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5

The Confucian Account of Freedom*

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Since the early twentieth century, Confucianism has often been criticized harshly for being fundamentally authoritarian, and for imposing rules of propriety (*li*) to limit individual freedom. The Western ideas of "choice" and "freedom" seemed to have no place in the works of Confucius or his successors. To the contrary, Confucians advocated abundant traditional ritual codes of behavior and required every individual member of the society to observe these rituals. Not only outward behavior patterns were regulated, even a person's thoughts were supposed to follow what is ritually appropriate. From social and political realms to family relationships, Confucianism was taken to be the foundation of a hierarchic order. Emperor Xian Zong of the Ming Dynasty (明憲宗) wrote,

> Under Heaven, not one day can pass without the Way of Confucius. Why is this so? Because when the Way of Confucius is

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> there, the social order is straight and the ethical principles are manifested; everything under Heaven is placed appropriately in their positions. ...Confucianism is where the weal and woe of the people are dependent upon, and the peace and chaos of the state are contingent on. Those who rule the land under Heaven really cannot spare Confucianism even for just a single day.[1]

Within this social order, those who were in subordinate positions had to follow the superordinate, though the superordinate were supposed to take the responsibility of guiding and protecting the subordinate in return. Not only social and political suppression was legitimized under the banner of Confucianism, family tragedies often resulted in part from the enforcement of Confucian rules of propriety. As Wm. Theodore de Bary says, during the revolution in the early twentieth century in China, especially in the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which was a breaking point between old and new, Confucianism was made to stand for all that was backward and benighted in China, including political corruption and repression, the suppression of women, concubinage, female infanticide, illiteracy, etc. Even today, says de Bary, Confucianism is still employed to justify the rulership by a political elite and by a party dictatorship allegedly for the people. The "dramatic appearance of the 'Goddess of Democracy' at T'ian-an-men," which is either "inspired by the Statue of Liberty (a French creation) or by the classic female impersonation of 'Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité'" would "least of all be identified with anything Chinese or with Confucian tradition" (see de Bary 1991, 103-8). Christina Whitman points out that "the Confucians rejected the Legalist position precisely because it left some areas free. Persuasion was preferred to compulsion as a means of regulating behavior—not because it would leave more room for deviance from social norms, but because it would result in more consistent conformity" (Whitman 1985, 93).

These assessments of Confucianism contain a great deal of truth. Without the slightest intention to defend any oppressive or repressive form of government or tradition, I will argue, however, that Confucianism entails a positive account of freedom. I will try to show that Confucius, and his main successor Mencius, upheld values that are expressed in Western philosophy by the term "freedom," though their views about necessary conditions for freedom and how to achieve freedom are different from the predominant views on the same subject in the West. I will also try to explain that their views on freedom are no less plausible than their popular Western rivals, and that they are highly relevant and significant to the contemporary world.

[1] Quoted from a stone tablet erected in 1468 in the Confucius Temple at Qu Fu. The tablet is known as "Da Cheng Bei"—the Tablet of Great Completion.

Since "freedom" is itself a complicated and controversial notion, for the convenience of our discussion, I would like to provide a rather simplified working map of differing concepts of "freedom," and argue from there that the Confucian account of freedom makes good sense in all areas of the map. We may first follow the convention of differentiating a "negative sense of freedom" from a "positive sense of freedom." "Negative" refers to the absence of constraints and coercion, and is thus known as the "*freedom from.*" "Positive" refers to the ability to choose and initiate one's own action, and is thus also known as the "*freedom to.*" According to this distinction, a prisoner in a cell may be free in the positive sense but not in the negative sense. We may further divide both the "negative freedom" and the "positive freedom" into two senses. The two senses of the "negative freedom" are (N1) the lack of internal constraints and coercion, including, but not limited to the lack of necessary knowledge to perform certain action, and (N2) the lack of external constraints and coercion, including, but not limited to the availability of alternatives and information. According to this distinction, a new chess player may be free to make her moves in the second sense but not in the first, and a prisoner may be free to escape in the first sense but not in the second. The two senses of the "positive freedom" are (P1) the freedom of the will or the possibility of choice, and (P2) self-determination or the exercise of initiative. According to this distinction, a person who is brainwashed to act in no way but that which his master wishes him to would be free in the sense of self-determination but not in the sense of having free will, and the Buridan's ass, which I will discuss

later, would be free in the sense of having free will, but lacks freedom in the sense of self-determination.

