by cultivating an awareness of our own bodies/persons (*shen* 身) as relationally constituted—that we can hope to achieve the requisite moral powers or ethical virtuosity (*de* 德) requisite to transform our experience in morally ameliorative ways. But if we fail to strive with imagination to make the most of our embodied potential as relationally flourishing human persons, then we can only blame our ecological circumstances not our innate natures. This is what the Ox Mountain analogical argument is meant to show.

Let us return then to exploring the specific semantic valence of *qing* 情 in Confucian role ethics, particularly as it is realized in early pre-Qin texts, both received and recently excavated. Michael Puett takes on this question in an important essay from a volume devoted to love and emotions in classical Chinese thinking.¹⁸ He begins by looking at A.C. Graham's oft-cited assertion that:

Although the word *qing* is very common in pre-Han literature I should like to risk the generalization that it never means ‘passions’ even in the *Xunzi*, where we find the usage from which the later meaning developed.¹⁹

¹⁷ 孟子曰：「牛山之木嘗美矣，以其郊於大國也，斧斤伐之，可以為美乎？是其日夜之所息，雨露之所潤，非無萌蘖之生焉，牛羊又從而牧之，是以若彼濯濯也。人見其濯濯也，以為未嘗有材焉，此豈山之性也哉？雖存乎人者，豈無仁義之心哉？其所以放其良心者，亦猶斧斤之於木也，旦旦而伐之，可以為美乎？其日夜之所息，平旦之氣，其好惡與人相近也者幾希，則其旦晝之所為，有梏亡之矣。梏之反覆，則其夜氣不足以存；夜氣不足以存，則其違禽獸不遠矣。人見其禽獸也，而以為未嘗有才焉者，是豈人之情也哉？故苟得其養，無物不長；苟失其養，無物不消。孔子曰：『操則存，舍則亡；出入無時，莫知其鄉。』惟心之謂與？」

¹⁸ See Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of Qing in Early Chinese Thought.” *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*. Edited by Halvor Eifring. (Leiden, Brill, 2004.) Pages 37-68.

¹⁹ A.C. Graham, “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature”, in *The Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, New Series, 1967, 6.1-2.

Graham argues instead that the term always refers to “what is essential” or “genuine” in every context. Puett has us consider Chad Hansen’s rejection of Graham’s position regarding the non-normative denotation of *qing* 情. Hansen argues that:

Graham’s explanation that *qing* somehow goes from meaning “reality” (cum “essence”) to meaning “passions” is also unsettling. It still requires that the term shifted from referring to something metaphysical and objective (reality, essence, or the facts) to referring to something subjective and psychological (passions).... Postulating such a radical meaning change also violates the principle of humanity’s call for explanation on analogy to us. Our words would hardly be intelligible if they arbitrarily changed meaning so radically while no one seemed to notice.²⁰

Hansen’s contention then is that *qing* lacks a unified conceptual core and is better thought of as a cluster concept that incorporates all of our “reality-induced discrimination or distinction making reactions.” Such a “reality feedback loop” can clearly include things like “pleasure, anger, sadness, fear, love, hate, desire” (the Seven Emotions of classical Confucian moral psychology), but the term itself refers to the processes of representing reality and not to embodied emotions per se.

Michael Puett goes to the “*Nature Emerges from Conditions*” (*Xingzimingchu* 《性自命出》) text to claim that both Graham and Hansen are mistaken in their respective subjectivizing and objectifying positions regarding the possible meanings of *qing* 情. Puett argues that *qing* in its pre-Qin (particularly in its Chu 楚 cultural context) refers to something like a “dispositional responsiveness” which clearly involves a strong emotional component of existential awareness regarding ethically salient situations.

²⁰ Chad Hansen, “*Qing* (Emotions) in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought”, in Joel Marks and Roger T. Ames, *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 195.

I think Puett is basically correct in his interpretation of *qing* 情 within the *Xingzimingchu* 《性自命出》. However, by problematizing the implicit fact/value dichotomy expressed in modern, post-Humean English, Puett doesn't really do much in way of contextualizing *qing* 情 in a non-foundational, pluralistic *ars contextualis*. In what follows, I will offer some representative passages of the way *qing* 情 is used in Si-Meng texts. I will then go on to provide some philosophical insights derived from what the neo-pragmatist Hilary Putnam has termed a "pragmatic moral realism." And, finally, I will be aiming to show how these early Confucian authors made use of something akin to Putnam's pragmatist contention that it is impossible and undesirable to disentangle "fact" from "value" in our practical dealings with a thoroughly relational and interdependent bio-family-socially-constituted cosmos.

A real problem for any engaged ethical experience is seeking to practically understand the ontology of human freedom. Given the obvious fact that we are naturally social beings, how is it that we can realize a power to act from our own personal *tian* 天 commanding sense of responsibility? Particularly given the dialogic social ontology which constitutes our experience of personality—i.e. the manifold of roles and relations that we inhabit in our unfolding embodied narratives in the world—how is it possible to realize a power that allows us to *transform*, and not merely *adapt*, to our manifold multiplicity of life situations? To begin to answer some of these perhaps unanswerable questions that emerge out of an onto-hermeneutical approach to thinking through human experience, we do well to offer an interpretive framework for understanding three early Confucian texts—the

Wuxingpian, the *Xingzimingchu*, and the *Mencius*. These texts, one well-known as the effective consummation of the architectonic of the Confucian *Four Books* and two recently excavated texts formerly lost to tradition, can offer a meliorative stage for thinking through what I will here in this section be calling an onto-affective approach to ethics.

This onto-hermeneutical section will begin with a brief excursus into Martin Heidegger's famous essay "What is Metaphysics?" (1929) in order to situate what such an approach to the question of the Being of beings in the context of an onto-affective "irruption" or "encounter" can possibly mean. I will also show how Heidegger's analysis of Dasein falls short of adequately dealing with the manifold affects that command ontological and ethical significance. Next, I will give an overview of a tradition of thinking the onto-affective in a line that stretches from Baruch Spinoza through Friedrich Nietzsche, culminating in Giles Deleuze. These philosophers attempt to think "life affirmation" (*conatus*) and give a rich account of the various ways in which affective experience serves as a precognitive or even pre-personal *ground* from which any agency might emerge. Finally, I will offer an account of *qing* 情 in the Si-Meng lineage of Confucian thought in light of the question of practical freedom. Chung-Ying Cheng's onto-hermeneutic methodology will be employed in this section through laying out an *Yi* 易 conceptual framework of "comprehensive observation" (*guan* 觀) and "mood-affect attunement" (*xian* 咸, *gan* 感) in dialogue with the Si-Meng texts I am working with.

In *What is Metaphysics?* Heidegger passes by an overview of the history of the content and methodology of the tradition of Occidental philosophy with us at least

since Aristotle. Rather he moves right in to *the question* which “can be asked only in such a way that the questioner as such is present together with the question, that is, is placed in question.”²¹ He then moves on to inquire after the grounds of any and all possible ways of knowing the world. In the context of modern science Heidegger claims that there is a “trinity” of epistemic factors guiding our modern world construction—“relation to the world, attitude, and irruption.” Modern Dasein is disclosed, according to Heidegger, in this threefold way:

That to which the relation to the world refers are beings themselves—and nothing besides.

That from which every attitude takes its guidance are beings themselves—and nothing further.

That with which the scientific confrontation in the irruption occurs are beings themselves—and beyond that nothing.²²

But as becomes clear in a series of extremely *reductio* arguments, it is impossible to think the Nothing at the ground-abys of all beings if all we are relying upon is a conception of humanity as *animal rationale*. But modern science needs to think the No-thing if it wants to come to terms with and possibly overcome its own *nihilism*. So “if the nothing itself is to be questioned,” then “we must be able to encounter it” somehow. But how? If the “nothing is the complete negation of the totality of beings,” then clearly it is impossible to think this negation as long as we remain on the level of representational rationality (either in its *pure form* as logic and mathematics or in its *empirical determination* as experimental science). How then is an acquaintance, if not knowledge, of *no-thing-ness* possible?

²¹ “What is Metaphysics?” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Harper Collins, 1993), p.93.

²² *Ibid.*, p.95.

Building off of his freshly realized insights from the working out of *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger turns more directly in this particular essay to “moods” (*Bestimmung*) in order to disclose the No-thing he considers to be groundlessly grounding the Being of beings. Moods are ontologically prior to our mental representations and rational interpretations of things. Situations that we encounter disclose the primordial way it always is with “the Nothing.” Although we always already remain incapable of grasping beings as a totality in an intellectual-rational manner, it remains true that “no matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be . . . it always deals with beings in a unity of the ‘whole,’ if only in a shadowy way.”²³ Heidegger goes on to claim that moods, as a “being attuned,” are what allow us to find ourselves *belonging* among beings as a whole:

The founding mode of attunement [*die Befindlichkeit der Stimmung*] not only reveals beings as a whole in various ways, but this revealing—far from being merely incidental—is also the basic occurrence of our Da-sein. What we call a “feeling” is neither a transitory epiphenomenon of our thinking and willing behavior nor simply an impulse that provokes such behavior nor merely a present condition we have to put up with somehow or other.²⁴

In this onto-affective analysis of Being disclosure Heidegger only considers four fundamental moods of Dasein—excitement, joy, boredom and anxiety. Excitement entails a kind of complete absorption or clinging “to this or that particular being, precisely in our everyday preoccupations.” Joy is considered to involve a similar absorption, not in things that preoccupy us, but in the “presence of the Dasein—and not simply of the person—of a human being whom we love.” Boredom as a “drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things

²³ Ibid. p.99.

²⁴ Ibid., p.100.

and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference.”²⁵ While all three of these moods can reveal beings as a whole, they simultaneously conceal the ground of the No-thing. But this is precisely what we need to overcome the nihilism we have been thrown into. Moreover, Heidegger gives this question added urgency by claiming that “without the original revelation of the nothing, no *selfhood* and no *freedom*”²⁶—which is also the practical ethical question that provoked this onto-affective inquiry to begin with.

Although these basic grounding moods disclose us to the whole of beings—somewhat akin to what John Dewey, taking a cue from Charles Santiago Peirce, called “the qualitative immediacy of situations”—they also simultaneously close us off from encountering the no-thing beyond beings. Heidegger turns to anxiety as a uniquely attuned mood that puts us directly in touch with the no-thing. Using the insights of Soren Kierkegaard’s treatment of *angst*—a generalized fear of nothing in particular—Heidegger shows how “in the face of anxiety all utterance of the ‘is’ falls silent” and the nothing is revealed. Heidegger claims that anxiety of this onto-affective disclosure does indeed occur in our experience, although it is quite rare:

By this anxiety we do not mean the quite common anxiousness, ultimately reducible to fearfulness, which all too readily comes over us. Anxiety is basically different from fear. We become afraid in the face of this or that particular being that threatens us in this or that respect. Because fear possesses this trait of being “fear in the face of” and “fear for,” he who fears and is afraid is captive to the mood in which he finds himself....Anxiety does not let such confusion arise. Much to the contrary, a peculiar calm pervades it. Anxiety is indeed anxiety in the face of. . . but not in the face of this or that thing.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p.99.

²⁶ Ibid., p.103 [Italics added for emphasis].

²⁷ Ibid., p.100.

In anxiety we say “one feels ill at ease [*es ist einem unheimlich*].” This uncanny feeling lets us feel as if “we can get no hold on things” and therefore allows the No-thing to disclose itself.

In this fundamental ontological mood of anxiety, *Dasein* is “held out into the open.” Indeed, for Heidegger, anxiety is not a fundamentally pessimistic mood. For as Heidegger suggests, some of the “daring ones,” who go beyond the petty “Oh, yes” and “Oh, no” of the chatter of “the They” (*das Man*), can feel an anxiety that “cannot be opposed to joy or even to the comfortable enjoyment of a tranquilized bustle. It stands—outside all such opposition—in secret alliance with the cheerfulness and gentleness of creative longing.”²⁸ But, even with this being the case, we have to ask ourselves whether Heidegger’s treatment of onto-disclosive moods is sufficient to the task of disclosing the liberating No-thing-ness at the heart of things. Of course, Heidegger’s later “poetic ontology” does more to think the “creative longing” at the heart of thrown *Dasein*. In considering the onto-affective ethics of Si-Meng Confucianism, we will also have a chance to return to this question of the relationship between the mood of a deep anxiety (arising out of a concern for how it is with things) and moods of musicality/joy (as a creative affirmation of life and its possibilities).

Another thinker who has presented a deep challenge to most fundamental, and therefore most unquestioned, tradition of Western ontotheology, is Baruch Spinoza. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza reveals a deep understanding of Being as a social construction of the possible and actual modes of bodily substance with body—i.e.,

²⁸ Ibid., p.106

corporeal substance—being understood in the broadest sense possible as including mental images, affect images, and all modes of *re-presentation* that a living human organism/person complex engages in in any construction of the sensible. But as Jacques Ranciere argues in *The Politics of Aesthetics* a social ontology that takes seriously the ethico-political implications of aesthetic practices needs to show how there is a kind of “univocity of predicates that modifies the modes of substance” (Spinoza) to make sense of the sensible. Ranciere identifies any specific political and ethical problems facing us as always referring somehow back to the basic question of how to achieve a just “distribution of the sensible.” The *distribution of the sensible* as defined by Ranciere claims that “system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.” And this basic onto-affective dynamic can be understood in a rather Kantian way as the “system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience.”²⁹ For Ranciere, the important thing is “that the question of the relationships between aesthetics and politics be raised...at the level of sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization.” One biopolitical lesson to be drawn from an ontological inquiry at this level of political-aesthetic practice is that “arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what

²⁹ *The Politics of Aesthetics* (Continuum, 2004), p.13.

they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parceling out of the visible and the invisible.”³⁰

Ranciere is part of the tradition of French thinkers of a socializing ontology including Deleuze. And like Deleuze, Ranciere is interested in uncovering the sites of domination and emancipation at the level of bio-political micropractices of self-creation and world-constitution. If, as Spinoza understood the point of *Ethics* to be a striving for perfection (understood as a passing from a state of ontological increase rather than diminution in terms of an agential sites of power (*potentia agendi*), then it follows naturally that “everything that increases or enhances our power of acting is good, and that which diminishes or restrains it is bad; and we only know good and bad through the feeling of joy or sadness of which we are conscious.”³¹ These onto-affective *feelings* hold us out into the openness of our freedom to determine our fundamental ethical orientation. This ethical orientation is not to be captured either in the mental faculty, the feeling faculty (understood primarily as *passions*—i.e. passive feelings), or from a foundationally determined discrete willing faculty. Rather, this historical *a priori* of our subjective consciousness (which is always already a *conscience*) is primarily a matter of *body* or *em-bodi-ment* for Spinoza. This is not some crude reductionism of ethical experience to the system coordinates mapped out onto reductively understood mechanical-biological space in terms of patterns discovered in processes of species selection, natural selection, and sexual selection—although such scientific information can of course be helpful in ruling out

³⁰ Ibid., p19.

³¹ From Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (City Lights, 1988) in the attached glossary of Spinozist terminology, p.71. This particular passage is commenting upon Spinoza’s *Ethics* (IV, 8).

other reductionist approaches to ethics that reduce the ethical subject to one or another fictitious metaphysical “faculty.” Rather, for Spinoza, since “the power of acting is what opens the capacity for being affected to the greatest number of things, a thing is *good* insofar as it ‘disposes the body that it can be affected in a greater number of ways’”³² and vice versa a thing is *bad*, insofar as it leads to a decomposition or decadence of our corporeal being. This composition (harmonizing) and decomposition (conflict) model of ethical determination resonates with a Confucian sensibility as to the ontological dimensions of *qing* 情.

In what follows, I will be presenting how a Si-Meng onto-affective approach to ethics can help us achieve powers to transform situations towards greater life integration and steer them away from destructive violence and coercion in experience. If it is truly the case that, as Spinoza claims, “we don’t even know what a body can do,” then we certainly shouldn’t denigrate bodily experience in deference to some supposedly disembodied rational intellect or some pure faculty of willing. The Confucian tradition grounded in an *Yijing* cosmology of *guan* 觀 and *gan* 感 provides us with a viable way of thinking through the body to get at an onto-affective dimension of creative agential experience.

In an essay on the onto-hermeneutical significance of the recently discovered “Human Nature Emerges from Commanding Situations” 《性自命出》 Cheng Chung-Ying argues that “any theory of the development of the concept of human self we must recognize that the human self has to have an inner content that enables itself to know and respond to the world in such a way that we may find eventually

³² *Ethics* (IV, 38) quoted from Deleuze, p.71.

an autonomy of will that can make moral choice and adopt a norm to follow in action.”³³ He then goes on to claim that certain excavated texts reveal an important development of Confucius’ teachings on human self and moral cultivation:

The formation of this concept of self is not transcendent nor transcendental but ascertained on experiential grounds of observation and reflection on feeling and perception. What we have witnessed is an onto-genesis of various feelings and dispositions under a fundamental conception of self, which presents itself in the practice and performance of virtues. I shall call this Chinese metaphysics “onto-generative metaphysics of human self” (*ziwo benti xingshangxue* 自我本體形上學) in distinction from the ontological metaphysics or simply ontology of the Greek kind.

A particular line of Confucian thinking that I am philosophically reconstructing here, is the Si-Meng lineage. While individual authorship is always a problematic way from which to approach pre-Qin texts, there is certainly a thematic and contextual resonance between texts historically attributed to Zisizi (*Zhongyong* and *Wuxingpian*) and the *Mencius*. I will briefly lay out the role of onto-affectivity in the WXP and *Mencius* before going to another excavated text that I think gives a comprehensive onto-affective account of the genesis of moral emotions and ethical virtuosities.

In the WXP the central concern is to show how the four basic Confucian virtues—*ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, *zhi* 智—and the embodied unity of these virtuosities—*sheng* 聖—can come to be formed within a person. Confucian “virtuosity” (*de* 德) should be understood as that power (*virtus*) that allows one to “get” (*de* 得) in touch with the most extensive and intensive web of human and natural relations, which in

³³ See Cheng, “ON INTERNAL ONTO-GENESIS OF VIRTUOUS ACTIONS IN THE *WU XING PIAN*”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy, Supplement to Volume 37 (2010)* 142–158.

turn gives rise to an intensification of this very agential power. Clearly this power of agency is related to human affections in a fundamental way. The author of the ZY is concerned to show how “happiness, anger, sadness, joy” (*xi nu ai le* 喜怒哀樂)—the four basic affects of Confucian moral psychology—are related to ethical self-cultivation. Before these four basic affects emerge (*weifa* 未發) heart-minding (*xin* 心) is in nascent equilibrium (*zhong* 中); but given the inevitable need for action these affects will be expressed as the qualitative-atmospheric background of human thinking, feeling, and action. So it is necessary to think through these moods and how they can be made rhythmically compatible with the original equilibrium (*fa er jiezhongjie* 發而皆中節), so as to maintain a harmony (*he* 和) with our basic human dispositions and commanding experience while promoting an ethically integrative (*cheng* 誠) process of virtuosic formation.

The WXP also provides an onto-affective account of how virtuous conduct can be "internally" formed. The WXP begins with the following:

Consummate humanity being formed within is called ‘virtuosic conduct’; not being formed within it is just called ‘conduct’. Optimal appropriateness being formed within is called ‘virtuosic conduct’; not being formed within is just called ‘conduct’. Ritual propriety being formed within is called ‘virtuosic conduct’; not being formed within is just called ‘conduct’. Wisdom being formed within is called ‘virtuosic conduct’; not being formed within it is just called ‘conduct’. Sagacity being formed within is called ‘virtuosic conduct’; not being formed within is just called ‘conduct’. There are five types of virtuosic conduct, harmonized these are called virtuosity; the first four types of conduct harmonized is called ‘efficacy.’ Efficacy is the way of humanity; virtuosity is the way of *tian*.³⁴

³⁴仁形於內，謂之德之行；不形於內，謂之行。義形於內，謂之德之行；不形於內，謂之行。禮形於內，謂之德之行；不形於內，謂之行。智形於內，謂之德之行；不形於內，謂之行。聖形於內，謂之德之行；不形於內謂之行。德之行五，和謂之德；四行和，謂之善。善，人道也；德，天道。

What is important to note from this passage is that "virtuosity" *de* 德 goes beyond mere efficacy in conduct, i.e. a social harmony achieved by creating a society governed by the norms and values of *ren, yi, li, zhi*. Confucian onto-generative *de* 德 rather is an accumulated agential power that resonates with the creative integrative powers of *tian*. Mencius holds that "creative integrity is the way of heaven. While thinking through this creative integrity is the way of humanity"³⁵ (誠者，天之道也；思誠者，人之道也). Here Sagacity is defined as an ability to achieve a creative integrity akin to cosmic-cultural ideals of "commanding way-making" or *tiandao* 天道.

The following section of the WXP begins to lay out the means by which one cultivates this cosmic creative integrity in their person. Here we can see a Confucian onto-affective approach to self-cultivation:

Without worry formed centrally in the heart-mind, the authoritative person cannot have wisdom formed centrally in their heart-minding processes. And without wisdom formed centrally in their heart-minding, there can be no happiness. Without happiness there is no feeling of security. Without a feeling of security, there is no joy. And without joy there is no virtuosity.³⁶

The authoritative person (i.e. one who commits themselves to a lifelong project of Confucian self-cultivation) can rely upon the basic ontologically disclosive moods as reliable indicators of ethical growth. Cheng Chung-Ying observes in reference to the WXP holding "misgiving (*you* 憂) as the beginning of the process of the formation of virtue" it is certainly verifiable in our lived experience that in "resolving an anxious

³⁵ See *Mencius*, 離樓上.

³⁶ 君子無中心之憂則無中心之智，無中心之智則無中心之悅，無中心之悅則不安，不安則不樂，不樂則無德。

problem of life...we have to look in our mind for a way-out and when we get a way-out, we not only come to know what to do but we experience a certain joy at the same time.”³⁷

The *Mengzi* provides a theory as to what kind of problems in life should give rise to a basic anxiety that discloses how it is with our ethical agency:

Mengzi said, "What differentiates the authoritative person from the common lot of humanity is preservation of heart-minding. An authoritative person preserves their heart-minding through consummate humanity and ritual propriety. . Thus an authoritative person has a lifelong *anxious concern*, not just a one morning worry. What is the content of this concerning anxiety? Shun was a person. I am also a person. Shun sets a moral patterning for the world that can be gifted to subsequent generations, but I haven't distinguished myself yet even from a common villager. This is indeed something to worry about. What should I be anxious about? To be like Shun, that is it. If an authoritative person is without worry then if it is not consummate conduct, it won't be done; if it is not ritually proper, it won't be carried out. If there is a trifling worry that comes up, an authoritative person will not give it much thought."³⁸

Unlike Heidegger's treatment of anxiety as an onto-disclosive wherein what is revealed is "*No-thing* in particular", the onto-affective disclosure in the *Mengzi* has specific ethical content in the form of an exemplary person—the historical sage king Shun.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ 孟子曰：「君子所以異於人者，以其存心也。君子以仁存心，以禮存心。仁者愛人，有禮者敬人。愛人者人恆愛之，敬人者人恆敬之。有人於此，其待我以橫逆，則君子必自反也：我必不仁也，必無禮也，此物奚宜至哉？其自反而仁矣，自反而有禮矣，其橫逆由是也，君子必自反也：我必不忠。自反而忠矣，其橫逆由是也，君子曰：『此亦妄人也已矣。如此則與禽獸奚擇哉？於禽獸又何難焉？』是故君子有終身之憂，無一朝之患也。乃若所憂則有之：舜人也，我亦人也。舜為法於天下，可傳於後世，我由未免為鄉人也，是則可憂也。憂之如何？如舜而已矣。若夫君子所患則亡矣。非仁無為也，非禮無行也。如有一朝之患，則君子不患矣。」

Mengzi 6A6 takes the four basic virtuosities of the Confucian ethical project of self cultivation to be grounded in four onto-affective “sprouts” of discernible feeling:

Mencius said, “With respect to the affections (*qing* 情), they are capable (*ke* 可) of being directed towards good conduct, this is what I mean by saying human nature is good. If one acts contrary to good conduct, it is not the fault of their raw material. The heart of compassion and empathy is in reach of everyone. The heart of shame and dislike is in reach of everyone. The heart of reverence and respect is in reach of everyone. The heart of right and wrong is in reach of everyone. The heart of compassion and empathy is consummate humanity. The heart of shame and dislike is the heart of optimal appropriateness. The heart of reverence and respect is ritual propriety. The heart of right and wrong is wisdom. Consummate humanity, optimal appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom are not imposed on my self from without. They are rooted here in my embodied person, only we do not think upon them. Thus it is said, “Seek it and it will be found, let it go and it will be lost.” People differ in their degrees of self-cultivation in lesser or greater amounts, this is because they are unable (*buneng* 不能) to make the most of their potential. To quote the *Odes*: *Tian* generates the teeming multitudes and each thing/situation has its norm. When the people take up the beautiful and fitting, their liking is indeed esteemed virtuosity.” Confucius said, “Whoever made this poem certainly has an intimate knowledge of the way! So it is that each thing/situation has its norm and when the people take up the beautiful and fitting, their liking is indeed esteemed virtue.”³⁹

Confucian role ethics somaesthetically considers persons and situations in navigating the complexities of ethical experience. In a *qing* 情 discourse of "sympathetic resonance" (*gan* 感) the lived experience of personal relationships can be described using a rich array of emotional language and imaginative

³⁹ *Mencius* 告子上, 6. 孟子曰：「乃若其情，則可以為善矣，乃所謂善也。若夫為不善，非才之罪也。惻隱之心，人皆有之；羞惡之心，人皆有之；恭敬之心，人皆有之；是非之心，人皆有之。惻隱之心，仁也；羞惡之心，義也；恭敬之心，禮也；是非之心，智也。仁義禮智，非由外鑠我也，我固有之也，弗思耳矣。故曰：『求則得之，舍則失之。』或相倍蓰而無算者，不能盡其才者也。《詩》曰：『天生蒸民，有物有則。民之秉夷，好是懿德。』孔子曰：『為此詩者，其知道乎！故有物必有則，民之秉夷也，故好是懿德。』」

responsiveness can prescribe a nuanced discourse of *responsibilities*. Confucian role-focused somaesthetics avoids psychologizing the moral emotions as either subjective expressions of a discrete individual or as mere solipsistic constructions of purportedly objective ethical facts and norms. Si-Meng thinking offers a non-reductive material account of moral affect within a qi-based correlative cosmology. By avoiding both psychological and physiological reductionist accounts of ethical sensibility, Confucian somaesthetics provides a dynamic and transactional account of human nature (*xing* 性) and conduct.

The model of disengaged rationality familiar to the Western ontotheological tradition of ethics stands in stark contrast to the embodied practices of personal cultivation within Confucianism. But Confucian somaesthetics is best not considered as the other of Reason, for this presupposes the possibility of disentangling fact from value or Objectivity from Subjectivity. The activity of "heartminding" *xin* 心 in Confucian ethical deliberation does not allow for a clear and distinct line to be drawn between the "knowing" and "feeling" of persons, things, and events in the world. The function of heartminding is to "think" (*si* 思), and this introduces the possibility of creatively responding (as opposed to merely reacting) to situations in imaginative ways. It is only by "reflecting on things close at hand" (*jinsi* 近思), that is by cultivating an awareness of our own bodies as relationally constituted and constituting, that we can hope to achieve the power (*de* 德) to transform experience in an ameliorative fashion.

When Puett refers to something like a “dispositional responsiveness” which clearly involves a strong affective dimension, he has in mind this non-dualistic structure of experience that doesn't make the metaphysical move of dichotomizing reason and emotion. Before turning to the XZMC, I would like to offer one more passage from the *Mencius* that reveals more of the onto-affective significance of *qing* 情:

Mencius said, “The source of the spring is sprouting forth, unceasing through night and day. It fills up every space and then goes forth, advancing to the four seas. It is because it has a source like this that such an achievement is possible. To be without a source, is like during the season of heavy rains when after a deluge the water covers the land, but after a short while it dries up. Thus the consummate person is ashamed that his reputation will exceed his ‘essence/feeling’ (*qing* 情).”⁴⁰

Here the authoritative person's shame is a result of their reputation exceeding their achieved ethical essence. But as we have been arguing, for the Si-Meng tradition of correlative, somaesthetic thinking “essence” is synonymous with configured affect as an ethical achievement. The initial feelings and natural moods of a person are the basic materials from which Sagely perception and action is realized. All this ameliorative growth is a matter of *qi* 氣 accumulation and configuration as the *Mengzi* frequently reiterates.⁴¹

The XZMC also begins with an onto-hermeneutic analysis of the onto-affective dimensions of embodied moral psychology:

⁴⁰ 離樓下。孟子曰：「原泉混混，不舍晝夜。盈科而後進，放乎四海，有本者如是，是之取爾。苟為無本，七八月之間雨集，溝澮皆盈；其涸也，可立而待也。故聲聞過情，君子恥之。」

⁴¹ See his important doctrine of “oceanic qi” 浩然之氣. It is important to note that Mencius recognizes that “qi is what fills up the body” (氣，體之充也) and that this entails a kind of growth in both intensity and expansiveness (至剛，至大) that culminates in the Great Body of the Sage (聖之大體——與天地上下同流).

With regards to human persons, although they have a nature, their heart-mind is without a fixed intentionality. They wait for a situation/thing and only then do they begin to orient themselves, and they wait upon something pleasant before they act. It is only through repeated activity (habituation) that their nature is settled. The *qi* of happiness, anger, sadness, and grief are nature. When these are expressed in externally it is a matter of being brought forth by situations. Nature emerges from order; the ordering descends from *tian*. The way begins with affections, affection is born of our nature. Starting out one is close to affection, consummating one is close to optimal appropriateness. Knowing affections one can go forth. Knowing optimal appropriateness one can hold on to what is essential within. Liking and disliking are a matter of our nature. What we like and what we dislike is a matter of the things we experience. Being capable of moral adeptness or ineptitude is in our nature, but actually being morally adept or inept is a matter of the propensity of things.⁴²

What does it mean then to say that “the [Confucian] way begins in affections”

(*daoshiyuqing* 道始於情)?

The XZMC deals with ritual and music that promote a regime of aesthetic and ethical ritual practices that either “order the affections” (理其情) or “beautify the affections” (美其情). These two entangled ideals are clearly not mutually exclusive for the Si-Meng Confucians. Rituals and music can provide a rhythmic ordering to our experience such that our basic moods become revelatory of a deeper onto-cosmic ordering and productive of an ethically transformative power welling up within.⁴³

A helpful interpretive paradigm for understanding this program of “ordering” and “beautifying” our affections is Cheng Chung-Ying’s onto-hermeneutic distinction between *guan* 觀 and *gan* 感. For Cheng, *guan* is an externally directed process of

⁴² 凡人唯有性，心無定志，待物而後作，待悅而後行，待習而後定。喜怒哀悲之氣，性也。及其見於外，則物取之也。性自命出，命自天降。道始於情，情生於性。始者近情，終者近義。知情者能出之，知義者能納之。好惡，性也。所好所惡，物也。善不善，性也。所善所不善，勢也。

⁴³ 禮，樂，有為舉之也。聖人比其類而論會之，觀其先後而逆順之，體其義而節度之，理其情而出入之，然後復以教。教，所以生德於中者也。

“investigating things” (格物至知) while *gan* is the internal onto-affective feeling that reveals an “immanently transcendent” source of meaning and ethical agency.

With this section completed it should become more readily evident that thinking through the embodied affects can serve as the ground from which ethical agency is realized and receives proper orientation. The onto-hermeneutic Confucian project places great emphasis on the internal onto-genesis of virtuosic conduct and as such resonates with onto-affective thinkers like Spinoza, Heidegger, and Deleuze. Here I have just been trying to open a space for further philosophical conversation. One thing that the excavated texts have done is to further solidify the need for contemporary thinkers interested in Confucian thought to take seriously the role of affect in ethical experience. Affects (moods, feelings, sentiments, passions) should not be ignored in thinking about ethical value and creative agency. As the materially motivational force that turns thought into action, and as the means of perceiving the subtle (both felt fringe and atmospheric background) aspects of ethically salient situations, affect is indeed indispensable for non-foundational, non-ideal ethical theory and the embodied practices of self-cultivation. A reconstructed Si-Meng Confucian lineage then has a lot to offer us in contemporary discourse, since it presents a unique account of affect in relation to the heartminding (*xin* 心) and nature naturing (*xing* 性).

III. Pragmatism and Affect Theory

I will first give a brief overview of the classical American pragmatist tradition, focusing primarily on William James and John Dewey in terms of how they conceptualized emotions. The non-subjective character of emotions can be

developed using James' famous article "What is an emotion?" (1884), wherein he develops the well-known and oft-criticized James-Lange theory of emotions. In this theory the qualitative-phenomenological feel of individual emotions are taken to be actually mere epiphenomenon of a more holistic organism-environment transaction. We don't first feel afraid in the internal theatre of our subjective minds and then look around for an object to be afraid of. As James would describe it, rather, we feel fearful because we find ourselves enmeshed in existentially problematic situations that are *actually* full-of-fear (or at least of fear-inducing properties). Such a vitalistic and somaesthetically critical understanding of practical agency involves our bodily organism and felt personal sense of agency in "objective" biological-cultural transactions with ecological conditions. For instance, if we imagine coming across a hungry tiger in the forest in the act of hunting, it certainly wouldn't be the case that we would first provide a mental representation of the situation and only then experience subjective physiological symptoms such as an increased pulse rate and intense desire for flight (or as a last resort fight). Rather, in such extreme cases, the inherent danger of the situation leads directly to certain physiological responses of a practically-engaged organism seeking its own biological self-preservation. Such immediate experiences of truth-tracking "emotions" are what James' has in mind in developing his pragmatic moral psychology. More nuanced examples of, say, feeling depressed in the context of realizing certain existential roles and interpersonal relationships are also clearly instances of a reality-tracking function that can practically-orient our affective discoveries.

We can also explore James' development of his early statement in one of his most speculatively metaphysical works—*Pure Experience* (1907). The chapter "The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience" will guide the flow of this section and to a large degree will influence the philosophical temperament of this entire dissertation. Here James argues that our experience of "subjective" *thoughts* and "objective" *things* are "absolutely homogeneous as to their material, and that their opposition is only one of relation and of function."⁴⁴ For James, there is no "thought-stuff different from thing-stuff" but rather the more "inner" or "subjective" aspects of our experience and the more "outer" or "objective" aspects are aspectually cut from the "same identical piece of 'pure experience'."⁴⁵

James takes a functionalist account of subjective values and objective facts, insofar as the "central point of the pure-experience theory is that 'outer' and 'inner' are names for two groups into which we sort experiences according to the way in which they act upon their neighbors."⁴⁶ He cites his own collaborative James-Lange theory of emotions—wherein the physiology of embodied affect epistemically and ontologically precedes any subjective experience of emotion—as evidence of this pure-experience functionalism. He also points to the ambiguity of emotional experience in the "aesthetic" and "rhetorical" as opposed to the merely descriptive uses of language:

We discover beauty just as we discover the physical properties of things. Training is needed to make us expert in either line. Single sensations also may be ambiguous. Shall we say an 'agreeable degree of heat,' or an 'agreeable feeling' occasioned by the degree of heat? Either will do; and

⁴⁴ William James, *Collected Works*, p.1206.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1206.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.1207.

language would lose most of its esthetic and rhetorical value were we forbidden to *project* words primarily connoting our affections upon the objects by which the affections are aroused. The man is really hateful; the action really mean; the situation really tragic—all in themselves and quite apart from our opinion. We even go so far as to talk of a weary road, a giddy height, a jocund morning or a sullen sky.⁴⁷

James also cites a psychological study regarding multiple personality disorder wherein subjects fail to perceive a difference in their own bodily movement from the movement of others in their experience. James thinks that all of this points to a "primitive stage of perception in which discriminations afterwards needful have not yet been made."⁴⁸ James also points out the "shifting place of 'secondary qualities' in the history of philosophy" as another instance of "excellent proof of the fact that 'inner' and 'outer' are not coefficients with which experiences come to us aboriginally stamped" but are rather the "results of a later classification performed by us for particular needs."

James argues convincingly within his pure experience theory that "there is no original spirituality or materiality in being, intuitively discerned" but "only a translocation of experiences from one world to another" a "grouping of them with one set or another of associates for definitely practical or intellectual ends."⁴⁹ And regarding the "persistent ambiguity of *relations*" James simply holds that they are undeniably "parts of pure experience" not being mental or physical in and of themselves, but nonetheless they are thought of and experienced as having a reality capable of pragmatic or functional description *in medias res*.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.1209.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.1211.

Simply put, the reason that our "epithets of value" have a fundamentally "ambiguous or amphibious *status*" as appearing in our experience of the world is, according to James, that our "body itself is the primary instance of the ambiguous."

James elaborates this somaesthetic focal point as follows:

Sometimes I treat my body purely as a part of outer nature. Sometimes, again, I think of it as 'mine,' I sort it with the 'me,' and then certain local changes and determinations in it pass for spiritual happenings. Its breathing is my 'thinking,' its sensorial adjustments are my 'attention,' its kinesthetic alterations are my 'efforts,' its visceral perturbations are my 'emotions.' The obstinate controversies that have arisen over such statements as these (which sound so paradoxical, and which can yet be made so seriously) prove how hard it is to decide by bare introspection what it is in experiences that shall make them either spiritual or material. It surely can be nothing intrinsic in the individual experiences. It is their way of behaving towards each other, their system of relations, their function; and all these things vary with the context in which we find it opportune to consider them.⁵⁰

John Dewey gives a similar pragmatic account of emotions, but he avoids some of the more unfortunate rhetorical characterizations that have led some to read James' theory (ironically) either as a kind of biological reductionism, psychological behaviorism or an instance of naive spiritualism or moral objectivism.

In *Art as Experience* (1930) Dewey articulates what might be called a kind of

"atmospheric quality" theory of emotional and ethical experience:

An act of perception proceeds by waves that extend serially throughout the entire organism. There is, therefore, no such thing in perception as seeing or hearing *plus* emotion. The perceived object or scene is emotionally pervaded throughout. When an aroused emotion does not permeate the material that is perceived or thought of, it is either preliminary or pathological.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.1213.

⁵¹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1930), p.55.

In a fascinating article—“Thought in the Strenuous Mood: Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Feeling”⁵²—Richard Shusterman provides a helpful synthesis of aspects of both the Jamesian and Deweyan lines of thought regarding affectivity. Importantly, Shusterman provides a clear conceptual distinction between “feeling”, “emotion” and “mood” and explores the import these semantic connotations have for developing a pragmatically-oriented ethical theory. As a motivational bridge between thought and action, pragmatism as a philosophy of feeling provides a useful framework for approaching the Si-Meng discourse on the epistemological, ontological, and ethical implications of affectivity. Having presented this classical pragmatist account of affectivity we can see how Hilary Putnam’s account of *pragmatic moral realism* can be developed in order to resonate with Si-Meng Confucian role ethics as both an illuminating normative framework and a viable metaethical position.⁵³

IV. Confucian Affect and Moral Sentiment Theory

In the remainder of this chapter I will develop a Si-Meng position on *qing* and show how it resonates with pragmatic moral realism. First, I will put Si-Meng Confucian role ethics into philosophical dialogue with another important voice in analytic metaethics—Michael Slote’s contemporary version of moral sentimentalism. Initially, the Si-Meng discourse and Slote’s position would seem to have a lot of common ground. After a deeper analysis, however, despite the presence of much shared philosophical material, at a fundamental level Slote is still working within a

⁵² Richard Shusterman, “Thought in the Strenuous Mood: Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Feeling,” in *New Literary History*, vol. 43, number 3, Summer 2012, pp. 433-454.

⁵³ I largely derive my interpretation of Putnam’s non-foundationalist moral realism primarily from his *Ethics without Ontology* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

rather limiting perspective wherein reason and sentiment are dichotomized in a pernicious and reductive psychologism; whereas the Si-Meng discourse, on the other hand, tries to take into account the entirety of human experience in a somaesthetically sensitive manner.

