Feminist Encounters with Confucius

Edited by

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BRILL

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CHAPTER 7

Confucian Ethics and Care: An Amicable Split?

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1   Introduction: Feminists, Care and Confucians

Feminism has an uncertain relationship with care. On one reading, care represents an important dimension of morality. It gives voice to care-givers' experiences of everyday action and moral commitments[1] and many care-givers are women. These experiences have been neglected in moral theories that construe morality as a question of moral justification grounded in an impartial or objective point of view. As a response, care ethics contributes to the feminist aspiration of greater equality and justice for women, while also enriching discussions about what morality is.

But on the other hand, some feminists[2] have worried that care might be a manifestation of ingrained gender inequality and oppressive structures. Caring behaviour is a rational coping mechanism that enables women to make the most of social limitations imposed upon them by men. Unable to find equality with men in other areas of social life, which largely reflect patriarchal forms of social organization that favour men, women retreat to the domestic realm. There, they exert some autonomy in caring for infants and working spouses, and secure for themselves some security under male patronage. But such care does not indicate an important dimension of women's experience in need of recognition and support; rather it is symptomatic of a social structure that is unjust and in need of reform.

Faced with this disagreement, and trying to assess the value of care as a mode of moral conduct, Confucian thought can offer some insights. First, it can contribute to the ongoing discussion as to exactly what "care" is, as different definitions and descriptions continue to emerge. Exploring the idea of care by exploring Confucian thought might strengthen its standing as a viable moral perspective, or at least reveal why care was once considered an important approach.

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1   Carol Gilligan. *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
2   See, for example, Claudia Card, 'Gender and Moral Luck,' in *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Virginia Held (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 79–98.

One feature of Confucian ethical thought renders it particularly well placed to contribute to the debate about care. A long-standing criticism of care ethics is that it suggests an objectionably gendered ethics—women focus on care while men focus on justice. Such a division does not serve women's interests, for the reasons noted above. However, the Confucian tradition has valued notions of care that are clearly not limited to women (see Chenyang Li's account below). At the same time, the tradition and its ethics have also been bound up with notions of patriarchy and hierarchy. This suggests that care is not intrinsically limited to a feminine perspective and, more importantly, it is not the regrettable by-product of male dominance.

Furthermore, the Confucian tradition can furnish novel conceptions of care. As I argue below, a non-feminine Confucian notion of care is worth developing. This highlights dimensions of care neglected in contemporary discussions that focus on the mother-child relationship, and the problem of other minds, empathy, and sympathy. In addition, this conception of care can help proponents of care ethics to develop responses to objections that are commonly raised against them, some of which are made by feminists. In order to develop this novel conception of care, however, it must first be distinguished from the most well-known presentation of Confucian ethics as an ethics of care provided by Chenyang Li.

2   Confucianism and Care Ethics: Chenyang Li's Claim

In his much-discussed 1994 article, Chenyang Li argues that classical Confucian ethics and Care ethics "share common ground far more important than has previously been realized."[3] According to Li, Confucian ethics should be understood in terms of a cardinal virtue or value, *ren*, and *ren* is importantly similar to the concept of care that characterizes contemporary care ethics. While often translated as humaneness or goodness, Li suggests the core content of "*ren*" is best understood as "caring,"[4] since this term captures what is common to various facets of *ren*, including, "altruism, kindness, charity, compassion,

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3   Chenyang Li. "The Confucian Concept of *Jen* and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study," *Hypatia*, 9, no. 1 (1994): 71. Li is not the only one to explore parallels between the two ethics. See also Henry Rosemont, Jr., "Classical Confucian and Contemporary Feminist Perspectives on the Self: Some Parallels and their Implications," in *Culture and Self: Philosophical and Religious Perspectives, East and West*, ed. Douglas Allen (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 63–82.

4   Li, "Confucian Concept of *Jen*," 73.

human-heartedness and humaneness,"[5] Significantly, Li anchors his account of *ren* in *Analects* 17.22. Li writes, "Confucius came closest to a definition of *ren* when he said 'Ren is to *ai* others' (17.22)." Sometimes translated as "love," Li argues that *ai* is best understood as "caring for tenderly,"[6] thus making the link between *ren* and caring explicit.[7]

Li makes two other claims of similarity. The first is that both classical Confucian ethics and Care ethics are "ethics without general principles."[8] Confucius does not offer a single guiding principle to guide behaviour and achieve the elevated status of *ren*, but gives varying piecemeal advice.[9] Further, while ritual and social mores (*li*), with their implicit emphasis on rule-governed action, were important in early Confucian thought, Li suggests that *ren* was more important. To support this claim, he cites *Analects* 3.3 that, without *ren, li* "is of no use."[10] Li sees a connection here with the work of care ethicist Nel Noddings. He quotes Noddings' claim about care that "The one-caring is wary of rules and principles. She formulates and holds them loosely, tentatively, as economies of a sort, but she insists upon holding closely to the concrete."[11] Li suggests that "both remain flexible with rules,"[12] and it is the particulars of the situation and the persons involved that determine the right action.

The third point of similarity is that both ethics prioritize partiality or "graded love." Echoing *Analects* 1.2 that filial piety and brotherly love are the root of *ren*,[13] Li notes that *ren* "demands that one love one's parents first and other people second."[14] Li notes a similar idea in Noddings' work. She writes, "I care deeply for those in my inner circles and more lightly for those farther removed from my personal life."[15] Care, as a natural sentiment, arises in face-to-face encounters and is thus primarily directed to those around us, with whom we have daily interactions. Its influence on action wanes when more distant others

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5   Ibid.

6   Ibid.

7   For *Analects* passages on *ai* see, for example, 11.10, 14.7, 17.4 and 17.21.

8   Li, "Confucian Concept of *Jen*," 73.

9   In *Analects* 11.21, for example, Confucius gives different advice to the same question, apparently in response to the different temperaments of the questioners.

10   Li, "Confucian Concept of *Jen*," 76.

11   Nel Noddings. *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 55, cited in Li, "Confucian Concept of *ren*," 77.