I

In his famous short autobiography, Confucius says "At the age of seventy, I was able to follow my heart-mind (*xin*)'s desires-wills (*yu*) without overstepping the lines 七十而從心所欲, 不逾矩."[2] This short statement entails rich layers of meaning that are directly and profoundly relevant to the topic of freedom.

First of all, the phrase "to follow the heart-mind's desires-wills without overstepping the lines" indicates a state of *freedom to* do what he wants (positive freedom). Though the word *xin* 心 in Chinese means both heart and mind, and the word *yu* 欲 means both desire and will, the statement entails that the "heart" part and the "mind" part of the *xin* (and thus desires and will) were not in perfect union before Confucius reached the age of seventy. Here we see a power of the mind that is not simply identical with the heart's desires. When the mind informed him where the "lines" were, before the age of seventy, his heart still wanted to do otherwise. For this reason he (the mind) was not able to let his heart take the lead to do whatever it desired. He had to exercise his free will to choose the right path, and regulate his heart's desires so they would not go out of the lines. At the age of seventy Confucius felt he could finally trust his heart's desires. The trust was an authorization from the mind that supervised the heart's desires, based on the fact that the heart was cultivated well enough that it had no more desires to overstep the lines. This interpretation does not necessarily require us to split the Confucian heart-mind into two separate entities. It only requires us to see the sophistication of the Confucian heart-mind, to see that it performs multiple functions of thinking, feeling, willing, desiring, and decision-making.

[2] Confucius, The *Analects*, 2:4. Further references to the book will be marked by the relevant chapter and passage numbers in parentheses. The translation is mainly based on D. C. Lau's (New York: Penguin Books, 1979) and Ames/Rosemont's (New York, Ballantine Books, 1998). Occasionally I take the liberty of altering a few words to make the translation more accurate in the given context.

Also entailed in the passage is an idea about the *freedom from* constraints, restrictions, and coercion. Even though the statement looks exactly like the opposite, as it clearly says that there were lines that Confucius was not supposed to overstep, the real message, however, is that the lines, which were restrictions to him, no longer existed to him as restrictions. After his life-long cultivation, his heart had no more improper desires or ill wills that had to be regulated and restricted. When a person has no intention to shoplift, the surveillance cameras in the shop means no restriction to the person. Similarly, when a person has cultivated herself so well that there is no more desire to do anything inappropriate, the person is free from moral restrictions in the same sense. It does not mean that there are no more moral codes and other norms; it means that those codes and norms are no longer restrictions to the person. They are restrictions only when the agent feels uncomfortable with them and has a desire to go against them.

Having said that, the statement entails both the "freedom to" and the "freedom from," it must be noted that the freedom is not a state of indifference to dispositions. It is rather a state of no-hindrance resulting from cultivated spontaneity, a state of having dispositions to do what the moral norms require effortlessly. The dispositions include developed benevolent tendencies (what Mencius calls "the Four Incipient Tendencies," namely, the Heart of Compassion, the Heart of Shame, The Heart of Courtesy and Modesty, and the Heart of Right and Wrong), and ritual habits guided by the rich knowledge and wisdom of how to apply them. They are so deeply embodied that they become the person's second nature, and the person is therefore able to act in accordance with them spontaneously and effortlessly. This state is essentially no different from the Daoist idea of *wuwei* 無爲, the action of non-action, wonderfully illustrated by Zhuangzi's famous story of Cook Ding. While Cook Ding is able to cut up an ox so skilfully that he lets his spirit move his arms and legs freely, like watching an event taking place by itself, and he enjoys his own action in an aesthetic spirit of "*you* 遊" (free wandering), the well-cultivated Confucian is also able to "set the sights on the Way,

sustain with virtue, lean upon human-heartedness, and wander (*you*) in artistic creativity" (7:6).