In his *Moral Sentimentalism* (2010) Michael Slote presents his version of moral sentimentalism—a comprehensive theoretic position that he claims can provide a systematic account of normative ethics, metaethics, and moral education. The key to his entire project is the concept of *empathy*. Slote defines “empathy” as “the cement of the moral universe.”⁵⁴ For Slote, a necessary component of any viable sentimentalist approach to ethics is to ground our use of morally evaluative language and ethically discursive practices in some sort of non-judgmental (i.e. non-moral) phenomenon. The problem as he sees it with much of the previous sentimentalist literature (including his philosophical hero—David Hume), is that in one way or another, the sentiment(s) used to ground our ethically evaluative practices implicitly contain the moral concepts that they are meant to explain. Simply put, either we appeal to a non-sentimental (i.e. Rational—utilitarian or deontological) account *or* we employ some non-evaluative sentiments to ground our evaluative frameworks. In other words, a coherent sentimentalist account cannot be viciously circular *and* it must be able to derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’—which runs counter to what has been dubbed (quite inappropriately) as Hume’s Law.

It is precisely *empathy* that Slote believes can fulfill these theoretical tasks. Slote reminds us that the term “empathy” is an early twentieth century English

⁵⁴ Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism*, p.14.

translation of the German word *Einfuehlung* (lit. “feeling into”). And Slote’s claim is that the classical sentimentalists (David Hume and Adam Smith) used the term “sympathy” to refer in different contexts to both what we currently mean by “sympathy” and “empathy” respectively. This failure to distinguish between sympathy and empathy may also have led to their inability to come to a coherent systematic normative and metaethical theory grounded in a singularly sentimental phenomenon. Slote provides a rough and ready definitional distinction between ‘sympathy’ and ‘empathy’ by appealing to the colloquial “feeling someone’s pain” (e.g. Bill Clinton) and merely “feeling *for* someone who is in pain.” The former type of feeling then refers to the concept of empathy and the latter to sympathy.

What matters in determining the meaning of morally evaluative terms for Slote is getting clear about the appropriate empathic concern we have towards ethically-salient *situations*. Slote thinks that what matters most is the first-person (phenomenological) standpoint of moral agency and this is what empathic concern is directed towards in grounding moral approval and disapproval. On the first-order, normative level we empathize with persons, and animals. Slote doesn’t really consider the possibility of empathizing with plants and inanimate objects, although he does mention Wang Yangming in his introduction as a Confucian philosopher concerned with “empathy”, and Wang would seem to countenance such empathic phenomenon. But what matters morally is “an account of approval and disapproval that focuses on agential traits and the standpoint of those who possess them, rather than on (empathy with) the effects such traits have on the welfare of others.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.33.

What Slote is doing then is pushing the Hutchesonian-Humean line of moral sense theory away from a focus on “utility” towards a focus on the agent. By making such a move, Slote believes we can better accommodate for the advantages a deontological or virtue-theoretic approach might have while avoiding the associated ontological and ethical pitfalls. Moral approval and disapproval takes the form of a third-person empathic response to the first-order empathic caring of (moral) *agents*. Here I would question Slote’s interpretive mechanism in that he doesn’t spell out what he means by *agency*, and he can’t possibly mean full-blown “moral” agency (due to the charge of circularity he wishes to avoid). It is not clear how a singular “psychological state” can do the work that he wants it to. And given that this is how Slote describes empathy—in entirely psychological terms—we are left wondering about the physiological, relational, and sociobiological aspects of empathy. It seems difficult to imagine how Slote’s non-normative naturalistic account of empathy can account for agency in any sense, but what Slote seems to have in mind is describing how we *ought* to navigate situations in our experience in terms of managing the economy of our empathic capacities and responses. Slote argues that it is an advantage of his theory that one unified sentimental capacity—empathy—is used to explain both our first-order responses to situations and our higher-order evaluations of ourselves and others in a moral language.

The phenomenology of ethically evaluative empathy comes for Slote in terms of phenomenological/affective “warmth or tenderness” (approval) and “chill” (disapproval). As he puts it, “approval is primarily an attitude toward an agent, not toward those the agent is concerned about, so it may be wondered how

empathically feeling (some of) the warmth the agent feels toward others can constitute approval *of the agent*, and the same point can, of course, be made about coldness and disapproval as well.”⁵⁶ Slote defends moral objectivity with a pseudo-reference-fixing account for moral language a la Saul Kripke's treatment of naming and definite descriptions. I say “pseudo” Kripkean, because Slote is uncomfortable with the way in which Kripke gives a causal account of semantic reference that would entail an *a posteriori* definition of moral terms like “good” and “right.” Moreover, as far as I know, Kripke himself never attempted to apply his semantic theory of reference to ethically evaluative language games of any variety. Simply put, Slote thinks that the “warmth” and “chill” we feel by way of empathic contagion is the same whether we are reacting to an immediate situation (with or without ethical content) is *the same* as the feeling we have directed towards an agent in terms of moral evaluation. It is Kripkean because although the empathic feeling might be the same, the causal *source* or *origin* makes all the difference in terms of fixing semantic reference.

While giving up an “exact analogy with reference-fixing in the case of color and natural kind terms” Slote does want to argue that “it is a priori that actions are morally good if and only if they express or reflect agential warmth” and his argument depends upon “an a priori fixing of the meaning of ‘morally good’ (or the concept of moral goodness) in relation to the experience of being warmed by the warmth of (evinced by) an agent or agents.”⁵⁷ Even setting aside the worries I’ve already mentioned regarding Slote’s failure to specify exactly what he means by

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.38.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.63.

“agency” in this context, given that it obviously cannot be *moral* agency at this level, we can still be worried about the phenomenology of the “experience of being warmed by the warmth” of another. There seems to be a lot of heat generated in Slote's approach without necessarily casting any light on normative and metaethical issues. Slote does go on to claim that “what fixes or helps to fix the reference is not some thin, subjective notion of experience but, rather, certain experiences *as directed toward others and as reflecting what others feel.*”⁵⁸ This sounds promising, but given that he has already defined empathy as a purely “psychological state” it seems that he undercuts a lot of potential ground for arriving at a robust conception of empathic caring that allows for objectivity, or at least strong intersubjectivity, in morals.

The attempt to ground morals in a pre-judgmental, yet shared, realm of sentimental experience is going to face certain challenges. Slote nicely summarizes some of the challenges sentimentalism is bound to face:

The fact that certain nonjudgmental empathy-derived attitudes or feelings toward (the ways) agents (treat others) can be characterized as positive and negative lends definite support to the view that they *are*, respectively, attitudes of approval and disapproval. If what we are talking about here isn't full-blown moral approval or disapproval, then at the very least it can be plausibly viewed as the ur-phenomenon of moral approval and disapproval, and if we can now use what we have said about these (ur-)attitudes to clarify moral judgments and any sort of (full-blown) moral approval and disapproval that springs from or requires moral judgment, then the sentimentalist approach will be largely vindicated or at least made to seem somewhat plausible way of doing metaethics.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.63.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.47.

Here I think Slote comes rather close to a Si-Meng Confucian approach to ethical discourse. For these Confucians “the moral way begins with feeling” (道始於情), but “feeling” in this Confucian line is much more holistic and dynamic than Slote’s notion of empathy because it considers the normative role that the affections play in a broadly pragmatic and vitalistic notion of correlative experience.

Slote gets a lot of mileage out of his conception of empathy—everything from a theory of social justice to a perspective on international relations, and even a ground for scientific objectivity! It seems at times that “empathy” for Slote functions as a kind of magical philosopher’s stone to conjure up for solving any and all ethical and metaethical problems. In what follows, I will briefly lay out a Si-Meng Confucian critique of Slote’s position, yet still allowing for the possibility that a broadly-conceived sentimentalist approach (or affect theory) to normative ethics and metaethical theory might be the best philosophical and practical option available to us.

V. Si-Meng Ethical Feelings in the "Nature Emerges from Commanding Situations"
Xingzimingchu 性自命出

This Si-Meng critique will be developed in response to Slote’s reductive understanding of moral sentiment entirely in terms of a rather abstract notion of empathy. Since Slote doesn’t adequately theorize empathy as an embodied and transactional phenomena, his approach is liable to the charge of a biological reductionism by taking the complexities of moral life and practical deliberation to be merely a matter of an evolutionary instinct (e.g. mirror neurons, etc.). Si-Meng somaesthetics on the other hand is able to provide a holistic account of moral

perception and ethical cultivation by taking into account the entirety of human experience vitally grounded in relational somaticity and affectivity—*viz.*, our "biocultural legacy as personal centers of human becoming" (*tianrenheyi* 天人合一).

The remaining part of this chapter will take a closer look at the Si-Meng text "Nature Emerges from Conditions"⁶⁰ to show how in terms of normative and metaethical discourse it is capable of moving beyond the two leading potentially viable positions in moral sentimentalism—Simon Blackburn's *expressivism* or "quasi-realism" and John McDowell and David Wiggins' "primary quality realism" or "sensible subjectivism" *perceptivism*. I have been arguing that some kind of broadly conceived moral sentimentalism, or affect theory approach, is the best way to navigate the reconstruction of contemporary ethical theory towards a more ecstatically naturalistic and pragmatic conception of moral realism. Here I wish to reveal how the Si-Meng discourse allows for going beyond some of the central issues that divide the expressivist and perceptivist versions of moral sentimentalism. If the concept *qing* 情 is appropriately understood beyond any ontologically distinct fact/value dichotomy, it leads rather easily into a way of thinking through our

⁶⁰ Many authoritative interpreters of the recently excavated Guodian materials would take issue with my lumping the *Xingzimingchu* in with more obviously Si-Meng originating texts like the *Wuxing* and *LuMu Gong wen Zisi*. In fact, I take a rather radical position in viewing the entire cache of Guodian texts (even the obviously Daoist materials) as part of the intimate personal library (a library that the tomb occupant wished to take with him into the shadowy regions of Chu conceptions of immortality) of a Si-Meng inspired scholar. In providing a comprehensive overview of the textual similarities (including material culture like the specific scripts and length of bamboo strips) and conceptual resonances emerging between individual texts of the Guodian corpus Scoot Cook cites the work of Liu Zeliang, "Cong Guodian Chujian kan xian-Qin ru-dao guanxi de yanbian," pp. 9-10 in asserting that there is a "greater coherence at work in the Guodian corpus as a larger whole, seen as a purposeful selection built around a central core of Confucian texts with—perhaps—certain alterations made as necessary to ensure that all the texts conform to a more general set of philosophical principles in harmony with that nucleus." (*The Bamboo Texts of Guodian* v. I, p.107). It is to this "more general set of philosophical principles", or perhaps more accurately "general philosophical *vision*" that I mean to attribute to a decidedly Si-Meng lineage of Confucian thinking.

ethically relevant experience without setting up a strict ontological divide between *subjective* expressions of value preference and the passive perception of a supposedly antecedent order of *objective* moral qualities.

In short, what Si-Meng role ethical thinking allows us to do is develop a holistic vision of ethical experience that articulates a comprehensive conception of ethical truth grounded in the realm of *imaginative moral potential* and a corresponding *ameliorative conception of ethical agency* that is capable of *discovering* and *creatively realizing* this prospective yet "true" ethical order. Doing full justice to our capacity to function in the world as creative ethical agents (more akin to moral artists than passive spectators of an antecedently fixed, static, block-universe of value), Si-Meng *ethical thinking* ("embodied reflection" *fanshen* 反身, "thinking through creative integrity" *sicheng* 思誠) begins with a creative appreciation of our ethical potential in the context of our embodied moral affects and culminates in a description of sagely ease in realizing *ameliorative praxis* in the context of our familial and sociopolitically stipulated roles and relationships.

Si-Meng role ethics is holistic because it avoids the intellectualist pitfalls of isolating one of either two poles of our embodied experience. Si-Meng thinkers don't abstract a rationally determined *character* from the complexity of ethical situations that we find ourselves enmeshed in—a kind of One-behind-the-Many model of moral agency. Nor does Si-Meng ethical theory attempt to abstractly identify certain antecedently existing static features of situations or rationally determined principles by which to dogmatically assert ethical truths. In contrast, what we discover is a complex process of mutual belonging and the emergent

becoming of ethical agency in the context of affectively charged and relationally embodied experience of role identity (*minglun* 明倫):

Liking and disliking are a matter of our natures. What we like and what we dislike is a matter of things (*wu* 物).⁶¹ Effectiveness and ineffectiveness are a matter of our (moral) natures. What we are perfecting (i.e. making more effective) and what we fail to perfect upon is a matter of dispositionality (*shi* 勢). Our natural dispositions are the central thing and events (*wu* 物) are what call this out as specific expressions. The bronze and jade bells will not sound unless chimed. Although persons have a (moral) natural disposition, if the heartminding is not called forth it won't be expressed. Every heartminding process has an intentionality, and there is nothing it is incapable of in concert; the (moral) natural disposition not being capable of acting on its own accord is just like the mouth being unable to speak on its own [without the interaction of air and the received semantic-syntactic tradition of specific languages].⁶²

We see here how the idea of reciprocally informing processes of an organism-environment transaction are at the heart of Si-Meng thinking about ethical experience. Here it is impossible to valorize either the expressivist or perceptualist side of the analytic debate within the metaethics of moral sentimentalism here because the possibility of *moral perception* emerges equiprimordially with the capacity for *moral expression*.

The term *xing* 性 in the text is appropriately translated either as "nature" or "disposition" as long as we keep in mind that it doesn't refer to an ontologically static essence or metaphysically independent (aseity) order of being. Instead, it is

⁶¹ In here and what follows *wu* 物 is best understood as "things" or *pragmata* in a decidedly process and event oriented ontology. C.S. Peirce developed the term pragmatism from Immanuel Kant's distinction between an *a priori* determined "practical" (*practische*) order of categorical imperatives and an *a posteriori*, experimental domain of hypothetically determinate "things" (*pragmata*).

⁶²好恶，性也。所好所恶，物也。善不善性也，所善所不善，势也。凡性为主，物取之也。金石之有声，弗扣不鸣，人之虽有性，心弗取不出。凡心有志也，无与不可，性不可独行犹口之不可独言也。(2)

always used in Si-Meng discourse to refer to *processes of becoming fully human* or a *nature naturing*. Thus it always already has an aspirational (normative) and ontological (descriptive) sense. Here I have taken to including (moral) in parentheses before "naturing" *xing* 性 just to highlight the implicit (only in English) normative connotations that the term has in certain contexts:

As far as one's (moral) nature goes: it either is moved, flows, transacts with things, is sharpened by experience, is expressed, nourished, or it grows. What moves our nature is eventful unfolding of things (*wu* 物). What causes our nature to flow is delight (*yue* 悅). What causes transactions to occur is given dispositional structures (*gu* 故). What causes our nature to be sharpened (i.e. resolutely focused) is optimal appropriateness (*yi* 義). What expresses our nature is the disposition of things (*shi* 勢). What nourishes our nature is habit (*xi* 習). What grows our (moral) nature is authoritative way-making (*dao* 道).⁶³

"Authoritative way-making" is my preferred translation of *dao* 道 in the Si-Meng role ethical context because it prefaces the personalization and gerundive aspects of creatively making a way forward in a world that is inherently pluralistic and ameliorative insofar as we are capable of realizing previously pregnant moral potentials:

Authoritative way-making is a way that gathers things meaningfully together. In matters of authoritative way-making it is the arts of heartminding that are vitally central. Authoritative way-making has four specific arts. Only the way-making of human persons can be articulated (*ke dao* 可道). The other three arts are just way-making.⁶⁴

This passage rather mysteriously refers to the "four arts" (*si shu* 四術) of

"authoritative way-making". The text avers any explicit mention of the "non-" or

⁶³凡性，或动之，或逆之，或交之，或厉之，或出之，或养之，或长之。凡动性者，物也；逆性者，悦也；交性者，故也；厉性者，义也；出性者，势也；养性者，习也；长性者，道也。(4)

⁶⁴道者，群物之道。凡道，心术为主。道四术，唯人道为可道也。其三术者，道之而已。(6)

"extra-" human modes of creative way-making and chooses instead to focus explicitly on the modes of creative ethical way-making particular to the human experience. The rest of the text focuses on the realization of moral categories and modes of ethical evaluation derivative from an honest assessment of our affective capacities as human persons and the transformative potentials that music and ritual performance have in ameliorating our bioculturally "given" potentials:

Sages consider the temperaments of things in articulating (moral) categories. They observe the order of appearance of things and flow into teaching directly. They embody optimal appropriateness and bring rhythmic order to their experience. They bring reasonable coherence (*li* 理) to their affections (*qing* 情) in their (moral) expressions and sense impressions. After all this they return to education. Education is the reason that moral virtuosity is born in the center of their personality.⁶⁵

And the text continues to explore the somaesthetic potentials of ritual and music in terms of beautifying the expression and perfecting the perception of moral value in the world:

Paying utmost attention to their appearance and comportment is the reason that refined order is manifest in their displayed character. The authoritative person (*junzi* 君子) beautifies their affective dispositions (*qing* 情), valorizes optimal appropriateness, perfects their comportment, improves their demeanor, takes joy in authoritative way-making, and delights in education. This is why they are so reverent (*jing* 敬).⁶⁶

Most interestingly is the appreciation of embodied moral affect in terms of the physiological expression of feelings like joy and sadness as filtered through experiences of relational moral-affective influence (e.g. shared laughter and musical enjoyment):

⁶⁵圣人比其类而论会之，观其先后，而逆训之，体其义而节度之，理其情而出入之，然后复以教。教，所以生德于中者也。(8)

⁶⁶致容貌，所以度节也。君子美其情，贵其义，善其节，好其容，乐其道，悦其教，是以敬焉。(10)

Laughter is the shallow expression of ritual propriety. Musical enjoyment is the deep expression of ritual propriety. Sound (*sheng* 聲) emerges from the sincere expression of feelings. Only then can it penetrate deeply into the heartminding of human persons. Upon hearing the sound of laughter fresh delight is experienced. Upon hearing the sound of choral singing one's heartminding is made exuberant. Upon hearing the sounds of the zither and lute one is brought to an intense emotional state culminating in a sigh. Observing the *Lai* and *Wu* ballads one is stimulated to be affectively ordered and motivated for action. Upon observing the *Shao* and *Xia* odes one is brought to a state wherein they wish to make a concerted effort to be frugal. In singing and thinking the heartminding is moved. . . upon dwelling on the music for a sustained period one is able to reflect upon the process of perfecting (*fanshan* 反善) and to become more resolutely careful (*shen* 慎). One's (moral) expression and perception is made fluid and effective (*churu ye shun* 出入也順). This is the beginning of moral virtuosity (*de* 德). The music of Zheng and Wei should not be listened to. The music of the ancients is capable of affecting fundamental transformation of the heartminding process. Excessive music can harm the heartminding by creating excessive desire. It is all a matter of educating persons. The *Lai* and *Wu* ballads calls us out and the *Shao* and *Wu* ballads affect us profoundly.⁶⁷

The realization of creative ethical agency entails a deep appreciation of the role relational potentials of persons as they come to inhabit their corresponding moral landscapes of affectively attuned value expressions and perceptions. The *Analects* 17.2 has Confucius express a pragmatic metaphysics of persons—in terms of our bioculturally "given" natures we are more or less the same—or, at least, uninterestingly different; and it is only with assiduous practice that we can come to individuate ourselves in any meaningfully ethical sense.⁶⁸ It is only with the

⁶⁷笑，礼之浅泽也。乐，礼之深泽也。凡声，其出于情也信，然后其入拨人之心也厚。闻笑声，则鲜如也斯喜。闻歌谣，则陶如也斯奋。听琴瑟之声，则悸如也斯叹。观《赉》、《武》，则齐如也斯作。观《韶》、《夏》，则勉如也斯俭。咏思而动心，==如也，其居次也旧（久），其反善复始也慎，其出入也顺，司（始）其德也。郑卫之乐，则非其听而从之也。凡古乐龙（动）心，益（淫）乐龙（动）指（嗜），皆教其人者也。《赉》、《武》乐取，《韶》、《夏》乐情。(11)

⁶⁸子曰：「性相近也，習相遠也。」 The Master said: "The (moral) nature of persons is relatively approximate. It is only with habitual cultivation that distinctive differences emerge."

concerted cultivation of creative ethical agency (*shendu* 慎獨) that a person begins to distinguish themselves in terms of a refined moral appreciation:

Realizing the utmost enjoyment of music there must be tragic feeling (*bei* 悲). It is all a matter of realizing the utmost affectional experience. Sadness and joy are close in terms of the nature of their feelings (*xingqingxiangjin* 性情相近), this is because their heartminding processes are not far from each other. Crying comes upon us in a wave of sudden emotion and only slowly diminishes in intensity. Joy comes upon us as a deep and abiding awareness of the ineluctable tragedy at the heart of things. This is what happens when we take a vast affective perspective in thinking.⁶⁹

In the context of Si-Meng thinking, such moral appreciation takes the form of an embodied and affectively charged experience—simultaneously the *expression* and *perception* of—a potentially ameliorative transformation of ethical reality:

Thinking upon experiencing worry (*you* 憂) we are affected by a tragic feeling. Thinking upon feeling joy we experience elation. The function of thinking is the deepening of our personal experience of heartminding (*fansizhiyong xinweishen* 凡思之用，心為甚). Deep appreciation (lit. sighing in admiration) is the true method of heartminding. When the sound of sighing admiration changes so does the heartminding. When the heartminding process is transformed so is the expressed sound of admiration.⁷⁰

It is a definite mistake to consider the somaesthetic and affective appreciation of moral potential in Si-Meng ethics as an essentially blind or irrational affair. A central component of Si-Meng ethics is the vital role that "creative ethical thinking" (*si* 思) plays in crafting the particular structure that the moral imagination will project out into the familial-social-cosmic web of interdependent relationality. Despite being decidedly aesthetic in orientation (it requires imagination and

⁶⁹凡至乐必悲，哭亦悲，皆至其情也。哀、乐，其性情相近也，是故其心不远。哭之动心也，浸杀，其央恋恋如也，戚然以终。乐之动心也，浚深鬱陶，其央则流如也悲，悠然以思。(12)

⁷⁰凡忧，思而后悲；凡乐，思而后忻。凡思之用，心为甚。叹，思之方也，其声变则其心变，其心变则其声亦然。(13)

adaptability over mechanistic, rational determinations) it is far from a haphazard or blind process that the Si-Meng Confucians are advertising. Indeed, Confucian role ethics requires us to critically engage with the extension of our family born feelings into the sociopolitical realm:

The hardest part of (moral) learning is the seeking after one's authentic heartminding.⁷¹ Following upon what one does in action is close to getting it, but this is not as effective (and fast acting) as employing the affective dimensions of musical enjoyment. Even if one is capable of carrying out one's duties, if you are incapable of realizing authentic heartminding it will not be valued. If the seeking after one's heartminding is artificially affected it will not be achieved. It can be known that people are incapable of realization due to artificial affectation. In the happening of ten distinct (moral) errors, a unique process of heartminding must be present in each one. Upon inspection how can it be possible for the authentic feelings (*qing* 情) to be hidden?⁷²

So far from advocating a blind emotional or sentimental appraisal (or reaction) to ethically problematic situations, the Si-Meng lineage promotes an authoritative appreciation of ethical value in concrete embodiment and affectively charged experience. It is important to recognize however that different domains of role ethical experience get relationally articulated with different types of affective strategies for responding appropriately. While some scholars have suggested reading certain passages of the Guodian corpus as offering a contrasting

⁷¹ This passage calls to mind the *Mengzi's* adage about the singular point of (moral) learning being the "seeking after the lost heartmind" (*xuewenzhidao wu ta, qiu qi fangxin er yi* 學問之道無它，求其放心而已). See *Mengzi* 6A11, 孟子曰：「仁，人心也；義，人路也。舍其路而弗由，放其心而不知求，哀哉！人有雞犬放，則知求之；有放心，而不知求。學問之道無他，求其放心而已矣。」

Mengzi said, "Consummate conduct is the heartminding of authoritative persons. Optimal appropriateness is the existential path of authoritative persons. To lose one's path and have nowhere to tread from or to lose one's heart and have no idea where to seek it—what a tragedy! When people lose their chickens and dogs they know to seek after them. But when one loses their heartminding capacities they don't even know to seek after them. The point of learning is nothing other than to seek out and recover the lost capacities of authoritative heartminding."

⁷² 凡学者隶 [求] 其心为难。从其所为，近得之矣，不如以乐之速也。唯 [虽] 能其事，不能其心，不贵。求其心有为也，弗得之矣。人之不能以为 (伪) 也，可知也。其过十举，其心必在焉，察其见者，情安失哉？(15)

philosophical or metaethical position from Mengzi's defense of an "internalist" position regarding the ethical cultivation of "consummate humanity" (*ren* 仁) and "optimal appropriateness" (*yi* 義), I take the side of the *Zhongyong* insofar as, "consummate humanity is the virtuosity of being human, wherein affection for one's parents is the most vital thing; optimal appropriateness is the virtuosity of acting appropriately (or fittingly, *yi* 宜), wherein honoring of (morally) worthy persons is the most vital thing."⁷³ In the *Guodian* corpus we often find a kind of complementary or contrapuntal pairing of *ren* 仁 and *yi* 義 in such texts as the "Wu xing", "Liu de" and in the "Yucong I" we find the parallel passage:

[Those who are thick with consummate humanity but thin] on optimal appropriateness are held close but not honored; [those who] are thick with optimal appropriateness but thin on consummate humanity are honored but not held close.⁷⁴

And even though these texts maintain an internal/external distinction between ethical domains of discourse it refers primarily to a role-relational distinction, and not an ontological dichotomy, between intimate family experience and more ritually formalized modes of sociopolitical conduct:

Consummate humanity is born from authoritative human persons. Optimal appropriateness is born from way-making. One is born from within; the other is born from without.⁷⁵

Consummate humanity pertains to the internal. Optimal appropriateness pertains to the external. Ritual propriety and music are held in common.⁷⁶

⁷³仁者人也，親親為大；義者宜也，尊賢為大，ZY 20

⁷⁴厚於仁，薄於義，親而不尊。厚於義，薄於仁，尊而不親。(Strips 77, 82, 79).

⁷⁵仁生於人，義生於道。或生於內，或生於外。("Yucong I" strips 22-23).

⁷⁶仁，內也。義，外也。禮樂，共也。("Liu de" strip 26).

In a passage from the "Xing zi ming chu" that finds close parallels with received material from the *Liji* and *Mengzi* we see clearly that the internal/external distinction *does not* refer to an ontological dichotomy or psychological dualism within our experience, but rather refers directly to different domains of ethical life that require a more intimate response of caring affect or a more formal response of ritualized conduct:

When affecting order within the household gates, lenience is to be desired; when governing those beyond the household gates, decisiveness is to be desired.⁷⁷

So instead of a psychological dualism or an onto-epistemic foundationalism that would separate distinct domains of ethical deliberation, what we have here is the presupposition of one seamless whole body of ethical wisdom that applies itself to unique ethical situations by taking account of historically-fundled, embodied experience. We can of course fruitfully employ guiding rules of thumb, without needing abstract moral principles, in order to direct our ethical investigations into our immediate experience of (moral) affectivity.

Moral truth then is literally a "true-ing" of our "bioculturally" endowed feelings so as to realize an optimal perception or appreciation of *potential* value schemas culminating in a gathering of virtuosic energies (*de* 德) strenuously aiming at bringing about the amelioration of our shared, interpersonal experience. This process certainly involves a deep appreciation of the affective, embodied, and imaginative aspects of our experience, but also inevitably presupposes a reliance upon critical thinking and creative intelligence in "investigating" value realizations

⁷⁷ 門內之治，愆其宛也。門外之治，愆其制也。(Strips 58-59).

in our everyday experience of becoming consummately human together in relationships and role performances:

Investigation is the method of realizing optimal appropriateness. Optimal appropriateness is the method of realizing reverence. Reverence is how we bring appropriate order to events. Genuineness (*du* 篤) is the method of realizing consummate conduct (*ren* 仁). Consummate conduct is the method of realizing our true (moral) natures (*xing* 性). Our true (moral) nature is synonymous with 'growth' (*sheng* 生).⁷⁸ Doing one's utmost (*zhong* 忠) is the method of realizing sincerity in relationships (*xin* 信). Sincerity in relationships is the method of realizing true affection (*qing* 情). True affection emerges from our (moral) natures.⁷⁹

The real enemy within Si-Meng Confucian role ethics then isn't a radically "evil" propensity or some purported "original sin" in our inborn natures acting against rationally defined moral inclinations (cf. Kant's "crooked timber of humanity), but rather is any lack of imagination and empathic consideration for the vital *potentials* we have in any given moment for ameliorating our situational self-becoming in the context of our embodied relationships and our familial-social-political role performances. We should be so very careful then in guarding against incipient and actual hypocrisy (i.e. anytime where feeling and intention don't coalesce leading us to engage in coercive conduct), even more so than we are watchful of the manifest propensities persons may have for overtly selfish or destructive behavior:

The artificiality of human action should be detested. With artificiality comes miserliness, and with miserliness comes calculation. When selfish calculation begins there is no end to it. Resolute carefulness (*shen* 慎) is the method of realizing consummate conduct. Having realized consummate

⁷⁸ This may sound similar to the Gaozian contention in *Mengzi* 6A3 that "our nature is our biological life" (*shengzhe wei xing* 生之謂性). However, I read *sheng* 生 as vital growth here in part because I place the *Xingzimingchu* text as part of (or at least closely related to) the Si-Meng corpus of Confucian writings and not as part of the Gaozi-Yangist tradition of moral skepticism/nihilism.

⁷⁹ 察，义之方也。义，敬之方也。敬，物之节也。笃，仁之方也。仁，性之方也。性或生之。忠，信之方也。信，情之方也。情出于性。(16)

conduct, even with (moral) faults there is no judgmental detesting involved. Timely accomplishment is the method of achieving goals. With (moral) error there is always regret. Not exercising resolute carefulness (*shen* 慎) is a sure way to come into error.⁸⁰

Just as *Mengzi* 7A1⁸¹ says it is by engaging fully without remainder with our affective and embodied experience—or "exhausting our heartminding" (*jinqixin* 盡其心) that we can come to realize our ourselves most fully and authentically in the relational fabric of our role-constituted lives. Instead of abstracting from our lived-experience using rationally deterministic algorithms for adjudicating between conflicting interests—be they altruistic or egoistic—instead, since we are always already involved *in medias res*, we ought to be "working out from within"⁸² the transactional dynamics of our lived experiences of the ordinary. Only by more fully and authentically engaging with our embodied affects can we hope to realize the ameliorative potentials haunting our focal awareness from the fringes of a futurity marked by *tian*-endowed processes of becoming divine:

The human affects can certainly bring us delight. If we act according to the affections, then even if there is (moral) error there will not be detestation. If we act not according to the affections even if something difficult is

⁸⁰ 凡人伪为可恶也。伪斯吝矣，吝斯虑矣，虑斯莫与之结矣。慎，仁之方也。然而其过不恶。速，谋之方也，有过则咎。人不慎斯有过，信矣。(20)

⁸¹ 孟子曰：「盡其心者，知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。存其心，養其性，所以事天也。夭壽不貳，修身以俟之，所以立命也。」

Mengzi said: "By fully engaging in affective experience one can realize their nature. By realizing one's nature one can realize their biocultural endowment (*tian* 天). By resolutely focusing the feelings one can then nourish their nature, and this is how we serve *tian*. Premature death or long life make no difference here. In cultivating the unique body-person and in waiting upon *tian*, this is how we establish ourselves in the commanding fate of *tian*."

⁸² To translate the idea of "processes of celestial and human becoming unique together" (*tianrenheyi* 天人合一) so central to the Si-Meng role ethical corpus, I borrow the phrase "working out from within" from Peter Hershock. In *Valuing Diversity: Buddhist Reflections on Realizing a more Equitable Global Future* (SUNY, 2012), Hershock persuasively argues that we take diversity as an achievement concept that refers primarily to "a value crucial to *working out from within* the global dynamics of the twenty-first century to change the way things are changing in a shared commitment to improvising and sustaining ever more equitable modalities of human-with-planetary flourishing." (p.2).

accomplished it will not be valued. If we have the affections of persons, even if what we set out to achieve isn't accomplished, we will still have their trust.⁸³

There is an intimate connection then presupposed here between the achievement of social-political order and the realization of any authentically embodied set of moral-affective dispositions to act in our familial-socially stipulated roles. By entering fully and imaginatively into the creative processes of being configured by our unique set of interpersonal relationships and role performances, we can hope to contribute more fully to the amelioration of collective human experience that spans intergenerational across time, backwards into the biocultural tradition of ancestral wisdom (*tian* 天命) and prospectively into the potentialities of *tian*-inspired living:

Beautifying the affections is the reason that in some cases there can be trust even without verbal articulation. Perfecting our (moral) natures is why there can be cases wherein even without explicit ethical education the people are morally steadfast (*weijiao er minheng* 未教而民恆). It is an implicit blessing that the people can be made active without the offering of rewards. And it is because people have reverent awe in their heartminding that there can be (moral) fear without threat of punishment. Being materially poor, but the people still hold them in esteem. This is the power of moral virtuosity (*de* 德). Impoverished but still gathering together, this is an effect of authoritative way-making.⁸⁴ . . . Authoritative persons who cling to their (moral) aspirations (*zhizhi* 执志) are bound to have a glorious heartminding. When they open their mouths to speak there is bound to be quickly achieved trust. The ritual propriety between host and guest is bound to be ordered in terms of ethical comportment, and the ritual propriety of ritual sacrifices is bound to be ordered in terms of reverence. The ritual mourning period is bound to be full of sincere expressions of grief and sorrow. Authoritative persons take

⁸³ 凡人情为可悦也。苟以其情，唯（虽）过不恶；不以其情，唯（虽）难不贵。苟有其情，唯（虽）未之为，斯人信之矣。(21)

⁸⁴ 未言而信，有美情者也。未教而民恆，性善者也。未赏而民劝，含福者也。未型（刑）而民畏，有心畏者也。贱而民贵之，有德者也。贫而民聚焉，有道者也。(22)

authentic heartminding to be vitally central when it comes to their embodied persons.⁸⁵

In the following chapter we will continue to explore the role of cultivated and creatively focused (moral) affect in a reconstructed Si-Meng lineage of Confucian role ethics. We will have the opportunity to consider how relationally constituted and role-defined embodied moral affect can achieve creative ethical agency by resolutely caring for the potentials of unique human becoming (*shendu* 慎獨) at the heart of "each" center of affective-moral personal energies that is embodied in historically conditioned and culturally embedded human persons.

⁸⁵君子执志必有夫光光之心，出言必有夫柬柬之信，宾客之礼必有夫齐齐之容，祭祀之礼必有夫齐齐之敬，居丧必有夫恋恋之哀。君子身以为主心。(28)

Chapter Three: "Resolute Becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨) as a Non-Foundational Ground for Agential Realism in Confucian Role Ethics

This chapter is constellated by four interwoven themes. First of all, we will be considering the role of the body and performativity in reconstructing a concept of ethical agency in Confucian role ethics. By focusing on the embodied and performative aspects of personal becoming, we will be able to cast our attention upon the transactional and vitalist notion of "matter-energy" or "psycho-physical stuff" (*qi* 氣)—an important and innovative concept in early Chinese philosophy that draws no hard and fast ontological divisions between the biological, social, and spiritual dimensions of embodied experience. By focusing through *qi* 氣 we can better realize a dynamic conception of ethical agency that makes no foundationally individualistic presuppositions in thinking about the casting of persons in their uniquely embodied roles and relationships.¹ Secondly, we will be exploring the dynamics of non-foundational selving processes and transactional realizations of agency in a reconstructed Si-Meng lineage that takes a *qi*-based physiognomy of persons quite seriously because there is no purported Reality/Appearance dichotomy to appeal to in denigrating natural embodiment by reifying individualized characters in a One-behind-the-Many substance ontology of persons. By taking a confident leap into the field of comparative phenomenology of relationally constituted *personalism* we are better situated to understand the unique hermeneutical presuppositions of Si-Meng embodied thinking (or Somaesthetics).

¹ By casting I mean to indicate both the ritual performance of a unique agency in the context of one's embodied roles and relationships and highlight the imaginative "appreciation" of unique persons in their potential sociopolitical positions of differential power relationships which are in turn imaginatively (i.e. "ritually") grounded in ethically authoritative (i.e. non-coercive) hierarchies of benefactors and beneficiaries (*shangxia zhifen* 上下之分).

Thus we can get a clearer understanding of the kind of ethical *epoche* that this thinking can open up onto the basic ground of human becomings or dynamic "selving" processes—what the early Confucians called "vital plurisignarity" or "unique relational potential" (*du* 獨).² In this section comparative hermeneutics of self-realization and conceptions of personal uniqueness will be explored to help clarify the murky and complicated processes of realizing ethical agency in "non-ideal" contexts. The guiding non-ideal theoretical question will be how to best approach the "blooming, buzzing confusion" of messy selving processes in ethical projects of becoming consummately human as a unique agency in worlds of real precarity and fleeting promise. Next, we will be tracing the outlines of a genealogy of the concept of "resolute becoming" or "carefully realizing one's personal uniqueness/ritual potential" (*shendu* 慎獨) in the living tradition of Confucian role ethics. Although we will be focusing primarily on some core passages from classical texts in the Si-Meng lineage, we will also have the opportunity to see how this living tradition continues to exert a profound influence over the development of Confucian thinking regarding ethical, political, and even religious discourses. In the final section I will be introducing the work of Karen Barad—a feminist philosopher of science—who has initiated a quantum theory of agential realism that we can avail

² For the early Confucians "vital singularity" (*du* 獨) doesn't refer to an ontologically discrete entity such that a mathematical abstraction could apply to the phenomenological trait of personhood—thus we might wish to use the term "plurisignarity" to highlight the non-foundational becoming one and returning to the many dynamic at the heart of Confucian correlative cosmology. However, *du* 獨 does reference an always creative site of unique self becoming that is not reducible to the aggregated total of experienced roles and relationships. For more on the idea of "selving" see Irene Fast's *Selving: A Relational Theory of Self Organization* (1998).

ourselves of in articulating a reconstructed, non-foundational conception of moral agency in Si-Meng Confucian role ethics.

I. Commanding Vital Energies in Si-Meng Confucianism

Emulating the former kings in broad outline yet incognizant of their unifying traditions, they were boastful and ambitious nonetheless, while sundry and scattered in learning and experience. They fabricated a doctrine on the basis of an archaic past and called it the "five conducts" (*wuxing* 五行); it was unorthodox to the extreme and lacking in any standards, abstruse, and incomprehensible, cryptic and unintelligible. They thereupon adorned their words to lend reverence to [their doctrine], saying: "These are truly the words of the former gentleman (Confucius!)"—Zisi sang the lead in this, and Meng Ke chimed along.

-Xunzi³

Mengzi said: "A *junzi* has five modes of teaching: there is the transformation that is like the coming of a timely rain; there is the 'completion of 'virtuosic potential' (*de* 德), there is the procurement and management of wealth; there is dialogue and inquiry; there is private cultivation as well. These five are the means by which a *junzi* carries out their teaching.