12   Li, "Confucian Concept of *Jen*," 77.

13   Ibid., 79.

14   Ibid., 80.

15   Nel Noddings, *Caring A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 16.

or strangers are involved. Further, when a conflict arises between personal attachment and other, more impersonal, normative claims, then both ethics grant priority to personal attachment. The famous sheep-stealing passage in the *Analects* (13.18) is often cited to illustrate this point, alongside Noddings' example of a person remaining loyalty to family despite racist sympathies.[16]

3   Reaction to Li's Account—Criticisms

How accurate is Li's claim of significant similarity between the two approaches? It has been challenged in various ways.

Perhaps most striking is the objection that the ideal of *ren* should not be understood as care, but rather forms part of a highly patriarchical social and moral order that has often oppressed women; this traditional order is incompatible with the aims of contemporary care ethics, which seeks to give voice to women's experiences. Lijun Yuan makes such an argument.[17] Her account understands *ren* in terms of li, often translated as ritual, based on *Analects* 12.1: "he who can submit himself to *li* is *ren*."[18] Here "*li*" are understood as customary norms, dating from the Zhou, and largely dismissive of women. This leads her to argue that care ethics, "contrasts with the Confucian concept of *li* (rites), which portrays women as a lower rank of human, or as petty people (morally retarded people)."[19] She points to the lack of references to women in the *Analects*, coupled with derogatory remarks on the rare occasions they appear, such as 17.25: "It is only women and petty persons who are difficult to provide for. Drawing them close they are immodest; keeping them at a distance they complain."

Further, Yuan then identifies a close link between the classical text and the institutionalized sexism and theories of the later Chinese tradition. She claims that a historical study of the Confucian tradition confirms this. Citing the *Liji*, the *Nüjie* (Admonitions for Women) and the *Yinyang* framework of Dong Zhongshu, Yuan points out how these both conveyed highly gendered

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16   Ibid., 109–12.
17   Lijun Yuan, "Ethics of Care and Concept of *Jen*: A Reply to Chenyang Li," *Hypatia* 17, no. 1 (2002): 107–129. See also Ranjoo Seodu Herr "Is Confucianism Compatible With Care Ethics? A Critique," *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 4 (2003): 471–89. Herr offers similar reservations, asserting that "historical Confucianism *was* undoubtedly sexist" (482, italics in original).
18   Quoted in Yuan, "Ethics of Care and Concept of Jen," 111.
19   Ibid., 109.

moralities and were continuations of the views developed in the *Analects*. For her, this confirms that the Confucian moral vision cannot be an ethics of care.

Yuan's arguments fail to address the specifics of Chenyang Li's arguments, however; specifically the claim that the *Analects* has nothing significant to say about women and so cannot be condemned as essentially sexist. Li argues, for example, that *Analects* 17.25 refers not to women in general but only to a particular kind of young girl. This, Li believes, allows for the claim that the *Analects* says too little about women to ascribe to it any meaningful position on gender. Further, even if *Analects* 17.25 (or 8.20) does appear to present a troubling view of women, it has little obvious connection with the core Confucian ethical ideas of ritualized social interaction and benevolence. And even if later more explicitly gender-orientated philosophies claim classical Confucian roots, including Dong Zhongshu's *Yinyang* theorizing in the Han Dynasty (approximately 400 years after the historical Confucius), arguably these do not express the spirit of the early Confucians. Yuan does not address this distinction between gender-biased "Confucianism" and gender-neutral classical Confucian thought.

In addition to these unresolved interpretive questions, Yuan's account contains a significant assumption: that care ethics is necessarily gendered and associated with women's concerns and experiences. This is one possible approach to the distinguishing features of care ethics. But it ignores a further possibility: a non-feminist and non-feminine care ethics. This would be an articulation of care not derived from an account of women's experiences but which might still be an informative conception of care. In this chapter, I will consider such an account of care, drawn from Confucian ethics.

A second challenge to Li's position is offered by Daniel Star, who denies that Confucian ethics supports ethical particularism to the extent implied in Li's second claim of similarity.[20] Star argues that the ethics of *ren* cannot be an ethics of care because the former is based on social rules or norms while the latter is particularistic in nature. For Star, Li's error lies partly in his failure to account for the relation between the concepts of *yi* and *ren*. It is *yi* (appropriateness) that expresses the occasional need for contextual adjustments in practical matters, not *ren*. *Ren* largely expresses the ideal of conduct that accords with role-based norms. Discretionary acts are thus the exception, not the norm. Star writes, "I believe the Confucian is always going to be interested in understanding relationships through role based categories, especially those of a hierarchical kind, and this is what prevents Confucian care from being

20   Daniel Star, "Do Confucians Really Care? A Defense of the Distinctiveness of Care Ethics: A Reply to Chenyang Li," *Hypatia*, 17, no. 1 (2002): 77–106.

deeply particularistic."[21] Confucian ethics, Star claims, are better understood as a "unique kind of role-focused ethics."[22]

This worry that Confucian ethics is more rule- and role-governed than Li's account recognizes seems valid. Identifying *ren* directly with care does prematurely exclude other aspects of this "master" virtue, such as personal refinement and good reputation. At the same time, however, one can question whether Star's identification of Confucian ethics as a mix of virtue ethics and role ethics adequately captures that diverse cluster of ethical practices that the Confucians value, and whether role and care might both be feature prominently.[23]

More pertinent to the present discussion is the worry that Star is perhaps too hasty in classifying care ethics as a form of ethical particularism. Caring need not always take the form of highly personal responses to unique individuals. The caring, for example, of nurses for patients and of adult children for aging parents can be systematic and follow routines, and yet be genuine caring. In focusing on the link between care ethics and particularism, Star overlooks the possibility that Confucian ethics could still be a form of care ethics, just a more complex form than the one sketched by Li—one not defined by particularistic decisions. In the final section, I present an account of Confucian care that suggests a less particularistic account of caring.

Another critique is offered by Julia Tao.[24] Tao claims a significant difference exists in the approach of the two ethics towards impartiality and commitment to strangers. The motivating force of Noddings' care ethics is grounded in the

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21   Ibid., 92.

22   Ibid., 78. For an additional account of why the Confucian concern with ritual is incompatible with the basic practices of care ethics, see Herr, "Is Confucianism Compatible?," 476–477 and 481–482. Herr claims that Confucian ritual introduces a "certain deferential distance" into personal relationships, especially parent-child relations. This contrasts with the ideal of a care that seeks to, "dismantle emotional and psychological barriers and to become friends on equal terms."

23   Shirong Luo also claims that Confucian ethics is a virtue ethics. See Luo's "Relation, Virtue, and Relational Virtue: Three Concepts of Caring," *Hypatia* 22, no. 3 (2007): 92–110. Luo argues that caring interactions can be understood as the expression of two virtues, caring by the carer and gratitude from the cared-for (105). However, in reducing the response of the cared for to a single virtue (gratitude), Luo fails to appreciate the epistemological dimension of the response of the cared-for. Such feedback is important not just as thankfulness for services rendered, but also as a comment on the appropriateness of the caring, which can prevent inappropriate 'caring' or domination.

24   Julia Po-Wah Lai Tao, "Two Perspectives of Care: Confucian Ren and Feminist Care," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2000): 215–40.

possibility that care is given in reciprocal relationships, where the cared-for responds to the care and the carergiver has the benefit of experiencing the reception of that care. Without the possibility of such a concrete connection, it is reasonable to withhold care giving. In contrast, claims Tao, Confucian ethics includes greater concern for strangers and more distant others, even where no possibility of a more personal caring connection exists. Indeed, this is part of the meaning of *ren*: "Ren requires both general love and relationship love."[25] A difference between the two ethics thus emerges, with Noddings' care ethics appearing more parochial and limited in its ethical commitments, and Confucian ethics incorporating a commitment to impartiality and broad public concern lacking in the former.

Tao's analysis however, is rather uncharitable in its account of Noddings' care. Published before the release of Noddings' later book, *Starting from Home*,[26] Tao's analysis lacks recognition of Noddings' distinction between caring for and caring about. This is significant because this distinction enables Noddings to explain how her account of care can generate meaningful concern for strangers, with whom no direct caring encounters are possible. Namely, recognition of the value of direct caring encounters motives a person to care about distant strangers and ensure they enjoy the conditions necessary to enable them to engage in face-to-face caring encounters (caring for). When understood in this way, Noddings' account of caring includes a concern for and responsibility towards distant strangers which Tao overlooks. The alleged difference between the two approaches, based on Confucianism's supposed greater recognition of strangers and more distant others, thus dissolves. In short, Yuan's, Star's and Tao's accounts leave unresolved the question of whether Confucian ethics has any significant connections with contemporary care ethics, or merely exhibits superficial resemblances.

4 Reassessing Chenyang Li's Claims: Confucianism as a Care Ethics?

In what follows, I have two aims. First, despite these reservations about Yuan's, Star's and Tao's objections, I argue that Chenyang Li's argument that Confucian ethics be understood as an ethics of care is unconvincing. The argument might be expressed as follows. Either the *Analects* presents an ethics of care, in which case almost any moral theory is an ethics of care; or the *Analects* is not an ethics

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25   Ibid., 224.
26   Noddings, *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2002).

of care, as this is understood by the care ethicist Li cites in his argument—Nel Noddings. There are crucial differences between the Confucian valuing of personal attachment and the structure of Noddings' care.

However, following from this merely destructive project is a second task. This is to draw on Confucian thought to enrich understanding of the notion 'care' as an ethical orientation. Classic Confucian thought might not be an ethics of care in the technical sense discussed, but the basic premise of Li's project is a valid one. Approaching classical Confucian ethics from a care ethics perspective yields a novel conception of care that can enhance understanding of this much disputed concept. This is one based on modeling or setting an example.

Consider the first part of the argument: Li's account of what qualifies as care is too broad to capture what is distinctive about care ethics. Li attributes to the virtue *ren* a wide variety of care-like dispositions or attitudes, including "altruism, kindness, charity, compassion, human-heartedness and humaneness."[27] But in doing so he fails to distinguish between different interpersonal attitudes, and treats them all collectively as care. But, altruism does not ensure care: a person can wish well to others, and even do what they think is beneficial for them, while failing to fully appreciate what they need—i.e., to fully care for them. Similarly, compassion is compatible with failing to actually act to help others; a person can feel the pain of another without actively assisting them. But care is frequently understood to entail labourful activity and practical assistance.[28] Simply put, when care is understood so broadly, so as to include diverse attitudes such as altruism or charity, then most moral systems will be care ethics. They, too, demand kindness, well-wishing and compassion from their adherents. But, as we shall see, Noddings offers a quite precise definition of care, and it is not clear that the *Analects* places any systematic or sustained emphasis on that conception of care. Li's failure to address the details of the ethics of care obscures what is distinctive about it as a moral theory. To see what this more precise definition is, and how it fails to map clearly onto classical Confucian ethics, let us turn to Noddings' formulation of care ethics.[29]

27   Li, "Confucian Concept of *Jen*," 73.

28   Joan Tronto's account of care, for example, emphasizes the political and embodied dimensions of care. See Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethics of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

29   Another potentially deep-rooted difference is worth noting. To the extent that *Analects* is addressed to adult children or those ready to follow path of self-cultivation à la Confucius, then it assumes completed childhood development. But it is precisely the nurturing of

5   Noddings' Care Ethics: Three-Step Caring

In her book, *Starting at Home*, Noddings provides the following account of care. Care is a dyadic relationship between a caregiver and a cared for, and a relationship between two people, A and B, "is a caring relation (or encounter) if and only if:"[30]

i.   A cares for B—that is, A's consciousness is characterized by attention and motivational displacement—and
ii.   A performs some act in accordance with i., and
iii. B recognizes that A cares for B.