-Mengzi⁴

In this section, I will be arguing for a particular interpretation of imaginatively empathic 'reflection' (*si* 思) in order to explain how ethical 'responsibility'⁵ or 'optimal appropriateness' (*yi* 義) can serve as an *internalist* standard of ethical excellence or moral virtuosity (*zhishanzhimei* 盡善盡美) by providing a truly qualitative criterion for assessing the trajectory of personal growth in vital

³略法先王而不知其統，然而（猶）材劇志大，聞見雜博。案往舊造說，謂之五行，甚辟遠而無類，幽隱而無說，閉約而無解。案飾其辭，而祇敬之，曰：此真先君子之言也。子思唱之，孟軻和之。「...」

⁴孟子曰：「君子之所以教者五：有如時雨化之者，有成德者，有達財者，有答問者，有私淑艾者。此五者，君子之所以教也。」

⁵ As has already been indicated in previous chapters, there is a real difficulty in identifying a discrete ethical domain of philosophical discourse in the Confucian tradition. One could argue that there is no meaningful sense in which the prudential, the aesthetic, the biological, the political, the familial, etc. can be distinguished in terms of identifying a distinct domain of *oughts* from the uniquely *ethical* as a theoretical domain of discourse.

potentiality (*de* 德) of culturally creative persons involved in democratic experiments in living (*minweiben* 民為本). The "commanding values" (*tianming* 天命) implicit in the fluid becoming of anthropocosmic 'vital energies' (*qi* 氣) will be explored via a reconstruction of the Si-Meng ethical project of "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨), "preserving one's heart and nourishing one's vitality" (*cunxin yangxing* 存心養性), and 'creativity' (*cheng* 誠). A more nuanced understanding of the embodied, relational, and fully naturalized moral psychology of Si-Meng ethical cultivation can also help us make sense of the idea of the "unwavering heart" (*budongxin* 不動心) and the "moral physiognomy" involved in any Si-Meng concept of a 'Sagehood' (*sheng* 聖). The concept of a "sage" (*shengren* 聖人) will also be considered for its ameliorative potential as an inspirational regulative ideal within contemporary democratic cultures and institutions (both in culturally-institutionally *liberal* and *illiberal* or *a-liberal* democratic contexts).

Exploring the relationship between ethical and aesthetic values in lived experience is a fascinating field for philosophical research—indeed the task of articulating an edifying speculative metaphysics should place our embodied, value-laden experience front and center in this postmodern culture of ours that shuns any "transcendental pretense" and all totalizing metanarratives that would seek some value-neutral "view from nowhere" from which to secure an epistemic foundation for deciding how things [ought to] hang together in the broadest sense of the term. Quite a few interpreters of Confucian philosophy have argued for an "aesthetic" reading of central concepts like 'virtuosic potential' *de* 德 and 'optimal

appropriateness' *yi* 義. The *Shuowenjiezi* lexicon claims that 'beauty' and 'efficacy' have a similar "meaning": 《羊部》美：甘也。从羊从大。羊在六畜主給膳也。美與善同意。 But what would it actually mean to suggest that "beauty" and "(moral) efficacy"⁶ have the same semantic significance? Aside from the etymological connotations of being related to one and the same auspicious animal—considering the concrete importance that sheep have had and continue to have in maintaining and nourishing the nutritional and ritual fabric of so many individuals, families and communities, another important and interesting affinity to be drawn between the 'aesthetic' and the 'ethical' realms of experience can be found in the early Confucian insistence on "focusing the familiar" (*zhongyong* 中庸) in an attempt to enchant the ordinary and make the secular sacred through the performance of ritual technologies and musical virtuosity aimed at realizing creative individuality and communal flourishing out of the raw materials of *life* as we "originally" find ourselves entangled in fluid webs of relationality (*renxing* 人性). Human "nature" is understood here both "immediately" as unrefined impulse and "mediately" as ritually aestheticized desire and intentionality. Such attention to aesthetic detail and "ritual performativity" (*lirong* 禮容) plays a paramount role in the Confucian tradition and will be continually referred to throughout this dissertation to defend a

⁶ In the Confucian tradition of thinking about ethics there is no distinction drawn between "the Good" as such or things "intrinsically" valuable--understood as a kind of ontologically discrete axiological essentialism--and things merely "instrumentally" good or good *for* a particular purpose. The means-ends continuum is thought to be fully integrated. John Dewey's idea of "ends-in-view" is a good way to think about Ruist *shan* 善. So there is really no need to introduce the qualifier "moral" when talking about *efficacy*. Dewey provocatively suggests that "all growth in maturity consists in *not* immediately giving way to [immediate impulse] but in remaking them in their first manifestation through consideration of the consequences they will occasion *if* they are acted upon—an operation which is equivalent to judging or evaluating them as means operating in connection with extra-personal conditions also as means" (447). See his *Theory of Valuation*.

holistically aestheticized view of persons as irreducibly significant sites of becoming creative ethical agency in transforming an initially diffuse field of relationships into a dynamic and resolutely role-focused experience of commanding responsibility.

It is my contention here that a sufficiently 'reconstructed'⁷ Si-Meng lineage of Confucianism can offer us a particularly persuasive account of the emergence of ethical values and modes of ecstatic value realization out of an aestheticized stylization of the natural and social conditions that we find ourselves inhabiting as unique persons.

A complete picture of the mid-to-late Warring States period philosophical lineage known as the Si-Meng family of thought (*simeng sixiang* 思孟儒家) is still coming into focus for us as contemporary interpreters of a living Confucian tradition. With the ongoing excavation of certain texts—like the *Guodian* corpus for instance—a significant hermeneutic challenge emerges for scholars trying to make sense of this and other early "lineages" or "schools" of Confucian philosophy. The complexity of the historical emergence of various branches of Confucianism during the Warring States period is quite certainly more complex than Hanfeizi's assertion that the Confucians simply split into eight schools (儒分為八) during this formative epoch.

⁷ As made clear in the previous chapter, I appropriate this idea of reconstruction from the Deweyan corpus wherein he argues for an urgent need to reconstruct the statically dualistic concepts of traditional Western philosophy in favor of a post-Darwinian dynamic conception of philosophy as an implement for transforming our social-cum-natural relationships that constitute worlds of meaning (*Umwelt*). I also intend to point to the urgent task of reconceptualizing certain classically Confucian categories—like the three cords and five relationships (*san gang wu chang* 三綱五常)—in light of a radical reassessment of sexual, gender, and class based notions of role identities and corresponding capabilities.

It should be an entirely uncontroversial claim that the emergence of excavated texts calls for responsible intertextual and contextualized re-interpretations of the classical Confucian canon. However, any hermeneutics of classifying and interpreting excavated texts according to received tradition presents a number of serious difficulties. Scott Cook in his introduction to the translation and commentary of the complete corpus of Guodian texts, speaks of a "greatest danger" in examining these texts in terms of their "affiliation with intellectual lineages," both received historically as part of a living Confucian tradition of intertextuality and in an attempt to (re)construct lineages of early Confucian thought out of the new material. Since we inevitably bring our received prejudices to bear on excavated textual material and the possibility of understanding within a received textual tradition rests upon the very *historicity* of evolving traditions of interpretation it is imperative that we "put our prejudices at risk" in an attempt to contextualize the Guodian materials within a framework of responsibly imagined or "reconstructed" lineages of thought. These are philosophical lineages that, "whatever their ontological status, certainly developed over time, [and] we are always in danger of judging the texts against those later developments, with which we are in most cases intimately more familiar."⁸ Cook highlights a tendency amongst scholars to look for intertextual resonance and to argue for the philosophical coherence of certain 'doctrines' (*yan* 言 and *shuo* 說) conceived along the lines of direct transmissions of teacher-student lineages of thought:

⁸ Cook, *Guodian* p.68.

[The] Si-Meng notion of "seeking it within one's self" (*qiu zhu ji* 求諸己) and "Pang Pu himself stressed early on how not only the "Wu xing," but also such texts as "Yucong 1-3, "Xing zi ming chu," and indeed all the Confucian texts of the Guodian corpus approach the problem of human ethics from an internal perspective, in which Heaven's mandate (*tianming* 天命) is decreed through the endowment of human nature and to be sought within rather than something to be emulated externally, a perspective that equally characterizes both the "Zhong yong" and the *Mengzi*.

It is a certain *internalist* understanding then of the cultivation and expression of 'virtuosity potential' (*de* 德) that allows scholars to draw parallels between received texts and the excavated materials and to make claims of a unified conceptual scheme emerging from a shared lineage of teachings.

But this tendency to look for conceptual coherence and a desire to pigeon-hole thinkers can be very problematic as well. In a discussion of the plurality of interpretations of the Guodian materials Cook refers to the tendency to classify texts according to an internalist/externalist dichotomy:

There are, naturally, objections to be raised against the plausibility of the [Si-Meng] association, especially as any individual Guodian text can potentially be argued to espouse, in whole or in part, a philosophy at odds with that of the texts traditionally associated with the [Si-Meng] lineage. The "Xing zi ming chu" in particular forms a focal point for such criticisms, insofar as the inherent goodness of human nature (*xing* 性) is a key philosophical position in both the "Zhong yong" and, more explicitly, the *Mengzi*, whereas the inherent moral status of *xing* in this Guodian text is neutral or ambiguous at best, and for all those who, like Pang Pu, see in it a fundamentally "internalist" orientation, just as many others would stress its emphasis on "external" education and align it more closely with the *Xunzi*.

Part of my own interpretive project rests upon rejecting any essentialist or foundationalist reading of the Si-Meng lineage as being dependent upon an ideological assertion regarding the "inherent goodness of human nature" wherein "human nature" is understood to refer to a purported metaphysical claim (i.e. an

essence or ground that transcends our embodiment, historicity and cultural specificity as unique human persons). Instead, I seek to contextualize the notion of Si-Meng *internalism* within a thoroughly relational framework and a process-oriented correlative cosmology. When we speak of the development of moral virtuosities as being internal or intrinsic (*nei* 内) then what we mean is that such exemplary traits accrue to holistically conceived persons in narrative processes of bodily becoming. We need to avoid thinking of virtue and character as some reified psychological inwardness or as mere expressions of metaphysically innate essences. Rather, what we have occurring in the Si-Meng lineage of thinking about "human becomings" is an appreciation of certain edifying and more or less stable *traits* of fluidly realized *natural complexes* in the context of relational interdependence, ontological becoming, and cultural contextualism.

While it is indeed possible that the Guodian texts offer a unified presentation of a particular lineage of Confucian teaching, perhaps we are best advised not to anachronistically impose our received prejudices regarding an internalist/externalist framework upon these texts. By performing a kind of hermeneutical *epoche* as it were—that is, refraining from desiring to pigeonhole these materials in some idealized Mengzian, Gaozian, Xunzian or in any early Ruist lineage whatsoever—"we may come to see the Guodian Confucian texts, while each approaching their central concerns from different angles, may after all derive from a coherent philosophy in which the cultivation of both inner sincerity and outward forms of learned behavior are equally important, at a time when the dogmatic

separation of the two was still a philosophical nightmare of which they had not even begun to dream."⁹

In a way strikingly similar to Pang Pu, Chen Lai argues for a kind of internalist reading of the 'Xingzimingchu' and suggests that it likely emerged from the teachings of 子游. This hypothesis could find some degree of confirmation in Xunzi's claim that Zisizi and Mengzi "sang in harmony" with Zi You's teaching. Chen Lai even claims that we can consider Zi You and Si-Meng thinking to be part of "one system" (子游之儒與子思之儒本一系)¹⁰ While Chen stops short of identifying the *Xingzimingchu* as entirely of one mind with the Si-Meng lineage, he does think that its presentation of an open-ended, dynamic, and transactional understanding of "human nature" and the corresponding modes of realizing ethical agency (perception and performance) that such a relational concept of persons requires is certainly consistent with the following five core concepts that Chen takes to be characteristic of the Si-Meng school:

- 1) 'caring for uniqueness' (*shendu* 慎獨)
- 2) 'somaesthetic cultivation' (*xiushen* 修身)
- 3) 'affectionate regard for the people' (*qinmin* 親民)
- 4) 'seeking or returning to one's self' (求己, 反己, 反求諸己)

⁹ Cook, p.121.

¹⁰ Chen, p.11.

5) a "democratic" understanding of 'loyalty' 忠—i.e. an understanding that demands a *relationally reflexive critique* of sovereign power when it is not being employed in the vital interests of the people.¹¹

While wishing to avoid the interpretive folly of reading received prejudice into the excavated texts, Scott Cook argues that if "we can first manage to put all such preconceptions [viz. preconceptions regarding the lineage—Si-Mengian, Gaozian, Xunzian or what have you] behind us" we may come to see the Guodian Confucian texts as orbiting around a philosophically coherent constellation of uniquely Si-Meng concerns about the cultivation of both inner integrity and outward forms of ritually appropriate behavior that are equally important, at a time when the "dogmatic separation of the two was still a philosophical nightmare of which they had not even begun to dream." Thus Cook reads the Guodian texts more as precursors or moments of transformation of what might have happened "between the teachings of Kongzi and Mengzi" (*kongmengzhijian* 孔孟之間) and less as ideological or metaphysical statements about 'human nature' (*renxing* 人性) and its purportedly "heavenly endowments" (*tianming* 天命). Nevertheless, Cook is confident in outlining four features of the Guodian cache of texts that have clear conceptual affinities, if not downright philosophical unity, with the received Si-Meng texts such as the *Zhongyong* and *Mengzi*. The four features are:

1) "heaven and human endowment" which refers to the inseparability of *tian* and *ren* in the realization of one's ethical potential;

¹¹ See Chen Lai 陳來, 帛書《五行》與簡帛研究 (新知三聯, 2009).

- 2) "the paths to virtuous conduct"—concepts like *shendu* 慎獨, *fanji* 反己, and *cheng* 誠 as methods or techniques of "caring for the self" and working on one's "ethical substance";
- 3) "education, moral suasion, and the role of tradition";
- 4) "musical harmony and the symphony of virtues"—a depiction of ethical excellence and Sagehood that highlights the rhythmic qualities and ethically improvisational capabilities of Confucian Sagely exemplars.

While it is certainly beyond the scope of this dissertation, to make any definitive judgments regarding the historical objectivity or plausibility of positing any such distinct philosophical "lineages" that any specific excavated text ought to be placed in, I don't think that this is in itself a cause for hermeneutic lamentation. For it would seem to me that a much more important and urgent task is to present a viable *philosophical* "reconstruction" of Si-Meng ethical discourse through creative interpretations and responsible appropriations of notion like creative ethical 'reflection' (*si* 思) and its relation to the practices of 'caring for vital singularity/personal uniqueness' (*shendu* 慎獨) and 'creatively integrating' (*cheng* 誠) one's habitual dispositions and vital impulses as part of an aesthetico-ethical project of ritually transforming the cosmos from the inside out. In brief, it will be my contention that in addition to the conceptual affinities listed above by Chen Lai, Scott Cook and others, that we can find within Si-Meng discourse a coherent and compelling vision of ethical cultivation and moral psychology that offers a rather provocative and *sui generis* understanding of "reflective ethical engagement" (*si*

思)—a notion of ethical engagement or deep relational entanglement that foregrounds the lived-body in its experience of role-focused affect, narrative imagination, and creative integrity that structures our uniquely endowed capacities for personal and democratic amelioration. One might critically suggest that this is just my own wishful thinking in looking to the distant past to help elucidate the potentials of the present moment, and perhaps I'm just another instance of a naively romantic Confucian philosopher trying to emulate "the former kings in broad outline yet [remaining] incognizant of their unifying traditions", or a scholar that is "boastful and ambitious nonetheless, while sundry and scattered in learning and experience" in an attempt to "fabricate a doctrine on the basis of an archaic past" that is "lacking in any standards, abstruse, and incomprehensible, cryptic and unintelligible." It is likely the case that such criticisms probably apply to me as well, it is still worth pointing out that even if this is the case I can still provide my own unique signature upon a line of thinking begun by the likes of Zisizi and Meng Ke—a line of thinking gifted to me by my own esteemed teachers, colleagues and friends on this lifelong journey of Confucian learning for oneself (*wei ji zhi xue* 為己之學). It is certainly a deeply shared joy (*tongle* 同樂) to be part of this ongoing and vital conversation of a committed Ruist "way of learning" (*daotong* 道統). And in the spirit of Richard Rorty's post-metaphysical conception of philosophy as the art of intelligent and edifying conversation across spatio-temporal regions and traditions—let us strive to keep the comparative philosophical conversation going.¹²

¹² In particular I am interested in contributing to the living tradition of Ruist "Dao learning" (*daoxue* 道學) and follow Steve Angle's provocative suggestion of engaging in "rooted global philosophy"

II. Moral Beauty, Virtuosity Conduct, and Si-Meng Moral Physiognomy

A common thread uniting Si-Meng ethical discourse would seem to be the effects that moral cultivation have on one's physiology in terms of ethically expressive demeanors and embodied performances. The somaesthetic aspect of ethical performativity will be highlighted here, particularly with regards to the role that 'countenance' (*se* 色) plays in expressing ethically consummate agency as an communicatively effective nexus of *qi* 氣- charged relationality. Through considering how moral performance is evaluated somaesthetically in Confucian role ethics, I believe we can better imagine a broader range of biopolitical strategies for resisting violent coercion and fascist oppression in all their pernicious forms.

Once upon being asked about "family reverence" (*xiao* 孝)—a concern obviously most central to the Confucian ethical project—Confucius responded:

Showing the proper countenance is difficult (*se nan* 色難). As for the young contributing their energies when there is work to be done, and deferring to their elders when there is wine and food to be had—how can merely doing these things be considered showing proper family reverence?¹³

For Confucius, poor performance in acting out one's role responsibilities matters most significantly in evaluating ethically salient conduct and identifying truly exemplary persons. Even if one were to "go through the motions" of carrying out all

(Angle, 2002). I aspire to put my roots down as a Confucian scholar but always with the goal of contributing to a larger conversation aimed at a creative fusion of horizons across philosophical traditions and culturally sedimented wisdom. We might problematize the language of "global" philosophy following Spivak's critique of colonial discourse (the globe is an abstract space that we can quantitatively measure, whereas the *planet* is a concrete place that we inhabit as earthly creatures marked by irreducible vulnerability and apophantic finitude). For more on the importance of post-colonial discourse in the task of articulating a responsible "planetary" cross-cultural conversation regarding the wisdom of life (*salim*) see Jea Sophia Oh, *A Postcolonial Planetary Ecotheology of Life* (Sopher Press, 2011), p.33.

¹³ *Analects* 2.8: 子夏問孝。子曰：「色難。有事，弟子服其勞；有酒食，先生饌，曾是以為孝乎？」 The translation, with a slight adjustment is from Roger Ames' *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (2011), p.171.

the ostensibly identifiable ethical duties required of them by taking into account all of their familial and socially defined roles, if the performance of these role-based responsibilities were to leave anything to be desired in terms of appropriately deferential bodily demeanor, deferential countenance and somaesthetic style, then the overall relational dynamic would most surely diminished and the role-focused *responsibility* would be less than optimally realized. If we take books nine through eleven of the *Analects* seriously as a kind of exemplary profile or paradigmatic portrait of the performative virtuosity that was revelatory of the “timely Sage”¹⁴ himself, then we can begin to flesh out the kind of exemplars we are looking for in our own uniquely situated projects of realizing optimal appropriateness in our role-focused responsibilities and relationships. As Roger Ames argues “it is precisely these passages, remembering as they do the existential moments in the life lived by Confucius himself, that are most revealing of the extent to which the appropriate conduct of a scholar-official (*shi* 士) participating in the daily activities of the court was at once highly formalized and intensely personal: the cut of his robes, the cadence of his stride, his keen sense of context and proprieties, his posture and facial demeanor, his profound expression of reverent attention, his tone of voice, his gestures of deference, even the rhythm of his breathing.”¹⁵ Confucius’ skill as an

¹⁴ *Sheng zhi shi zhe* 聖之時者 “the timely Sage” is a phrase coined by Mencius to depict Confucius’ uncanny ability to improvise ethically in a way rather reminiscent of a virtuosic Jazz artist. “Riding the blue note” through the seeming dissonance and transitions of a life to *achieve* a harmonious outcome certainly requires moral artistry and improvisational skill. But the “timely sage” can flow through the dissonant transitions without losing sight of the more settled values and propensities of their lived experience.

¹⁵ *Confucian Role Ethics*, p.173.

ethical *actor* in terms of effortlessly adjusting his countenance, posture, and breath to the situation at hand is the revealed in the following passage from the *Lunyu*:

On passing through the entrance way to the Duke's court, Confucius would bow forward from the waist as though the gateway were not high enough. While in attendance, he would not stand in the middle of the entranceway; on passing through, he would not step on the raised threshold. On passing by the empty throne, his countenance would change visibly, his legs would bend, and in his speech he would seem to be breathless. He would lift the hem of his skirts in ascending the hall, bow forward from the waist, and hold in his breath as though having difficulty with his breathing. On leaving and descending the first steps, he would relax his expression and regain his composure. He would glide briskly from the bottom of the steps, and returning to his place, he would resume a reverent posture.¹⁶

While this performance of Confucius may strike some as a rather obsequious spectacle, Roger Ames persuasively reminds us that it is precisely through the performance of such somaesthetic virtuosity that a more profound and sustainable “communal fabric” can come into being:

[*Li* 禮—‘ritual proprieties’] have a somatic dimension whereby body is often more effective than language in communicating the deference necessary to strengthen the bonds among the participants in the various communal life forms. Witness the way in which Confucius's body expresses *li* in his appearance at court recounted in the passage above. *Li* have a profoundly affective aspect wherein feelings suffuse and fortify the relational activities, providing the communal fabric a tensile strength that resists rupture. Refinement through the performance of *li* must be understood in light of the uniqueness of each participant engaged in the profoundly aesthetic project of becoming consummate as a person.¹⁷

The basic onto-political fact of human plurality here can be understood in terms of the grounds for a plurality of uniquely aesthetic projects—projects that take "a

¹⁶ *Analects* 10.4: 「入公門，鞠躬如也，如不容。立不中門，行不履闕。過位，色勃如也，足躩如也，其言似不足者。攝齊升堂，鞠躬如也，屏氣似不息者。出，降一等，逞顏色，怡怡如也。沒階趨進，翼如也。復其位，蹶蹶如也。」 Translation from Ames (2011), p.173.

¹⁷ Ames, p.174.

life..."¹⁸ or what the late Foucault called our "ethical substance"¹⁹ as their primordial material. The early Confucian insistence on "resolute becoming" (*shen qi du* 慎其獨), particularly within a reconstructed Si-Meng lineage, is understood as a matter of cultivating relational virtuosity (*ren* 仁) and optimal appropriateness (*yi* 義) in one's uniquely embodied roles and relationships. *Mengzi* describes an ideal of self-cultivation in terms of realizing a "flood-like *qi*" (*haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣) that is most extensive (*zhida* 至大) in empathic scope and most resolutely focused (*zhigang* 至剛) in terms of unique concern and ethical motivation.²⁰

Mengzi was keenly aware of the performative significance of bodily comportment and of the salience of an ethically expressive countenance. The text describes the countenance of a sage in metaphorical terms with the analogy of a jade-like luster:

What an authoritative person "natures" is the rooting of consummate conduct, appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom in the heart. This gives rise to a glossy coloration seen on the face, replete in the back, and spread throughout the four limbs. The four limbs don't speak and yet they are expressive.²¹

Mengzi said, "Physical form and countenance are apportioned by *tian*. But only a Sage can consummate their physiognomy."²²

¹⁸ For the significance of this Deleuzian idea including the significant ellipsis see Giorgio Agamben "Absolute Immanence". As a technical term "A life..." is a "pure dance of words" wherein "the ellipsis take the indefinite meaning of the particle 'a' to its limit." Agamben claims that the "technical term *a life* ... expresses this transcendental determinability of immanence as singular life, its absolutely virtual nature and its definition through this virtuality alone." For Deleuze a life ... "contains only virtual entities. It is composed of virtualities, events, singularities. What one calls virtual is not something lacking in reality."

¹⁹ See Foucault on *aphrodisia* in the *History of Sexuality* v. 1-3.

²⁰ See *Mengzi* 2A2.

²¹ 君子所性，仁義禮智根於心。其生色也，睟然見於面、盎於背。施於四體，四體不言而喻。

²² 孟子曰：「形色，天性也。惟聖人然後可以踐形。」

In fact, the physiognomic, gestural and performative aspects of appropriate ethical conduct are so vitally important for the *Mengzi* that the text even considers it possible to become a sage by merely "faking it" for long enough: "the sages Yao and Shun natured (*xing* 性之) [consummate conduct], the generals Tang and Wu embodied (*shenzhi* 身之) it, and the five hegemony feigned it (*jiazhi* 假之). Who is to say that upon feigning it long enough they didn't actually have it?"²³ The *Mengzi* consistently proclaims that any purported reality/appearance distinction with regards to ethical "character"²⁴ dissolves when it comes to authoritative ethical conduct, "if you wear the clothes of a Yao, speak the words of Yao, and generally act like Yao, then you are a Yao."²⁵

But this is not to suggest that *Mengzi* and the early Confucians were not aware of the presence of potential ethical counterfeits or the pervasiveness of moral hypocrisy. The *Mengzi* seems to suggest that the genuineness of one's performance, ranging anywhere from the realization and maintenance of political authoritativeness to the intimate space of sharing a meal with family and friends, is inevitably made manifest in physiognomy, "one who desires a good name can even pass up on ruling a country of a thousand chariots; but if he is not the real deal it will become clear even within the space of sharing a simple meal of a bowl of millet and

²³ *Mencius* 7A30.

²⁴ See "Were the Confucian's Virtuous? A Response to Kupperman" (In Ames and Rosemont *Confucian Role Ethics: A Moral Vision for the 21st Century*, 2016). A role ethical understanding of "character" is aesthetically grounded in a narrative project of imbuing a life with ethical significance via the narrative appropriation of ritual propriety and role-based virtuosity. Excellence in activity not a reified sense of "character" as a kind of one-behind-the-many way of thinking about ethical subjectivity, which is common to much of Aristotelian inspired Virtue Ethics.

²⁵ *Mencius*, 6B2.

bean soup.”²⁶ It is through our expressive countenance that we come to manifest our unique physiognomic traits and dynamic *qi* configurations as coalescing into a more or less coherent sense of ethical agency with social reality. The kind of social recognition that a role-focused conception of responsibility entails commands a deep appreciation of difference as radical human plurality and diversity, and entails a kind of methodological pluralism that goes way beyond anything that the classically liberal tradition in the West has in terms of a call for mere 'toleration' of incommensurable comprehensive doctrines or competing visions of a good life for society as an aggregation of discrete, foundational individuals.

It is precisely in the scrutiny of uniquely situated and narratively charged countenances that we inevitably begin to understand persons in the context of their web of relationality. And only with such understanding active can we hope to imaginatively get the most out of situations via the ameliorative application of optimal appropriateness (*yi* 義). But how can the *Mengzi* be so sure that by appreciating the countenance of another person we can truly begin to know their uniqueness? This idea of relational potential as constituting the unique web of relationality out of which we can realize creative agency stands in stark contrast to fixed, metaphysical notions of "character" or any moral psychology that would reify a determinate pattern of becoming in terms of a One-behind-the-many substance metaphysics of persons.

²⁶ *Mencius* 7B11: 「好名之人，能讓千乘之國；苟非其人，簞食豆羹見於色。」 See also 2A3 for a consideration of the problem of counterfeiture.

Another significant question we should raise is whence comes the Mengzian confidence that a jade-like countenance of "authoritative persons" (*junzi* 君子) or Sages can truly "transform" persons and their relational dynamics just in mere passing? What is the nature of this ethical physiognomy? Is there a kind of supernatural or mystic ideology implicit in the Si-Meng writings on ethical physiognomy or can we understand these texts in an ecstatically naturalist manner? These and other related questions can only be approached *experimentally* in the space of our everyday lives, in the routine bodily habits and styles of comportment that make us who we are. The somaesthetic energies that we inhabit in course of our daily dealings and relational transactions are all we have to work with in ameliorating our ethical and political lives. And such ameliorative projects can be assessed from a Confucian standpoint as a kind of somaesthetic energetics or qi-based psychoanalysis of all "selving" processes. Following Mengzi's definition of the lived-body as a "vessel of vital energies" (*ti chong qi* 體，冲氣也),²⁷ we can assess ethical agency without appeal to abstract notions of principle, virtue or character. Instead, it is presupposed that we can make concrete evaluations of the qualitative flows of *qi* energy within a person's overall life. Such modes of appraisal necessarily involve a phenomenological, or radically empirical, approach—a hermeneutics of selving that pays constant respect to a deeply tacit dimension of personal becoming. Any attempt at full articulation of the selving process at a level of explicitly propositional or analytic discourse is bound to be deficient or hermeneutically distorting in some way. However, a Si-Meng Ru model of ethical appraisal of

²⁷ Mengzi 2A2.

performative, embodied agency must involve an assessment of the holistic well-being or transactional health of unique persons in the disclosure of their ethical agency (*shendu* 慎獨) over time and in relational contexts. Such relational thinking is what the Si-Meng foregrounding of the expressiveness of the body is capable of achieving. For example, the *Mengzi* advertises that "in appreciating people nothing is better than the eyes" (*cunhuren moshan yu muzi* 存乎人，莫善於目子).

Rather than presupposing a simplistic and superstitious physiognomic reading (*kanxiang* 看像) of persons, a reconstructed Si-Meng approach to ethical evaluation requires a diachronic and deeply relational understanding of selving process aiming to determine the overall quality and trajectory of the growth potentials of ethical agency (*de* 德) and a role-focused ends-in-view ideal of creative personal integration (*cheng* 誠).

III. Ethical Agency, Wordless Teaching, and Caring for Relational Potential

In the *Mengzi* we discover a persuasive presentation of ethical agency and a relationally constituted sense of role-focused responsibility. This all happens in the context of a sustained philosophical argument, discoverable in a series of narrative contexts, for the importance of situating agential realist formations in the locus of familial, social, and religious networks of *transactional becoming*. A Mengzian vision of ethical agency gives full appreciative attention to the disclosive truth conditions of the radically pluralistic potentials of lived democratic experience. The *Mengzi* repeatedly claims that the virtuosic potentials (*de* 德) of any person have the capacity to amelioratively transform situations, even without explicitly articulating

a set of rationally determined rules or moral principles by which to a priori navigate lived experience:

Mengzi said: "A *junzi* has five modes of teaching: there is the transformation that is like the coming of a timely rain; there is the 'completion of "virtuosic potential' (*de* 德), there is the procurement and management of wealth; there is dialogue and inquiry; there is private cultivation as well. These five are the means by which a *junzi* carries out their teachings.²⁸

Such "wordless teaching" (*buyan zhi jiao* 不言之教) is a common feature surrounding *de* 德 discourse in both early "Confucian" and "Daoist" schools of thought from the Warring States period.²⁹ Indeed, the presence of both Daoist and Confucian materials in the Guodian tomb leads to speculation as to whether such pronounced ideological divisions had even begun to be drawn yet. It also leads one to wonder whether the tomb occupant himself wasn't an adherent of a particular Si-Meng line of Ruist philosophy and had found certain conceptual affinities and textual resonances between the *Daodejing*, *Taiyishengshui* and some of the more onto-cosmologically speculative and ethically provocative "Confucian" texts like the *Wuxingpian* and *Xingzimingchu*.³⁰

²⁸ 孟子曰：「君子之所以教者五：有如時雨化之者，有成德者，有達財者，有答問者，有私淑艾者。此五者，君子之所以教也。」

²⁹ Of course, as attested by the transdisciplinary and "interfaith" nature of the Guodian tomb occupant's library, thinkers from the Warring States milieu were not working under the assumption that such hard and fast traditional boundaries clearly demarcating philosophical "schools" were operative. A strong argument can be made that a shared conceptual framework or "cluster", operating with some basic metaphysical assumptions held in common across different intellectual "ways" (*dao* 道) regarding a Yin-Yang correlative cosmology, existed as a kind of horizon of intelligibility for all of the Warring States philosophers, even including the Mohists and Legalists who on first glance would seem to be more akin to a kind of "rationalist" order of interpretation.

³⁰ For an insightful study on the unique idea of correlative "order" in Chu philosophical texts (both proto-Daoist and more Ruist) see Wang, Zhongjiang (trans. Misha Tadd) *Order in Early Chinese Excavated Texts: Natural, Supernatural, and Legal Approaches*. The section on "oneness" in late Zhou and pre-Qin philosophical discourse puts the Guodian found *Taiyishengshui* 《太一生水》 into a broad philosophical and illuminating intertextual conversation.

The pervasive idea of an embodied 'moral physiognomy', and the uncanny ability to assess the ethical "stuff" of someone, merely based upon the perception of superficial markers such as their 'jade-like complexion' is called into question by the *Xunzi* in a chapter explicitly aimed at these purportedly "superstitious" and "heterodox" teachings of the Si-Meng lineage.³¹

What Xunzi is intent on criticizing is the ease in which a Si-Meng ethical expressionism can all too easily lead to a kind of moral hypocrisy in which people without the requisite "internalized" virtuosity or cultivated 'virtual potential' (*de* 德) find themselves in positions of authority and relationally commanding deference. In such situations, merely acting in accord with their appropriate tasks and mandated duties emergent in connection with the roles and relationships they are inhabiting (*tianming* 天命) becomes highly problematic and conducive to hypocrisy and coercion as such hypocrites are occupying roles and positions of recognizable authority and employing deceitful appearances and methods to cover up their lack of true virtuosity.

Mengzi was said to have "professed the intrinsic efficacy of our natural dispositions and extolled the virtuosity of Yao and Shun."³² Indeed, the difference between Xunzi and Mengzi on the question of "human nature" or "natural dispositions" (*renxing* 人性) is not really about a debate over a purportedly fixed ontological essence determining what it means to be a human being in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for being included in an "ethically" normative

³¹ See the "Against Physiognomy" (*feixiang* 非相) chapter of the *Xunzi*.

³²道性善，言比稱堯舜

category of definitional evaluation. Rather this in-house debate is really more of a question regarding the respective *emphasis* that these particular Confucian thinkers placed upon *intrinsic* existential phenomena like affect, correlatively-constitutive interpersonal relationships, bodily expressive moral charisma, and the efficiency of ritual propriety and sagely exemplars in constructing a shared social grammar by which to make sense of ethical evaluation. Such intrinsic ethical focus (*nei* 內) can be contrasted with a more *extrinsic* reliance upon features and phenomena of a potentially more stable realm of inherited social institutions, cultural patterns, formal education and established rituals and music. The *Mengzi* takes a rather positive view of certain morally creative persons—so-called 'Sages' and 'worthies' (*shengxian* 聖賢)—in terms of their ability to effect ethical transformation within their particular communities via authoritative and virtuosic performances of ritually appropriate and ethically exemplary conduct. It is through an embodied virtuosic command of communicative capabilities—listening to the most pressing concerns of the multitudes and realizing wisdom in the form of ethically persuasive speech—that an ameliorative transformation of the relational fabric of society is made possible. We will consider later how this ritually idealized communicative model of Sagehood informs a uniquely Ruist understanding of democratic agency within a relationally constituted, process-oriented and event-consummated metaphysical framework of a *qi* 氣 based correlative cosmology.

The *Xunzi*, on the other hand, seems to reserve a much more suspicious hermeneutics for the capacities individuals have to effectively realize ameliorative growth. And it would seem that he is much more realistically attuned to the

potential dangers of moral hypocrisy in the administration of governance and public life more generally—hence the need for *extrinsic* ritual and legal codes (*fa* 法).

There might be another point of fundamental disagreement between these schools of Confucian thought represented here in the tradition by the philosophical figures of Xunzi and Mengzi. This is the idea that not only was it a matter of emphasis in terms of the ethical impact of virtuosic or charismatic exemplars, but also the "nature good vs. nature crude" *xingshan* 性善 / *xing e* 性惡 distinction might also point to a fundamentally different understanding of the ethical potential of our 'vital energies' *qi* 氣 and the role that they can play in the achievement of virtuosic conduct and the realization of exemplary traits (i.e. sagely natural complexes guiding our embodied selving processes). Responsibly translating the conceptual clustering associated with these two poles of early Confucian theories of human nature, we should take *shan* 善 as a kind of pragmatic efficiency—i.e. "good for. . .", "good with. . .", "good to. . .", etc., and not some purportedly essentialized notion of purely *moral goodness qua moral goodness*. Likewise, we should read the Xunzian line of thinking in terms of a "crude" (*e* 惡) or unrefined sensibility structure—that is, the brute desires for food, drink, and sex without aesthetic or ritual reflection upon the "point" of such embodied pursuits and how to optimize relational flourishing in a family-social-cosmic nexus of entangled processes of human becoming.³³

³³ I borrow Kurtis Hagen's translation of "crude nature" (*xing e* 性惡) to highlight the decidedly non-ontotheological presuppositions in this Ruist debate. See his "Artifice and Virtue in the Xunzi" *Dao* (Hagen, K. Dao (2003) 3: 85.)

For now, suffice it to say that all early Confucian projects of ethical cultivation would share this kind of broadly understood 'aesthetic holism' in terms of thinking through vital ethical and political questions like: what is the optimal life course for a uniquely situated human person like myself? What would constitute a harmonious and well-integrated life given the facticity of my uniquely situated relational responsibilities focused by a manifold of roles? What should I do in terms of navigating the complexity of harmonizing a diverse and constantly changing set of role identities over the course of life? How to balance competing claims on my vital energies and ethical focus? What habits and intentional practices are most efficacious in terms of attempting to lead a virtuosic life that contributes to the democratic flourishing of the communicating community of which one's personal life is a vital part?³⁴

Instead of attempting to give theoretically coherent and definitive systematic accounts of *the Good Life* according to some supposedly universal set of valid dictates of reason, the Ruist tradition of ethical-political thinking avers such speculation in favor of a more concrete and embodied conception of wisdom that works best by a kind of "pointing" directly to exemplary persons who serve as ethical constellations and regulative ideals for the democratic community becoming more harmonious a plurisignality together. Such ethical "pointing" or embodied indexicality works best by allusive or poetic descriptions of exemplary persons and

³⁴子曰：「不曰『如之何如之何』者，吾末如之何也已矣。」 *Analects* 15.16

The phrase "what to do?" (*ruzhihe* 如之何) appears a total of 143 times in the database of pre-Qin Ruist texts at ctext.org. Although this phrase is not referencing anything like autonomous choice it does highlight the uniquely transactional and *participatory* (*peitian* 配天) nature of Confucian role ethical creative agency.

there more or less sedimented traits and such presentations often function better with a kind of fecund ambiguity or indirect form of communication. Sometimes there is even a kind of Ruist apophantic theology of *tian* 天 discourse that can only be understood holistically with a kind of somaesthetic awareness of the entire "bodyheartminding" (*xin* 心) of persons, and cannot function merely on the level of verbal discursive formations—after all, "does *tian* speak?" (天何言?)

The acknowledgement of the possibility of "silent illumination" and charismatic ethical transformation occurring beyond verbal articulation can be found even in the more "externalist" (外) writings of the *Xunzi*:

Nothing is more efficacious for the authoritative person in nourishing their feeling and thinking than to be effectively and creatively integrated in their habitual configurations of vital energy (*cheng* 誠). There is nothing else to concern oneself with other than aiming at the utmost of creative integration...the "perfection" of the authoritative person's virtuosic efficacy is such that even in silence it is expressed, prior to the bestowal of service or favors one is treated like family, and without displaying anger one is held in reverence and respect. This is because authoritative persons act in accord with the vital command of things (*shun ming* 順命) by caring for their unique potential (*shendu* 慎獨). The efficacious employment of a course of action (*dao* 道) is such that without creative integration of habit energies there is no unique individuality. And without individuality there is no signature style, and, thus even through the direct expression of one's countenance or via verbal articulation the people will be unwilling to follow the moral charge. If they do follow the charge, it will be with hesitation and doubt. The heavens and earth are vast and sublime, but without creative integration, nature itself cannot transform things. The wisdom of the sage is like this; without creative integration the people cannot be transformed.³⁵

³⁵君子養心莫善於誠，致誠則無它事矣.....君子至德，嘿然而喻，未施而親，不怒而威，夫此順命，以慎其獨者也。善之為道者，不誠則不獨，不獨則不形，不形則雖作於心，見於色，出於言，民猶若未從也，雖從必疑。天地為大矣，不誠則不能化萬物。聖人為知矣，不誠則不能化萬民。

It should be clear by now then that to approach an understanding of the Si-Meng Ruist thinking to develop a reconstructed Ruist democratic metaphysics of persons as becoming creatively integrated in the course of living role-focused agency, we need to be able to responsibly situate persons in their vital contexts of relationality that is always a *qi*-manifested plurisingularity of persons. This is why the *Mengzi* claims that it is epistemically mistaken not to seek virtuosic potential in *qi* if we can't get at it at the level of explicit verbal discourse or comprehensive philosophical doctrines (*yan* 言).³⁶

The previously cited passage of the *Xunzi* that highlights the importance of "resolute becoming" as a resolute focus on optimizing personal relational potential in the context of ritually stipulated aesthetico-ethical value structures (*li* 禮) should already alert us to the possibility that the author(s) of the *Xunzi* may have been rhetorically overplaying the true philosophical differences between them and the Si-Meng Ruists on the question of human nature. In fact, since Confucius himself was said to have seldom talked about "nature" (*xing* 性) many of the subsequent philosophical divisions in Ruist thinking can be read as attempts to articulate a coherent conception of the moral psychology of persons. We might read the *Xunzi* as being a development of the "overcome the self with ritual propriety" (*keji fu li* 克己復禮) model found in the *Analects*. It is interesting that the use of the character *ji* 己 is frequently used in pre-Qin sources to refer to a cause of fault or error in addressing ethical and political situations. The open-ended aspect of the selving

³⁶ See *Mengzi* on articulating the method of cultivating "oceanic *qi*" (*haoranzhiqi* 浩然之氣) in 2A2.

process is on display in this character though as it is also used to reference a reflexive ethical sensibility. In a very interesting passage from the *Xunzi* we see how the ideal of not leaving "relational virtuosity" (*ren* 仁) even for a space of a meal doesn't make Yan Hui an exemplar for blind conformism to predetermined ritualistic principles, but actually "overcoming" *ji* 己 can only be carried out in a context of self-love (*ziai* 自愛):

Zilu came upon the Master in repose. Confucius said: "You! What do you make of wisdom (*zhi* 知)? And what do you make of relational virtuosity (*ren* 仁)?" Zilu responded: "A wise person gets others to acknowledge them, and a *ren* person gets others to love them." Confucius said: "You can be a scholar-official." Next Zigong arrived. Confucius asked, "Ci! What do you make of wisdom (*zhi* 知)? And what do you make of relational virtuosity (*ren* 仁)?" Zigong responded, "The wise person knows others, and the *ren* person loves others." Confucius said, "You can be an authoritative person (*junzi* 君子) amongst scholar-officials." Finally, Yan Hui enters. Confucius asked, "Hui! What do you make of wisdom (*zhi* 知)? And what do you make of relational virtuosity (*ren* 仁)?" Yan Hui said: "A wise person knows themselves and a *ren* person loves themselves (*ziai* 自愛)." Confucius said, "You can be an enlightened authoritative person (*ming junzi* 明君子)."³⁷

I would argue that this passage is important to show the philosophical convergence of Si-Meng and Xunzian thinking regarding relationally constituted persons and the ritual performance of ethical agency. It is significant that the more egoist language of *ji* 己 as something to be overcome or at least reflected upon is jettisoned here by Yan Hui and is replaced with the more gerundive sense of self as intra-spection (*zi* 自) that also points to the spontaneity (*ziran* 自然) of becoming more creatively

³⁷ *Xunzi* 《子道》：子路入，子曰：「由！知者若何？仁者若何？」子路對曰：「知者使人知己，仁者使人愛己。」子曰：「可謂士矣。」子貢入，子曰：「賜！知者若何？仁者若何？」子貢對曰：「知者知人，仁者愛人。」子曰：「可謂士君子矣。」顏淵入，子曰：「回！知者若何？仁者若何？」顏淵對曰：「知者自知，仁者自愛。」子曰：「可謂明君子矣。」

integrated in a role-focused commanding responsibility. In fact, the *Xunzi* author(s) here in the use of Yan Hui as an interlocutor focusing on "self-love" (*ziai* 自愛) gives us an alternative but resonant vocabulary for talking about the moral phenomenology of "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨) that actually bridges the two traditions of early Ruism.

IV. Agential Realism and Non-Foundational Si-Meng Moral Agency

This section will explore the notion of 'matter-ing' as it unfurls a multiplicity of meanings in a contemporary spaces and anti-foundational discursivity. Process-oriented metaphysics—as generalized theoretical descriptions of the way the ten-thousand things hang together in the broadest sense of the term—don't rely upon any transcendental or foundational notions of an *arche* or *substance*, or any other ontotheological transcendental concepts of absolute *ipseity* to explain the dualistic relationship between Form and Matter. The experience of *material singularity* will be a starting point as we explore notions of experimental metaphysics and transactional potential in order to apply these ideas to a process notion of vibrant materialism. It will be argued that by accepting a reconstructed Si-Meng metaphysics of "resolute becoming" or "transactional plurisingularity" in dialogue with Karen Barad's (et. al) theory of *agential realism* we can realize greater clarity regarding the aporia of pernicious conformism within Confucian Role ethics. It will be argued that by abandoning any foundationalist liberal *choice* paradigms and instead adopting a thoroughly transactional notion of agentially realistic *freedom* wrought within role performances and material enactments of disclosive relationality, we can better respond to concerns that the obsession with traditional

roles and encumbering relationships within Confucian Role ethics stultifies the growth of creative agency and coercively enforces an unhealthy degree of conservatism.

In discussing the ways that Confucianism has been "manufactured" by Western interpreters since the Jesuit missionaries sent back their first attempts at translation, Roger Ames points out that it has usually been an aggressively conservative presentation of the Ru-literati tradition following in the wake of Confucius' innovative transmissions that has predominated in Western imaginations. Confucianism "has all too often been appropriated by the powers-that-be to reinforce class and gender inequities" or as a "dry-as-bones catechism—a form of political indoctrination to be foisted upon witless school children for their ostensive moral edification."³⁸ In reviewing how thinkers like G.W.F. Hegel, Bertrand Russell, and John Dewey variously characterized Confucianism as being responsible for an unhealthy conservatism and traditional (patriarchal, monarchic) inertia in classical Chinese culture, Ames also considers how contemporary cross-cultural comparative hermeneutics can replicate this pattern of (celebratory and deprecatory) orientalism. Ames critically interrogates Zhang Longxi's rather Hegelian sounding characterization of Chinese language as being essentially on the material and concrete side of a abstract/concrete, Form/Matter set of dualistic presuppositions:

The Chinese language, as seen in this formulation, appears to be a language of concrete things and specific objects, a language bogged down in matter and unable to rise above the ground of materiality and literality toward any spiritual height. The judgment is thus not on Chinese translation of

³⁸ Roger Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, p.19.

particular foreign words and concepts, but on the very nature and ability of the Chinese language as a whole.³⁹

In an attempt to rectify or at least ameliorate the trend of denigratory orientalism in comparative philosophy and sinology more generally, Ames makes use of Hilary Putnam's notion of *internal realism* to critique the naively realist assumptions behind much of these trends of critiquing supposedly romantic anti-podalism or celebratory orientalism:

Elements of what we call 'language' or 'mind' *penetrate so deeply into what we call 'reality' that the very project of representing ourselves as being 'mappers' of something 'language-independent' is fatally compromised from the start.* Like Relativism, but in a different way, Realism is an impossible attempt to view the world from Nowhere. . . The Confucian persuasion of "embodying our experience" (*ti* 體) and "pursuing a ritual propriety in our roles and relations" (*li* 禮) differs from Putnam only in that it is more radical, going beyond the twentieth-century philosophical preoccupation with 'language' and 'mind' to claim that *our entire psychophysical persons* are involved in the process of assimilating and transforming the world as it is experienced.⁴⁰

Taking a stand against all forms of metaphysical essentialism that would postulate "block universes" of cross-cultural comparative hermeneutics, truly *correlative thinking* seeks not "closure in patterns of fixed regularity" but instead aims at "synthetic" and "open-ended, aesthetic disclosures in *ad hoc* unities constituted by unique details."⁴¹

In imagining a more inclusive, democratic, and pragmatically reconstructed set of "regulative ideals" to bring to the received Confucian tradition (in the four East Asian "streams" of China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan and in its diffusion

³⁹ Ibid., p.33.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.21-22.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.26.

throughout the world) Roger Ames joins forces with the likes of Bertrand Russell and Ambrose King who in their own ways advocated a "revitalized Confucianism" wherein the "traditional emphasis upon family feeling as both the entry point and the substance of moral competence" is complimented with a "more robust framework of regulative ideals directed at preempting the all-to-frequent misuse of intimate relationships" capable of giving rise to "nepotism, cronyism and other forms of social and political corruption" and more intimate forms of violence and coercion. Ames comes to the conclusion that just as "intimacy needs the restraining complement of integrity, concrete family feelings require the guiding complement of some form of more general ideals."⁴²

In what follows I will present some of the experimental metaphysical inquiries of Karen Barad, and explore ways in which her agential realist perspective can provide a productive space in which to have dialogue aimed at "revitalizing" a Si-Meng Confucian role ethics wherein *resolute becoming* as "resolute human becoming" *shendu* 慎獨 can provide a non-foundational ground from which to imaginatively develop the kind of regulative ideals we need to "reconstruct" a non-coercive, inclusive, post-patriarchal, creatively democratic Confucianism for the present moment.

Karen Barad is a physicist and feminist philosopher who realized the possibility of creatively integrating two fields of discourse in a unified theory of matter mattering. Things matter because bodies matter in a multiplicity of ways. Barad builds on a tradition from Spinoza through Deleuze that questions the

⁴² Ibid., p.35.

animate/inanimate ontological difference in a conceptual space of reasons playing within a generative language game guided by the basic presupposition of vibrant matter or that all things are "alive" in and matter ethically speaking.⁴³

Barad reminds us that the history of the idea of matter in the Western tradition of philosophy can be read for the most part as a series of dismissive strategies of exclusion for an unruly and inconceivable subject of discourse. She accepts this historical situation as a lamentable given but agrees largely with the set of patriarchal, authoritarian, racist, classist strategies of domination masked in philosophical ideologies of exclusion, because for any discursive formation there is always already a process of inclusion and exclusion going on. Discursive materiality is always a matter of "boundary making processes" and on an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a fixed substratum, or a passive stuff awaiting the formal imprint of culture or history, it is always already an intra-actional historical affair of "congealing of agency" as an enactive process. This idea of *congealing agency* is helpful in formulating a way to talk about "resolute becoming" 慎獨 that makes use of a cluster of concepts ranging from a *qi* 氣-based vocabulary wherein material refinement (*jing* 精 to *shen* 神) culminates in "creative integrity" (*cheng* 誠).

Barad asks the poignant question, "Where did we ever get the strange idea that nature—as opposed to culture—is ahistorical and timeless? We are far too impressed by our own cleverness and self-consciousness. . . . We need to stop telling

⁴³ In what follows I will be drawing largely upon one significant essay of Barad's to introduce her version of agential realism and put it in conversation with Si-Meng insights. See Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" [*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2003, vol. 28, no.3].

ourselves the same old anthropocentric bedtime stories."⁴⁴ Instead of "anthropocentric bedtime stories" what we now need are newly written anthropocene sermons or manifestos as calls to agential action.

Both metaphysical realism and social constructivism presuppose a "representationalist" account of semantics and epistemology. But a "*performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things." And, for Barad, performativity, properly understood, is not "an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real." We have to see language is mattering in embodied processes and social ontologies that get beyond the part/whole mereology of persons embedded in totalizing metaphysical narratives. If we see language games (including the most serious ones) as always a performative utterance of bodies in socially-ritually constituted spaces, then it is much easier to get a grasp on the importance of self-cultivation techniques (*gongfu* 功夫) as found in texts like the "Great Learning" and *Focusing the Familiar*.

Barad criticizes both dogmatic realists and naive constructivists in not being sufficiently materialist in orientation. But her materialism is a materialism with a twist of vibrancy informed by a performative theory of body:

[B]oth scientific realists and social constructivists believe that scientific knowledge (in its multiple representational forms such as theoretical concepts, graphs, particle tracks, photographic images) mediates our access to the material world; where they differ is on the question of referent, whether scientific knowledge represents things in the world as they really

⁴⁴ Ibid., Barad is quoting a passage from Steve Shaviro (1997).

are (i.e., "Nature") or "objects that are the product of social activities (i.e., "Culture"), but both groups subscribe to representationalism.⁴⁵

Barad wishes to have us move from any ontotheological representationalist accounts of "correspondences" between descriptions of reality (e.g. Mirror of Nature) to more materially discursive practices of vibrantly enacted doings/actions. Liberal social theories and traditional scientific accounts of knowledge alike "owe much to the idea that the world is composed of individuals"—just atoms swirling in the void. But "the idea that beings exist as individuals with inherent attributes, anterior to their representation, is a metaphysical presupposition that underlies the belief in political, linguistic, and epistemological forms of representationalism." Representationalism is the "belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent....that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing." And for Barad all such representationalist accounts rest on a fundamental and pernicious philosophical fiction of atomism.

It would be better then if we replaced Democritus' dream of atoms in the void and Descartes' delusion of an ontological gap/cut as ideological building blocks for naive Reality/Appearance Realism (i.e. matter as object of representation or passive entity for phenomenological impressionism) with a more robustly *quantum* conception of things:

I want to encourage doubt about [the] presumption that representations (that is, their meaning or content) are more accessible to us than the things they supposedly represent. IF there is no magic language through which we can unerringly reach out directly to its referents, why should we think there is nevertheless a language that magically enables us to reach out directly to

⁴⁵ Ibid.,

its sense or representational content? The presumption that we can know what we mean, or what our verbal performances say, more readily than we can know the objects those sayings are about is a Cartesian legacy, a linguistic variation on Descartes' insistence that we have a direct and privileged access to the contents of our thoughts that we lack towards the "external" world.⁴⁶

Atomism as an ontological position is of the same ilk with the myth of the given that Wilfred Sellars has famously debunked. We do better to follow Hilary Putnam's "Realism with a Human Face" and the pragmatic insistence on overturning the asymmetrical faith many unrepentant persons have in representationalism as a sedimented Cartesian habit of mind in epistemology and ethical-political matters. Barad reminds us that it is going to take a "healthy skepticism toward Cartesian doubt to be able to begin to see an alternative."

It can be difficult to overcome these deeply entrenched habits of the mind in trying to think outside of a representationalist, atomistic, foundationalist framework. We always risk being surreptitiously corrupted by the very schemas we are seeking liberation from by replicating a new "God in the gaps" to replace the old monotheism. Barad quotes Rosa Bradiotti to highlight the non-foundational urge in thinking location without atomistic representation:

To be in process or transition does not place the thinking subject outside history or time [...]. A location is an embedded and embodied memory: it is a set of counter-memories, which are activated by the resisting thinker against the grain of the dominant representations of subjectivity. A location is a materialist temporal and spatial site of co-production of the subject, and thus anything but an instance of relativism.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid., Barad is quoting from Joseph Rouse (1997, p.209).

⁴⁷ Ibid, (Bradiotti 2006, 199). This insight is similar to Deleuze's take on the naive realism of ordinary language philosophy: "As long as we stick to things and words we can believe that we are speaking of what we see, that we see what we are speaking of, and that the two are linked." (Deleuze 1988, 65).

Barad prefers to speak of agency (without individual agents) instead of subjectivity (perhaps losing some of the Foucaultian post-structuralist precision in understanding biopolitical strategies of subject formation). But with Bradiotti she wishes to think of a "host of material-discursive forces"—social, cultural, psychic, economic, natural, physical, biological, geopolitical, geological, et cetera—that are always operating to shape our lived experience. *Agential realism* is indeed *realist* because it ceases to deploy the comforting bedtime stories of immaterial subjectivity or foundational atomism and instead focuses on the host of material-discursive forces always already at play in shaping our experience in the world. For Barad *agential realism* is an account of "technoscientific and other practices that takes feminist, antiracist, poststructuralist, queer, Marxist, science studies, and scientific insights seriously."

With the rejection of a "metaphysics of relata" of "words" and "things" coming into contact in some representationalist bedtime story, Barad insists that we rely instead upon a clear-eyed *agential realist* account so that "it is once again possible to acknowledge nature, the body, and materiality in the fullness of their becoming without resorting to the optics of transparency or opacity, the geometrics of absolute exteriority or interiority, and the theoretization of the human as either pure cause or pure effect while at the same time remaining resolutely accountable for the role 'we' play in the intertwined practices of knowing and becoming."

Barad's *agential realism* is a kind of "experimental metaphysics" in the tradition of Emerson, James, Dewey, Whitehead, et. al that is more interested to see what kind of lives we can live by accepting a novel metaphysical conception of matter and spirit;

rather than being preoccupied with getting it right (a totalizing system to explain everything) we ought to be focused on getting on with it.

The quantum dimension of Barad's theory of agential realism is developed in dialogue with Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr on "spooky action at a distance" and quantum entanglement more generally. Barad develops her theory of "agential intra-action" by explicating Bohr's take on "position" and "momentum" (e.g. of light as 'particle and 'wave' function of assemblage of experimentation not representation). Apparently for Bohr we must accept a both/and dialectic of pure becoming to even hope to understand quantum entanglement. Another glaring paradox for traditional representationalist metaphysics is the idea of "relations without preexisting relata." But it is "through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the 'components' of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful" so on such a quantum theory of agency we don't have to posit relata before relations (a welcome presupposition for Si-Meng thinking indeed).

Drawing on the language of Bohr's quantum theory, Barad urges us to stop appealing to a "Cartesian cut" that would seek to representationally realize a Subjective/Objective split in any observable phenomenon and instead stay faithful to things by taking an "agential cut" maybe more akin to a refined expression of musical sensibility than an ontological dissector's knife. An "agential cut" seeks "*local resolution within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological indeterminacy" and "relata do not preexist relations; rather, relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions." Such relational ontology entails a "reworking of the

traditional notion of causality" and this is something that a nuanced exploration of early Si-Meng thinking about the embodied moral psychology of persons and material-discursive agency can contribute to future inter-cultural comparative discussions regarding agency and causality. A most fruitful area is how to understand a "propensity of things" (*shi* 勢) and "commanding situations" (*ming* 命) way of thinking about causality. Finding quantum entanglements between pre-Qin theories of agency and causation and contemporary discussions in feminist epistemology is an exciting proposition to be sure.⁴⁸

Barad attempts to think through the "wave-particle duality paradox" as resolved by Bohr in the following manner: "the objective referent is not some abstract, independently existing entity but rather the phenomenon of light interacting with the apparatus." She actually rejects the so-called Heisenberg "uncertainty" principle because true indeterminacy is different from anthropocentric uncertainty. Since "apparatuses are dynamic (re)configurings of the world, specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances through which specific exclusionary boundaries are enacted [and they are decidedly not] "static arrangements *in* the world." Barad highlights the performative and vibrant possibilities of matter mattering using the language of apparatuses as "open-ended practices." And since "boundaries do not sit still" any purported Nature/Culture dualism is untenable and instead a bipolar natureculture dynamism is populated with varying degrees of "agential intra-actions of multiple apparatuses of bodily

⁴⁸ See for example Francois Jullien *On the Propensity of Things* and *A Treatise on Efficacy* for an excellent study on classical Chinese theories of non-foundational, correlative thinking about causality and non-coercive agency.

production." Indeed, it is through such dynamic exclusionary and open-ended inclusionary "practices that the differential boundaries between 'humans' and 'nonhumans,' 'culture' and 'nature,' the 'social' and the 'scientific' are constituted" or enacted. The world just "*is* intra-activity in its differential mattering." That is, for Barad, it is through various ongoing intra-actions that "phenomena come to matter—in both senses of the word." Instead of foundational subjects or sovereign sites of metaphysically supernaturalist libertarian freedom, what Barad brings to our attention is a sense of *agency* as discursively embodied *freedom* as a host of material configurations. Instead of simple power differentials then we must seek a language of flow and dynamism to capture the subtle nuances involved in experiences of freedom and creative agency:

The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity in the ongoing reconfiguring of locally determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies. This ongoing *flow of agency* through which 'part' of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another 'part' of the world and through which local causal structures, boundaries, and properties are stabilized and destabilized does not take place in space and time but in the making of spacetime itself. The world is and *ongoing open process of mattering* through which "mattering" itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities.⁴⁹

The primary "unit" then in *agential realism* is not "words" and "things" but "material-discursive practices" through which boundaries are provisionally constituted and virtually enacted. Such dynamic intra-action *is* agency. Agency is not an attribute of things to be described in some representationalist ontology, but rather is itself the "ongoing reconfigurings of the world." This non-foundational post-anthropocentric vision of agency is what Barad means by a post-humanist

⁴⁹ Ibid.,

"performative metaphysics" wherein materiality and discursivity are intertwined in the performance of apparatuses of agency production and not assumed to be some ready-made feature of the natural world or some purely cultural artifice.

Discursive practices are not synonymous with "language" as the sum total of verbal communication rather they are expressive of the "(re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted." They are just "causal intra-actions" as "resolute becoming" (*du* 獨) that is diffused uniformly throughout the world of "commanding situations" (*tianming* 天命). The ability to be creative "on par with *tian*" (*peitian* 配天) is not then some expression of humanistic hubris of the Si-Meng Ruists, rather it is a way of talking about the vital source of creativity that pervades all things in varying degrees of flowing configurations of agency. For Barad matter is vibrant because it thinks, feels, and is desiring agency:

Matter, like meaning, is not an individually articulated or static entity. Matter is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification; nor is it an uncontested ground for scientific, feminist, or Marxist theories. Matter is not a support, location, referent, or source of sustainability for discourse. Matter is not immutable or passive. It does not require the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete it. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity.⁵⁰

Matter is a vital configuration of pure becoming and ultimate singularities actively realizing various degrees of agential creativity. On an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a static substance or underlying foundation for formal impressions; rather, "matter is substance in its intra-active becoming--not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process

⁵⁰ Ibid.

of iterative intra-activity." As already mentioned the phrase "congealing of agency" is particularly apt for thinking through the processes of *qi*-concertion and refinement involved in "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨) as embodied self-cultivation (功夫 *gongfu*).

Since for Barad, "discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to one another. . ." a *yinyang* aspectual narrative account of agency and the of correlative concepts can be brought into a productive inter-cultural conversation in making sense of a Confucian focus-field process cosmology and relational ontology of persons. Because "material-discursive practices are specific iterative enactments—agential intra-actions—through which matter is differentially engaged and articulated (in the emergence of boundaries and meanings)", the reconfiguring of material-discursive fields of possibilities in the iterative dynamics of intra-activity itself is agency. This discursive quantum account of agency is strikingly similar to the decentered, distributed notion of *shi* 勢-causality and *nature naturing through commanding situations* (*xingming* 性命) agency to be found in the Si-Meng Confucian perspective. Matter "comes to matter through the iterative intra-activity of the world in its becoming" and this contemporary Spinozist set of assumptions about *natura naturata* and *natura naturans* is relevant to understanding the "incipient tendencies" (*weifa* 未發) and "expressed affects" (*yifa* 已發) as described in the moral phenomenology of the *Zhongyong* on the embodied *ars contextualis* of "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨).

Indeed, "bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena." And the lived *ti* 體-bodies that Deborah Sommer describes as a polysemous corpus of rhizomatic becoming are no exception to this rule. The etymology of 體 indicates a trans-*form*-ative structure of ritualizing potential. A structure that is stable enough to undergo changes without losing its fluid form, but also adaptable enough to be receptive of new *ritual energies* and creative potentialities for edifying ethical transformation of role-focused responsibilities in freshly realized commanding situations. As we saw in the previous chapter, Deweyan reconstruction in philosophy is just tracking the truth of experience in claiming that democratic growth is the only ethically regulative ideal.

Barad claims that her version of agential realism is post-humanist insofar as it jettisons any Enlightenment promises of total liberation of *human* potential in utopian social arrangements. It is also post-humanist in that it decenters the agential cut outside of narrowly circumscribed anthropocentric fields of discourse:

On an agential realist account, agency is cut loose from its traditional humanist orbit. Agency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity. Nor does it merely entail resignification or other specific kinds of moves within a social geometry of antihumanism. Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. . . Agency is not an attribute whatsoever—it is "doing" / "being" in its intra-activity. Agency is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity.⁵¹

In what follows, I will continue to use the agential realist framework to make sense of a reconstructed Si-Meng philosophical lineage. However, I think the label post-humanist probably won't fit any Confucian style of thinking due to the pervasive

⁵¹ Ibid.,

"anthropocosmic" (*tianrenheyi* 天人合一) boundary articulations that resonate throughout the tradition. However, it should be readily obvious that Confucian ecological humanism stands in stark contrast to the pernicious anthropocentrism of the dominant Western (Greco-Christian) ontotheological tradition. Pragmatism, agential realism, hermeneutic phenomenology and other reformations of the regnant foundationalism in philosophy will continue to be explored as we strive with moral imagination to reconstruct Si-Meng thinking about agency for the present moment.

Chapter Four: *Comparative Philosophy, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: A Methodological Interlude*

I. Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the philosophical project of attempting to understand possible understandings of any and all possible interpretive stances. It could be thought of as the asymptotically ideal attempt to understand the various modes of understanding that might be revealed in the course of any person's transaction with their intersubjective lifeworld. Phenomenology, on the other hand, in its broadest definitional sense is the embodied pursuit of *truth* free of all a priori conceptual abstraction. Phenomenology and hermeneutics both deal predominantly with human *experience* and the various ways in which we attempt to make sense of the world from our uniquely embodied perspectives. From its earliest inception, with Edmund Husserl's rallying cry to "return to the things themselves," phenomenology has been a highly contested philosophical discipline. Some have wanted to turn it into a rigorous science that is capable of realizing clear and distinct conceptual analysis, while others have more professed an imperfect, non-ideal practice of an existentially embodied discipline of trying to make optimal sense of things via a vital poetics of life.

Philosophical hermeneutics, an attempted marriage of these two aforementioned philosophical traditions, from its conception has been concerned with making sense of *textual* interpretation within living traditional matrices of

embodied meaning-making. In a 1975 essay "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics"¹ Paul Ricoeur explains and explores the relationship between these two philosophical disciplines. In what follows I will be introducing this particular essay and considering its implications for the emergent field of decolonized inter-cultural comparative philosophy.

For our present purposes of reconstructing a Si-Meng lineage of interpretation regarding ethical resoluteness and creative agency of persons in a thoroughly relational cosmological context, it will prove beneficial for us to appropriate some of Ricoeur's findings as we attempt to think through the experience of becoming a relationally flourishing human person with and for others in the context of our narratively embodied experience. It should become readily evident that the subject matter we are dealing with in our reconstitution of Si-Meng thinking about ethics and creative agency is a fluid, process notion of relational "selving." As such, we can only approach understanding these traditional textual materials if we open ourselves up to the possibility of being transformed in the horizon of relational, inter-cultural interpretation made evident by the unfolding of an emergent discursive-matter of "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨)—that is, over one's transactional ritual potential—and the "creative integration" (*cheng* 誠) of one's resolute ethical agency.

¹ Paul Ricoeur, 'Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,' from *Nous* 9 (1975): 85-102. Reprinted in *Ricoeur: From Text to Action* (Continuum 2008), p.23-50.

II. Departing from Foundationalist Phenomenology with the Myth of the Given

Ricoeur begins his essay with a disavowal of doing any comparative history of modern philosophy. Rather he claims that he has set out to pursue the question of the "destiny" of philosophy as phenomenology and hermeneutics. His essay seeks to be a "debate about the ways in which philosophy can still be pursued"² in the present milieu. He posits the following two theses for deeper consideration:

(1) What hermeneutics has ruined is not phenomenology but one of its interpretations, namely, its *idealistic* interpretation by Husserl himself (i.e. Husserlian idealism).

(2) Beyond a simple opposition there exists, between phenomenology and hermeneutics, a mutual *belonging*—*phenomenology remains the unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics* and phenomenology cannot constitute itself without a *hermeneutical presupposition*.

The first part of the essay seeks to show that the foundational presuppositions of Husserlian idealism presuppose a kind of hermeneutical consciousness and therefore Ricoeur is able to deconstruct the notion of a foundational egology with the idea of "belonging" to tradition understood as a dynamic horizon of meaningful possibilities.

It is evident that Husserl's desire to set phenomenology on the firm ground of a rigorous science couldn't mean the same thing as using the natural sciences to orient or begin an inquiry into the origins of conscious experience. Thus we have the first "schematic thesis" of Husserlian idealism that (a) "the ideal of scientificity proclaimed by phenomenology is not in continuity with the sciences, their axioms and their foundational enterprise: the 'ultimate justification' that constitutes phenomenology is of a different order." (24) It is a question of origins as a *Selbst-*

² Ibid. p.23.

Begründung [self-grounding] that interests the Husserl of the *Logical Investigations*. Secondly, we have the thesis (b) that "the foundation in principle is of the order of intuition; to found is to see. . .the priority. . .of intentional fulfillment as opposed to any philosophy of deduction or construction." Ricoeur highlights the importance of a "field of experience" in this intuitional capacity of the self-grounding subject of idealist phenomenology:

The key concept in this respect is that of an *Erfahrungsfeld* [field of experience]. The strangeness of phenomenology lies entirely therein: from the outset, the principle is a 'field' and the first truth an 'experience.' In contrast to all 'speculative constructions,' every question of principle is resolved through vision. I just spoke of strangeness: for is it not astonishing that in spite of (and thanks to) the critique of empiricism, experience in the strict empirical sense is surpassed only in an 'experience'? This synonymy of *Erfahrung* signifies that phenomenology is not situated elsewhere, in another world, but rather is concerned with natural experience itself, insofar as the latter is unaware of its meaning. Consequently, however much the emphasis may be placed on the a priori character, on the reduction to the *eidōs*, on the role of imaginative variations, and even on the notion of 'possibility,' it is still and always the character of experience that is underlined (one has only to consider the expression 'intuitive possibilities'.³

Thus we can see that although Husserl was rejecting the dogmatism of scientism and any and all attempts to ground the "field of experience" upon epistemic foundations of the natural sciences, the bracketing of the "natural attitude" requires that one return to an originary experience of being-in-the-world as only an active and imaginative participant can in beginning with our natural intuitions of being an embodied, familiarly-embedded, and socially-constituted person.

The third schematic thesis of Husserlian idealism is that (c) "the place of plenary intuition is subjectivity. All transcendence is doubtful; immanence alone is

³ Ibid., p.25. Husserl quote from *Hua* 5:142.

indubitable."⁴ This is one of the most problematic claims of Husserlian idealism insofar as it presupposes a "myth of the given" or a purely immanent/immediate form of consciousness. And it is directly related to the thesis (d) that "subjectivity thus promoted to the rank of the transcendental is not empirical consciousness, [but] the object of psychology."⁵ Instead, there is a fundamental reduction or "*the* philosophical conversion" that separates a "noetics or no-ology" from an empirically grounded psychology. Finally, we have the idea that (e) "awareness that sustains the work of reflection develops its own ethical implications: reflection is thus the immediately self-responsible act."⁶ For Husserl, the "supremely autonomous" or "foundational" act of self-positing is "at the same time—in the same breath, so to speak—epistemological and ethical. . . The self assertive character of the foundation constitutes the philosophical subject as responsible subject. This is the philosophizing subject as such."⁷

As we move on to see how Ricoeur deconstructs idealist phenomenology with the presuppositions of historicist hermeneutics, it is perhaps useful to keep in mind the Si-Meng dynamic of exercising constant vigilance over one's unique plurisignality and transactional ritual potential as itself an embodiment of creative ethical agency (*shendu* 慎獨). Such "resolute becoming" has been likened to a Husserlian *epoche* by some contemporary sinologists.⁸ It is important that we understand such claims in light of the hermeneutical critique of Husserlian idealism

⁴ Ibid., p.25.

⁵ Ibid., p.26.

⁶ Ibid., p.27.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Liang Tao (2008).

rather than in an ontologically foundationalist mode of approaching an understanding of the Si-Meng Confucian project of ethical self-cultivation.

In the tradition of Anglo-American analytic philosophy the critique of the "myth of the given" has also received much attention. Wilfred Sellars is well known for his attack on the "myth of the given" and his development of a coherentist epistemology and functional role/inferentialist semantics. A Sellarsian position deconstructs any possibility of an epistemological piece of experience functioning as a certainty or the myth of the "given." Here is a formalization of Sellars' argument that the given is a myth, from "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind":

1. A cognitive state is *epistemically independent* if it possesses its epistemic status independently of its being inferred or inferable from some other cognitive state.
[Definition of epistemic independence]
2. A cognitive state is epistemically efficacious — is capable of epistemically supporting other cognitive states — if the epistemic status of those other states can be validly inferred (formally or materially) from its epistemic status.
[Definition of epistemic efficacy]
3. The doctrine of the given is that any empirical knowledge *that p* requires some (or is itself) basic, that is, epistemically independent, knowledge (*that g, h, i, ...*) which is epistemically efficacious with respect to *p*.
[Definition of doctrine of the given]
4. Inferential relations are always between items with propositional form.
[By the nature of inference]
5. Therefore, non-propositional items (such as sense data) are epistemically inefficacious and cannot serve as what is given.
[From 2 and 4]
6. No inferentially acquired, propositionally structured mental state is epistemically independent.
[From 1]
7. Examination of multiple candidates for non-inferentially acquired, propositionally structured cognitive states indicates that their epistemic status presupposes the possession by the knowing subject of other empirical knowledge, both of particulars and of general empirical truths.
[From Sellars' analyses of statements about sense-data and appearances in Parts 1-IV of EPM and his analysis of epistemic authority in Part VIII]
8. Presupposition is an epistemic and therefore an inferential relation.
[Assumed (See PRE)]
9. Non-inferentially acquired empirical knowledge that presupposes the

possession by the knowing subject of other empirical knowledge is not epistemically independent.

[From 1, 7, and 8]

10. Any empirical, propositional cognition is acquired either inferentially or non-inferentially.

[Excluded middle]

11. Therefore, propositionally structured cognitions, whether inferentially or non-inferentially acquired, are never epistemically independent and cannot serve as the given.

[6, 9, 10, constructive dilemma]

12. Every cognition is either propositionally structured or not.

[Excluded middle]

13. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that no item of empirical knowledge can serve the function of a given.

[5,11, 12, constructive dilemma]⁹

It is interesting to note that this argument concludes with something that it is "reasonable" to accept all things considered, but doesn't itself presuppose an a priori conception of reason as something given to natural experience.

We can now return to Richard Rorty's use of Sellars' deconstruction of the "myth of the given"¹⁰ in his post-linguistic turn brand of neopragmatism that in no way relies upon a pre-verbal, extra-textual, realm of (pre)conscious naturalized *experience*. For, within a Rortyan version of neopragmatism it is axiomatic that all experience is linguistically mediated and culturally coded. There is a sense in which this post-linguistic turn insight is perfectly consonant with William James' postulate, dictum, and generalized conclusion of *radical empiricism*:

The postulate is that the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience. [Things of an unexperientable nature may exist ad libitum, but they form no part of the material for philosophic debate.]

⁹ This formalized argument of the "myth of the given" is extracted from William DeVries Stanford Encyclopedia entry: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sellars/> (accessed 1/2/2018).

¹⁰ See Rorty's "World Well Lost" in *Consequences of Pragmatism*.

The statement of fact is that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves.

The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves part of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure.¹¹

Jamesian interest in the continuity of natural experience leaves Rorty rather nonplussed insofar as he displayed little or no patience for metaphysical speculations into the nature of any supposedly overarching connective tissue from which experience grew in both its linguistic and extra-linguistic capacities and significance. Rorty selectively emphasizes the "deconstructive" or "therapeutic" aspects of Dewey's *Experience and Nature* in claiming that, "it is easier to think of the book as an explanation of why nobody needs a metaphysics, rather than as itself a metaphysical system."

For Rorty, Dewey's naturalistically "metaphysical" magnum opus is not an "empirical metaphysics" but a "historico-sociological study of the cultural phenomenon called 'metaphysics.'" Rorty suggests that we cannot serve both Locke and Hegel—or an diachronic, atomized empiricism and a synchronic historicist ontology. However, Rorty recognizes and appreciates Dewey's persistent desire to wish to write a "naturalistic (cultural) metaphysics"—despite Santayana's and others contention that this was indicative of a kind of oxymoronic paradox:

This is the extend and method of my "metaphysics":—the large and constant features of human sufferings, enjoyments, trials, failures and successes together with the institutions of art, science, technology, politics, and religion which mark them, communicate genuine features of the world within which man lives. The method differs no whit from that of any investigator who, by

¹¹ See *The Writings of William James*, p.314.

making certain observations and experiments, and by utilizing the existing body of ideas available for calculation and interpretation, concludes that he really succeeds in finding out something about some limited aspect of nature. If there is any novelty in *Experience and Nature*, it is not, I should say, this "metaphysics" which is that of the common man, but lies in the use made of the method to understand a group of special problems which have troubled philosophy.¹²

Sidney Hook, a student of Dewey's and writing during his communist conversion stage, comments on the appropriate place of philosophy in criticizing cultural presuppositions and deeply held ethical-political value schemas:

Traditional metaphysics has always been a violent and logically impossible attempt to impose some parochial scheme of values upon the cosmos in order to justify or undermine a set of existing social institutions by a pretended deduction from the nature of Reality. . . . But once crack the shell of any metaphysical doctrine, what appears is not verifiable knowledge but a directing bias . . . the preeminent subject matter of philosophy has been the relation between things and *values*.¹³

What we might wish to call "Dewey's Dilemma" regarding metaphysical speculation is characterized by Rorty in the following manner:

EITHER Dewey's metaphysics differs from 'traditional metaphysics' in not having a *directing bias concerning social values* because Dewey has found an 'empirical' way of doing metaphysics which abstracts from any such biases and values, OR else when Dewey falls into his vein of talking of the 'generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds' he is in *slightly bad faith*.¹⁴

For philosophy is either viewed as a spectatorial or participatory discipline of life. That is, it is either an attempt to gain a God's eye view from Nowhere (*sub species aeternitas*) or an embodied and experimental precarious essay in working out democratically in the context of interpretive communities of communication an effective "instrument of social change" or a *philosophical reconstruction*.

¹² See John Dewey, "Half-hearted Naturalism" (1927).

¹³ See Sidney Hook, *John Dewey* (1939).

¹⁴ See Rorty, p.74.

The dissolution of pseudo-problems (the problems of philosophers—e.g. the discourse of logical empiricism) and the turn to an effective cultural criticism (the problems of everyday men and women) is strenuously argued for in the context of Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics:

Intellectual prophecy is dangerous; but if I read the signs of the times aright, the next synthetic movement in philosophy will emerge when the significance of the social sciences and arts has become the object of reflective attention in the same way that mathematical and physical sciences have been made the objects of thought in the past, and when their full import is grasped.¹⁵

Rorty reads Dewey as attempting to make naturalistically "systematic" sense out of the critical turn from a Kantian architectonic of a priori Reason to Hegelian historicism. Rorty sees Dewey as just another thinker in a naturalistic-contextualistic line including the likes of Nietzsche, Dilthey, Cassirer, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, Cavell, Danto and anyone who pays close attention to the "cultural matrix" out of which the social sciences have emerged. For Rorty, "Dewey is just the philosopher one might want to reread if one were turning from Kant to Hegel, from a 'metaphysics of experience' to a study of cultural development."¹⁶

Rorty thinks that he pinpoints the tension in Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics as being an attempt to impossibly synthesize the empiricist and historicist urges in speculative, critical thinking about cultural matrices of conceptual and evaluative frameworks. Rorty actually endorses Dewey's failed attempt at metaphysical synopsis in a qualified sense:

Sympathetic expositors of Dewey-as-metaphysician—such as Hofstadter, who describes "the aim of metaphysics, as a general theory of existence" as

¹⁵ See Dewey, (1930).