On this account, the activity of care is a fundamentally local event; it is a face-to-face interaction that allows for full attention to, and response to, the particular needs of the cared-for. Several elements of this three-step account of care might be examined, to determine whether or not they have a meaningful correlate in classical Confucian ethics. These include the emphasis on face-to-face encounters as the ground of ethical conduct, the importance of laboring to meet the needs of the cared for, and the importance of sensitivity to the response of the cared as to whether an action is appropriate or not. While the above three-step account is taken from Noddings' work, there is broader agreement that any ethics of care must have something like this structure.[31]

Here, I will focus on only one core feature of this account of care ethics, asking whether it finds a counterpart in Confucian concepts and practices—the requirement of motivational displacement. *Motivational displacement* refers to the way in which a person becomes engrossed in the actions and features of the person before one, through careful attention to that person, and becomes motivated to act for their interests and goals. It is, as it were, as if the other's goals and needs become one's own during the interaction. Noddings provides an oft-quoted example to illustrate such caring:

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    young children, where the mother-child relationship is central, from which Noddings'
    care ethics begins.

30   Noddings, *Starting at Home*, 19.

31   Vrinda Dalmiya offers a similar, four-step, account of care: Seeing the cared-for as a
     concrete subject and morally important; an emotional "engrossment" in the cared-for
     to determine her needs; a motivational displacement to work for those needs; and the
     cared-for acknowledging the care-giver's efforts. See Dalmiya, "Caring Comparisons:
     Thoughts on Comparative Care Ethics," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 36, no. 2 (2009):
     192–209, especially 195.

> Ms. A, a math teacher, stands beside student B as he struggles to solve an equation. Ms. A can almost feel the pencil in her own hand. She anticipates what B will write, and she pushes mentally toward the next step, making marks and erasures mentally. Her moves are directed by his. She may intervene occasionally but only to keep his plan alive, not to substitute her own. She introduces her own plan of attack only if his own plan fails entirely and he asks, "What should I do?"[32]

I argue that while there is some evidence of motivational displacement in the Confucian texts, there are other forms of motivation deriving from personal attachment that have an equal if not greater influence on action. But this plurality of motivational sources, and the lack of emphasis on motivational displacement, means it is difficult to agree with Li that Confucian ethics is similar to care ethics of the kind promoted by Noddings. In the latter it is motivational displacement that constitutes the driving motivation of care. It is more plausible to think of early Confucian ethics as what might be called a relational ethics, which includes but is not limited to the kind of care described by Noddings.

6   Motivational Displacement and Confucian Ethics

Perhaps the strongest evidence for thinking of Confucian ethics as being centered on motivational displacement is found in the *Mencius*, and accounts of the sage king, Shun. Shun is both a paradigm of filial piety and also of empathic understanding. Despite their attempts to kill him, his own emotions remain centered on and mirror those of his family. He is 'anxious when his brother Xiang was anxious' and 'glad when his brother was glad' (5A2). Similarly, the Mencian account of the four shoots in 2A6 lists compassion (*buren ren zhixin* 不忍人之心) as the first of these innate affective dispositions; this also suggests the idea of motivational displacement—of a direct and motivating sharing in the experiences of another. The direct link between affective experience and action is made explicit in the statement that the heart that cannot bear the suffering of others produces government that cannot bear the suffering of others (*buren ren zhixin* 不忍人之政). Further, the Mencius features a term—*yang* (養)—that suggests the value of nurture and, in particular, caring for elders (*yanglao* 養老). In 7A22 King Wen was good at "caring for the old" and "guided the women and children in taking care of the old."[33]

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32   Noddings, *Starting at Home*, 17.

33   Quoted in Irene Bloom, trans., *Mencius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 149.

There are, however, reasons to doubt that the motivational displacement described by Noddings is of similar importance in the *Mencius*. Firstly, the Mencian stories arguably most suggestive of motivational displacement— those of the inability to bear directly perceived suffering featured in the stories of King Xuan and the Ox and the Child and the Well—present extreme situations of impending harm or life-threatening danger, where the moral task is to urgently respond to such suffering. In such cases, motivational displacement might be easiest. But this contrasts with the care ethicists focus on sustained emotional responsiveness to various unremarkable everyday interactions, such as teaching the young. These more extreme and dramatic cases are thus not reliable evidence of the importance of motivational displacement in the text.

There is, in addition, explicit textual evidence that motivational displacement is not regarded as a reliable source of action within relationships. In *Mencius* 4A18, Gongsun Chou asks Mencius why men of virtue do not teach their sons. Mencius replies, "The circumstances do not allow it. Instruction necessarily involves correction and when the correction is not effective then the next thing is that they (fathers) become angry. When they become angry then they hurt each other." This, Mencius notes, is why "in ancient times people exchanged sons and taught one another's sons."

This passage warns against teaching one's own son, betraying a lack of confidence that engrossment and motivational displacement will reliably arise. Rather, there is likely to be frustration, arising from fathers correcting and sons resenting this. The passage then declares that close relationships must be carefully managed to prevent "estrangement" (*li* 離), thereby revealing a very different view of the psychology of close relationships. Contrast Mencius' account with Noddings' example of the teacher, Ms. A. The contrast in attitudes towards educating the young is striking and warns us against too readily equating care and Confucian ethics.[34]

The prognosis for the *Analects*—the text upon which Li's argument is based—is similarly mixed. In general, the demand that children should have a heightened concern with the well-being of their parents seems to express the kinds of motivations captured by the term "motivational displacement."

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34   The *Analects* account of Confucius as a teacher also contrasts with Noddings' teacher. Ms. A is utterly supportive of the struggling student, but Confucius' commitment as educator has a more conditional tone. Confucius does not instruct those who are not eager, nor those who, shown one corner, do not return with the other three (*Analects* 7.8). Demandingness rather than care describes such teaching. I return to the relationship between the example set by Confucian educators and the structure of care in the final section.

Passage 2.7, for example, suggests that the right kind of relationship with parents involves more that merely ensuring their material well-being, since this is done for mere horses and dogs; it must involve the right kind of emotional or affective experience, reverence or respect (*jing* 敬)—an experience which might motivate caring acts.