¹⁶ Rorty, p.76.

the "discovery of the basic types of involvements and their relationships"—cannot, I think, explain why we *need* a discipline at that level of generality, nor how the results of such "discoveries" can be anything but trivial. Would anyone—including Dewey himself—really believe that there is a discipline that could somehow do for "the basic types of involvement," something left undone by novelists, sociologists, biologists, poets, and historians? All one might want a philosopher to do is to synthesize the novels, poems, histories, and sociologies of the day into some larger unity. But such syntheses are, in fact, offered us on all sides, in *every* discipline.¹⁷

Rorty sees "the philosopher" *qua* 'intellectual' as inevitably engaged in projects of synthesis, but wants to deflate any pretensions to metaphysical transcendence or overarching systemic completion in the field of cultural criticism. But Dewey himself shared this suspicion regarding Philosophy and the transcendental pretense. Dewey found the root problem to lie in a faulty notion of atomized, foundationalist, ahistoricist psychology of persons. When *psychology* is considered as a totalizing discipline capable of encompassing all aspects of experience, the empirical and social "psychology as method" perspective is unfortunately left out of the cultural conversation. Dewey considers the notion of "Self-consciousness" in light of accepting the demythologizing tasks set for us when embracing the epistemological myth of the given:

We may see how the matter stands by inquiring what would be the effect upon philosophy if self-consciousness were not an *experienced fact*, i.e., if it were not one actual stage in that realization of the universe by an individual which is defined as constituting the sphere of psychology. The result would be again, precisely, that no such thing as philosophy, under any theory of its nature whatever, is possible. Philosophy, it cannot be too often repeated, consists simply in viewing things *sub specie aeternitatis* or *in ordine ad universum*. . . . To deny, therefore, that self-consciousness is a matter of psychological experience is to deny the possibility of any philosophy.¹⁸

¹⁷ Rorty, *ibid.*

¹⁸ See Dewey, *Early Works 1*, p.52.

Rorty reads Dewey's later attempts to do justice "both to his earlier belief that the Kant-Hegel-Green critique of empiricism was the key to an understanding of man, and to his growing distrust of philosophy as a view of the universe *sub specie aeternitatis*" as a sincere attempt to reconstruct culture along more democratic and non-coercive (i.e. anti-fascist) lines. Dewey's own lament that he should've retitled *Experience and Nature* as *Culture and Nature* would seem to lend credence to the idea that the concept "experience" has outworn its Lockean and Hegelian welcome in a post-metaphysical culture of interpretation. Rorty thinks it is silly to keep seeking a trans-cultural ground for a naturalistic metaphysics of *experience* because it fails to take into account the irreducibly cultural dimensions of specific linguistic discursive formations:

This viewpoint would not be *sub specie aeternitatis*, since it would emphasize precisely the temporality and contingency which Augustine and Spinoza used the notion of 'eternity' to exclude. But it would resemble traditional metaphysics in providing a permanent neutral matrix for future inquiry. Such a naturalistic metaphysics would say, 'Here is what experience is really like, before dualistic analysis has done its fell work.'¹⁹

Rorty, like Santayana before him, thinks that 'Naturalistic metaphysics' is a contradiction in terms: "One can put this point best, perhaps, by saying that no man can serve both Locke and Hegel." The longstanding debate between Empirical vs. Historical methods in philosophy can only be set aside if we give up seeking ahistorical, foundationalist grounds for making sense of a metaphysics of *experience*.

But if we consider briefly how Dewey "(re)solved" the Mind-Body question within his comprehensive naturalistic metaphysical vision we might wish to think twice about Rorty's overly sanguine view of a post-metaphysical cultural matrix. It

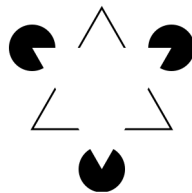
¹⁹ Rorty, *ibid.*

would seem that a naturalist vs. supernaturalist set of presuppositions continues to rear its ugly head in current ethico-political "culture wars."

Dewey's transactional account of mind is manifested in the context of his deep commitment to creative democracy as a regulative ideal of all interpretive communities in naturalistic experience:

Feelings make sense; as immediate meanings of events or objects, they are sensations, or more properly, *sensa*. Without language, the qualities of organic action that are feelings are pains, pleasures odors, noises, tones, only potentially and proleptically. With language, they are discriminated and identified. They are then "objectified"; they are immediate traits of things. This "objectification" is not a miraculous ejection from the organism or soul into external things, nor an illusory attribution of psychical entities to physical things. The qualities never were "in" the organism; they always were qualities of interactions in which both extra-organic things and organisms partake.²⁰

The way in which relational emergence of *mind* takes ontological and axiological precedence over any purportedly discrete naturalistic relata finds a nice conceptual analogy with the following illustration. If you look closely you will agree that no clearly and distinctly demarcated triangles exist in the picture. However, the nature of creative perception yields unmistakable triangulation patterns emergent in the following gestalt-shifting image:



The perceivable triangles are just emergent aesthetic phenomenon arising when natural experience comes into sufficiently complicated interpretive dynamics. In

²⁰ Dewey, *ibid.*

this dissertation I am going to be arguing that a reconstructed Si-Meng ethical theory can speak of the true "self" and creative "agency" in a similar non-foundational, gestalt-shifting manner. We don't need any metaphysical illusions to support the discourse on ethical agential realism emergent in a reconstructed Si-Meng lineage of thinking through role-bearing persons.

Rorty recognizes Dewey's justifiable desire to find a "unified" theory of knowledge ("to gain knowledge is to solve problems") but he rejects his attempt to place everything in one continuous naturalistic web of interpretation: "one does not need to find 'continuities' between nervous systems and people, or between 'experience' and 'nature' to address problems." Rorty thinks that Dewey "blew up notions like 'transaction' and 'situation' until they sounded as mysterious as 'prime matter' or 'thing-in-itself.'" According to Rorty, Dewey "made it sound as if what the table *really* was, was neither an ugly brown thing whose hard edges bumped people, nor yet a swirl of particles, but something common to both —sheer potentiality, ready to be transformed in a situation."

While I appreciate Rorty's post-metaphysical aestheticism and turn towards cultural politics, I don't think this is a fair criticism of Dewey's basic "metaphysical" project. Dewey's notion of "qualitative immediacy" and logic of "situations" doesn't seek the kind of metaphysical systemization as closure that Rorty wants to purge from his earlier transcendental psychologism. Rather, Dewey's thinking is always situated against a backdrop of *radical empiricism* and doesn't admit anything into discourse that can't potentially *be experienced*, nor does he leave anything out that can be similarly experienced.

Rorty thinks that dissolving the pseudo-problems of philosophers and redescribing culture so as to better address the problems of persons is all that we need to learn from Dewey:

Dewey, I suggested earlier, was not as good at dissolving philosophical problems as the followers of either the early or the later Wittgenstein—but he had a larger aim in view. He wanted to sketch a culture that would not continually give rise to new versions of the old problems, because it would no longer make the distinctions between Truth, Goodness, and Beauty which engender such problems.²¹

I wish to suggest that we can continue to learn so much more from Dewey's corpus of writing. Dewey shares with many post-Wittgensteinian philosophers a vision of philosophy as therapy wherein the goal of Philosophy (big P understood as a systematic and conceptually rigorous space of reasons) is to make itself obsolete wherein philosophy (little p understood as a cultural "criticism of criticisms" intellectually kibitzes in an inter-disciplinary and inter-cultural landscape of imaginative moral vistas). I agree with Rorty when he says that we need to embrace Dewey's "will to Truth" as a pragmatic quest for increased power in democratic relationality and not as some static "accuracy of representation." Rorty and I both would embrace the post-scientistic/logically positivist culture ushered in by Dewey's writings wherein any attempt to "break down this notion [of representationalist Truth], if scientific inquiry could be seen as adapting and coping rather than copying, the continuity between science, morals, and art would become apparent." Classical or Paleo-Pragmatists who embrace a democratic pluralism and *radical empiricism* should also share with Neo-Pragmatists like Rorty an interest in deflating the pretensions of philosophy by recognizing it is nothing other than a

²¹ Ibid., p.86.

particularly arcane literary discipline. We out to then put aside a "big P" pretension to *seriousness* and instead embrace a critically ironic attitude towards our "final vocabularies" by putting our deeply held philosophical presuppositions at risk:

[T]he spirit of seriousness can only exist in an intellectual world in which human life is an attempt to attain an end beyond life, an escape from freedom into the atemporal. The conception of such a world is still built into our education and our common speech, not to mention the attitude of philosophers toward their work. But Dewey did his best to help us get rid of it, and he should not be blamed if he occasionally came down with the disease he was trying to cure.²²

III. Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Traditional Belonging: Navigating Suspicion and Faith

In the essay introduced in the previous section Ricoeur goes on to express an idea of human finitude in a positive light of *belonging* to historical traditions of meaning. What he calls the "first declaration of hermeneutics" is that "the problematic of objectivity presupposes a prior relation of inclusion that encompasses the allegedly autonomous subject and the allegedly adverse object."²³ Belonging is expressed by Heidegger as *being-in-the-world* and this internal relationship expresses better the "primacy of care over the gaze, and the horizontal character of that to which we are bound."²⁴ It is this enacted and extended sense of being-in-the-world that always already precedes any abstract notion of epistemological or ethical reflection in Ricoeur's dual hermeneutics of suspicion and faith. Thus we can say that all interpretation presupposes a "structure of anticipation":

²² Rorty, *ibid.*

²³ Ricoeur, p.27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.28.

'Meaning which is structured by fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception, forms for any project the horizon in terms of which something can be understood as something (SZ, 151; BT, 193) Thus the field of interpretation is as vast as that of understanding, which covers all projection of meaning in a situation.

So philosophical hermeneutics is never a unitary pursuit, but always presupposes a plurality of aims and presuppositions. Ricoeur demonstrates that any hermeneutic interpretive stance, in its derivation from a working philosophy of *ars contextualis* and a concrete interpretation of sacred texts, can be conceived along a bipolar spectrum of faith and suspicion:

The first positioning aims at the *restoration* of a meaning addressed to the interpreter in the form of a message. It is characterized by a willingness to listen, to absorb as much as possible the message in its given form and it respects the symbol, understood as a cultural mechanism for our apprehension of reality, as a place of revelation. This type of hermeneutics is animated by faith. By contrast, hermeneutics may be approached as the *demystification* of meaning presented to the interpreter in the form of a disguise. This type of hermeneutics is characterized by suspicion, by a skepticism towards the given.²⁵

Ricoeur focuses on the works of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud to articulate what he means by a hermeneutics of suspicion. It is my contention that the current project of reconstructing Si-Meng role-focused ethics of creative agency can navigate the tendency to read living religious-philosophical traditions as either completely a host of symbols deserving reverence (faith) or as a teeming multitude of disguised ideologies of oppression requiring critical skepticism (suspicion) in order to get beyond the mystified power dynamics being naturalized, essentialized and/or otherwise transcendentally legitimated.

²⁵ Ruthellen Josselson "The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion" in *Narrative Inquiry* 14(1), p.3.

The work of feminists philosophers to problematize and critique patriarchal structures of violence implicit or explicit in Confucian texts and traditions represents an important set of voices that needs to continually be referenced in future projects of ameliorative reconstruction of the Confucian tradition. Reading any given array of thinkers and texts in the context of a living tradition requires a hermeneutic sensitivity to the presence of precarious meaning and value and the ethical demand to continually submit received traditions to criticism via hermeneutics of distancing and suspicion.²⁶ Robin Wang recognizes the vital centrality of a *yin yang* 陰陽 narrative cosmology in understanding the construction of Heaven and Earth in early Chinese philosophy. Yet she also remains suspicious of the ways that a reciprocity of *yin yang* can be used to legitimate structures and practices of patriarchal violence and oppression: "on the one hand, *yinyang* seems to be an intriguing and valuable conceptual resource in ancient Chinese thought for a balanced account of gender equality; on the other hand, no one can deny the fact that the inhumane treatment of women throughout Chinese history has often been rationalized in the name of *yinyang*."²⁷ Lisa Li-Hsiang Rosenlee has offered an interesting model of "cut and suture"²⁸ critical method to remove wholesale the explicit and implicit patriarchal gender-biases and assumptions undergirding Confucian practices of exclusion and oppression. Instead of throwing out the baby with the patriarchal bathwater, the cut and suture model would allow for a

²⁶ An important work that presents a feminist reading of gender dynamics in an *YinYang* narrative cosmology is Robin Wang's *Yin Yang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture* (Cambridge, 2012).

²⁷ Wang (2012), p. xi.

²⁸ See Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (SUNY, 2006) p.149.

preservation of the uniquely relational pattern of thinking about gender roles and responsibilities that even allow us to speak of a Confucian feminism promoting gender equity by appreciating difference and role-focused deference. We might wish to question the viability of a cut and suture approach to reconstructing a critical Confucianism for facing current predicaments of culture and gender oppression. If we think the "disease" of patriarchy runs too deep in the Confucian tradition to be simply extrapolated using surgical metaphors, then we might also think that patriarchy is more like a cancer and we need a different set of resources and guiding conceptual metaphors to navigate the faith/suspicion hermeneutic with regards to reconstructing gender roles in Confucianism. I think that the non-foundational, reconstructed sense of agency offered in this role-focused reconstruction of Si-Meng Confucianism can offer an attractive metaethical framework from which to address questions and projects aimed at transforming oppressive cultural-philosophical presuppositions into ameliorative relationships of democratic flourishing. Thinking about gender dynamics through roles instead of metaphysical-biological essences offers not only a more realistic picture of who we are in families and communities of interpretation, but also a more attractive way of thinking through the socially "scripted" performances that structure our normative expectations on a continual and unavoidable basis. Let us now turn to thinking through the background presuppositions shaping our role-focused selves and responsibilities in a reconstructed Si-Meng living tradition of Confucian role ethics.

IV. Reconstructing Si-Meng *Daotong* 道統 in a Horizon of Inter-Cultural Comparative Philosophy

This sense of a fore-structure of understanding or a belongingness to a predestined horizon of meaning possibilities resonates with a Confucian role ethical sensibility. Let us take a look at the first three chapters of the "Expansive Learning" *Daxue* 大學 as a window onto the belongingness of emergent ethical agency in

Confucian role ethics:

Way-making of Expansive Learning resides in understanding illuminating virtuosity. It lies in renewing [or intimately caring for] the common people and in resting in optimal efficacy. Knowing where to dwell one can then focus one's energies. Focusing one's energies one can then be calm and collected. Being calm and collected one can then be peaceful. Being peaceful one can then engage in responsible ethical reflection. Engaging in responsible ethical reflection one can be self-possessed. Things have root origins and phenomenal appearances. Events have consummations and beginnings. Knowing what should be prioritized and what should come later, this indeed comes close to authoritative way-making.²⁹

This opening passage sets the stage for Confucian ethical *epoche* by highlighting the embedded nature of persons in their familial and social contexts of normatively stipulating roles (via a familially focused social scripting) that naturally entails a creative regulative ideal of optimal ethical efficacy (*zhishan* 至善). The next chapter continues with the following recipe for ethico-political transformation:

The ancient sages desiring to understand enlightening virtuosity in the cosmos would first govern their states; desiring to govern their states, they would first maintain good order in their families; desiring to keep good order in their families, they would first cultivate their embodied personality; desiring to cultivate their embodied personality, they would first rectify their heartminds; desiring to rectify their heartminds, they would first creatively integrate their intentionality; desiring to creatively integrate their intentionality, they would first extend their knowledge. Extending

²⁹大學之道，在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。知止而后有定，定而后能靜，靜而后能安，安而后能慮，慮而后能得。物有本末，事有終始，知所先後，則近道矣

knowledge is a matter of investigating things. With investigating things knowledge is grown. By growing knowledge intentions are creatively integrated. When intentions are creatively integrated heartminds are rectified. Heartminds are rectified and embodied persons are cultivated. Embodied persons are cultivated and families are put in good order. Families are put in good order and states are governed properly. States are governed properly and the cosmos is at peace. From the son of heaven to the common folk, all should take cultivating their embodied personality as the root. Having a disordered root with well-ordered phenomenal branches just cannot happen. It likewise has never been the case that what is thickly attended to will show up thin nor what is thinly attended to will show up thick. This is called realizing the root! This is called optimal wisdom!³⁰

This passage further articulates the diffuse yet intense democratic agency embodied in unique persons in webs of relationality ritually shaping role-focused responsibilities and corresponding ethical ideals of character and conduct. It is important to read the ethical vision here as one of radiating circles of concern from intimate family experience to the furthest reaches of the anthropocosmic experience involved in the project of becoming fully human. Confucian self-cultivation is not a rationally ordered algorithm for achieving virtue as defined within some ontologically discrete perfected order of individual character traits. The following passage introduces the corresponding and complementary ideas of "creative integration" (*cheng* 誠) and "resolute becoming" or "caring for uniqueness/ritual potential/plurisingularity" (*shendu* 慎獨):

Creatively integrating one's intentionality (*chengqi* 誠其意) is a matter of having no self-delusion (*wuziqi* 毋自欺). This is like despising noxious odors and loving beautiful visions. This is called self-esteem. Thus the

³⁰古之欲明明德於天下者，先治其國；欲治其國者，先齊其家；欲齊其家者，先修其身；欲修其身者，先正其心；欲正其心者，先誠其意；欲誠其意者，先致其知，致知在格物。物格而後知至，知至而後意誠，意誠而後心正，心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。自天子以至於庶人，壹是皆以修身為本。其本亂而末治者否矣，其所厚者薄，而其所薄者厚，未之有也！此謂知本，此謂知之至也。

authoritative person must be ever so vigilant about their creative potential (*gu junzi bi shenqidu ye* 故君子必慎其獨也). When petty persons are dwelling at ease there is no limit to their iniquity. When they see an authoritative person however they straighten up their act and attach themselves to the good. In considering how other persons consider you there is great benefit in thinking it is like looking directly at your innermost self. This is called creative integrity within manifesting in your appearance without. Thus authoritative persons must be ever so careful about their ritual potential (慎其獨). Zengzi said: "Ten eyes upon me, ten hands pointing me out, oh how serious this is!" Wealth adorns rooms, and virtue adorns persons. If heartminding is broadly cultivated the embodied person will be luxuriant. Thus authoritative persons must creatively integrate their intentionality.³¹

What we have going on here is a hermeneutic phenomenology regarding the emergence of ethical agency in the context of one's embodied, familial, sociopolitical, and cosmological roles and relationships. The notion of "knowing priority" (*zhi xianhou* 知先後) here should not be read as a chronological or ontological prioritization, but rather as an ethico-religious valorization of the processes of emerging creative integrity in the context of one's experiential field of role-focused responsibilities and relationships. Such an emergent focus-field dynamic of ethical agency should be recognized as operative here instead of presupposing any foundationalist model of epistemic certainty, reified subjectivity, a retaic character, or any rationally determined principal-based theories of morality.

The process of focusing a vast field of interpretation to bring about the emergence of an ameliorative ethical agency inevitably raises questions about the legitimacy of traditional fore-structures of meaning and the very possibility of

³¹所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也，如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自謙，故君子必慎其獨也！小人閑居為不善，無所不至，見君子而後厭然，掩其不善，而著其善。人之視己，如見其肺肝然，則何益矣！此謂誠於中，形於外，故君子必慎其獨也。曾子曰：「十目所視，十手所指，其嚴乎！」富潤屋，德潤身，心廣體胖，故君子必誠其意。

effective ideological critique. Instead of viewing the possibility of ideological critique as the means of challenging structures of oppression and domination in human cultural formations, Ricoeur and Confucian role ethics share an emphasis on the significance of critical 'distanciation' in a process of historical "conversation" with living traditions of meaning and horizons of intelligibility. Ricoeur insists that historico-traditional "interpretation is the process by which, in the interplay of question and answer, the interlocutors collectively determine the contextual values that structure their conversation."³² However, it is made clear that this notion of "conversation" with traditional structures of meaning goes beyond any ordinary sense of merely lingual communication and must include the deeply sedimented habitual patterns of bodily comportment and ethical conduct that constitute our relational dynamics with a historically saturated world:

[C]onversation rests upon a relation that is too limited to cover the whole field of explication. Conversation, that is, ultimately dialogical relation, is contained within the limits of a *vis-a-vis* which is a face-a-face. The historical connection that encompasses it is singularly more complex. The 'short' intersubjective relation is intertwined, in the interior of the historical connection, with various 'long' intersubjective relations, mediated by diverse social institutions, social roles, and collectivities (groups, classes, nations, cultural traditions, etc.). The long intersubjective relations are sustained by a historical tradition of which dialogue is only a segment. Explication therefore extends much further than dialogue, coinciding with the broadest historical connection.³³

What this entails is that we must always be *in medias res* from where we stand historically speaking if we want to grow as persons with a resolutely focused ethical agency. We cannot in any autonomous sense "choose" what we want to inherit or reject from traditional fore-structures of meaning. Rather, we can only

³² Ricoeur, *ibid.* p.29.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.30.

"appropriate" what is truly efficacious for our personal growth in the context of our embodied roles and relationships and push back against that which limits or hinders our growth as responsible ethical agency.³⁴ Unlike the Husserlian fiction of a foundational subject making of traditional structures of meaning an "object" of historico-scientific inquiry, according to Ricoeurian hermeneutical phenomenology, what we need is a "general theory of prejudices" and a "critique of ideology" (that can never be totalizing) in the practice of *distanciation*. The concept of *distanciation* is the "dialectical counterpart of the notion of belonging, in the sense that we belong to a historical tradition through a relation of distance which oscillates between remoteness and proximity. . . To interpret is to render near what is far (temporally, geographically, culturally, spiritually)."³⁵

What Ricoeur asks that we focus on in any project of interpretation is our *Lebenswelt* [life-world] understood as a historically saturated being-in-the-world:

The return to the *Lebenswelt* can more effectively play this paradigmatic role for hermeneutics if the *Lebenswelt* is not confused with some sort of ineffable immediacy and is not identified with the vital and emotional envelope of human experience, but rather is construed as designating the reservoir of meaning, the surplus of sense in living experience, which renders the objectifying and explanatory attitude possible.³⁶

In short, what Ricoeur highlights is the life-world of embodied and historically saturated personhood—a world that is honeycombed with imaginative possibilities

³⁴ An illustrative example of this critical *distanciation* of the fore-structures of Confucian can be found in the feminist reading of Confucianism offered by Lisa Li-Hsiang Rosenlee in her *Confucian and Women: A Philosophical Translation* (SUNY 2007). Here she argues for a "cut and suture" model of hermeneutical reconstruction wherein we can cut out the patriarchal normativity and replace it with a gender equity that does full justice to the relational conception of persons that the Confucian tradition promotes.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.32.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.41

for meaning construction and prospects for vital interpretation. What is to be interpreted in any text is "a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my own most possibilities" and "to understand *oneself* is to understand oneself *in front of the text*."³⁷

In order to see how Ricoeur practices his critical hermeneutic balancing act between suspicion and faith, in what follows we will be exploring his conception of narrative imagination as an ethical aim in *Oneself as Another*. It may seem strange that in a text centered on the question of selfhood Ricoeur would devote so much space to thinking about justice. But this seeming peculiarity is abated somewhat when we recall that, for Ricoeur, an *ipse-idem* dialectic as constructed by narrative and interpersonal relationships is secured from hyperbolic certainty (Descartes) and radical suspicion (Nietzsche) by an ethical praxis of attestation; which at "every level—linguistic, praxic, narrative, and prescriptive—will preserve the question 'who?' from being replaced by the questions 'what?' or 'why?'"³⁸ By an *ipse-idem* dialectic Ricoeur means to point to the difference between a self-same ontological sense of personal identity and a narratively construed commitment to ethical preservation and integral becoming in the course of a life. Attestation is a matter of taking a stand in relation to others so as to assure self-constancy as a matter of solicitude. Attestation can take the form of a promise, or vow, to oneself, or to others, to be there—not in a dogmatic or fixed mode of selfsameness, but in the open and solicitous mode of being true to one's own best possibilities for living a good life *with and for others in just institutions*. Because selfhood is secured only in

³⁷ Ibid., p.34-35.

³⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p.23.

the practical field of identifying and working towards a good life with and for others in just institutions, Ricoeur focuses on the ethical dimensions of the hermeneutics of selving. Although he wishes to establish “the primacy of ethics over morality”³⁹ this does not mean that in Ricoeur's thinking justice as a moral norm is tacked on as a deontological afterthought to the ethical disposition we have to live well with others. To get a better grasp of the nature of justice and the role that it plays in Ricoeur's ethics, we will be examining here his revised hermeneutical eudaimonism, his antipathy towards non-hermeneutic or totalizing theories of justice, and the creative role that a narratively constituted moral imagination can play in keeping alive a keen sense of justice in striving to live well with and for others—even, perhaps especially so, for others who are not yet present in the radical sense of not yet having material-ethico-political conditions available for realizing the very discursive possibility of having a voice present in the ongoing conversations of creative democracy.

We might consider Ricoeur's ethical aim in *Oneself as Another* to be a creative hermeneutics of personalizing a non-foundational categorical imperative through embodied *phronesis*. Since “authentic” or “integral” selving is not some ontological given, but is something hard won in the working out of our selving in the concrete relationships and roles that we find ourselves thrown into, Ricoeur takes a contextualist-historicist approach towards clarifying or “resolving” the self as an ethical project. Mere conceptual analysis involving counterfactual reasoning replete with science fiction accounts of brain swapping and so forth cannot deal adequately

³⁹ Ibid., p.171.

with the fundamentally ethical dynamic of self-identity as a being concerned with others or with an ideal of loyalty to loyalty (Royce) as a generalized care about humanity. The last four studies of Ricoeur's treatise on selfhood deal explicitly with ethics. Ricoeur suggests that the practical wisdom sought in his ethics "aims at reconciling Aristotle's *phronesis*, by way of Kant's *Moralität*, with Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*" (290). Ricoeur privileges a teleological conception of ethics in the sense of a historical community sharing particular conceptions of the good life—or at least sharing the motivation to work out an ideal of such a life in a pluralistic conversation—and he highlights how such a conception infuses all of our ethical deliberations without determining in advance what the *phronimos* ought to do in any given situation. However, Ricoeur sees "naïve *phronesis*" undergoing a critical transformation in the Enlightenment struggle to free rational agents from the dogmas of convention, arriving at what Ricoeur calls a "critical *phronesis*" capable of coming to terms with the inevitable conflicts arising at the level of moral institutions (self-respect) and ethical solicitude for persons (self-esteem). Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, stripped of its metaphysical pretensions to reveal an Absolute Spirit acting through a representative State, is capable of mediating between the personal-situational ethics of Aristotle and the Universalist morality of Kant:

Reduced to modesty, *Sittlichkeit* now joins *phronesis* in moral judgment in situation. In return, because it has crossed through so many mediations and so many conflicts, the *phronesis* of moral judgment in situation is saved from any temptation of anomie. It is through public debate, friendly discussion, and shared convictions that moral judgment in situation is formed.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.190.

I would like to now examine how Ricoeur passes through the Kantian sieve of morality to arrive at his account of the mature *phronimos* who is certain that his self-attestation is warranted, while simultaneously remaining open to the “art of conversion” in which “the ethics of argumentation is put to the test in the conflict of convictions.”⁴¹

In the seventh study of *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur sets out to establish “the primacy of ethics over morality—that is, of the aim over the norm,” but in such a way that the “rightful place” is given to “moral norms, without letting them have the final word.”⁴² Much of post-Kantian ethical theory that takes a deontological approach seriously has tended to work in the opposite direction by making room for virtuous character, conceptions of the good life, or utilitarian considerations within the larger normative framework of duties and obligations. By sharply defining the ethical perspective as that of *aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions*, Ricoeur puts the Kantian imperative to respect persons qua persons at the heart of his ethics; but he does this in such a way that abstract justice doesn’t completely overshadow solicitude. In fact, for Ricoeur, a “sense of justice takes nothing away from solicitude; the sense of justice presupposes it, to the extent that it holds persons to be irreplaceable. Justice in turn adds to solicitude, to the extent that the field of application of equality is all of humanity.”⁴³ An ideal of justice as equality of opportunity (i.e. justice as *fairness*) is what ensures that solicitude

⁴¹ Ibid., p.290.

⁴² Ibid., p.171.

⁴³ Ibid., p.202.

doesn't take the form of favoritism or dogmatic adherence to certain conceptions of the good life, which always does violence to others in democratic community. Institutions are inherently incapable of exhibiting the kind of ethical sensitivity to situations that individual *phronimos* are in possession of. Therefore it is necessary that institutions striving to be just provide for a certain degree of formalization regarding the good in the form of laws and norms to cope with the contingencies of practical life. However, when Ricoeur turns to perhaps the two most plausible theories of justice presented in the twentieth century—Rawlsian constructivism and Habermasian discourse ethics—he rejects them both as no more than (perhaps useful) philosophical fictions grounding certain convictions that some people may or may not share in contemporary liberal democracies.

It is interesting to note that both Rawls and Habermas, in their own unique ways, carry on the Kantian legacy of ideally employing reason to arrive at irrecusable moral truths. Ricoeur finds such a theoretical approach to justice inadequate for dealing with the complexity of life as we find it in all of its “discordant concordance” and tragic conflict. Ricoeur's *narrative approach* to selfing processes also shapes his thinking about justice as an ideal end-in-view and messianic “to come”. In reformulating his appropriation of Kant and his critique of both Rawls' and Habermas' idealized theories, Ricoeur's thinking on justice presupposes a historicist and contextually bound moral imagination informed by cultural narratives present in liberal democracies (perhaps even including aspects of the useful “fictions” that Rawls and Habermas deploy).

As we've already seen, Kantian morality is introduced by Ricoeur to ensure that no single conception of the good life usurps the ethical place reserved for ongoing open dialogue and solicitous relationality in working out appropriate conceptions of creative democracy. As he puts it, "the principal legacy of ethics to morality lies in the very idea of the *just*, which henceforth looks both ways: in the direction of the "good" as the extension of solicitude to "each one" of the faceless members of society; in the direction of the "legal," to such a degree does the prestige of justice appear to dissolve into positive law."⁴⁴ Ricoeur is more interested in the side of justice oriented towards the *good*, as any *legal* framework exists only against the backdrop of a societies' considered convictions regarding justice which presupposes certain conceptions of the good life. So when Kant describes *autonomy* as the ability to self-legislate the moral law, Ricoeur sees this carried out against an implicit background teleology of freedom as actualizing the rational will of mankind—"It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will*."⁴⁵

Another reason why Ricoeur takes Aristotelian ethics to be primary to Kantian morality is found in his appraisal of Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative. The first formulation—"Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"⁴⁶—is "unprecedented in the teleological tradition"⁴⁷, but, in a sense, can be viewed as the logical extension of the solicitude for others through rational desire aiming at

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.228.

⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, p.61.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.88.

⁴⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p.208.

universality. It is precisely this notion of universalizability that leads Kant to the second formulation—"Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."⁴⁸ The universal idea of *humanity* is fleshed out somewhat in this formulation due to the inclusion of the concept of person. Although humanity is the abstract ideal of a fully rational will acting according to the dictates of morality according to Kant, actual humanity can only be found in flesh and blood human persons. Thus Ricoeur reinterprets the second formulation in such a way as to maintain its entirely original character. For the danger with Kantian morality is always that the uniqueness of persons, and the need for solicitude, will be eradicated in the face of an abstract appeal to disinterested reason treating all rational agents identically. Ricoeur states the problem in the following terms:

In light of the intimate dialectic of solicitude, the second Kantian imperative reveals itself as the seat of a tension between the two key terms: that of humanity and that of the person as an end in himself or herself. The idea of humanity as a singular term is introduced in the context of an abstract universality that governs the principle of autonomy, without the consideration of persons. The idea of persons as ends in themselves, however, demands that one take into account the plurality of persons, without allowing one to take this idea as far as the conception of otherness...Introduced as the mediating term between the diversity of persons, the notion of humanity has the effect of lessening, to the point of eliminating, the otherness that is at the root of this diversity, otherness which is dramatized in the dissymmetrical relation of the power one will holds over another, opposed by the Golden Rule.⁴⁹

As soon as we desire to treat someone not merely instrumentally, as a reified thing amongst things, but as a unique person we have to get to know their desires, hopes,

⁴⁸ Kant, *Groundwork*, p.96.

⁴⁹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp.222-223.

aspirations, convictions, and so forth. The Golden Rule is excessively informal—at the level of inclinations we can never be entirely certain that what we are doing for another is really what they want. Kant was right to see the ideal of happiness a hopelessly empty term if applied at the general level of humanity. However, something like Aristotelian *eudamonia* is needed to account for the experience of associated ethical living wherein sympathetic identification with others and imaginative rehearsal of the consequences of our conduct are the order of the day.

Ricoeur then wishes to keep the Kantian emphasis on universality—understood as the need to keep the circle of concern open to others who have not yet arrived—by employing a concept of humanity wherein justice as equality of distribution reigns supreme. However, he tempers this universalizing move by highlighting the irreducible plurality of persons and, therefore, the need to consider qualitatively different ideals of justice as opposed to a cheaply arrived at ideal of strict isonomy. Ricoeur does consider whether he hasn't done "a violence" to the Kantian intention by highlighting the plurality of persons in the field of inclinations. It is unlikely that Kant himself would've been all that pleased to have such a creatively sympathetic reader as Ricoeur. For what Kant's categorical imperative (in any of its formulations) was seemed to meant to accomplish was help break us away from our everyday identifications with the realm of sensuous inclination—freeing us, as it were, to realize ourselves as citizens of the kingdom of ends via the exercise of pure practical reason. The question remains then what exactly does Ricoeur desire to keep from this mixed Kantian heritage and how does it function in his own account of justice?

Perhaps Ricoeur only wanted a means by which to theorize the foundations of a procedural or legalistic account of justice as primarily a matter of equality before the law or fair treatment within institutions. This is a possible answer, but Ricoeur claims that the idea of justice points in two directions: “towards the *good*, with respect to which it marks the extension of interpersonal relationships to institutions; and toward the *legal*, the judicial system conferring upon the law coherence and the right of constraint.”⁵⁰ Moreover, Ricoeur claims that in the context of this study he will remain entirely on the side of the *good*. In any event, even if we took a purely formalized or procedural view of what justice entails, it would always be incomplete and in need of further revision in light of the actual conditions of persons in community. Thus it is impossible, given Ricoeur’s own hermeneutic assumptions, to maintain a strict separation between the *good* and *legal* when it comes to thinking about justice (and this is not only because the idea of justice in terms of the *good* presupposes institutions which must be highly formalized).

Ricoeur’s contention is that any attempt to formalize principles of justice cannot be separated from the actual historical conversations that we ourselves are. Traditional accounts of justice necessarily infuse our imaginations when formulating procedures aimed at securing just cultures and institutions. In fact, Ricoeur claims, we seldom have a sense of completeness when thinking about what would constitute an ideally just society. Rather, we are capable of immediate scandalization in the face of radical injustices and are therefore spurred on to

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.197.

hammer out working conceptions of justice to come in historical-material democratic conversations. Ricoeur reminds us that the very idea of justice arose out of the immemorial origins of mythopoetic thinking within Greek tragedy and continues to be evoked as a historically and culturally bound *feeling*:

[T]he idea of justice is better named *sense* of justice on the fundamental level where we remain here. Sense of justice and of injustice, it would be better to say here, for what we are first aware of is injustice: "Unjust! What injustice!" we cry. And indeed it is in the mode of complaint that we penetrate the field of the just and the unjust...The sense of injustice is not simply more poignant but more perspicacious than the sense of justice, for justice more often is lacking and injustice prevails.⁵¹

The challenge for Ricoeur is how to get these often diffuse and ambiguous convictions about what constitutes justice to provide the clarity and rigor necessary for legitimating just institutions. In what follows we will explore further Ricoeur's analysis of two well-known and plausible theories of justice that he ultimately finds to be incapable of adequately accounting for the realities of the deeply historicist and contingent nature of creatively democratic culture.

As we've seen already Ricoeur is interested in appropriating aspects of liberal (Rawlsian) "founding fictions" but reconceived after a critical hermeneutics of suspicion, faith, and narratively achieved reflective equilibrium. In his antipathy to teleological ethics, John Rawls attempted to formulate a theory of justice that is entirely "political and not metaphysical."⁵² Rawls takes up the contractualist tradition of the Enlightenment and gives it a new spin. Without assuming an actual event of mutual agreement to protect the rights of citizens in a commonwealth to

⁵¹ Ibid., p.198.

⁵² John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14(3):223-251 (1985).

have or have possibly occurred in history, Rawls provides us with a heuristic for coming to a strictly procedural notion of justice as *fairness*. This is done with his notorious deployment of the “veil of ignorance” concept, wherein the founding parties involved in ideally rational deliberation about the just distribution of social goods are asked to bracket their embodied conceptions of a narratively construed good life arrived at through the contingency of social positioning and differentially displayed natural capacities. Although, as Ricoeur points out, in Rawl's conception of the ideal founders behind the veil “every party must have a sufficient knowledge of the general psychology of human nature with respect to fundamental passions and motivations; [and], the parties must know what every reasonable being is presumed to wish to possess, namely primary social goods without which the exercise of freedom would be an empty demand...[and], since the choice is between several conceptions of justice, the parties must have suitable knowledge about the principles of justice in competition” they must also, as far as possible, “annihilate...the effects of contingency, due to nature as much as to social circumstances.”⁵³ Behind the veil of ignorance then “everyone is equally rational and similarly situated, each is convinced by the same arguments.”⁵⁴ The possibility of unanimous agreement regarding the principles of justice is secured by this hypothetical rationalist reduction of the uniely embodied narrative plurality of persons.

The by now well known critique of the Rawlsian approach, one that Ricoeur also levels, is that the grand artifice of Rawlsian constructivism is nothing more than

⁵³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p.191.

⁵⁴ Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p.139.

an elaborately subtle way for Rawls himself to smuggle in his own considered convictions about the good life at the level of politics. The rational agent situated behind the veil of ignorance must actually be more contextually bound by teleological prejudice than the theory itself admits. Rawls himself suggests that any theory of justice arrived at in the hypothetical original position, must be tested against our historically-culturally realized “considered convictions” in a method of reflective equilibrium.⁵⁵ But it is precisely here that Ricoeur’s thesis is borne out insofar as the Rawlsian approach “provides at best the formalization of a sense of justice that it never ceases to presuppose.”⁵⁶ Rawls’ “whole system of argumentation can therefore be seen as a progressive rationalization of these convictions, when they are affected by prejudices or weakened by doubts. This rationalization consists in a complex process of mutual adjustment between conviction and theory.”⁵⁷ It is this notion of *reflective equilibrium* that Ricoeur most values in the Rawlsian project, but Ricoeur would have us be more intellectually honest by putting our considered convictions on the table, as it were, instead of surreptitiously presupposing them in a formalized apparatus of argumentation. For Ricoeur the founding fictions of contractualist and deontological theories must be brought back to the actual experience of associated living in historically conditioned democratic communities:

The contract is found to occupy on the plane of institutions the place that autonomy claims on the fundamental plane of morality. But whereas autonomy can be said to be a “fact of reason,” the social contract appears to be capable only of drawing its legitimacy from a fiction—a founding fiction,

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.19.

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p.236.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.237.

to be sure, but a fiction nonetheless. Why is this so? Is this because the self-foundation of the political body lacks the basic attestation from which good will and the person as end in himself draw their legitimacy? Is it because peoples, enslaved for millennia to a principle of domination transcending their will to live together, do not know that they are sovereign, not by reason of an imaginary contract, but by virtue of the will to live together that they have *forgotten*?..If now, by moving backward, we carry this doubt affecting the fiction of the contract back to the principle of autonomy, does not the latter also risk finding itself a fiction intended to compensate for forgetting the foundation of deontology in *the desire to live well with and for others in just institutions*?⁵⁸

According to Ricouer, the fatal flaw with Rawls' theory of justice is not to be found in any of the particular formulations or principles of a just society that he comes up with, but rather arises at a theoretically meta-level with his reliance on a suspect circular mode of argumentation from behind a non-transparent hypothetical "original position"—potentially masking all sorts of pernicious prejudice. Not only is it highly improbable that anyone is psychologically capable of carrying out a complete reduction of their contingently arrived at conceptions of ethical-political value, but moreover it is not even clear what Rawls' theory is supposed to accomplish even if it were possible to put oneself behind the veil of ignorance. As is clearly evidenced by the fact that libertarian-anarchist theorists on the one hand, and communitarian-Marxian thinkers on the other, both tend to find Rawls' arguments entirely unconvincing, it is in no way certain that a broadly shared conception of rationality exists at this particular juncture in late modern Western liberal democratic countries. It seems then that, unlike the traditional contractualists in political theory, Rawls is offering us an avowedly *fictional* account of what might happen if it were possible to carry out a complete bracketing of our

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.239.

personal prejudices and consider questions of justice from a purely rational point of view. But absent a clear consensus on what would count as rational decision making in the hypothetical original position, it seems that the Rawlsian account is nothing more than an elaborate, yet largely unpersuasive, account of one particular Harvard philosophy professor's considered convictions regarding a theory of justice writ large in a recent iteration of ideal theory.

By the time of *Political Liberalism* Rawls did recognize the need to account for the necessarily historical and tradition bound nature of political rationality. He did this by introducing the notion of an "overlapping consensus" regarding teleological conceptions of the good life within reasonably pluralistic democratic societies. The "fact of reasonable pluralism" is a principle measured against the convergence of particular traditions about what constitutes goods necessary for a flourishing human life. But what the concept of "overlapping consensus" fails to do is provide a reasonably plausible account of *how* such consensus can be reached within liberal democratic institutions. As the current American culture wars certainly reflect: it is perfectly possible to "tolerate" someone else's considered convictions the way that we tolerate an unpleasant sight or odor—we can simply turn our ethical attention away. But this kind of liberal "tolerance", as an active ignoring of the alterity and humanity of others, results in a kind of conceptual and political violence, particularly for vulnerable persons within current socio-economic configurations of existing liberal democracies. Perhaps Rawls did not consider carefully enough J.S. Mill's warnings against the "tyranny of the majority," for he never indicated how exactly a liberal democracy could go about securing the

“reasonable pluralism” it purports to protect while at the same time working towards hammering out a robust “overlapping consensus” capable of producing the shared sense of rationality that would theoretically ground the principles of justice produced from the original position.

Another plausible theory of justice is found in the “discourse ethics” of Habermas and Apel. For these thinkers the actual pragmatics of communication matters in construing a theory of justice. The retrospective “fiction” of an original position is dropped in favor of a prospective account of what an “idealized speech situation” would look like. The ideal practical discourse is always a *real* discourse for Habermas. However, the Kantian-cum-Freudian view Habermas takes regarding the purification process of historically conditioned discourse (i.e. convention and tradition) towards the ideal speech situation reveals what Gadamer called the Enlightenment “prejudice against prejudice”, and as such places Ricoeur’s discursive-narrative ethics in the light of a plausible alternative to the overly idealistic and rationalistic Habermasian approach.

I think we can conceive of Ricoeur's ethical aim in *Oneself as Another* as a critical conversation in an expanding communicating community without needing to posit a final vocabulary or determinate moral convergence. Ricoeur’s ethical aim is a non-ideal and non-foundational creative democratic narrative requiring sustained commitment to cultivating ever more responsive moral imagination.

The ideal speech situation of which Habermas attempts to liberate conventionally bound communication to functions in some respects like a Peircean ideal end of inquiry. The difference being that, for Peirce, scientific inquiry

identifies a community of inquirers (real and imagined; past, present, and future) to embody the requisite skills and commitments that would ensure the practice of critical fallibilism and experimentalism as a scientific community converging upon the actual truths of reality. Habermas, on the other hand, does not take practical discourse to be the sole domain of a definitive historical community, but instead takes the situation of a universal rationality that would identify participants in an idealized speech situation. The practice of giving reasons for our convictions in a free and open society is what ensures, for Habermas, that, as we approximate an ideal speech situation, an increasingly shared and extensive conception of the good for democratic society would come into view. It is unclear whether Habermas meant to say that we could ever reach the utopian ideal of free and totally uncoerced communication, or if such a goal serves as a regulative ideal in his political decision making. In any event, it is the case that an ideal of political convergence carries with it commitments to the Kantian legacy of universalization in morality even if historicizing reason in actual political discourse, as opposed to presupposing it as given somehow to transcendental egos *a priori*.

Ricoeur claims that Habermas and Apel's morality of communication has succeeded in merging "the three Kantian imperatives into a single problematic: the principle of autonomy following the category of unity, the principle of respect following the category of multiplicity, and the principle of the kingdom of ends following the category of totality."⁵⁹ Ricoeur thinks that this merger is capable of founding the self "in a single stroke in its dimension of universality and in its

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.281.

dialogic dimension, interpersonal as well as institutional” as long as we keep in mind the irreducibility of difference in any *actualization* of free and open democratic communication:

My thesis is that [the morality of communication] becomes fully authorized if it is kept along the regressive path of *justification*, thereby leaving uncovered the conflictual zone situated along the path of *actualization*.⁶⁰

For Ricoeur, any finalized or totalizing notions of rational convergence in democratic theory are bound to do violence to the irreducible plurality of persons by mitigating the demand placed upon us to imaginatively identify with the situation of others (both present in the actual conversation at hand and not yet at the table because denied a chance at this particular historic juncture of what it means to be a good citizen in the particular democratic community carrying out the conversation regarding ideals of justice).

Ricoeur goes a long way with the Habermasian project by similarly rejecting the search for ultimate foundations in moral-political discourse, but in a sense could be said to be more radically empirical than Habermas by recognizing the irreducible plurality of persons in a democratic conversation. By highlighting difference inherent in democratic life Ricoeur is safe from the totalizing impulse found in Habermas’ purification project aiming at convergence. Ricoeur agrees with Claude Lefort that democracy effectively “accepts its contradictions to the point of institutionalizing conflict.”⁶¹ Ricoeur quotes approvingly from Lefort’s *Democracy and Political Theory*: “Democracy thus proves to be the historical society *par excellence*, a society which, in its very form, welcomes and preserves indeterminacy

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.280.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.260.

and which provides a remarkable contrast with totalitarianism which, because it is constructed under the slogan of creating a new man, claims to understand the law of its organization and development, and which, in the modern world, secretly designates itself as a *society without a history*.”⁶²

It is with a reformed Hegelianism that Ricoeur checks the tendency towards totalitarianism within Habermasian discourse ethics. Reason must be understood within its historical context, or *Sittlichkeit*, otherwise the tendency to assume a totalizing view from nowhere and everywhere surreptitiously introduces itself in the guise of an idealized speech situation. Perhaps Habermas never really got over his Marxist heritage in assuming that a critical stance vis-à-vis one’s traditions and conventions could be taken outside of history. Ricoeur invites us to consider a discourse ethics that drops foundationalism both regressively and progressively, thus remaining more faithful to the actual practice of democracy:

The recourse to performative contradiction, for Habermas, denotes nothing more than an admission that there exists no principle of replacement within the framework of argumentative practice, without this transcendental presupposition standing as a final justification. I shall confine myself to stating that it is precisely by renouncing the idea of an ultimate foundation (which hermeneutics will confirm by its insistence on the finiteness of justification) that we are invited to follow the inverse path from that of justification. If indeed we admit along with Habermas himself that “the *moral* intuitions of everyday life are not in need of clarification by the philosopher” and that the foundational enterprise has, in the final analysis, only a therapeutic function, in the sense of Wittgenstein, with regard to skeptical counterarguments set up as “professional ideologies”⁶³—then the ethics of discussion will not simply involve an attempt to found the requirement of universalization along a regressive path but will also involve an examination along a progressive path on the level of actual practice.⁶⁴

⁶² Lefort, p.16.

⁶³ Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p.98.

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p.283.

Ricoeur wishes to keep open the sensitivity to unique situations in the process of formalizing justice. The “historically and culturally determined character” of estimations regarding justice need to be saved from the purifying impulse found in Habermasian discourse ethics. Just as Kant employed a “strategy of purification” of the sensuous inclinations (including ideas of happiness) in freeing up pure practical reason, Habermas employs a similar strategy “against everything that can be placed under the title of *convention*.”⁶⁵ For Habermas, anything arrived at outside of the strictures of the ideal speech situation is *prima facie* suspect. Ricoeur would “like to suggest a reformulation of the ethics of argumentation that will allow it to integrate the objections of contextualism, while allowing the latter, at the same time, to take seriously the requirement of universalization in order to focus on the conditions for placing this requirement in context.”⁶⁶ The problem with Habermas is not that he sets up an ideal of free and open discussion to determine the conditions for the possibility of arriving at legitimate principles of justice, but rather that he assumes that absent such total freedom of speech we are hopelessly enmeshed in a corrupt ethical order.

Ricoeur’s critique of Habermas has two important results: first, he thinks that ethical-political ideals of universalization need not be conceived in terms of absolute convergence. We are better off thinking in terms of embodied, pragmatic ideals of endless expansion of circles of care towards a fluid boundary concept of *humanity*, as opposed to positing a fixed convergence conception of objective human flourishing in liberal democratic institutions. Secondly, Ricoeur recognizes that it is

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.286.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.287.

a false choice presented to us to have to choose between “reminiscence and hope” in Habermas. It is clearly a mistake to rule out ‘convention’ *tout court* when we realize that certain historical narratives can and should exert a powerful influence in projects of liberation.

Ricoeur reminds us that, “democracy is not a political system without conflicts but a system in which conflicts are open and negotiable in accordance with recognized rules of arbitration.”⁶⁷ It is because the drama of democracy can never decide upon public goods “in a scientific or dogmatic manner” that “political discussion is without conclusion.”⁶⁸ Democracy requires collective *phronesis* in working out the “priority to be granted, in a determined culture and historical situation, to this or that primary good defining the spheres of justice.”⁶⁹ Discourse ethics for Ricoeur then functions at a level of cultivating the aesthetic and moral art of embodied conversation and historical narrative. That is, it requires the conscious effort and capabilities requisite to keep alive an infinite task of aiming to live well with and for others in just institutions (political, cultural, familial, social, religious—what the Confucians call “ritual” *li* 禮). Such a deep ethical commitment requires, at the very least, a keen sensitivity to the cultural narratives that define the various communities contributing to the constitution of one’s narrative identity or selving process.

Moreover, narrative is vitally important for Ricoeur’s ethics in increasing the power of our moral imagination to be able to sympathetically identify with

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.258.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

unfamiliar others in the course of realizing ever more expansive and intensive democratic conversations. What Ricoeur calls the “thought experiments we conduct in the great laboratory of the imaginary”⁷⁰ are the means of disclosing to us the experiences of actual and possible others in a narratively intimate fashion without having to enter directly into the personal lifeworld of every possible ethically salient problem or predicament. Embodied narrative provides a powerful resource for people to share their experiences across racial, class, and cultural barriers. We all have families and friends and strive with imagination to make the most of our experience in the roles and relationships we find ourselves being constituted by. The ethical dimension of narrative can perform “its functions of discovery and transformation with respect to the reader’s feelings and actions, in the phase of the refiguration of action by the narrative.”⁷¹ While surely faced with its own limitations, the narrative imagination may be our only hope in keeping alive the promises of creative democracy as an ethical ideal. When so many persons are being systematically oppressed in the practical discourse of liberal democratic decision making, a more encompassing sense of narrative can function to give voice to the repressed and forgotten voices of a creative democratic community. Perhaps most importantly the transformative power of narrative can help keep us open to those who have not yet even arrived to participate in the conversation. We must continue to strive to keep open the narrative horizons encompassing any current democratic vistas we may inhabit.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.164.

⁷¹ Ibid.

In what follows of our exploration of Si-Meng ethical agency in the thoroughly relational cosmology presupposed by Confucian role ethics, a high degree of hermeneutical sensitivity will be required of us. We will not be seeking an ontologically foundational, ahistorical grounding subject for our ethical discourse, for in the hermeneutical phenomenology presupposed here "subjectivity must be lost as radical origin if it is to be recovered in a more modest role." The role that we hope to recover for agency is as an experientially *internalist* mode of meaningful revelation in the cosmological context of our dynamic relationships and the particular familial and socially focused roles that we occupy over the course of a narratively constituted life. To do this we will imaginatively inhabit the worlds opened up by the Si-Meng texts and creatively appropriate meaning for current existential application. To appropriate is "to make what was alien become one's own. What is appropriated is indeed the matter of the text. But the matter of the text becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of the text be. So I exchange the *me, master* of itself, for the *self, disciple* of the text."⁷² Let us continue then to make ourselves "disciples" of the Si-Meng corpus of texts and see what creative appropriations and self-transformations might occur as an outcome. Also, in what follows we will be continuing the process of reconstructing a Confucian tradition of "gathering of way-making" (*daotong* 道統) that stretches from the Si-Meng lineage to Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy in East Asia and in growing cultural trends outside of historically Confucian cultures. In this project of critical reconstruction we will be focused more on the philosophical coherence or family

⁷² Ricouer, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, p.35.

resemblance of "way-making" that we can find in this living tradition of Ruist (儒家) role-focused thinking about ethics (倫理道德) and will be only peripherally dealing with the historical-political responses to changing historical fortunes of governments employing Confucian ideology to keep themselves pure from the "foreign" philosophical "pollutants" such as Buddhism and the indigenous but equally "heterodox" (異端) tradition of philosophical Daoism. Moving away from these kind of ethnonationalist, identitarian abuses of Confucianism doesn't mean that we aren't going to be taking a stance in current debates regarding the value of Confucianism in the important task of continuing to decolonize philosophy and religious studies departments and in developing a viable ethical theory of agency that can be used to resist blustering dictators, corporate criminals, and all forms of fascist oppression.

Chapter Five: The Contemporary Significance of "Resolute Agency" *shendu* 慎獨 and the Disclosure of its True Meaning in Si-Meng Horizontal Hermeneutics

I. Received Glosses of *shendu* 慎獨 and the hermeneutical challenges of excavated texts: Rereading "Focusing the Familiar" *Zhongyong* and "Expansive Learning" *Daxue* after *Guodian*

This chapter will further elaborate the central Si-Meng concept of "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨), which has predominantly been understood as a kind of "circumspection in private" due to the influence of Zheng Xuan and Zhu Xi's historically authoritative interpretive glosses within an unfolding of Confucian *daotong* orthodoxy. It will be my aim here to show that such an abstractly *spatial* and inwardly *psychological* understanding of *shendu* 慎獨—as being morally circumspect while in solitary states of dwelling or privacy—is a distortion of the original Si-Meng spirit and letter. And thus, these readings should be replaced with a more *place*-based, narrative notion of *creative agency*, *plurisingularity* and *personal uniqueness* that includes both an existential and temporal dimension with particular emphasis placed upon the importance of aesthetico-ethical attention and transactional potentials for amelioratevely significant growth.

By recontextualizing the notion of "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨) in light of recovered archeological materials like the "Five Modes of Proper Conduct" *Wuxing* 《五行》 and by hermeneutically situating the occurrence of this important philosophical phrase within received texts like the "Expansive Learning" *Daxue* 《大學》 and "Focusing the Familiar" *Zhongyong* 《中庸》, this central Si-Meng concept can be clarified and reconstructed so as to be used to refer to the embodied ethical discipline of cultivating attentive virtuosity and appreciative vigilance regarding the

subtle transformations of alethic-disclosive self-in-circumstance (*ji* 己) and the transactional potentials (*tianming* 天命) that such a personal becoming has for realizing creative integration or dissolute degeneracy at any given moment in the course of a narrative unfolding of personally unique "human nature" (*renxing* 人性) as ethical achievement concept. Basically, I will be arguing that the various historical and contemporary (mis)readings of *du* 獨 as a predominantly spatial notion of dwelling in solitude or privacy were a product of a certain understanding perpetuated by Kong Yingda and Zhu Xi's largely psychologistic conceptions of a purely inward notion of the heartmind as precariously located between selfish desire (*siyu* 私慾) and heavenly patterning (*tianli* 天理). By returning to an "original" (because reconstructed) Si-Meng sense of "resolute becoming" *shendu* 慎獨 as found in received and recovered texts in Warring States philosophical discourse, it will become clear that this phrase refers to a kind of embodied ethical technique of self-cultivation in role-focused projects of ameliorative relationality. The phrase references a kind of spiritual practice (*gongfu* 功夫) that depends upon attentional vigilance and circumstantial awareness aimed at optimizing transactional potentials and consolidating virtuosic habit-energy in a radically relational cosmos wherein any purported ontological dichotomy between a purely public and private domain of consciousness finds no conceptual or experiential traction.

Instead, the subtle workings of heartminding ought be understood affectively as concrete expressions of embodied *qi*-patterning and personal trajectories of

possible growth that more or less concertedly (or disconcertedly) enter into relationships with currently flowing patterns of *qi* energies. As Toegye (退溪) the Joseon Neo-Confucian put it in the context of the Four-Seven debate in Korean Confucianism: "normative patterning (*li* 理) and psychophysical energies (*qi* 氣) are not one, nor are they different (*buyi ye bu yi* 不一也不異)."¹ This embodied technique of "resolute becoming" then is a matter of attentively appreciating current relational *qi* networks and creatively imagining future possibilities to more optimally realize flourishing patterns of personal growth and ethical transformation in an always transitional processes of human becoming.

Let us take a close look at the phrase "resolute becoming" in the opening passage of the *Zhongyong*:

What *tian* commands is called natural dispositions. To follow the lead of these dispositions is called creative way-making. To cultivate way-making is called education. As far as creative way-making goes, we cannot leave it even for an instant. If it can be abandoned it is not true way-making. Thus authoritative persons are ever so vigilant about what they cannot see and ever so anxious about what they haven't yet heard. Nothing is more manifest than what is inchoate and incipient. Thereby authoritative persons always exercise the utmost care over their unique agential becoming as persons (*junzi shen qi du ye* 君子慎其獨也).²

Zheng Xuan glossed *shendu* here as being 'circumspect while dwelling alone in private'³ and Kong Yingda follows suit but shifts the focus from 'dwelling' 居 to a more spatially neutral notion of 'place' 處, a character that may be used to apply just

¹ See Michael Kalton, et. al, ed. *The Four Seven Debate* (1998). Translation from Chinese my own.

² 天命之謂性，率性之謂道，修道之謂教。道也者，不可須臾離也，可離非道也。是故君子戒慎乎其所不睹，恐懼乎其所不聞，莫顯乎隱，莫顯乎微，故君子慎其獨也。

³ “慎獨者，慎其閑居之所為。小人於隱者動作言語，自以為不視睹，不見聞，則必律盡其情也。若有占聽之者，是為顯見，甚於眾人之中為之。” [漢] 鄭玄注，《禮記注》，第 459 頁。

as much to the "place" of privately manifesting desires and inclinations as to bodily comportment and behavior. Thus the inner workings of heartminding are receiving an increasingly inward or *psychologistic* understanding in Confucian hermeneutical commentary:

Thus "exemplary persons are ever so concerned about their privacy" means that even in a secretive place (隱微之處) they are afraid lest immorality arise. Thus the consummate humanity of exemplary persons exercises caution while dwelling alone (獨居). This is to say that although they are dwelling in private, they are capable of maintaining constant vigilance over their personal way-making.⁴

It would seem that Zhu Xi further psychologizes this particular passage by introducing a seemingly entirely interior notion of "privacy" of personalized psychophysical experience:

"Nothing is more evident than the hidden and nothing is more manifest than the inchoate. Thus exemplary persons are ever so concerned about their interiority." : *du* 獨 refers to what others do not [can not?] know, but to that place where one alone knows. This is to say that in the centrality of the inchoate darkness, at the level of incipient becoming, although it is yet to be fully formed the opportune moment (幾) has already become active. Although others do not know it, one's self (己) alone knows. This is why there is nothing more clear and evident in the whole world than this interiority. Thus authoritative persons exercise constant concern and caution and always add vigilance to their anxiety. If one doesn't squash the emergence of selfish desire (人慾) even before it has a chance to develop and grow then one can even get to the extreme position of abandoning authoritative way-making altogether.⁵

⁴故君子慎其獨也者，以其隱微之處，恐其罪惡彰顯，故君子之人極慎其獨居。言雖曰獨居，能謹慎守道也。” [唐] 孔穎達，《禮記正義》，第 879 頁。

⁵“莫見乎隱，莫顯乎微，故君子慎其獨也”：獨者，人所不知而已所獨知之地也。言幽暗之中，細微之事，亦雖未形而幾則已動，人雖不知而已獨知之，則是天下之事無有著見明顯而過於此者。是以君子即常戒懼，而於此憂加謹焉，所以馭人慾於將萌，而不使其滋長於隱微之中，以至離道之遠也。《四書章句集注》，中華書局 1983 年版，18 頁。

All three of these highly influential and authoritative Confucian commentaries seem to rest largely upon the assumption that the use of *shendu* in the *Zhongyong* text is semantically equivalent to a parallel passage in the "Expansive Learning" *Daxue*, wherein the idea of privacy and imagined moral surveillance would seem to be obviously at play:

Petty persons will stop at nothing when engaging in immoral behavior while in leisurely dwelling. With the appearance of an authoritative person they will put on an air of disgust, abandon their iniquity and attach themselves to efficacious conduct. How beneficial it is to consider the way people see you as if looking at your inner affective landscape [lit. your "lungs and kidneys"]. This is called being creatively integrated within and taking form without. Thus exemplary persons are ever so concerned about their *du* [aleness].⁶

In this passage Zheng Xuan glosses "leisurely dwelling" 閑居 as a place of "retired ease and avoidance of others" 退燕避人, so *shendu* becomes primarily a matter of circumspection while in a state of presumed privacy—a kind of internalized ethical conscience that imaginatively posits an "authoritative person" 君子 as super-ego or "generalized other" to serve as a kind of witness consciousness or morally (i.e. inwardly subjective subjection to externally stipulated principles) surveillance mechanism for every aspect of conduct, speech, and thought; even while dwelling alone by oneself.

However, if we consider the above passage from the *Expansive Learning* 大學 within its larger interpretive context, we can see clearly that it has much more to do with an experientially intrinsic state of *shendu* as a form of 'ethical resoluteness' or 'integrity' 誠其意 than it does with either an assumed interior state of psychology or

⁶小人閑居為不善，無所不至。見君子而后厭然，捨其不善，而著其善。人之視己，如見其肺肝然，則何益矣。此謂誠於中形於外，故君子必慎其獨也。

with some purely ontological sense of aloneness. The idea of cultivating vigilance about one's unique agential becoming as a person, understood as a relationally responsive nexus of significant human relationships and role-focused ethical responsibility is central to the tradition of Confucian role ethics.⁷ The phrase appears prominently in the *Expansive Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) in the context of appreciating the role of natural (moral) emotions in wholeheartedly engaging with deeply personal projects of ethicoreligious *self*-cultivation:

Creatively integrating one's intentionality (*chengqi* 誠其意) is a matter of having no self-delusion (*wuzi* 毋自欺). This is like despising noxious odors and loving beautiful visions. This is called self-esteem. Thus the authoritative person must be vigilant about their plurisignality/agential potential (*gu junzi bi shenqidu ye* 故君子必慎其獨也). When petty persons are dwelling at ease there is no limit to their iniquity. When they see an authoritative person however they straighten up their act and attach themselves to the good. In considering how other persons view you there is great benefit in thinking it is like looking directly at your innermost self. This is called creative integrity within manifesting in your appearance without. Thus authoritative persons must be ever so vigilant in their plurisignality (慎其獨). Zengzi said: "Ten eyes upon me, ten hands pointing me out, oh how serious this is!" Wealth adorns rooms, and virtue adorns persons. If the heartmind is broadly cultivated the body will be luxuriant. Thus authoritative persons must creatively integrate their intentionality.⁸

⁷ As we've seen the phrase *shendu* 慎獨 appears in early texts associated with the Zisizi-Mencian lineage (*Si-Meng* 思孟學派) of Confucian orthodoxy, but also appears in the *Xunzi* and continues to play a central role in the development of a mainline tradition (*daotong* 道統) of Confucian role ethics. For an excellent study of how *du* 獨 is employed in Warring States philosophical and poetic discourse see Chan, Shirely and Lee, Daniel "Shendu and Qingdu: Reading the Recovered Bamboo and Silk Manuscripts" *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 2015, Vol.10 (1): 4-20.

⁸ *Daxue* 《大學》：所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也，如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自謙，故君子必慎其獨也！小人閑居為不善，無所不至，見君子而後厭然，掩其不善，而著其善。人之視己，如見其肺肝然，則何益矣！此謂誠於中，形於外，故君子必慎其獨也。曾子曰：「十目所視，十手所指，其嚴乎！」富潤屋，德潤身，心廣體胖，故君子必誠其意。

Due to the fact that *du* 獨 is probably etymologically related to a canine creature isolated from its pack⁹ and the second instance of the phrase in the above passage follows a discussion of what petty persons are capable of when isolated in a solitary dwelling, many commentators, following the lead of Zheng Xuan and Zhu Xi's glossings, have understood *shendu* 慎獨 to refer to an ontic or existential notion of aloneness in the world. Whether understood as a physical sense of privacy or as a moral psychological notion of pure inwardness, both readings of *shendu* as being "cautious in one's aloneness" unfortunately would seem to diminish the semantic richness of a concept particularly apt to be understood correlatively as a creative pattern of dynamic and vital relationality.

The intersubjective nature of *shendu* is highlighted by Tu Wei-Ming as an "ordinary process of self-education"¹⁰ and he recommends "the art and science of 'vigilant solitariness' as the authentic method of self-cultivation":

The conventional practice of rendering *shendu* as "watchful when one is alone" may lead us to think that the emphasis is on behaving properly in private as well in public. This interpretation makes sense, but it only scratches the surface of the *Problematik* that *shendu* addresses. In *Zhongyong*, the term *du*, which may mean "being alone," seems to refer to the self in terms of its singularity, uniqueness and innermost core.¹¹

But absent the notion of ontologically discrete individuals, what sense can we make of singularity of persons and corresponding ideas of ethicoreligious inwardness or resolute human becoming (i.e. creative agency)?

⁹ See *Shuowen Jiezi*, entry on *du* 獨, p.205 上. 獨：犬相得而鬪也。从犬蜀聲。羊為羣，犬為獨也。一曰北躡山有獨谷獸，如虎，白身，豕鬣，尾如馬。

¹⁰ See Tu Weiming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (SUNY, 1989), p.23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.109.

Roger Ames argues that within a collateral and co-creative cosmology of classical China it is requisite "that one resort to a focus/field rather than a part/whole explanatory model in understanding the intrinsic relationships that obtain among insistent particulars and their contextualizing world" and that "in the absence of discrete, externally related 'objects' or 'things,' causal interpretations must be replaced by the intuition of situated, interdependent, synergistic, and mutually creative processes."¹² In developing this focus-field model of creative agency and personal becoming Ames also appeals extensively to the recently excavated *Five Modes of Proper Conduct* (*Wuxing* 《五行》) traditionally attributed to Zisizi, to contextualize vitally relational thinking about *shendu* 慎獨.¹³

In the context of discussing the experiential continuity thesis of virtuosity in *tian* 天-accomplished sagacity the "Five Modes of Proper Conduct" *Wuxing* text poetically alludes to nesting birds:

The *wujiu* nesting in the willow tree has seven fledglings. The refined authoritative person (*junzi* 君子) has a singularly unique comportment. To be capable of singularity, one can then be said to be an authoritative person. The authoritative person remains vigilant about their singularity (*junzi shen qi du ye* 君子慎其獨也).¹⁴

The text makes another poetic reference to the behavior of birds in the emotionally laden situation of seeing off a [possibly estranged] loved one on for an indefinite duration:

¹² Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2011), p.71.

¹³ See Roger T. Ames, "Collaterality in Early Chinese Cosmology: An Argument for Confucian Harmony (*he* 和) as Creatio In Situ" *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, June 2005, pp.43-70.

¹⁴ *Wuxing*, strip 184.

"The swallows go flying about, with their wings disheveledly displayed. The lady was returning [to her native state], and I escorted her far into the country. I looked until I could no longer see her, and my tears feel down like rain drops." Only when you are able to display your wings disheveledly do you understand the utmost sadness. A profound person acts to *shenqidu* 慎其獨.¹⁵

This passage highlights the sense in which the inward comportment of the authoritative person is so resolutely focused on the affective dynamics of the immediate situation (*qing* 情) so as to optimally realize the situational potentials for meaningful communication and personal growth. Whatever this passage of poetic commentary is alluding to, it most certainly is not a celebration of some ontologically discrete sense of psychological inwardness. This bit of *Book of Odes* Si-Meng commentary reveals a deep appreciation of the relational potentials of persons in their role-focused situations atmospherically saturated with responsibility.

The *Wuxing* text also suggests that by "abandoning" (*she* 舍) the five modes of virtuosic conduct as mere external trappings of behavior—'consummate conduct' *ren* 仁, 'optimal appropriateness' *yi* 義, 'ritual propriety' *li* 禮, 'pragmatic wisdom' *zhi* 智, and 'sagacity' *sheng* 聖—one can be truly said to be "maintaining careful vigilance over their heartmind" (*shenqixin* 慎其心).¹⁶ And it is similarly claimed that by "abandoning the body" (*sheti* 舍體) as a vessel of transactional *qi* 氣 potentiality that the "utmost inwardness" or better "optimal intrinsicity" (*zhinei* 至內)¹⁷ can be

¹⁵ Ibid., strip 185-186.

¹⁶ Ibid., strip 223.

¹⁷ Ibid., strip 227. This passage is ambiguous in that the literal "housing" (*she* 舍) could also mean 'to abandon'. I prefer the former connotation, but the alternate reading is viable if we understand the

realized in embodied *shendu* practice. Roger Ames consistently maintains that the focal intrinsicity of situationally located persons is always already a transactional, dynamic, and correlative affair:

The always-unique persons in this collateral sense—this daughter to this mother—do not "have" relationships, or "come into" relationships, but rather are constituted as irreducibly relational by those bonds that locate them as foci within the field of the big family. They begin as "we" rather than "I." As Mencius claims, "all things are here in me," and most immediately and importantly among all things are one's family relations. Indeed, any putative "individuality" must be understood as either an abstraction from these concrete, native, and primarily acquired conditions, or an achieved distinctiveness cultivated in one's relations with others that makes one an identifiable object of deference. Similarly, any notion of "family" is an abstraction from these specific, particular persons who collectively and organically constitute a human nexus. Both particular persons and particular families are concrete configurations of particular relationships, and stand in a dynamic focus-field relationship with one another.¹⁸

Resolute focus in contexts of role-focused familial and social relationships is always a product of transactional experience within concrete configurations of biopolitical energies and dynamics. We might wish to consider teacher-student role reciprocity in light of this focus-field dynamic of persons. In Si-Meng thinking effective ethico-religious education is not simply a matter of handing down dogmatic catechisms to be recited by rote, but is rather a transactional affair wherein both teacher and student are transformed by processes of learning how to become more flourishingly human together.

It is my position here that we understand the experience and aspiration of "resolute agency" *shendu* not as the cultivation of some ontologically discrete notion of psychological identity or the preservation of some purportedly innate substance

abandoned body to be that of mere mechanical performance of ritually expected modes of conduct and not the wholehearted engagement with the transactional potentials of any given situation.

¹⁸ *Confucian Role Ethics*, p.144.

stipulating forever what it means to be "essentially" human; instead, we should focus on transactional potentials of persons-in-process of focusing their role responsibilities as always unique agential human becomings. In this light, the vital importance of role modeling becomes readily obvious. By *role modeling* here I do not mean to indicate the paradigmatic performance of certain pre-established modes of stereotypical moral conduct. Rather, what I have in mind is the inspirational sharing of styles for resolutely focusing in exemplary conduct in role-focused creativity (*chengzhizhe* 誠之者). This is a kind of inspirational ethical model that aspiring creative persons (*sicheng* 思誠者), those desiring to optimally realize their potentials for personal growth and ameliorative transformation, given as a concrete embodiment of exemplary selving in the context of way-making (*dao* 道).

In the following section we will be continuing to explore the contemporary relevance of "resolute becoming" *shendu* 慎獨 in thinking about embodied ethical agency and the vulnerabilities and opportunities—the real risks and rewards—involved in creatively integrating via role-focusing the manifold field of relationships. Since we always find ourselves projected as a natural complex into a given historical community (person as organism and as cultural presence—the mere "fact of association), we are tasked with consolidating our virtuosic habits to creatively interpret and make the most of this life together. But how can we take a natural person and make the secular sacred via a web of creative agency resolutely becoming in a creatively democratic interpreting community (*li* 禮)? This question will be guiding our further explorations into the non-ideal and non-foundational

ethical-political theory that presupposes an ecstatically naturalistic, secular, democratic faith. What we might call a pragmatic Confucian political theology is what we find ourselves enmeshed in given the non-foundational and pragmatically somaesthetic presuppositions emerging from our reconstruction of Si-Meng Confucian role ethics. As vectors of creative agency we never make autonomous choices but our constantly asking "what to do?" in terms of realizing ameliorative resolutions for complex ethical problems and predicaments. Let us continue to explore what creative agency without autonomous choice looks like in Si-Meng discourse.

II. Creative Agency without Metaphysical Foundations

The *Mengzi* often advertises a kind of "reflective engagement" (*si* 思) understood as an active narrative process of role-focused "thinking and feeling" that is fully immersed in the existentially embodied and precariously temporal processes of "nourishing one's nature" (*yang qi xing* 養其性)—wherein "nature" is understood as a dynamic life process (nature naturing) involving both "bare life" and narrative constructions of a self-in-processes of accumulating "optimal appropriateness" (*yi* 義) and actualizing "vital potentiality" (*de* 德) in the various roles and family-resembling relationships that we experience in the course of our lives viewed as future-oriented careers or as "extensive events."¹⁹

This kind of 思-thinking or "reflective engagement" model of role-focused thinking and feeling (affect theory) shares much in common with what Richard

¹⁹ See Dewey's "Time and Individuality" (1940) discussed below.

Shusterman calls the 6e model of thinking. Shusterman expands upon the 4E model of (enacted, embedded, extended, and embodied) model of consciousness to include the (esthetic and ethical) dimensions in a holistic somaesthetic pragmatism. The cognitive and affective dimensions of our cultivated critical intelligence (empathic imagination and strenuous motivation—*zhongshu* 恕忠) are at the center of the "heartminding arts" (*xinshu* 心術) of Si-Meng somaesthetic self-cultivation. This emergent, non-foundational conception of creative ethical agency is a radical departure from the commonly posited disengaged spectatorial stance of 'contemplation' or 'disinterested reflection' undergirding so much ethical and political theory after the enlightenment.²⁰

While a concept of ethical agency defined as the unencumbered exercise of an autonomous and rational will, is definitely not going to be a very useful tool for understanding Si-Meng moral psychology, this does not mean that we have to give up on thinking through agency altogether. As we saw in chapter three, the feminist philosopher of science, Karan Barad, is quite prepared to speak of an 'agential realism' wherein the fiction of an autonomous and sovereign human subject capable of exercising total sovereignty in the form of a heroically exercised will-power is replaced with precariously cooperating conditions fostering the emergence of vitally realized nexuses of relationally configured and concerted 'agency.' Barad, and more generally any thinker who shares, borrowing Thomas Kasulis' terminology, an *intimacy*, as opposed to *integrity*, orientation—viz., those who embrace a relational

²⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the enlightenment project of rationally grounded ethical theory was destined to fail given its individualizing and atomizing assumptions about persons abstracted from historically determined horizons of meaning and value (i.e. traditions). See his *After Virtue*.

ontology—are, if not comfortable with physicalist nihilism—e.g. Lucretius and some (bad) readings of Nietzsche—are faced with the task of making sense of ethical agency without relying upon a foundational agent or any supernatural powers. Barad describes such agentless agency as a matter of artfully managing fecund entanglements:

Agency is not held, it is not a property of persons or things; rather, agency is an enactment, a matter of possibilities for reconfiguring entanglements. So agency is not about choice in any liberal humanist sense; rather, it is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices.²¹

In what follows I wish to explore the art of realizing fecund entanglements as a way of thinking through embodied agency in Deweyan pragmatism. We will be looking closely at his 1940 essay "Time and Individuality" as a signature statement on making sense of unique personal "identity" as a temporal process and the concomitant sense of creative aesthetico-ethical potential (transactional futurity) as agency.

In "Time and Individuality"²² John Dewey rejects any notion of potential along the lines of a traditionally Aristotelian conception of pre-determined essence awaiting the right external conditions to manifest a fixed teleological order. In this succinct essay he offers a radically prospective and pragmatic conception of human potentiality grounded in a creative ethic of freedom. Dewey argues that ideas of the

²¹ From *New Materialism Interviews and Cartographies* (2013) "Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers—An Interview with Karen Barad". Another great place to explore a naturalistic metaphysics grounded in a "new materialist" feminist perspective is Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke, 2009).

²² "Time and Individuality" in *John Dewey On Experience, Nature, and Freedom* ed. Richard Bernstein (1960).

"eternal and immutable is the consummation of mortal man's quest for certainty" and that the traditional divisions of post-Platonic philosophy (idealist, materialist, mechanist, teleologist, realist, as well as the traditional atomistic form of empiricism) all suffer from the same family failing of wishing to seek out what is "ultimately real [as] fixed and unchanging, even though they have been as far apart as the poles in their ideas of its constitution."²³ According to Dewey, it was only with the dawn of "the enlightenment, the *eclaircissement*, the *Aufklärung*—names which in the three most advanced countries of Europe testified to the widespread belief that at last light had dawned, that dissipation of the darkness of ignorance, superstition, and bigotry was at hand, and the triumph of reason was assured—for reason was the counterpart in man of the laws of nature which science was disclosing."²⁴ While Dewey's pragmatic naturalism rejects the "triumph of reason" as a form of epistemological tyranny, the move away from fixed Aristotelian potentialities to the "vista of the indefinite perfectibility of man was opened" leading eventually to a pragmatic disavowal of the infallibility of the ideal epistemic subject—a conception grounded in a "spectator theory of knowledge" and the positing instead of the ameliorative ideals socially imagined by a cultivated critical intelligence and sustained ethics of creative democracy.

Dewey claims that it wasn't until the late nineteenth century that "the doctrine of the subordination of time and change seriously challenged."²⁵ And according to Dewey it was Henri Bergson and William James that first "installed

²³ Ibid., p.226.

²⁴ Ibid., p.227.

²⁵ Ibid., p.228.

change at the very heart of things" in terms of a speculative and naturalistic metaphysics of experience. According to Dewey, it was precisely these two thinkers who caused a Copernican revolution in thinking about life and consciousness and reinstated the importance of moral and artistic values in an "ongoing vital creative course. . .whose behavior and outcome are unpredictable both mechanically and from the standpoint of ends."²⁶

Dewey rehearses a Jamesian condemnation of all "block-universe" thinking that is a result of a moribundly mechanistic conception of causation. It doesn't matter whether we are mechanistic materialists or supernatural idealists in a "block-universe" philosophy:

[For] both hold to a closed universe in which there is no room for novelty and adventure. Both sacrifice individuality and all the values, moral and aesthetic, which hang upon individuality, for according to absolute idealism, as to mechanistic materialism, the individual is simply a part determined by the whole of which he is a part. Only a philosophy of pluralism, of genuine indetermination, and of change which is real and intrinsic gives significance to individuality. It alone justifies the struggle in creative activity and gives opportunity for the emergence of the genuinely new.²⁷

Dewey uses quantum mechanics and a still-being-written, hermeneutically expansive biography of Abraham Lincoln as primary examples of transactional individuality as creative agency in this essay. Dewey considers the life of Lincoln as "an extensive event; or, if you prefer, it is a course of events each of which takes up into itself something of what went before and leads on to that which comes after. The skill, the art, of the biographer is displayed in his ability to discover and portray the subtle ways, hidden often from the individual himself, in which one event grows

²⁶ Ibid., p.227.

²⁷ Ibid., p.229.

out of those which preceded and enters into those which follow....*Individuality is the uniqueness of the history, of the career*, not something given once for all at the beginning which then proceeds to unroll as a ball of yarn may be unwound. Lincoln made history. But it is just as true that he made himself as an individual in the history he made."²⁸

This reciprocal transformation of narrative history and transactionally "individual" potency is conceived by Dewey to be at the heart of all processes of change. It would seem that an animate/inanimate ontological division would preclude the possibility of real change and creative novelty on the latter half of this exclusive division. But Dewey problematizes the ease in which we might think of an atomistic universe as a "block-universe" deterministic givenness. Dewey considers so-called "inanimate elements" and "the prevailing view has been that time and sequential change are entirely foreign to their nature." And nowhere is this more evident than in the "classic conception of atoms"²⁹ as indivisible and unalterable basic elements or building-blocks of all things. For those that adhere to such an ontological divide there is thought to be a "sheer dualism between man and other things" (the truly animate vs. the merely mechanistic). But in the history of Western metaphysics there have always been "a few daring souls who have held that temporal quality and historical career are a mark of everything, including atomic elements, to which individuality may be attributed."³⁰ Dewey could have mentioned Enlightenment thinkers like Leibniz, Spinoza, Hegel and others who attempted to

²⁸ Ibid., p.230.