Similarly, there has been recent interest in the role of empathy in classical Confucian ethics, as expressed by the ideal *shu* (恕, see 4.15 and 15.24), as well as the *Mencius* passages on the four shoots.[35] Empathy has been understood in various ways, but a broad and inclusive gloss would include how, "the perceived mental states of another provoke some kind of response in some other party."[36] Empathy might be thought to be the key component of motivational displacement, and thus in so far as the *Analects* values empathy then susceptibility to motivational displacement will also be present.

Again, however, it is not clear that motivational displacement is important to the early Confucians. First, it is an open question just what kinds of emotions or psychological experiences should adorn practical care for parents. Respect, awe, affection, and shame all appear in the text in this regard. As will be discussed below, the affective components and attitudes involved are complex, and cannot be neatly reduced to motivational displacement.

Second, there are reasons for doubting whether empathy is equivalent to motivational displacement. As already noted, the ability to comprehend or mirror the mind of another is not itself sufficient for an ethical response; for such understanding could also serve deceptive or cruel ends. More importantly, Noddings herself is explicit that her account of motivational displacement is *not* empathy. She understands empathy as an intellectual exercise in comprehending the thoughts or feelings of another. But this, she claims, is not sufficient for engrossment. This can be illustrated by comparing Noddings' Ms. A, the teacher with the committed sports fan who becomes immersed in his or her team's matches. This fan 'kicks every ball' with the team, as if the immediate aims of fan and team are one. But is this empathy? Clearly it's not

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35   Brooks and Brooks translate *shu* as 'empathy', as does Daniel Gardner. See E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), and Gardner's *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007). For a summary of the debate over the place of empathy in the classical Confucian texts, see Andrew Terjesen, "Is Empathy the 'One Thread' Running Through Confucianism?" in *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism*, ed. Stephen C. Angle and Michael Slote (New York: Routledge, 2013): 201–208. For a discussion of Confucian thought and care ethics that focuses on empathy, see Luo, "Relation, Virtue, and Relational Virtue," especially 96–98.

36   Terjesen, "Is Empathy the 'One Thread'?," 201.

some kind of direct cognitive understanding of what another person or persons are feeling, since the fans are typically not focusing on the mental states or emotions of the players; and arguably it doesn't necessarily involve experiencing the same emotions, since two people can be united in a common goal but experience different feelings while working together: the players might be calm while the fans nervous, or the teacher anxious but the pupil without much emotion. The relationship is perhaps better characterized as being bound up in a single task.

Motivational displacement is also characterized by another feature that empathy does not necessarily involve. This is *attention*, the effort to look carefully at what the other is involved in, which then reveals features of a situation which would not otherwise register. We can imagine a different teacher, one who did her job teaching the material, and who was also reasonably sensitive to suffering or discomfort in her students and would help if such these became obvious. Such an attitude might be compared with Mencius' account of the king's response to the terrified ox. But arguably, Noddings caring teacher exhibits something more. Namely, she looks carefully and in doing so notices much about the child that would otherwise go unnoticed; and through this effort of this attention comes the understanding of and engrossment in the actions of the child, and more tailored help in solving the maths problems. But this extra level of personal attention, becoming engrossed in the scene before one or the particulars of the person, is not obviously described or conceptualized in *Analects* or the *Mencius*.

Whether, and to what extent, the idea of motivational displacement corresponds to the ethical vision presented in the *Analects* and *Mencius* remains an open question. The ethics of care developed by Noddings presents a highly structured account of care, and it would be stretching the classical texts too far to expect overly precise accounts of such fine-grained distinctions. But this means that the claim that the two approaches share a common approach to care finds, at best, only weak support.

7   Other Ways in Which Personal Relationships Shape Practical Motivation

The above discussion casts doubt on how important motivational displacement is in Confucian ethics, and whether the putative interest in empathy found in the texts can play an analogous role in determining action. But even if we allow that some form of motivational displacement is implicit in the texts, there is another powerful reason for doubting that classical Confucian

ethics is an ethics of care. This is the presence of multiple other practical motivations that direct the conduct of relationships. Their presence in the texts suggests that care has no foundational or privileged place in this ethics.

Perhaps the practical motivation that contrasts most strikingly with care and motivational displacement is the striving for personal cultivation. The *Analects* is replete with images of the *junzi* or cultivated person ("gentleman," "authoritative person") seeking to improve himself. Confucius' autobiographical statement at *Analects* 2.4 is the most definitive statement of this goal, and the frequent references to cutting and polishing jade or gems stones reinforce this ideal. Such refinement is achieved through mastery of a variety of social practices. These include fluency in the social rituals—including dealings with others, such as how to interact with different ages and generations—and understanding tradition and the classical texts, which can be used as a repository of ideas for dealing with the present.

There is no doubt that the project of personal cultivation includes securing good relations with others, and working to promote their ends, as the 'mutual establishing' of others (*liren* 立人) advocated in 6.30 makes clear. Still, however, there exists a clear difference between the motivation to develop one's own character so as to acquire social authority in one's community (as teacher, clan leader, adviser to a ruler, etc.), and motivations that arise through engrossment in the lives of others. The former only partially and occasionally entails the latter. This difference between such motivation and the ideal care is perhaps best illustrated by a lauded capacity of the *junzi*: the ability to detest people appropriately (*wu* 惡). Confucius notes that exemplary figures "detest those who are bold and do not observe ritual propriety; they detest those who, being determined to get what they want, are unrelenting" (17.24). Other passages, such as 4.3, 17.18, 17.24 and 17.26 confirm that detesting and disliking appropriately are desirable. Such passages suggest that, for the Confucian, caring does not have an especially privileged role and that other interpersonal attitudes can be equally important, including those seemingly inimical to care.[37]

The Confucian commitment to personal cultivation also suggests a reading of *shu* that raises doubts about equating it with the "empathy." On this account, *shu* is closer to consistency or even integrity—basing conduct towards others

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37   The *Mencius* features a similar readiness to condemn others. 4B28 describes Mencius' response to being treated in an "outrageous manner" (D.C. Lau, trans., 134). After reflecting on whether his conduct was "benevolent and courteous," and whether he has "done his best" for his interlocutor, Mencius is prepared to dismiss him as "no different from an animal." A caring, educating response is not required here; concern with maintaining good character is more highly valued.

on what one believes in. On this interpretation, conduct begins from oneself, with a person's own self or values taken as the standard of how to treat people, and others afforded the standards regarded acceptable to oneself. This does not necessarily require knowledge of others' minds. Such an account fits with the "Golden rule" in the text: "What I do not want others to do to me, I also want to refrain from doing to others" (5.11; see also 15.24). The basic standards for conduct come from oneself and are not, pace Noddings, caring responses to others.

The importance of personal cultivation in the *Analects* suggests that the complexity of Confucian stances and attitudes towards personal and interpersonal relationships cannot be reduced to a single attitude of a motivation to care. Indeed, the text values many other motivations deriving from personal attachment that structure and direct action. One such alternative motivation is a sense of duty directed towards significant others. Part of the function of *li* 禮 (ritual propriety) is to prescribe duties towards certain categories of people, to whom a person relates through socially defined relationships and roles. Relationships described in the *Analects* include father and son, teacher and mentee, and younger and older brother, while examples of resultant duties are knowing the age of parents (4.21) or not travelling far from them and so causing parents to be anxious (4.19). What motivates here is not personal attention and engrossment but the awareness of duty within personal relationships, or the habitual and conditioned responses that are based on the duty. A popular example would be greeting parents each morning and asking whether they need anything. This consciousness of duty implies that other motivations or desires must sometimes be reigned in and made subservient to duty; this in turn suggests there will sometimes be a tension between the ideal of attending to and becoming engrossed in the actions of the person before one (Ms. A and her student B) and the drive to uphold pre-existing duties to family and significant others; and there is no textual evidence that motivational displacement has any special claim on motivation in such circumstances.

Yet other forms of motivation deriving from personal attachment could be described, which are not reducible to care or motivational displacement. These include shame (*chi* 恥)—consciousness of some weakness or failing being seen by esteemed others (1.13, 2.3, and 13.20).[38] Here, again, personal attachment generates a motivation that exerts a practical influence on conduct.

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38   In the *Analects*, the term *chi* 恥 is more capacious that what is typically indicated by 'shame', and includes aspects of guilt and perhaps remorse—that is, negative emotions arising from failing to uphold some standard valued by oneself, but which are not necessarily the result of considering what friends or family will think of oneself (see 14.1).

Another such source of motivation, mentioned above, is reverence for certain esteemed others (*jing* 敬).[39] Illustrated in students' attitude towards Confucius, this might be directed towards figures such as parents and other community leaders and heighten a person's willingness to learn and to serve.

In summary, these alternative forms of practical motivation suggest that while the maintenance of relationships are important, as they are also in care ethics, they require the use of the many different forms of motivation that personal attachment engenders, and not merely motivational displacement. The caring attention that gives rise to motivational displacement is not the central tenet of the ethical theory that appears in the *Analects*, and cannot be considered a central theme of Confucian ethics.[40]

8   How Confucian Ethics Can Still Inform an Ethics of Care

I have argued that Confucian ethics is not an ethics of care in the sense that Chenyang Li and Nel Noddings have used this term. However, while attempts to align Care ethics and Confucian ethics too closely with each other are misguided, attempts at dialogue between Confucian ethics and care ethics remain worthwhile. Because Confucian ethics has so much to say about personal attachment, it is well placed to enrich contemporary debates about what exactly is 'care ethics', and to expand understanding of the most important features of "care."

To see this, we might make a distinction between *different levels or degrees of specificity* in care ethics. At the more concrete level is the belief that features like highly personal face-to-face encounter, engrossment and motivational displacement and some means of feedback or response from the cared-for are necessary elements of care ethics. However, care ethics can also be described

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     Nor is it always desirable to feel shame (e.g., 9.27). Nevertheless, a sense of shame rooted in family and personal attachment is valued in the text.

39   Some examples of what might be termed "reverence" are found in *Analects* 2.7, where *jing* describes the attitudes that should guide assistance to parents, 5.17 where it expresses attitudes of old friends to the venerable Yen Pinzhong, and 12.5 which captures the all round concern of the *junzi* for his personal interactions.

40   I have argued elsewhere that Confucian ethics is best understood as a kind of relational ethics, where the multiple practices and attitudes that constitute personal attachment collectively function to direct and co-ordinate conduct. This gives rise to one possible conception of harmony, which includes both social stability and the creation of shared delightful social events. Both are achieved through cultivation of the appropriate kind of personable sensibility. See Andrew Lambert, "*What Friendship Tells us About Morality: A Confucian Ethics of Personal Relationships*," PhD diss., (University of Hawaii, 2012).

in more general terms, in terms of less specific features or orientations (though still in more detail than Li's account above). These more general descriptions of care include the commitment to create and maintain personal relationships and attachment,[41] the demand to take responsibility for others with whom one stands in some kind of relationship,[42] and some kind of nurturing or helping the other to grow.[43] Confucian ethics does appear to contain these features, and this gives us reason to think that the Confucian ethics could be used to develop an alternative conception of care, one which might inform ongoing discussions about how to develop care ethics theory.

What might a Confucian approach to care be like? Arguably, it would express the Confucian concern with personal cultivation, and the subsequent acquisition of social influence, whether through formal appointment or through the force of good character. A passage in the *Mencius* provides an initial gloss on this conception of "care." We are told, in *Mencius* 2B2, that what is "most important" to "*caring* for the world and looking after the people" is *de* 德. *De* is sometimes translated as virtue but perhaps better understood as social influence deriving from embodied personal excellence. To anticipate what follows, a conception of care constructed from Confucian concepts and practices is one in which success at personal cultivation is a necessary condition for effective care; this is because it enables one to be an effective role model or exemplar. Furthermore, unlike accounts of care developed by feminist philosophers, this account of care will be a non-feminist and non-feminine account. It does not approach care through the experiences of woman, nor does it seek to redress historical injustice. It will, however—and this is what makes it philosophically interesting—help address some of the objections directed at such accounts of care.