²⁹ Ibid., p.231.

³⁰ Ibid., p.232.

take change seriously in their respective modes of metaphysical inquiry. Or he might have taken a cue from the process metaphysician A.N. Whitehead by suggesting that present in any thinker there is an interplay of *rational* and *aesthetic* orders of interpretations—with the former type of thinking taking a Part-Whole static conception of mechanistic causation and the latter type of thinking presupposing a Focus-Field dynamic of aesthetic, correlative influence. In any event, Dewey is able to derive three related dictums regarding the constitution of things in a post-relativity understanding of quantum mechanics:

- 1) scientific objects are purely relational;
- 2) scientific laws are "probability statements" or "statistical generalizations";
- 3) Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty or indeterminacy doesn't allow for simple location.

Dewey recognizes that so-called natural "laws do not 'govern' the activity of individuals." Instead they are just the "formulation of the frequency-distributions of the behavior of large numbers of individuals engaged in interactions with one another."³¹

Dewey later rejects the language of "interaction" as too passive and not relational enough. In his later works (after *Experience and Nature*) he preferred to speak instead of "transaction" with the "trans-" prefix indicating the non-foundational, reciprocal entanglement of things as abstractions from primary relationality. According to Dewey, the prefix "inter-" would seem to still be caught up in a "block-universe" mentality wherein relata can in some meaningful ontological sense be thought to pre-exist in some form or another their various relationships. In considering the transactional career of Lincoln, Dewey highlights

³¹ Ibid., p.236.

the kind of agency involved in commanding situations in an "individual" narrative. The "career which is [Lincoln's] unique individuality is the series of interactions in which he was created to be what he was by the ways in which he responded to the occasions with which he was presented. One cannot leave out either conditions as *opportunities* nor yet unique ways of responding to them."³² For Dewey, every "occasion is an *opportunity* only when it is an *evocation* of a specific event, while a response is not a necessary effect of a cause but is a way of using an occasion to render it a constituent of an *ongoing unique history*."³³ Dewey's thinking about "Individuality" as a transactional achievement "evoked" by commanding situations can only be properly conceived of as a temporal-narrative (qualitative) development. For Dewey such narrative development involves uncertainty, indeterminacy, and contingency. But it is these precarious conditions of vulnerability that are the very "essence" of agency and not mere teleological "accidents."

Despite wanting to blur the line between animate agency and inanimate mechanism, Dewey doesn't think that "physical and human individuality are identical, nor that the things which appear to us to be nonliving have the distinguishing characteristic of organisms. The difference between the inanimate and the animate is not so easily wiped out. But it does show that there is no fixed gap between them" and that "the principle of a developing career applies to all things in nature."³⁴

³² Ibid., p.239.

³³ Ibid., (Italics added for emphasis).

³⁴ Ibid., p.236.

At this point in the essay Dewey goes on to introduce the so-called "problem of time" as a question of merely quantitative alteration versus truly qualitative transformation. If all things have a temporal career, the important question is clearly what can we make of ourselves as a career and not whether we have freedom to act at all. But Dewey does recognize that "since it is a *problem* [he is] presenting, [he] shall assume that genuine transformations occur, and consider [their] implications."³⁵ Dewey goes on to state the problem both *negatively* as a historical-metaphysical exclusion and *positively* as a pragmatic provocation:

1) Negatively: "the idea (which is often identified with the essential meaning of evolution) is excluded that development is a process of unfolding what was previously implicit or latent."

2) Positively: "potentiality is a *category of existence*, for development cannot occur unless an individual has *powers* or *capacities* that are not actualized at a given time. But it also means that these powers are not unfolded from within, but are *called out* through *interaction* with other things."³⁶

For Dewey, the importance of transactional thinking precludes any reductionist, mechanical, causal "interactionism." The "primacy of relationality" is embraced by Dewey as a background presupposition for all thinking through agency and aesthetico-ethical creativity. This certainly resonates with the Si-Meng tendency to understand "nature naturing" as "emerging from conditions/commanding situations" (*xingziming chu* 《性自命出》). Dewey recognizes that while it is necessary to revive the category of potentiality as a characteristic of individuality, it has to be revived in a different form from that of its classic Aristotelian formulation" because according to the old Aristotelian view, "potentialities are connected with a

³⁵ Ibid., p.227.

³⁶ Ibid., p.237 (italics my own).

fixed end which the individual endeavors by its own nature or essence to actualize."³⁷ Instead of presupposing contingency and moral effort to be mere "accidents" of success, Dewey wants us to put a transactional understanding of change at the heart of our thinking about individuality as an ethical achievement.

Dewey argues that potentialities "must be thought of in terms of consequences of interactions with other things" and that "potentialities cannot be *known* until *after* the interactions [or better 'transactions'] have occurred."³⁸ Dewey's commitment to experimentalism and fallibilism in ethical theory becomes readily obvious here. We must first assay an adventure (imaginatively or practically) before we can make any post hoc judgments as to the appropriateness of the course of conduct. This is the same in aesthetic matters of creation and appreciation and the reconstructed Si-Meng lineage we are exploring shares a similar commitment to experimentalism, fallibilism, and a general aestheticism in matters of "optimal appropriateness" *yi* 義 and ethical sensibility. Let us return now to exploring Si-Meng thinking in the context of neighboring pre-Qin textual traditions and conceptual clusters.

III. *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi* on "True-ing" (*shen* 慎) and "Singular Transforming" (*du* 獨)

We've already seen how the *Xunzi* criticizes Si-Meng thinking for being overly reliant upon a "Five Phases" (*wuxing* 五行) relational cosmology of physiognomic appearance and for not having a clearly articulated theory of agency and ethical regime for self-cultivation. It is interesting to see how some of the very

³⁷ Ibid., p.238.

³⁸ Ibid., p.238.

same vocabulary that is criticized plays into the core conceptual cluster found in the *Xunzi* that seems to be more pessimistic about the potentials for unrefined or "crude" (*e* 惡) human nature to be "efficaciously directed" (*xing shan* 性善) prior to ritual refinement. Consider, for example, the following passage that explicitly references "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨) as a key component of ritual construction of creative agency:

There is nothing more efficacious for an authoritative person to nourish their heartminding processes than creative integrity (*cheng* 誠). There is nothing more important [for the ethical project] than realizing the utmost creative integrity. . . Authoritative persons when optimally potent (*de* 德) don't need to speak yet are expressive, they don't need to act but are received with familial affection, they don't need to get angry yet they are respected. They can achieve such flowing command (*shun ming* 順命) by concerning themselves with their creativity (*shen qi du ye* 慎其獨也). For those truly effective at way-making, if there is no creative integrity, there cannot be "transactional individuality" (*du* 獨); without transactional individuality there can be no signature style (*xing* 形); without signature style, although there is heartminding intentionality, expressive physiognomy, and verbal exhortations, the multitudes will be as if they have no exemplar—even if they were to follow an exemplar it would be full of doubt/hesitation (*yi* 疑). Heaven and earth are great! Without "creative integrity" the myriad things cannot transform (*hua* 化). The wisdom of the Sages is such that they recognize that without creative integrity they cannot transform the multitudes.³⁹

The clear connection between "creative integrity" and "transactional individuality" is discussed in an exemplarist theoretical context of "transformation" (*hua* 化). It is by focusing one's refined sense of ritual comportment and relational efficacy that one can really have an impact on the social fabric as a powerful exemplar. The

³⁹君子養心莫善於誠，致誠則無它事矣。...君子至德，默然而喻，未施而親，不怒而威，夫此順命，以慎其獨者也。善之為道者，不誠則不獨，不獨則不形，不形則雖作於心，見於色，出於言，民猶若未從也，雖從必疑。天地為大矣，不誠則不能化萬物。聖人為知矣，不誠則不能化萬民。《荀子·不苟》

suasion of a Sage operates at a pre-verbal and, for the *Xunzi*, even seemingly pre-physiognomic level of relational flow. The natural and ritual realm of ethical-political transformation is unified in this vision of "creative integrity" (*cheng* 誠) focused by a ritualized space of reasons.

The phrase "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨) plays an important transitional role in this passage from "creative integrity" to exemplary Sagehood in the *Xunzi*. We see how "singularity" *du* 獨 connects with uniqueness and transactional individualism in terms of a "signature style" or "form" (*xing* 形) flowing from realizing "commanding situations" (*shunming* 順命). The transactional uniqueness or "ritual potential" indicates a singular capacity to optimally transform with the myriad things (*huawanwu* 化萬物). Thus, the *Xunzi*, like the Si-Meng texts is working with an achievement notion of embodied "individuality" as a sort of somaesthetic holism and it would be a mistake for us to read the text as offering a reductionistic view of persons as merely mechanistic ritualized automatons.

With regards to the "resolve" or "caring attention" (*shen* 慎) part of the phrase, it occurs a total of thirty-five times throughout the *Xunzi*. For example we have a number of passages that refers to "authoritative persons being concerned with how they are establishing themselves" (*junzi shen qi suo li* 君子慎其所立). I think we benefit from putting the Si-Meng conceptual cluster into conversation not only with the *Xunzi* as a contrasting Confucian theoretical position, but also by considering the concepts *du* 獨 and *shen* 慎 in a text like the *Zhuangzi* as well.

This transactionally conceived "individualistic" language of "uniqueness" (*du* 獨) also occurs quite frequently in the Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.⁴⁰ Clearly the authors of this important pre-Qin Daoist text employed this term with varying degrees of philosophical precision within their working conceptual clusters. While perhaps not as prevalent or central as the focus-field language of "way-making" and "virtuosity" (*daode* 道德), the term *du* 獨 occurs over 45 times in the received *Zhuangzi* text and is frequently associated with "transformation" *hua* 化 and "heavenly/natural" (*tian* 天). Here I want to focus on just two passages from the inner chapters to introduce a contrasting but resonant conceptual cluster involving "transactional uniqueness" (*du* 獨). In the "Virtuosic Completion Pattern/Talisman" (*dechongfu* 德充符) chapter the following story culminates with a description of being completed by "*tian* 天 uniqueness":

Hunchback Crawler, who was deformed and lipless, gave counsel to Duke Ling of Wei. Duke Ling was so pleased with him that in looking upon whole persons he considered them to have freakishly long necks. Jarsized Goiter gave counsel to Duke Huan of Qi. Duke Huan was so pleased with him that in looking upon whole persons he considered them to have freakishly long necks. Thus virtuosity has its growth and [physical] form has its forgetting. When people don't forget what they have forgotten, but forget what they haven't forgotten, this is called true/creative (*cheng* 誠) forgetting. Thus Sages have their wandering—taking knowledge as a son of a concubine, promises and obligations as so much glue, virtuosity as a reception, and skill as something to sell. Sages have no definitive plans, so what use is knowledge? They are not split, so why do they need glue? They haven't lost anything so why do they need [to receive] virtuosity? They have no wares, so what use is mercantile activity? These four are the nourishment of *tian* 天.

⁴⁰ For an interesting treatment of pre-Qin conceptions of the "individual"—a contested term to use to describe unique personhood and ethical-political agency to be sure—see Erica Brindley's *Individualism in Early China* (2010). For a creatively contrasting position on the appropriateness of using the term "individual" at all to refer to the conceptual cluster/constellation of early Chinese thinking about ethics (especially the Confucian tradition) see Henry Rosemont's *Against Individualism* (2016).

What *tian* nourishes, *tian* eats. Thereby receiving nourishment from *tian*, what use is there for [other] humans? [Sages] have the form of a human, but not the characteristic feelings (*qing* 情) of humans. Because of having human form they dwell amongst humans. Because of having no [characteristically] human feelings their embodied persons are not encumbered by right and wrong. So minute and insignificant, thus they are considered human. So grand and expansive! Uniquely completing *tian* (*du cheng tian* 獨成天).⁴¹

This passage clearly deconstructs Confucian expectations of ritually appropriate bodily form and comportment, and problematizes any rigid distinction between "rights" and "wrongs" in an objectivist moral sense. Despite the divergences, a set of presuppositions regarding the use of *du* 獨 to refer to a singular capacity for creatively transforming with things is part of a shared conceptual constellation with a Si-Meng discourse on agency.

Another passage from the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* that clearly situates "singular potential" in a context of transactional becoming and considers "true" perception as an agential capacity to creatively transform with and through *tian* 天 commanding situations is found in the "Great Ancestral Teacher" (*Da Zong Shi* 《大宗師》) chapter. The character "singularity" *du* 獨 is also used here to describe a process of realizing singular transactional potential in working with a Sage teacher in a long line of creative way-making exemplars:

⁴¹ 《莊子-德充符》：『闔跂支離無脰說衛靈公，靈公說之，而視全人，其脰肩肩。甕盎大瘿說齊桓公，桓公說之，而視全人，其脰肩肩。故德有所長，而形有所忘，人不忘其所忘，而忘其所不忘，此謂誠忘。故聖人有所遊，而知為孽，約為膠，德為接，工為商。聖人不謀，惡用知？不斲，惡用膠？無喪，惡用德？不貨，惡用商？四者，天鬻也。天鬻者，天食也。既受食於天，又惡用人？有人之形，無人之情。有人之形，故群於人；無人之情，故是非不得於身。眇乎小哉！所以屬於人也。警乎大哉！獨成其天。』 For the translation of "uniquely completing *tian*" (獨成天) Legge has, "How grand and great is he in the unique perfection of his Heavenly (nature)!" Ziporyn opts for: "Vast and unmatched, he is alone in perfecting the Heavenly in himself." I've gone for a more explicitly non-foundational reading of *du* 獨 here not as signaling ontological discreteness, but transactional uniqueness in a process of creatively "completing" *tian* 天.

Nanbo Zikui asked Lady Ju, "You are old in years, but your complexion is like an infants, how is this so?" She responded: "I've heard [inquired into] way-making (*dao* 道)." Nanbo Zikui said, "Can way-making be acquired through learning (*xue* 學)?" She responded: "No! No way! You are not the person fit for this. Now Puliang Yi had the raw materials (*cai* 才) of Sagehood, but not the way-making of a Sage. I have the way-making of Sagehood, but not [a student] with the raw materials. I desired to teach him and thought it would be a matter of days before he achieved Sagehood. Although it wasn't as simple as that, it is still rather easy to impart Sagely way-making to someone with the raw materials for Sagehood. As if I was guarding a treasure, I imparted way-making to him. After three days he could exteriorize the whole world (*wai tianxia* 外天下). I kept at it with careful preservation (*shou* 守) and after seven days he could exteriorize *pragmata* (things/events; *wu* 物). Already able to exteriorize *pragmata* I again taught with careful preservation and after nine days he could exteriorize life (*wai sheng* 外生). Already being able to exteriorize life, then he achieved dawn like clarity. Achieving dawn-like clarity, he could realize his transactional uniqueness (*jian du* 見獨). Realizing his transactional uniqueness, he was capable of non-linear temporality (*wu gujin* 無古今). Being capable of realizing non-linear temporality he was then able to enter into a realm of no-death and no-birth. The killer of life doesn't die. And the birther of life isn't born. It commands all things, welcomes all things, destroys all things, completes (*cheng* 成) all things. It's name is Tranquility in Turmoil (*Ying Ning* 櫻寧). This Tranquility in Turmoil is so called because there is completion of turmoil." Nanbo Zikui said, "How did you uniquely (*du* 獨) learn this?" Lady Ju said, "I heard it from the son of Ink-Assistant. The son of Ink-Assistant heard it from the grandson of River-of-Recitation, who heard it from Looking-Illumination, who heard it from Whispering-Promise, who heard it from Needs-a-Servant, who heard it from Singing, who heard it from Dark Oblivion, who heard it from Participating-Emptiness, who heard it from Doubting-Beginning."⁴²

⁴² 《莊子－大宗師》：

南伯子葵問乎女偶曰：「子之年長矣，而色若孺子，何也？」曰：「吾聞道矣。」南伯子葵曰：「道可得學邪？」曰：「惡！惡可！子非其人也。夫卜梁倚有聖人之才，而無聖人之道，我有聖人之道，而無聖人之才，吾欲以教之，庶幾其果為聖人乎！不然，以聖人之道告聖人之才，亦易矣。吾猶守而告之，參日而後能外天下；已外天下矣，吾又守之，七日而後能外物；已外物矣，吾又守之，九日而後能外生；已外生矣，而後能朝徹；朝徹，而後能見獨；見獨，而後能無古今；無古今，而後能入於不死不生。殺生者不死，生生者不生。其為物，無不將也，無不迎也；無不毀也，無不成也。其名為櫻寧。櫻寧也者，櫻而後成者也。」南伯子葵曰：「子獨惡乎聞之？」曰：「聞諸副墨之子，副墨之子聞諸洛誦之孫，洛誦之孫聞之瞻明，瞻明聞之聶許，聶許聞之需役，需役聞之於謳，於謳聞之玄冥，玄冥聞之參寥，參寥聞之疑始。」 For the phrase "realizing unique potential" (*jian du* 見獨) Legge translates it as "sees his own individuality" and Ziporyn renders it as "see the Singularity."

I think both of these passages reveal a shared set of presuppositions between the Daoist text and the Si-Meng conceptual cluster. Despite obvious differences, the similarities are quite revealing regarding the transactional understanding of "individuality" as an embodied power to transform productively with things. Such agentially realist thinking pervades much of pre-Qin philosophical sources and becomes readily evident when exploring the conceptual genealogy of the phrase *shendu* 慎獨 in Confucian and Daoist materials.

It is also important to recognize the etymological and conceptual connections between "true-ing" (*zhen* 真) and "caring" (*shen* 慎) in pre-Qin texts. The *Zhuangzi* of course uses the ideal of the "true person" (*zhenren* 真人) as a central exemplary figure to make sense of the various ideals of effortless action (*wuwei* 無為) presented throughout the text. I use the term "true-ing" to make sense of "true person" instead of terms like "authentic" or "sincere", because I don't think that the Daoist authors were working with a representationalist epistemology or had anything like a Reality/Appearance dichotomy undergirding their ontological speculations. The gerundive sense of "true-ing", like true-ing a wheel to roll more effectively, highlights the participatory and transactional sense of emergent agency presupposed by the non-foundationalist theoretical stance in both pre-Qin Daoist and Confucian texts. Since "true-ing" can variantly be written both as *zhen* 真 and *zhen* 眞, with the latter character involving a "transforming" *hua* 化 radical component, the transactional nature of the process of "true-ing" should be readily apparent to the philosophically sensitive and hermeneutically attuned reader. We

might do better to give up the representationalist fantasy of "truth" altogether and talk instead about a relationally-constituted and situationally-sensitive atmospherics of *trust*.

In fact, the character for "true-ing" involves an "eye" *mu* 目 component and is likely related to a process of somaesthetic perception involving a "straightening out" or "rectifying" (*zhi* 直) of things in experience to realize a more readily flowing and productive course of transformations. A kind of post-essentialist "theory" of *truth* as a gerundive process of true-ing our experience—in its aesthetic-ethical-religious registers—can be drawn out in a creative reading of pre-Qin Confucian and Daoist texts elaborating the idea of "singularity" or "immediate transactional becoming" *du* 獨 and "creative integrity" (*cheng* 誠). Creativity is understood to be the optimizing of our uniquely realized and embodied roles in an aesthetically-ethically-religiously integrated virtuosic performance of non-foundational agency. Moral imagination as an art of contextualization is realized through affective resonance and artistic resolution in a holistic process of body-heart-minding (*xin* 心) with virtuosic agency (*de* 德). As was indicated in the previous chapter, this non-foundational sense of agency can be helpfully brought into focus by considering the basic ontological and ethical difference between Peirce's category of "firstness" and the hermeneutical-pragmatic critique of the "myth of the given" as first articulated by Wilfred Sellars. We Confucian pragmatic naturalists don't need to posit any mysterious access to a realm of pure intuition to make sense of moral realism to justify a supposedly "objective" realm of values. Instead, we have to make the most of the immediate

realms of affect-oriented "firstness" (*qing* 情) that we find ourselves entangled in as hopefully ever more influential centers of optimal appropriateness (*jiyi* 集義) commanding role-relational deference in intergenerational projects of ritual constructivism and as virtuosic contributors to living traditional horizons of meaning and value.

Since this notion of Confucian role ethical truth requires a relational and participatory conception of creative agency, I now turn to introducing the neo-Marxist theory of rhythmanalysis of Henri Lefebvre. We will then be in a better position to assess the critical reconstruction project I have been engaging in with the Si-Meng texts, thinkers, and tradition. After introducing and appropriating some insights and conceptual tools from Lefebvre's method of rhythmanalysis I will further refine the metaethical and first-order normative theoretical stance of a reconstructed Si-Meng conception of agency by using the dynamic metaphor of focus-field to express the "concerning creativity" (*shendu* 慎獨) at play in any critical encounter and appropriation of Si-Meng presuppositions, themes, and conceptual constellations.

IV. Rhythmanalysis and a "creative" (*cheng* 誠) disclosive theory of 'truth'

In seeking a way to critique the reified and oppressive structures of space and time in late industrial Capitalism, Henri Lefebvre used the concept of rhythm (a temporally flowing form) to ground his critical theoretical reflections.⁴³ Rhythmanalysis is not just a theoretical orientation but also a practical somaesthetic

⁴³ What follows draws from *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, by Henri Lefebvre (Bloomsbury, 2004).

stance. Various rhythms (natural, cultural) aren't merely the object of analysis and critique, but also serve as the focusing *tool* and method of analysis. Bio-cultural rhythms and relational thinking make up Lefebvre's method and subject matter simultaneously. Even though Lefebvre claims that, "[t]his little book does not conceal its ambition. It proposes nothing less than to found a science, a new field of knowledge [*savoir*]: the analysis of rhythms; with practical consequences."⁴⁴ The *savoir* theory of knowledge is different from a concatenation of systematic *connaissance*. It indicates a field of tacit and tactful know-how and aesthetic sensibility (*habitus*) as much as it does critical theoretical reflection in the form of propositional and programmatic discourse.

Lefebvre sees rhythm analysis as having a long history and inter-cultural background, because "of course, here, as in all sectors of knowledge [*connaissance*] and action germs, seeds and elements have existed for centuries. But it is only quite recently that this concept, *rhythm*, has taken on a developed form."⁴⁵ Like Peirce and pragmatic semioticians in America, Lefebvre wishes to critique structures of oppression beginning with what is most immediate "firstness" without succumbing to one or another form of the myth of the given in its epistemological or ethical-political-religious registers. How do fluid processes of becoming (with their inherent potentials for relational flourishing and holistic health) become reified as fixed or determinate *things* with severely limited potentials for creativity and growth? This question motivates Lefebvre's building on a rich tradition of Western critical marxism stemming from Theodor Adorno to Gregory Lukacs:

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

The critique of the thing and of the process of *thingification* (of *reification*) in modern thought would fill volumes. It has been led in the name of becoming, of movement, of mobility in general. But has it been seen through to the end? Does it not remain to be taken up again starting from what is most concrete: rhythm?⁴⁶

For Lefebvre, the study of rhythm(s) can proceed in at least two ways: 1) "study and compare cases" (e.g. the body, living or not with its respirations, pulses, circulations, assimilations — durations and phases of these durations, etc.) which always "remains close to practice" (i.e. it starts with concrete and proceeds to useful abstraction) or 2) "starting with concepts, definite categories...instead of going from concrete to abstract, one starts with full consciousness of the abstract in order to arrive at the concrete."⁴⁷ It is interesting that Lefebvre claims that these two methods do not "exclude" each other, but rather "they complete one another" in a single order of critical praxis. The reason that concretion/abstraction are not juxtaposed in Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis is that both refer to somaesthetically embodied practices of conceptual creation.

In asking if there is a "general concept of rhythm", Lefebvre answers with a definitive "yes, and everyone possesses it" in the dynamic form of social embodiment. But Lefebvre notes that most remain confused about the critical theoretical potential of using embodied rhythmanalysis as tool by confusing the "mechanical movement" idea of rhythm while brushing aside the "organic aspect." For Lefebvre, there is an aesthetic-ethical-religious (Kierkegaard) dimension of *repetition* in rhythmanalysis, but it is important not to be confused with mechanical-Formal sameness. All rhythm's contain both repetition and measure,

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.14.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

but "there is no identical absolute repetition, indefinitely. Whence the relation between repetition and difference. When it concerns the everyday, rites, ceremonies, fetes, rules and laws, there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference."⁴⁸

The oppressive, fascist effects of Capitalist socio-economic ordering are felt most immediately in our embodied experiences of alienated labor, colonized temporal and spatial dwelling. When the commodity "prevails over everything" "social space and (social) time, dominated by exchanges, become the time and space of markets; although not being *things* but including rhythms, they enter into products."⁴⁹ Not just in conditions of commodity fetishism, but in a generalized social ontology, *things* are conceptual abstractions derived from primordial relations with a rhythmic structure of repetition. The everyday, ordinary experience of things is haloed by a more or less dim sense of bio-cultural rhythmanalysis. Bringing our somaesthetic experience of rhythms to the forefront of critical consciousness is a transformative method of radical praxis for Lefebvre:

The everyday establishes itself, creating hourly demands, systems of transport, in short, its repetitive organization. *Things* matter little; the *thing* is only a metaphor, divulged by discourse, divulging representations that conceal the production of repetitive time and space. The *thing* has no more existence than *pure* identity (which the *thing* symbolizes materially.) There are only *things* and *people*. . . Time and space, the cyclical and the linear, exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made a measuring-measure; everything is cyclical repetition through linear repetitions. A dialectical relation (unity in opposition) thus acquires meaning and import, which is to say generality. One reaches by this road as by others, the depths of the dialectic.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.16.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.18.

Lefebvre defines *measure* in an agentially realist way: "rhythm seems natural, spontaneous, with no law other than its unfurling. Yet rhythm, always particular, (music, poetry, dance, gymnastics, work, etc.) always implies a measure. Everywhere where there is rhythm, there is *measure*, which is to say law, calculated and expected obligation, a project."⁵¹ The normativity of rhythmanalysis is always revealed in measuring measures by turning raw affect into refined sensibility. In this way Lefebvre's project of rhythmanalysis shares much in common with the Si-Meng Confucian role ethical project of beginning with "affect/situation" *qing* 情 to realize "optimal appropriateness in ritual patterns" *yili* 義理／禮 in a role-focused dynamic of ethical agency. A critical ethic of harmony is celebrated in both Confucian role ethics "musical perfectionism" (*yue* 樂) as a somaesthetic check on rigid formalization of entrenched historical-political hierarchies, and in Lefebvre's neo-marxist rhythmanalysis, "harmony, which results from a spontaneous ensemble, or from a *work of art*, is simultaneously quantitative and qualitative (in music and elsewhere: language movements, architecture, works of art and diverse arts, etc.)"—including the micro- and macro- ethical-political practices of all sorts—(*li* 禮) is a continually rewoven fabric of familial-social-political relational ontology.

Indeed, rhythmanalysis reunites the quantitative and qualitative (*zhida* 至大 and 至剛) aspects of critical theory to promote a broadly inter-disciplinary approach to critical theory and embodied practice. It is the very concept of *rhythm* that "reunites quantitative aspects and elements, which mark time and distinguish

⁵¹ Ibid.

moments in it — and qualitative aspects and elements, which link them together, found the unities and result from them."⁵² Lefebvre considers the temporal and spatial dimensions together in a somaesthetics of performative rhythm analysis as a critical method which is itself transformative (theory as *tool*):

Rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body. Rational, numerical, quantitative and qualitative rhythms superimpose themselves on the multiple natural rhythms of the body (respiration, the heart, hunger and thirst, etc.), though not without changing them. The bundle of natural rhythms wraps itself in rhythms of social or mental function. Whence the efficiency of the analytic operation that consists in opening and unwrapping the bundle. Disorder and illness, at the worst death, take over the operation. However, the natural and the rational play only a limited role in the analysis of rhythms, which are simultaneously natural and rational, and neither one nor the other.⁵³

Similarly in Si-Meng role ethics an integrated, holistic perspective of the "living body" (*ti* 體) and "socioculturally ritually embodied living" (*li* 禮) operate together as an ethically normative but agentially creative "thirdness" within a horizon of "firstness" (immediate bodily rhythms in a spectrum of health-illness) and "secondness" (socially stipulated roles and relationships with normative expectations and responsibilities). Lefebvre identifies the following set of conceptual oppositions that are to be correlatively understood in an ecological fashion rather than ontologically circumscribed set of dualisms:

- 1) repetition and difference;
- 2) mechanical and organic;
- 3) discovery and creation;
- 4) cyclical and linear;
- 5) continuous and discontinuous;
- 6) quantitative and qualitative.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Lefebvre considers it necessary to employ these concepts and correlative oppositions "with care, in such a way as to fine-tune them through use" because "they converge in the central concept of *measure*."⁵⁴ This normatively rich idea of *measure* is productively ambiguous between these bipolar conceptual correlates and is capable of "stimulat[ing] knowledge at the same time as practice." And all of this would seem to be strikingly resonant with Confucian somaesthetic thinking about the continuity of knowing and doing (*zhi xing he yi* 知行合一).

In a fashion strikingly akin to the Si-Meng ethical *epoche* of "concerning creativity" (*shendu* 慎獨), a practicing rhythm analyst puts their somaesthetic potential into imaginative and experimental relationship with a dynamic natural-social complex as a ritually participating member in a democratic or "beloved" community of interpreters.⁵⁵ For Lefebvre, rhythm analysis "does not isolate an object, or a subject, or a relation. It seeks to grasp a moving but determinate complexity (determination not entailing determinism)."⁵⁶ We might, following Derrida's deconstruction of traditional Marxist scientology (viz. bad science and bad faith), consider how Lefebvre's neo-marxist rhythm analysis can function as a general *hauntology* or philosophical exorcism:

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.19.

⁵⁵ For more on the "beloved community" and a community of interpretation see Robert Corrington's *The Community of Interpreters: On the Hermeneutics of Nature and the Bible in American Philosophical Tradition* (1987). In this text he takes up the semiotics of C.S. Peirce and the post-Absolutist philosophy of loyalty of Josiah Royce to develop a unique horizontal and emergent theory of democratic interpretation in a non-foundational way. The categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness are taken up to make sense of how natural complexes (natural communities) can potentially transform in non-coercive ways to realize ever more rich and inclusive horizons of meaning and value.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.21.

The spectre of theoretical questioning goes from *pure* abstraction — the logic of identity — to the full complexity of the contradictions of the *real*. An immense questionnaire, the answers to which are given in the heart of the questions, and nevertheless hide *themselves* behind words, in locutions and expressions. It often suffices to chase them out, to bring them into the light of day: to show them.⁵⁷

This kind of critical theory resonates well with the somaesthetic presuppositions of Confucian role ethics, particularly the non-foundational concept of agency in Si-Meng thinking.

The idea of "embodied thinking-feeling" (*si* 思) is central to Si-Meng discourse. It involves moral imagination and cultivated ritual deference in conduct, speech, and thought. The previously articulated passage in the *Mengzi* regarding the cultivation of "flood-like *qi* 氣" recognizes the importance of embodied and relational thinking in projects of self-cultivation and ameliorative ethical agency. We can't be like the hapless farmer from Song who pulled up his sprouts too soon in an attempt to aid the process of [ethical-agential] growth. We instead find ourselves called to patiently abide in transformative processes and skillfully intervene in bringing to fruition imagined futurity and realizing potential. Abiding our time and husbanding our resources is a much better approach to agential growth than the precipitous agriculturalist from Song. This kind of phenomenology of affect and role-focused sensibility-cum-responsibility is what the Si-Meng thinkers had in mind in inviting us to focus on the most basic flows of agential "firstness" or "concerning creativity" (*shendu* 慎獨) in realizing relational flourishing (*ren* 仁) in deferential patterns of familial-social-political creative democracy—both "ritual

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.23.

propriety" *li* 禮 and "authoritative governing" *renzheng* 仁政. Lefebvre similarly recognizes that "everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is *rhythm*. Therefore, [there is always]:

- (a) repetition (of movements, gestures, actions, situations, differences);
- (b) interferences of linear processes and cyclical processes;
- (c) birth, growth, peak, then decline and end."⁵⁸

Thus, for Lefebvre, "analysis should ride with the movements in whichever work or whichever sequence of actions until their end" and not give up due to inertia, exhaustion, or depression. Rhythmanalysis is an embodied *tool*, not an abstract theory—the point here, hence the marxism, is to change things not just to understand things in a bloodless ballet of abstractions.

The embodied and transactional theoretical *tool* approach offered by Lefebvre takes the notion of *rhythm* bringing with it or requiring "some complementary considerations: the implied but different notions of polyrhythmia, eurhythmia and arrhythmia." Rhythmanalysis elevates them to a theoretical level, starting from the lived-experience of rhythmic punctuation (projective and consummatory perspectives):

Polyrhythmia? It suffices to consult one's body; thus the everyday reveals itself to be a polyrhythmia from the first listening. Eurhythmia? Rhythms unite with one another in the state of *health*, in normal (which is to say normed!) everydayness; when they are discordant, there is suffering, a pathological state (of which arrhythmia is generally, at the same time, symptom, cause and effect). The discordance of rhythms brings previously eurhythmic organisations towards fatal disorder. Polyrhythmia analyses itself. A fundamental forecast: sooner or later the analysis succeeds in isolating from within the organised whole a particular movement and its

⁵⁸ Ibid.

rhythm. Often coupled empirically with speculations (see, for example, doctors in the field of auscultation, etc.), the analytic operation simultaneously discovers the multiplicity of rhythms and the uniqueness of particular rhythms (the heart, the kidneys, etc.). The rhythmanalysis here defined as a method and a theory pursues this time-honoured labour in a systematic and theoretical manner, by bringing together very diverse practices and very different types of knowledge: medicine, history, climatology, cosmology, poetry (*the poetic*), etc. Not forgetting, of course, sociology and psychology, which occupy the front line and supply the essentials.⁵⁹

Lefebvre provocatively asks the most basic question "What is it to think? And more precisely, what do you think when you speak of *rhythms*?"⁶⁰ The emphasis in this rhythmanalytic mode of inquiry isn't "what do you think when you speak of rhythm(s)" but more fundamentally "how do you think rhythmanalytically?"

Lefebvre recognizes the persistence of dualistic, body-denigrating (Nietzsche) ways of thinking in the post-Platonic, post-Pauline tradition(s) of Western philosophy, "the Cartesian tradition has long reigned in philosophy."

But the disembodied Cogito continues to haunt our theoretical presuppositions and embodied habitus in ethical and political thinking:

It is exhausted, but remains present. The 'Cogito . . .' signifies: to think is to think thought; it is to reflect on *oneself* by accentuating (putting the accent on) the consciousness inherent to the act of thinking. Yet what *we* have thought over the course of the preceding pages implies another conception of *thinking*. It is to think that which is not thought: the game and the risk, love, art, violence, in a word, the *world*, or more precisely the diverse relations between human being and the universe. Thinking is a part, but does not claim to be the totality, as many philosophers thought it. Thought explores, expresses. The exploration can hold in store surprises. Likewise, perhaps, rhythms and their analysis (rhythmanalysis).⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Lefebvre thinks that "rhythmanalysis could change our *perspective* on surroundings, because it changes our *conception* in relation to the classical philosophy that is still dominant in this field. The *sensible*, this scandal of philosophers from Plato to Hegel, (re)takes primacy, transformed without magic (without metaphysics)." There is "nothing inert in the *world*, *no things*: [there is only] very diverse rhythms, [acting] slow or lively (in relation to *us*)."⁶²

According to the *Mengzi* the "office" of the human body-heart-minding is to "think" (*xin zhi guan nai si* 心之官乃思也) and Confucian role-focused "embodied reflection" develops an elaborate somaesthetic vocabulary of selective ethical attention, refined sensibility/taste, and singular transactional *qi* potential (*jing yi* 精一). Thus, the language of "concerning creativity" (*shendu* 慎獨) cannot and should not be simply dismissed as psychologizing solipsism in private projects of self-cultivation, but it really demands a brave pragmatic reading with democratic agency realizing itself in the fullness of time and in shared spaces of trust-infused personalized-ritual appearance.

Lefebvre asks if there might be an esoteric dimension to his rather idiosyncratic development of rhythmanalysis as a mode of marxist criticism. The unique ability to turn the same "method" as embodied "tool" on both bodily and urban rhythms is an important sociological-anthropological insight in the Lefebvorean project. He asks, "might there be hidden, *secret*, rhythms, hence inaccessible movements and temporalities?" And answers himself, "No, because there are *no secrets*. Everything knows itself, but not everything says itself,

⁶² Ibid., p.26.

publicizes itself. Do not confuse silence with secrets!"⁶³ This rejection of a purely psychological, inward, private theatre of consciousness is consistent with Confucian role ethical sensibilities regarding "knowing incipency" (*zhiji* 知幾) and "way-making body-heart-minding is vulnerable and subtle" (*daoxin weiwei* 道心惟微). It also gives us a way to understand the philosophical persona of Confucius in the *Analects* rejecting any idea of esoteric teachings:

The Master said: "My students, do you think there is something I am hiding from you? I have nothing to hide. I don't act/conduct myself (*xing* 行) with out my relationship to you. This is me (Qiu 丘 : Confucius' personal name)."⁶⁴

This kind of revelatory teaching, without philosophical or religious esoteric doctrine, situates Confucianism in a very unique position in the 21st century as perhaps one of the only major world religious-philosophical traditions that can offer a robust ethical vocabulary for making sense of and ameliorating our current predicaments of culture while not asking for any ideological or doctrinal commitments—especially of a supernatural kind—on the part of its adherents/practitioners. We don't need to *believe* in anything but the power of role-focused responsibility beginning in familial experience and critically extending to Ultimate realms of ecological-religious flourishing to be a practicing Confucian. And this sort of "belief" is more of an embodied mode of tacit know-how (*xin* 信) than it is some sort of propositional calculus.

Lefebvre self-critically asks if his presentation of rhythmanalysis as a theory isn't just "phenomenology from the window"—considering especially his chapter

⁶³ Ibid., p.27.

⁶⁴ *Analects* 7.24: 子曰：「二三子以我為隱乎？吾無隱乎爾。吾無行而不與二三子者，是丘也。」

dealing with the rhythm of cities as taken in from a Parisian window. His answer is a mixed one insofar as this: "vaguely existential (a slightly heavy technical term) phenomenology (ditto) of which you speak, and of which you accuse these pages, passes over that which quite rightly connects space, time and the energies that unfold here and there, namely *rhythms*" are thought to be "no more than a more or less well-used *tool*."⁶⁵ But Lefebvre's idea of "tool" is far from an instrumental use of rationality, as it includes the body as a basic attuning element in all constructions of experience. We are either flourishing or not in any given situation of relational becoming. Hence "ritual" (li 禮) participation is a better way to think through rhythmanalysis as a "well-used tool" than is any voyeuristic epistemology of the spectator from the window.⁶⁶

Rhythmanalysis "consists in understanding that which comes to it from *nature* and that which is acquired, conventional, even sophisticated, by trying to isolate particular rhythms. It is a difficult type of analysis, one for which there are possible *ethical*, which is to say practical, implications, in other words, knowledge of the lived would modify, metamorphose, the lived without knowing it. Here we find, approached in a different way, but the same, the thought of metamorphosis."⁶⁷ Despite being presented at times as involving a post-human or at least extra-human, even anthropocene, perspective on the rhythm of cities, Lefebvre consistently returns to natural biorhythms as expressed and articulated by bodies resisting the colonization of time and lived-space via the oppressive structures of late Modern

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ For more on the participatory element of ritual see Herbert Fingarette's *The Secular as Sacred*.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.28.

capitalism. Thus the method of rhythmanalysis that he is presenting is not a passive spectator theory of knowledge or phenomenology presupposing a disinterested transcendental ego. It always asks us to return to the high stakes question of oppression and liberation of rhythmic flourishing in the context of democratic control of the means of production (including cultural and educational production).

We might think that Lefebvre's emphasis on natural biorhythms would leave us with a rather uninspiring portrait of the human experience as being little more than about realizing our unrefined desires for food, drink, sex, and achieving moderate levels of comfort. I want to offer the following passage from the *Mengzi* that can be used to complicate Lefebvre's neo-marxian presentation by adding to the ethical mix a role-focused sense of responsibility that blurs any purported ontological dichotomy between "nature" and [ethical] "calling":

Mengzi said: "The mouth is set on its tastes. The eyes are set on alluring sights. The ears are set on appealing sounds. The nose has its attractive smells. The four limbs are in desire of comfort and ease. For all of this there is "circumstance/propensity/fortune" (*ming* 命). And an authoritative person never calls this "nature" (*xing* 性). There is relational flourishing between father-son (parent-child), there is optimal appropriateness between ruler-minister (governing officials-democratic citizens), there is ritual propriety between guest-host, there is wisdom in [employing] worthy persons, and there is Sagehood (exemplary persons) in *tian*-way-making (*tiandao* 天道). For all of these role relations there is a sense of "calling/duty/propensity/circumstance/fortune" (*ming* 命) and there is "nature naturing" (*xing* 性). Authoritative persons do not call/consider this [role-focused responsibility-virtuosity] to be a matter of "fortunate circumstances" (*ming* 命).⁶⁸

⁶⁸ *Mengzi* 7b70 on 性 and 命:

孟子曰：「口之於味也，目之於色也，耳之於聲也，鼻之於臭也，四肢之於安佚也，性也，有命焉，君子不謂性也。仁之於父子也，義之於君臣也，禮之於賓主也，智之於賢者也，聖人之於天道也，命也，有性焉，君子不謂命也。」

In what follows we will be using a broadly rhythmanalytic and somaesthetic approach to develop a "creative" *cheng* 誠 theory of truth that starts with our basic affective experience as a kind of affective "firstness" (*qing* 情), considering ritual-ordered and role-focused expectations and available normative "scripts" for exemplary performance as a sort of "secondness" (*li* 禮), and realizing non-coercive virtuosity (*de* 德) in a role-focused and bodily-integrated "creative agency" (*cheng* 誠) as a kind of action-driving thirdness. The language of "resolute becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨) can be developed to articulate a rhythmanalysis of personal becoming in transactional relationality beginning in family experience and critically extending to cosmic ultimacy. I will also introduce some of Song dynasty discourse on "learning of way-making" (*daoxue* 道學) that uses a focus-field language of dynamic patterning (*li* 理) and "vital stuff" (*qi* 氣) to articulate a role-focused sense of transactional potential and optimal appropriateness to ground an agential and moral realist account of truth.

One question that we may have in reading received and excavated texts that make up the Si-Meng conceptual constellation we are reconstructing is how to best conceive of the relationship between the "four sprouts" (*siduan* 四端) or raw [moral] feelings potentially leading to virtuosic conduct and the "seven [natural] feelings" (*qiqing* 七情) characteristic of neuro-affective typical human persons? How should we understand a finely-tuned inquiry into the "root nature" (*benxing* 本性) of "way-making heartmind" (*daoxin* 道心) in the context of "vital stuff nature" (*qizhizhixing* 氣質之性) and its experiential sensorium of affective energies (*renxin* 人心)? These

are imminently practical questions and ought to illicit philosophical interest for us given that we inhabit a pluralistic, multicultural globalized world wherein a shared cultural grammar (*li* 禮) of a ritually-stylized aestheticization of social relations is largely absent or at least diminished beyond anything that the Si-Meng constellation of thinkers would be able to recognize or find acceptable. What are the limits of philosophical reconstruction in deploying Si-Meng discourse? What ends-in-view can we hope to achieve in critically engaging with this philosophical corpus and traditional horizon?

Is the Si-Meng inspired Four-Seven debate just a historically interesting but largely irrelevant philosophical exercise in Confucian casuistry? I want to argue to the contrary for at least two reasons. First of all, the debate offers a particular style of "way-making learning" wherein collaborative inquiry in a ritually constructed community of interpretation stands in stark contrast to the still largely Eurocentric, Enlightenment models of agonistic philosophical inquiry aimed at identifying some set of ahistorical Truths or achieving Rationally-Autonomous argumentative conquest. Secondly, this unique non-foundational discourse on ethical creativity, offers us a distinctively Confucian way of thinking through embodied agency that provides interesting material for doing comparative philosophy—particularly after the so-called "bodily turn" in recent philosophical movements like phenomenology, philosophy of mind, moral psychology, and pragmatic somaesthetics. The distinctively Confucian approach can contribute creative insights and potential

avenues for further exploration in recently emergent fields like neuroethics and sociobiological approaches to understanding "the ethical project."⁶⁹

In *Embodied Moral Psychology and Confucian Philosophy* (2013) Bongrae Seok highlights the "convincing possibility that seemingly archaic and foreign traditions like Confucian philosophy can benefit from an interdisciplinary integration of philosophy, psychology and other empirical sciences." And he suggests that Confucian moral philosophy as "a unique philosophical tradition of the embodied moral mind [that combines] the body and the heart (the affection towards others)" provides a "viable model of moral psychology where embodied emotion serves as the foundation of virtuous dispositions."⁷⁰ And in arguing that "Confucian philosophy is no longer a dead and gone tradition of ancient China" which contemporary persons have little academic interest in, Seok convincingly shows how Confucian ethical philosophy can be a "living tradition for all of us as a philosophy of moral excellence based on the embodied human emotions that we all vividly experience everyday."⁷¹ As such Confucian philosophy then proves to have a lot to contribute towards our interdisciplinary projects aimed at better theorizing moral experience and embodied agency in a realistic way.

In this process-oriented correlative cosmology from which Si-Meng and Neo-Confucian thinking emerges, the closest conceptual correlate to the English word "emotion" is *qing* 情 which can also mean something like the "essential facts about a thing or a situation" (i.e. "firstness" as immediate truth). Seok outlines some of the

⁶⁹ See for example Philip Kitcher's *The Ethical Project* (2011).

⁷⁰ Bongrae Seok, *Embodied Moral Psychology and Confucian Philosophy* (Lexington, 2013), p. x.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.xi

semantic scope of *qing* 情 and raises an important question regarding the

significance that this term might have for Confucian ethical thinking:

In Chinese philosophy, emotion is typically notated as *qing* (情) but *qing* is not necessarily affective, expressive, or irrational inner subjective states. In many Chinese philosophical texts, *qing* is explained (a) ontologically as the true nature of the world and the human being, (b) epistemologically as the way the mind (not as a distant observer but as a close resonator) understands the world, (c) axiologically as the positive sense of harmony or commitment to higher moral values. If *qing* is more than private inner episodes and feelings, what is *qing* and why is it important in Confucian moral philosophy and moral psychology?⁷²

Seok goes on to answer this provocative question by showing how *qing* 情 is best understood within a dynamic and disclosive field of embodied affect which unifies multiple possible interpretations of *qing* along a fact-value dialectical spectrum.⁷³

Part of the confusion for interpreters arises from expressions like "nature of things" *wu zhi qing* 物之情 (*Mencius*, 3A4) which lead A.C. Graham (1989) and others to define the *qing* of some object/situation to be part of the necessary and sufficient conditions for something being the kind of thing that it is. This sort of "essentialist" interpretation, wherein *qing* is conceptually equivalent to *eidos* is then applied to passages that more or less explicitly relate *qing* to the embodied emotions as just an instance of identifying the essential traits of universal human being. It would be an instance of a category mistake according to essentialists to view the *qing* 情 of insentient creatures or situations as any different from the *qing*

⁷² Ibid., p. 123.

⁷³ "In sum there are three major semantic dimensions of *qing*. First, *qing* means the nature of things. It is parallel but contrasted with *xing*, which is restricted to the essential and identifying features of existence. Second, *qing* also means the direct and vivid sensation of the way things progress or evolve in particular conditions of situations or environments. Third, *qing* means the affective side of the human psyche, the feeling we have about events occurring in and outside of us." (Ibid., p.126)

of human beings. Such an essentialist reading of *qing* is given further credence by the intimate correlation that the term has with "natural tendencies" or "inherent dispositions" (*xing* 性).

In addition to the interesting fact that the unprovenanced Shanghai Museum version of the Chu 楚 bamboo slips "Natural Tendencies Emerge from Conditions" (*Xingziming Chu* 《性自命出》) is titled "Discourse on Natural Tendencies and Affectivity" (*Xingqing Lun* 《性情論》), and as the later Four-Seven debates make readily obvious a vitally important question for Confucian thinkers throughout the ages has been to elucidate the nature of the relationship between "natural tendencies" (*xing* 性) and "affective experience" (*qing* 情). Indeed, Mengzi seems to even view the terms as interchangeable in his debate with Gaozi (*Mengzi* 6A6) who held that the *xing* 性 of human persons was ethically ambivalent at best (*xing wushan wu bushan* 性無善無不善). Mengzi's response to this Gaozian challenge is to respond that as far as human *qing* 情 goes it is certainly *capable* of acting ethically efficaciously (*nairuo qi qing* 乃若其情 則可以為善). The *Xunzi* also connects *xing* and *qing*: "*xing* is what *tian* accomplishes and *qing* is *xing*'s material foundation" (性者天之就也 情者性之質也).⁷⁴ And in the same chapter of the *Xunzi* there is an explicit connection drawn between "natural tendencies" and embodied emotions: "*xing*'s love, hate, joy, anger, sadness, and pleasure are called *qing*" (性之好惡喜怒哀樂謂之情). And in the *Liyun* (禮運) chapter of the *Liji* (禮記) we find expressions such as "human *qing* is a field" (人情以為田) and "human *qing* is the sage king's

⁷⁴ *Xunzi*, Chapter 22, Rectification of Names 正名篇.

field" (故人情者 聖王之田也). Seok here brings our attention to the fact that in contrast to any "private theater of Cartesian mind, this open field [of interpersonal affectivity] can be publicly accessible and cultivated."⁷⁵

Indeed, the various dimensions of affective experience (*qing* 情) can be unified using this metaphor of a *transactional field of disclosure* (not a statically given *mirror* of subjective representation):

This interactive and open nature of *qing* is probably understood better in the metaphor of field. *Qing* is an open space (field) where the world is felt directly and engaged interactively. It is not an enclosed theater where the world is only translated or, at best, transplanted. As *qing* is cultivated and properly governed, it is tuned to the world and it presents the world to us because it is the embodied feeling that gives us the direct sense of what the given situation really means to us. As far as we live in this world, we cannot be neutral and cool to the world; we are inescapably emotional to and interactive with the world because the world is not a physical location but a meaningful place to us. From this perspective of embodiment and interaction, different meanings of *qing* can be coherently understood.⁷⁶

We will continue to discover throughout our exploration of these core Si-Meng texts a great emphasis placed upon the vital significance of affectivity (*qing* 情) in coming to know an interpersonal world of shared experience. *Qing* is "'what something really is' in the sense that the unmediated experience itself resides in affective transactions that become selective and abstract when reduced to the cognitive structures of language" and "is important in understanding the radically contextualized and perspectival nature of creativity itself."⁷⁷

In order to better understand the full significance of the Four-Seven debate in Confucian philosophy we do well to contextualize it within a discourse regarding

⁷⁵ Seok, p.135.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.139.

⁷⁷ Hall and Ames, *Zhongyong* "Glossary", pp.73-74.

the relationship between "[normative] patterning" (*li* 理) and "vital energies" (*qi* 氣) in a tradition of Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucian philosophy. Building upon the hermeneutic work of Confucian thinkers like Zhou Duynyi, Zhang Zai, and the Cheng brothers, as well as drawing inspiration from Buddhist traditions of dharma lineage succession, Zhu Xi articulated a systematic account of way-learning transmission that points to exemplary "conceptual personae" in a living tradition who come to embody a certain understanding of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and ideals.⁷⁸

The later Korean interlocutors of the Four-Seven debate frequently refer to the writings of Zhu Xi as authoritative and the vocabulary of the "four sprouts" and "seven feelings" obviously come from the writings traditionally attributed to Mengzi and Zisizi respectively.⁷⁹ The "four sprouts" or moral affects—"compassion and empathy" (*ceyin zhixin* 惻隱之心), "(*xiu e zhixin* 羞惡之心), " " (*cirang zhixin* 辭讓之心), and " " (*shifei zhixin* 是非之心) all of which given the right kind of enviroing conditions can be developed into the relational virtuosities of 'consummate conduct' (*ren* 仁), 'optimal appropriateness' (*yi* 義), 'ritual propriety' (*li* 禮), and 'pragmatic wisdom' (*zhi* 智)—are, within the course of the debate, frequently referenced to explain a sort of "rooted goodness" (*xing ben shan* 性本善) of human nature. While

⁷⁸ For more on "conceptual personae" see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *What is Philosophy?* Zhu Xi sees his own thinking as an "authoritative consolidation" (*tong* 統) of the exemplary lives of Yao, Shun, Yu, and other Sage rules stretching through Confucius, through Zisizi, and Mengzi before being revived in the Song dynasty by figures like Zhou Dunyi and the Cheng brothers. See 《徽州朱文公祠堂记》：“尧、舜、禹、汤、文、武、周公生，而道始行；孔子孟子生，而道始明；孔孟之道，周、程、张之继之；周、程、张子之道，文公朱先生又继之。此道统之传，历万世而可考也。”

⁷⁹ p.56 reading *Zhuzi yulei* on 理 and 氣; p.63- body and 互發 (本性 and 氣情); Affect theory, new(ish) materialism, and agential realism; Zhu Xi's construction of 道統 and the importance of Zisizi and Mengzi (p.68 Zisizi and 41, 51, 56 on Si-Meng).

the "seven feelings" from the "Ritual Rhythm" chapter of the *Book of Rites* 《礼记·礼运》 "happiness"(xi 喜), "anger" (nu 怒), "sorrow" (ai 哀), "fear" (ju 惧), "love" (ai 爱), "disgust"(e 恶), and "desire" (yu 欲). This text was attributed to Zisizi who also offers a fourfold presentation of the basic biocultural affects "mandated by heaven" (*tianming* 天命) as "happiness", "anger", "sorrow", and "joy/musicality" (*le* 樂) in the "Focusing the Familiar" (*Zhongyong* 中庸) chapter of the *Liji*.

Since the main thrust of the debate circles around how to best understand the nature of the relationship between the "way-making heartmind" (*daoxin* 道心) of exemplary persons that realizes (perceives possibilities and creates potentiality) normative patterns of things (*gewu zhizhi* 格物致知) in terms of "coherence" or dynamic "patterning" (*li* 理) and a more mundane sense of "human heartmind" (*renxin* 人心) that is precariously positioned in a biologically and socially charged nexus of affective energies (*qi* 氣), it is important that we make use of a hermeneutically responsible *ars contextualis* to make sense of the non-dualistic distinction between "patterning" (*li* 理) and "affective energies" (*qi* 氣) that the various interlocutors depend upon in developing their respective positions. What we have to avoid is a simplistic rendering of *li* 理 as "Principle" understood in a tradition of metaphysical substance ontology in which the *Arche* or *Principium* is what is most real and stands behind the manifold of changing appearances as a directive force. We do well to give up a retrospective search after static, metaphysically transcendent Principles and turn instead to the real world of ever changing unique insistent particularities that can be prospectively and

pragmatically brought into greater degrees of unity in ethical and ontological discourse. We might take a hint from William James and prefer to speak of an "Ultimate" instead of an "Absolute" since we are interested here in achieving creative agency and not mirroring some metaphysically transcendent order of Being.⁸⁰

Indeed, this language of Ultimacy resonates more readily with the "limitless supreme ultimate" (*wuji er taiji* 無極而太極) that is employed in Dao-learning Confucian discourse to describe the ways in which "[ethically normative] patterning is continuous with the realization of a multiplicity of roles" (*liyifenshu* 理一分殊).

Likewise, in rendering *qi* 氣 in a philosophically nuanced translation requires that we guard against any simplistic understandings that would depend upon an ontologically dualistic categorization of Form/Matter characterizing much of Western philosophical history. The etymology of *qi* 氣 calls to mind vapors (visual and olfactory) emerging from a likely ritually significant context of heating millet wine to share with ancestors and guests at a banquet. It needs to be kept in mind then that far from referring to a distinct domain of purely material or corporeal stuff passively awaiting the imposition of active Form, *qi* 氣 always signifies an atmospheric *quality* of experience that can be pragmatically conceptualized using *yin-yang* correlative categories. It is then "rhythm" as moving patterning of *qi* configurations that is more appropriate to think with than the static

⁸⁰ See William James' on the "One and the Many" in *Pragmatism*.

Form(s) when considering how experience takes on more or less distinctive aesthetic-ethical-religious orderings of experience.

In discussing Guo Xi's Song dynasty painting *Early Spring*, Stanley Murashige considers the dynamic "mountain-water" (*shanshui* 山水) aesthetic patternings in a naturalistic yin-yang cosmology of rhythmic changes:

Though objects retain their individuality, they never claim a birthright beyond the community of the mountain. As one traverses the junctures of objects, one realizes that the objects depend upon each other for their existence, that they are reciprocal, that the movement from one is but a transformation into the other. No form is discrete in and of itself, but instead lives in the embrace of its neighbors, appearing in the metamorphosis that happens across boundaries. Illuminating contrast and the shifting in-and-out rhythm of the brush encourage correspondence, connotation, and correlation. While spontaneous inflections of contrast and rhythm bestow particularity, they deny absolute separateness, so that each thing, while retaining its own integrity, respects a common foundation.⁸¹

Murashige also draws upon the work of Xie He's (ca. 490) Six "Principles" of aesthetic creativity, particularly the first one of "vaporous energy/resonance corresponds with life/movement" (*qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動) to develop a contemporary hermeneutic of *qi* that views it relationally and contextually in light of atmospheric qualities and dispositional modes of non-linear influence (*shi* 勢). I too maintain that this is a pervasive and persistent feature of a yin-yang correlative cosmology and our renderings of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣 in philosophically nuanced English need to be up to the task of highlighting this cultural dynamic of somaesthetic and role ethical creativity.⁸²

⁸¹ See Stanley Murashige, "Rhythm, Order, Change, and Nature in Guo Xi's *Early Spring*" *Monumenta Serica* 43(1995): 337-364, p.348.

⁸² For a more recent Western Marxist interpretation that might help us think dynamically about structure and content see Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis*. From recent sinology, Paul Goldin's

V. William James' Stream of Consciousness and a Focus-Fringe Model of Selective Attention

In a 1905 essay published as part of *A Pluralistic Universe* William James writes that “[t]he body is the storm centre, the origin of co-ordinates, the constant place of stress in [our] experience-train. Everything circles round it, and is felt from its point of view.” The “world experienced,” James elaborates, “comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest.” For purposes of survival, and for other value-laden reasons of various modes of thriving, “all minds must [...] take an intense interest in the bodies to which they are yoked” and “[m]y own body and what ministers to its needs are thus the primitive object, instinctively determined, of my egoistic interests” even though “other objects may become interesting derivatively through association” with this very body.⁸³

As a pioneer in psychological inquiry William James wished to avoid the epistemic and ethical pitfalls of *Sensationalism*—that following the early modern Empiricists understood consciousness to be an atomistic train of discrete sense-data—and *Intellectualism*, a kind of thinking that posits a One-behind-the-many model or a transcendental ego to explain the continuity of conscious experience.⁸⁴

“What is *qi*? And was it a good idea?” (2017) is an interesting historical-philological conjecture regarding the cultural gestalt shift that occurred in late Bronze age antiquity using *qi* 氣 as an organizing root-metaphor for shifting the intellectual climate from a ghost and spirit belief-system to a more naturalistic explanation of cosmic and ancestral forces (*tian* 天) exerting influence over precarious human lives in the Warring States period.

⁸³ See William James *Principles of Psychology* v.1, p.324. For a provocative somaesthetic interpretation of James on body-thinking see Richard Shusterman's "Deeper into the Storm Center" in his *Body Consciousness* (2012).

⁸⁴ Basically, James wishes to avoid what Antonio Damasio has more recently referred to as "Descartes' Error" or the common fallacy of trying to separate out a wholly mental realm of experience from its corporeal and/or emotional background matter.

James argues that both these models are inadequate to the task of phenomenologically describing consciousness as an embodied process, and offers instead the heuristic metaphor of a "*stream* of consciousness." For James, "no one ever had a simple sensation by itself."⁸⁵ Instead, consciousness "from our natal days, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations, and what we call simple sensations are results of discriminative attention, pushed often to a very high degree."⁸⁶ Without positing a pure epistemic subject of representation, James says that at the level of bare phenomenological description of experience all that we are justified in saying is that "thinking of some sort goes on." For James consciousness is an embodied process marked by flow:

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; *it flows*. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.* (239)

James goes on to argue that any stream of consciousness is inevitably marked by five "characteristics" or what we might consider to be the enabling conditions for any conscious experience:

- 1) Every thought tends to be part of a *personal consciousness*. (personalism condition)
- 2) Within each personal consciousness thought is always *changing*. (process condition)
- 3) Within each personal consciousness thought is *sensibly continuous*. (continuity condition)
- 4) It always appears to deal with *objects independent of itself*. (intentionality condition)

⁸⁵ William James, *Principles of Psychology* v.1, p.224.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

5) It is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects—*chooses* from among them, in a world—all the while." (ethical-aesthetic interest condition)⁸⁷

With respect to the first condition of personalism James suggests that consciousness "in its *form*" always "tends to personality." In considering cases of borderline schizophrenia, hypnotism, and anaesthetic experience, James argues that consciousness has an inveterate tendency to strive towards revolving around a "center" of focal personality always marked by a horizontal, multiplicity of "fringe" awareness. As regards the second process condition James offers a kind of pragmatic materialist account of psychic transformations as being ineluctably marked by physical changes in bodily being. James points to the personal experience of changing moods with regards to purportedly stable entities or objects "out there" in the world:

There are facts which make us believe that our sensibility is altering all the time, so that the same object cannot easily give us the same sensation over again. The eye's sensibility to light is at its maximum when the eye is first exposed, and blunts itself with surprising rapidity. . . . We feel things differently according as we are sleepy or awake, hungry or full, fresh or tired. . . . Yet we never doubt that our *feelings* reveal the same world, with the same sensible qualities and the same sensible things occupying it.⁸⁸

James suggests that it is our "difference of sensibility" conditions that is revealed by our varying "emotions about things" from one age to another or even changing more rapidly with the onset of "different organic moods."⁸⁹ James accepts change as a given and recognizes that "experience is remolding us every moment" and "with

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 225—italics and parenthetical comments added for emphasis and clarity.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.232.

every *pulse of change*" we come to inhabit a different set of feeling conditions and we can appeal to "brain-physiology" to corroborate our view.

James develops a selective attention or "spotlight" model of focus-field thinking about consciousness. Our embodied experience, set as it is against a "blooming buzzing confusion" of ever changing background conditions, is meant to on this Jamesian account of flowing attention or "stream of consciousness" offer a realistic alternative to theories of perception or epistemologies that would posit a superordinate Knower or take the Known to refer only to unchanging entities. As a pragmatist, James was interested in an experimental epistemology that takes pluralism and instrumentalism for granted in an unfinished cosmos marked by plasticity and precarity. For James, a "permanently existing 'idea' or '*Vorstellung*' which makes its appearance before the footlights of consciousness at periodical intervals, is as mythological an entity as the Jack of Spades."⁹⁰

James develops the ethical and religious implications of his thinking about selective attention in a fringe-focus dynamic of perpetual becoming. [more here from James' text]. The "pulses of change" that he describes in his phenomenology of personal consciousness are also always "pockets of potential" for realizing aesthetic-ethical-religious "optimal appropriateness" (*yi* 義) that makes way for ever more expansive horizons of significance and ameliorative futurity. Such a means-ends continuum is circular but not in a vicious sense as it displays dimensions akin to an Emersonian sense of infinite perfectibility.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.236.

⁹¹ See Emerson's "Circles".

VI. A Dynamic Focus-Field Model of Confucian Role Ethical Agency: "Resolute Becoming" (*shendu* 慎獨) and "Creative Integrity" (*cheng* 誠) as ends-in-view

As we have already made clear, many scholars who would eschew any substance oriented, thing-based language to describe the relational ontology of experience in early Chinese thinking prefer to use a more dynamic register of discourse to describe human becomings in a correlative cosmology. Perhaps the single most important position this dissertation is making a plea for is reconstructing the Si-Meng lineage of Confucian role ethical thinking about persons, agency, and responsibility outside of the recent debates between "communitarian" and "liberal" conceptions of self/persons. It would seem that either we are forced to accept the ontological fiction of a wholly autonomous subject capable of choosing their conceptions of the good behind a theoretical veil of ignorance to ground the ideal apparatus of liberal democracy or we are left jettisoning any conception of self in favor of coercive authoritarian or paternalist structures that implement one or another form of "communitarian" perfectionism. I think that by reconstructing the Si-Meng discourse on embodied agency and unique personal potential we can get a rich conception of self or personhood that construes persons as relationally-constituted and becoming creators in ameliorating social structures (*li* 禮) and role-focused responsibility (*yi* 義).⁹²

⁹² For an illuminating discussion on the communitarian/liberal debates and a distinctively Confucian conception of democratic persons as uniquely situated persons see Sor-Hoon Tan's *Confucian Democracy*, pp.17-25. For a contemporary example wherein Si-Meng thinking about agency might be able to contribute important theoretical and practical strategic insights is in materialist, abolitionist, literacy programs that work with a "voices out" as opposed to an "oppressors in" model of revolutionary educational praxis. Transforming power-knowledge apparatuses from within and not merely attempting to rehabilitate or reform liberal subjects in carceral-educational systems or within

Indeed, *shendu* 慎獨 thinking as a practice of "resolute human becoming" or "concerning creativity" in role-focused responsibility structures the very conditions for the possibility of realizing creative ethical agency. But we can speak of unique "pulses of change" and "pockets of creativity" without having to posit a metaphysical will-o'-the-wisp, for there is no ready-made, purely inward conception of self that would serve to ground our "original nature" as some kind of metaphysical principle. We don't need to confess our philosophical sins every time we find ourselves guilty of one or another form of "the philosophical fallacy,"⁹³ but we should strive to make sense of creative agency without pernicious philosophical fictions that would inhibit creativity or promote oppressive structures to reign in unrepentant forms of autonomous and possessive "individualism." Reconstructing Si-Meng discourse allows us to think democratic agency without autonomous individuals or foundational subjects. We can do everything we need to counter oppressive, fascist domination structures in history and society starting with family-focused selves and extending to ameliorative "becoming creators" in a cosmic drama (*tiandirensancai* 天地人三才).⁹⁴

Roger Ames, drawing extensively upon pragmatist and process thinking, has developed a dynamic focus-field model of persons through philosophical

the "prison literary complex" is a paradigm shift that is urgently needed. See Michael Sutcliffe's "All our Community's Voices: Unteaching the Prison Literacy Complex" in *Abolition: An Insurgent Journal of Politics*.

⁹³ Dewey's terminology used to point out modes of reasoning that take the end result of a process has somehow causally necessary for initiating the process in the beginning. It is another way of saying "teleology."

⁹⁴ The phrase "becoming creator" is drawn from Emerson's *The American Scholar* where he uses it in a multiple sense to refer simultaneously to the process of becoming creative but also to aesthetico-ethical-religious situations that would be "becoming of" a creator spirit.

translations as *ars contextualis* that can assist uninitiated readers approach the probably rather unfamiliar set of assumptions undergirding early Chinese thinking about agency. It isn't just Si-Meng Confucians who are working with a relationally constituted concept of transactional uniqueness as participatory agency. We can employ a focus-field interpretive dynamic then to better approach pre-Qin and Han thinking. Perhaps it is only perhaps in some of the post-Buddhist thinkers in China that we get anything like a One-behind-the-Many model of transcendental ego in conceptualizing persons—and here too I think a strong case would have to be made on an individual textual basis that a focus-field dynamic wasn't still operative, although perhaps largely tacit in Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist texts. In *Thinking Through the Han* Ames and Hall make use of focus-field rhetoric to contextualize pluralistic Chinese thinking in contrast to single-source Western metaphysics:

Our focus-field model of the self must be understood in terms of what we have elsewhere termed, *ars contextualis*. Chinese thinkers, both Confucian and Daoist, most often employ an approach to philosophic understanding that is in striking contrast to the two dominant modes of Western speculation. Among the majority of classical Chinese thinkers, there is resort neither to *ontologia generalis*, a "general ontology," nor to *scientia universalis*, a "science of universal principles." It is the "art of contextualization" that is most characteristic of Chinese intellectual endeavors. The variety of specific contexts defined by particular family relations, or sociopolitical orders, constitute the fields focused by individuals who are in turn shaped by the field of influences they focus. *Ars contextualis*, as a practical endeavor, names that peculiar art of contextualization that allows the focal individual to ally herself with those contexts that she will constitute and that in turn will constitute her.⁹⁵

They go on to articulate how this *ars contextualis* as a focus-field dynamic is distinguished from other available conceptual schemas (e.g. part-whole mereology

⁹⁵ Ames and Hall, *Thinking Through the Han*, p.39.

or one-many micro-macro cosmic thinking). An early Chinese focus-field model deals with "this's and "that's" in an always provisional discourse of fluid becomings as opposed to static things in a block-universe:

Ars contextualis suggests a "this-that" rather than a "one-many" or "part-whole" model. Since there is no overarching context determining the shape of other contexts, the world is an open-ended affair comprised by "thises" and "thats" construable from any number of distinct perspectives. There is no One behind the many; there are, rather many ones, many particular foci that organize the fields about them. The art of contextualization involves the production of harmonious correlations of the myriad unique details (*wanwu* 萬物 or *wan you* 萬有) that make up the world."⁹⁶

In such a fluid and dynamic conception of becoming unique as resolutely focusing a diffuse field of relationality via a role-focused responsibility ideal, the importance of "doing one's utmost" (*zhong* 忠) and "patterns of deference" (*shu* 恕) as embodied moral imagination becomes readily evident. With a role-focused conception of agency all we have to draw upon is a legacy of exemplary persons paying careful attention to cultivating their virtuosities 德 and tending to their heartminding dispositions 心情 in ameliorating ritual performativity 禮 across time. This is what the Si-Meng distinction between "heavenly way-making" (*tiandao* 天道) and "human way-making" (*rendao* 人道) amounts to. It is not an ontological difference or unbridgeable theological chasm marked by an abyss of depravity. The heavenly-celestial legacy of ancestors and those who have forged paths of meaningful and ameliorative way-making before live on in current projects of constant renegotiation of what relational flourishing should look like in present predicaments and situations.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.40.

A dynamic focus-field model not only helps us approach early Chinese thinking on its own terms by putting our often unexamined and culturally received presuppositions at risk, but it also helps in developing a stance that can solve the dilemmas of universalism vs. particularism in ethical theory. *Ars Contextualis* is not just for sinologists and comparative philosophers making sense of texts, but as unique pockets of creative agency in the world we have the chance to make the most of our experience by thinking creatively in situations. A "focus/field model results from understanding an item's relation to the world to be constituted by acts of contextualization" because:

At any given moment, items in a correlative scheme are characterizable in terms of the focal point from and to which lines of divergence and convergence attributable to them move, and the field from which and to which those lines proceed . . . Fields are unbounded, pulsating in some vague manner from and to their various transient foci. This notion of field readily contrasts with the one-many and part-whole models.⁹⁷

Applying a focus/field model to classical Confucianism then can help us to see this tradition in terms of both a family-centered moral particularism (focus) and the kind of inclusive pluralism that is achieved within a flourishing community (field). A "focus/field model retains particularism as the focus while dissolving universalism into inclusive pluralism as the field."⁹⁸

It is definitely worth considering possible criticisms of this focus-field dynamic of selfhood as a heuristic for approaching early Confucian thinking with a degree of hermeneutic responsibility (appropriate balance of suspicion and faith).

⁹⁷ Ames and Hall, *Anticipating China*, p.273-275.

⁹⁸ For more on this dissolution of the particularist/universalist dilemma in ethical theory see Tao Jiang "Intimate Authority: The Rule of Ritual in Classical Confucian Political Discourse" in *Confucian Cultures of Authority*, p.22.

Might not it be the case that a focus-field dynamic is overly reliant, if not upon an ontologically foundational autonomous individual, at least upon a centered subject of representation in all too human (because coercive, classist and patriarchal) structures of ritual space? In addressing these centrist concerns about selfhood from a Buddhist perspective, Peter Hershock problematizes the focus-field model:

[T]he focus-field metaphor itself unfortunately replicates much of the objective and binary feel of all centrist conceptions of personhood. On the one hand, it implies the possibility of determining by observation that a person is *this* focusing of the field while I the observer am yet another. In effect, the language of focus and field requires the admission of a metaperspective from which it can be determined what is being focused—the field of relationships. Something acts as an 'outside-stander.' Moreover, the metaphor continues to represent the person as a part of the world, as a limited phenomenon on the perhaps infinite ranges of the field. In short, persons are still seen extrinsically, as objectifiable 'things' arising on or out of a surrounding field of relations.⁹⁹

What is seen to be lacking, from a Buddhist perspective, seems to be a richly narrative understanding of (an)atman or "no self" as a decentering compassionate force wherein a "realization that the world is neither an objective context for our personal existence, nor a merely subjective or ideal construct" can be embraced. That is, "the systems and focus-field models fail on the one hand to explicitly and unmitigatedly embrace the priority of orientation rather than being or existence—an embrace crucial to at least Mahayana Buddhist metaphysics—and, on the other, to fully appreciate the indispensable role of karma or *dramatic interplay* in any adequate depiction of (at least Buddhist) personhood."¹⁰⁰

Hershock considers the "dramatic quality of sentient impermanence" to be ontologically basic as a relationally driven narrative without privileged centers of

⁹⁹ See Peter Hershock's *Liberating Intimacy*, p.45.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

experience. Rehearsing philosophically informed etymologies Hershock reminds us that the English word "drama" derives from the Greek *draein* ("to act" or "to do") and likewise the Sanskrit *karma* "not only implies purposive action but also the inescapable meaningfulness of our purposes for how things have already and will yet come about."¹⁰¹ Hershock prefers to speak of narrative unfoldings and enfoldings of always provisional persons as opposed to purportedly discrete agents who as foundational centers of their unique worlds actively bring a focused attention to a diffuse field of relationality. Within a perspective of an all-pervasive buddha-mind, as a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere, it makes little sense to identify a singular center of foundational identity. However, it certainly can be beneficial to single out a practice-oriented site for agential cultivation. Hershock has made clear in his works dealing with Confucian cultures of Buddhist practice, it is only by starting with family and extending into society via critical narratives that we can hope to cultivate and sustain ethical attention (*samadhi*). Focusing *this* field of agency is the only recipe we have for ameliorating our precarious and finite experience as embodied persons.

Recently, Roger Ames has qualified his focus-field rhetoric by clarifying a profoundly embodied concept of agential creativity. We begin with the "fact of [family] association" that uniquely identifies us as potentially virtuosic human persons and extend into ever more refined and expansive (至大而至剛) fields of creative becoming:

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Taking the gerundive, processional, and dynamic sense of *dao* as primary, its several derived meanings emerge rather naturally: 'to lead forth' requires the 'explaining' of a 'method, art, teaching, or doctrine' that then produces a 'way, path, or road' that allows us to make our way forward. Thus, at its most fundamental level, *dao* denotes the active project of 'moving ahead in the world,' of 'forging a way forward,' of 'road building.' It is to register the dynamic implications of *dao* that we have on occasion used the neologism 'way-making' as a translation (Ames and Hall, 2003 *passim*) . . . *Dao* as both 'what is' (things and their various attributes) and 'how things are' (their actions and various modalities) serves as a perfect example of this dynamic holism. . . . Thus, there is no clear line between what we might take to be putative things and events: A 'thing' is a distinctive, dynamic focus located within an unbounded field of experience that is holographically implicated within this focus, requiring a focus-field rather than a part-whole language to give it expression.¹⁰²

This focus-field dynamic of things and persons requires a "completing" or "creative" view of cosmic processes (*tianli* 天理) and such a theory of ethical "truth" cannot be reduced to a simple representationalist "discovering" model; but instead we have to employ a pragmatic, somaesthetic, and rhythmanalytic notion of *measuring* to make sense of an always experimental project wherein responsibility as ritual construction and *tian* calling (*tianming* 天命) is always provisional, disclosive and transactionally realized.

¹⁰² See Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr., "The Intergenerational Transmission of Confucian Culture" *Confucian Role Ethics: A Moral Vision for the 21st Century?*, p.161.

Conclusion

As a major theme of this dissertation has been a disclosive theory of ethical truth within a relational conception of agency, it is only appropriate that I defer writing a definitive conclusion and opt instead for an invitation for future collaborative projects. This pluralistic and disclosive theory of truth I offer, which is neither discovered nor invented, but performed in an interpretive horizon of an always invitational communicating community spanning across intergenerational time and intercultural spaces of reasons, cannot yield systematic closure. But what such an aspirational theory does offer is a coherent vision and an emergent set of engaging ideals for reconstructing (in a profoundly Deweyan sense) philosophy to better deal with the problems and predicaments of persons in their everyday lives.

As emergent ends-in-view or horizontal possibilities for future research, I can say that this dissertation has me oriented in at least three distinct philosophical directions. First of all, I would like to continue to think through agency in a somatic and relationally realist manner in conversation with recent developments in a wide array of fields such as feminist ethics, object oriented ontology, new materialisms, new pragmatisms, ecstatic naturalisms, eco-ethics and newly emergent religious perspectives from a plurality of faith traditions.

Secondly, I would like to continue the comparative philosophical project I've started by reconstructing Si-Meng "resolute agency" (*shendu* 慎獨) thinking in an interpretive horizon of global, intercultural comparative philosophy. I hope to research more deeply the continuing genealogy of "resolute agency" in Confucian thinking by taking on the significance that this term comes to have in the Song-

Yuan-Ming transition period between so-called classical Confucianism to the neo-Confucian or *daoxue* 道學 movement to the modern period of a changing Confucian cultural matrix. Mapping the importance of *shendu* 慎獨 and an associated conceptual cluster in the so-called neo-Confucian thinkers is a philosophical narrative that I believe could be more effectively told by situating it in the reconstructed Si-Meng horizon that this dissertation lays out. Moving through the idea as it evolves from Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, and the Cheng brothers through Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, and Liu Zongzhou in particular, would be a great way to introduce and problematize the very idea of a distinctively Confucian metaphysics of persons in the Song-Ming period of intellectual development.

Finally, I want to continue to think through the contemporary significance of the concept *shendu* 慎獨 in ethical, political, and religious registers of cultural meaning for pluralistic societies that may or may not have a predominantly Confucian historical background. As a non-foundational way of thinking about personal agency as an achievement of creative integration of variously embodied roles and relationally-constituted responsibility matrices, we might find productive ways of moving beyond so much of the conceptual impasse of a post-Enlightenment tradition of thinking about individual and societal rights, obligations, and values. In arguing against discrete, foundational individualism in human rights discourse and political theory, we don't have to give up on creative personal agency as the role-encumbered dynamic of family-centric focused fields of meaning and responsibility, offer a more realistic and effective way of thinking about transformative agency. By shifting the paradigm from talk about individuals—be it rights, virtues, actions,

intentions, etc.—to a more role-focused discourse—rhythmanalysis, social imaginary, ritual practice, etc.—we can find more effective ways to critique and transform oppressive hierarchies that stifle personal creativity and agency. We don't need autonomy to talk about freedom, and we don't need discrete agents to think about agency.

As a relational and collaborative project, I invite anyone who finds this project to be philosophically amenable or resonant with their own thinking to keep offering constructive criticisms and creative inspiration. The interpretive community of Confucian way-making (*daotong* 道統) is always about making friends (*daoyou* 道友) in ongoing philosophical conversations and collaborative experiments in living. I look forward to staying on the path of such a somatically and relationally charged philosophical project as a way of life.

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