So what is this alternative conception of care? It is a form of care that arises in hierarchical relationship such as father-son, mentor and mentee, and teacher and pupil—relationships featuring disparities such as age, experience and even ability or competence. To use a slightly anachronistic term, it is the care embodied in the idea of the traditional Chinese *shifu* 師父—someone father-like and teacher-like, who seeks to impart knowledge and skills but does so from a position of both relative authority and personal attachment. Such care might be summarized as: concern that the cared-for succeed in the complex social world that they find themselves in, and a readiness to help towards

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41   Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

42   Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, and Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

43   Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980).

this end. Such caring makes the cared-for capable of doing something that they were not previous able to do, and might not have considered doing (i.e., did not think desirable or valuable).This includes care for both children preparing to enter a more structured and responsibility-laden environment, but also junior members already in it but exposed to new aspects of it.

This description expresses the idea that more experienced mentors are concerned to prepare those to whom they are personally attached to fulfill social roles, and to cope with less structured social situations not covered by role or social norms. Situations in which requisite conduct is largely prescribed include greetings, weddings, funerals and official posts or appointments, while less structured social interactions with more room for interpretation and also faux pas include relations with neighbours or friends. In all of these the ideal is to attain competency or even mastery.

This account of care differs in several ways from the more orthodox account of care that begin from the personal and particularistic. This ideal form of "care" moves away from the psychologized ideal of access to the cared-for's emotions and mental states, and response to the individual's present and visceral needs; instead, attention focuses on the intersection of that individual with the social world, and the various social practices that the cared-for must master in order to have good lives. This conception of "care" thus starts from the senior party's familiarity with what is "out there"—i.e., awareness of the difficulty of adjusting to and mastering a highly-structured social world—and the desire that the cared-for do so. It does not place strong emphasis on attention and openness to motivational displacement—i.e., on response to needs as they arise in face-to-face encounters. Consequently, while the 'feedback' of the cared-for might be taken into consideration, going against or even ignoring it is not oppressive, in so far as doing so serves to equip the cared-for with the relevant skills or temperament. Furthermore, this conception of care does not rely on a detailed conception of the cared-for's interests or good—i.e., a concern for how their different desires and goals form a unified life plan that the carer helps realize as much as possible. It is success in specific social contexts that moves the carer. Confucian concepts and practices also suggest a distinctive way that this kind of care is manifested: by being a role model or setting an example.

9   Care as Modeling

On this approach, "care" consists in showing the cared-for or mentee "how it's done." The importance of setting an example appears in various forms in the

Analects. The text itself is a study in how Confucius sets an example for the students of his school. This beneficial effect of exemplars is captured in the metaphor of the Pole star at 2.1: "The rule of *de* (excellence) can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars without leaving its place." The exemplary figure of Confucius is a kind of touchstone for human conduct, around whom others can find their moral bearings. This leads to confidence that such a figure can transform communities, even those of barbarians (9.14).

The text also offers more concrete accounts of model behaviour, such as how the *junzi* conducts himself under conditions of competition, when personal conflict is presumably most likely to arise. 3.7 explains this by reference to an archery contest: "Greeting they make way for each other, the archers ascend the hall, and returning they drink a salute. Even in contesting, they are exemplary persons."[44] Many additional examples are possible. Book five, for example, is replete with portraits of figures who are worthy of emulation. Confucius, we may presume, cares about his disciples' development, and with a view to readying them for positions of responsibility that will influence rulers. But this care is not simply a responsiveness to perceived needs. Rather, it is characterized by its suggestiveness. It is prospective and pre-emptive. It invites the cared-for to learn or study it in order to benefit from the help on offer. This is summed up in the well known passage, *Analects* 7.22:

> The Master said, "In strolling in the company of just two other persons, I am bound to find a teacher. Identifying their strengths, I follow them, and identifying their weaknesses, I reform myself accordingly"[45]

As this passage implies there is one method particularly suited to learning from exemplars. That is interpersonal comparison (bi). This is expressed explicitly in 6.30, and the requirement to learn from what is close at hand:

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

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44   Quoted in Ames and Rosemont, trans., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 83.

45   Another passage with a similar message is 4.17: "When you meet persons of exceptional character think to stand shoulder to shoulder with them; meeting persons of little character, look inward and examine yourself."

One seeking to "establish others" (*liren* 立人) and "promote others" (*daren* 達人) provides a personal example that permits of interpersonal learning and appropriation, and the cared-for is to learn by drawing analogies and conclusions (*pi* 譬) from that example.[46]

It is not difficult to extrapolate and apply this "care by modeling" to practical situations beyond the original Confucian context. For example, older brothers offer a model to younger family members or friends. This might include how they cope with bullying at school, which helps the cared-for to prepare for similar situations as they enter similar settings. Or in the choice of career, children and pupils observe how teachers and parents make a success (or not) of their professions, and have a sense of both how to succeed in them and whether or not they are suitable careers to take up.

It might be questioned whether modeling can be considered a species of care. After all, people can learn from the example set by others without any personal relationship existing between them. Modeling, however, retains key elements of care. First, it is an alternative form of nurture: modeling serves to enhance the skills and capacities of the cared for. Further, it is a form of taking responsibility for another, which is commonly regarded as a characteristic of care ethics.[47] It involves knowingly and often intentionally setting an example, such as when parents consciously police their language in front of their children or give money to charity collectors on the street to encourage generosity in their children. But perhaps the most salient reason it is a form of care is that the actions of the one who creates a model are rooted in the partial motivation to benefit a particular, limited set of people about whom they care. This desire to benefit certain people without constraint deriving from the interests of a wider set of people is a distinguishing feature of care ethics. Furthermore, the motivation to serve as a model might be rooted in such caring attachment; that is, if the person did not have such attachment he or she would have no interest in becoming a model. A simple anecdotal illustration of this is the possible change in mindset of someone becoming a father for the first time. Such a person might feel a new sense of responsibility, changing his lifestyle, on account of the desire to set a good example for his child.

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46   That such modeling is suggestive but not rigid and authoritarian is suggested by Confucius' reply when Zaiwo questions the need for a three-year mourning period (*Analects* 17.21). Confucius does not demand Zaiwo copy the model, but only suggests that he does. However, depending on circumstances and what skills or attributes the cared-for needs to acquire, modeling could also be demanding and 'strict'—i.e., require a more exact copying—at least initially. Musical training might be one such example.

47   See, for example, Held's chapter, "The Caring Person" in *The Ethics of Care*.

This conception of care is worth developing because it suggests responses to objections frequently directed at advocates of care ethics. The first such worry is whether acts of care that arise from focused attention and motivational sensitivity to a particular other are appropriate and genuinely helpful or whether they can at times undermine autonomy or even be domineering or oppressive. This objection is rooted in an epistemological problem: whether the carer can ever adequately know, and respond to, the interests of the cared for. A parent might make a decision about a child's future, acting on what they believe in the child's best interest, but a question remains as to whether it is really in the child's interest, or whether it assumes too much or imposes too much of the parents own values or interests.

In traditional liberal theory, consent plays an important role here, such that action on behalf of the other proceeds only after consent is given. Possible impingement on interests is thus avoided because the agent, understanding his or her needs, tacitly or explicitly agrees to or refuses the action. But in many cases such clear-cut notions of consent are not feasible, especially when junior parties to agreements, such as children, are not able to fully conceptualise their own interests. The final step of the caring model discussed above, the requirement that the carer taken account of the cared-for's response to acts of care was intended to address such concerns about paternalism, the imposition of values and the possible creation of dependency. But as Jean Tronto points out,[48] some acts of care must be undertaken without the prospect of such feedback. Examples include a nurse caring for an unconscious or incapacitated patient who is unable to give feedback on the treatment received. Such feedback cannot be a necessary requirement of genuine care.

The modeling-as-care approach avoids these difficulties because the epistemological basis for action is different. It is not the interests or the good of the one cared for that primarily drive action, but knowledge of the social world and existing practices and standards. Knowledge of these allow the carer to act authoritatively in these situations and so provide a suggestive model that helps the cared-for be successful in such practices and contexts. The carer's assumptions about the cared-for, however, are relatively limited. This approach lessens the need to know the mind of another—their desires or needs—as a condition of effective care, minimizing the dangers of misrepresentation and potentially oppressive assumptions and inferences.

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48   Joan Tronto, "Women and Caring: What Can Feminists Learn about Morality from Caring?', in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, ed. Alison Jaggar and Susan Bordo (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 172–87.

A second objection raised against the conventional three-step model of caring is what Vrinda Dalmiya labels the "No Exit" Objection.[49] If attentive caring and meeting present need are the most important ethical acts, then a person might do too much caring, sacrificing their own interests or losing their own integrity. How can they avoid remaining committed to relationships from which they ought to extract themselves, such as abusive spousal relations?

With modeling as care, although carers are clearly linked to the cared for, they are not hostage to cared-for's needs or interests. This is because it is not present and clear need that stimulates action. Instead, the carer's focus lies elsewhere, on integrating the mentee into various social situations and practices. This can be genuine care without being unconditional and vulnerable to dependency and abuse. If the cared-for consistently ignores the model provided, such modeling could be suspended. Confucius, for example, is clear about there being conditions under which a mentoring relationship can be ended, captured in *Analects* 7.8:

> The Master said, "To one who is not eager I do not reveal anything, nor do I explain anything to one who is not communicative. If I raise one corner for someone and he cannot come back with the other three, I do not go on."

Finally, modeling as care addresses objections to care ethics based on objections to partiality. Care ethics is founded on partiality and a narrow focus of attention and energy on a select group of people such as family or friends. As a result, it is often accused of being too exclusive, and lacking an adequate account of what is due to strangers or those with whom a personal relationship or bond does not exist.

But with care as modeling, the acts of care that are intended to benefit a selected group of cared-for individuals can also benefit those for whom such strong caring motivations do not exist. This is because the example set or the model offered are to some extent public and can therefore be studied by a wider audience. Further, modeling is a way to get the limited motivations of partial attachment to benefit a much broader range of people than that which the agent was actually motivated to help. For example, a father might coach a football team primarily because of his desire to introduce his son to the joys and challenges of football, but all who join the team can benefit from his example.

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49   Vrinda Dalmiya, "Caring Comparisons: Thoughts on Comparative Care Ethics," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (2009): 196.

The effect appears especially striking when compared with caring that focuses solely on the nurture on one particular being and responding to their needs.

Attempts to defend partiality by highlighting the extended range of the benefits that derive from it might not persuade someone who insists that a more thorough-going impartiality is integral to morally-justified conduct. However, it is not clear that this claim should be accepted. For example, if close personal relationships are accepted as necessary for the good life, and these can only be developed by investing time and energy into a select few relationships, then there is a morally-respectable constraint on the demand to act or reason impartially.

10   Concluding Remarks

This account of modeling-as-care, derived from classic Confucian thought, can enhance the ongoing debate about how the elusive ideal of "care" is to be understood. It offers a paradigm of care that contrasts with the familiar mother-child relationship, and instead invites us to explore the kinds of personal relationships that develop in the context of mentor-mentee interaction. Distilling such an account from prominent Confucian concepts and values does not mean that Confucian ethics is best conceptualized as an ethics of care, however. Here, I have argued that there are several important differences between the three-step model of caring articulated by Noddings and others, and the normative practices sketched in classical Confucian texts. Most significantly, I argued, the classical Confucians, do not regard ideal conduct as most fundamentally being about close empathic connection and deep personal familiarity. Various other practices and concepts that constitute personal attachment are at least as important to action as care. These include according with social norms governing well-defined relationships, participation in shared social events such as ritual, which seek to realise a kind of shared social delight among participants, and being susceptible to powerful motivations such as aversion to shame and reverence towards certain esteemed others. The thought that Confucian ethics might be a form of relational ethics but not an ethics of care confirms the importance of treating Confucian ethics as an independent approach to ethics, not to be treated reductively, as an exotic expression of an already familiar moral theory. It also invites further comparative work and conceptual borrowings to further develop the framework presented here, with the aim of enriching both approaches. The attempt to marry the two perspectives thus ends in an amicable split: the two orientations part ways but on beneficial terms.

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