People usually conceive freedom of the will as a state of autonomy. A free agent in this sense is one who makes autonomous decisions, and not being impelled by any inclinations or dispositions. If one decides to follow certain norms freely, the norms are chosen as right and good by the agent as one of the options that one is not impelled to take, not even by one's own psychological inclinations. In the autobiographic statement of Confucius, however, the norms are followed exactly as his psychological inclinations lean toward. This is the reason why Confucian ethics becomes "descriptive psychology," as Chad Hansen puts it. It describes what the sages incline. For this reason, Hansen concludes that "Confucianism has no doctrine of freedom" (Hansen 1972, 170). Under this concept of freedom, i.e. as a state of being indifferent to inclinations, not only Confucianism, but even the whole Chinese philosophical tradition lacks this dimension. When A. C. Graham said that it would be naive to look for the exact word for the Western idea of liberty or freedom in Chinese culture,[3] he also had this idea of freedom in mind. Graham was quite right in identifying the Chinese concept of *ziran* 自然—"being so of itself"—as the counterpart. In the state of being so of itself, there is no exercise of the will to limit and regulate actions done in accordance with one's dispositions. Graham also uses "spontaneity" to translate the concept of *ziran*, and says, "For Chinese moral philosophizing, the good is what the wisest spontaneously prefer" (Graham 1995, 302).

It might be puzzling that Chinese philosophers, Confucius and Mencius included, had never clearly raised the issue of freedom of the will. But this fact may be conceived as something fortunate, if not insightful, in Chinese philosophy. Upon close examination, we may notice a connection between P1 and N1, namely the freedom of the will and the freedom from internal constraints. If we take P1 to mean

[3] Graham uses the word "liberty." But his use of the word seems to be synonymous to the word "freedom."

total indifference to any inclinations, it would require the total freedom in the sense of N1. Yet the total freedom in the sense of N1 would be self-defeating, since it would mean that, on the one hand, the person is not constrained by the lack of knowledge, character, and other dispositions to perform the intended act, and on the other hand, the person is not even led in any direction by the presence of knowledge, character, and other dispositions necessary for a successful performance of the act. It would also make P2 (self-determination) impossible. Confucius and other major traditional Chinese philosophers never took an individual person as an indifferent choice-maker who can disconnect from his or her characters and dispositions. Not only is it impossible for anyone to be free from dispositions, but even if we assume that one could be totally indifferent to dispositions, the person would be like the Buridan's ass, which starved to death between two equally good piles of hay, because it could not find a reason to go to one pile and not the other. Some may take Buridan's ass as an exceptional case, as rarely a person would confront alternatives that are exactly equal in goodness. But in every rational deliberation, if one does not have any inclination, how can one even find reason to go to one alternative and not another? Furthermore, if freedom is indifference, the person should be indifferent to the choice he makes and be able to choose between making the choice and not making the choice. The person has to choose the choice, and for the same reason, he has to choose the choice to choose the choice. This regress will go backward infinitely. The result is obvious—the person will not be able to make any choice, unless, at some point she lets it go and simply chooses! Once when Confucius was asked whether a person should think three times before taking an action, Confucius said "twice is enough" (*Analects*, 5:20). Clearly Confucius was aware of the fact that too much deliberation is restrictive, and having to deliberate too much is a sign of lacking freedom. To be free in the positive sense, one has to avoid two extremes. One extreme is to be impelled by blind impulses, and the other extreme is to have no impulses that lead in any direction. Neither of the extremes is a state of freedom. The freedom has to be somewhere in between. The Confucian cultivated spontaneity is such a golden mean. A good example is playing chess. A chess master obviously enjoys more free-

dom than an uncultivated newcomer who knows nothing about chess. The newcomer either follows blind impulses or holds a chess piece without even knowing how to deliberate. The freedom that the master enjoys is the result of the master's rich experience, knowledge, talent, and the ability of maintaining an optimal psychological and physiological condition.

Many Western philosophers had more or less awareness of the problems entailed in the notion of freedom as indifference, and expressed reservations toward the notion. For example, Descartes takes it to be the "lowest grade" of freedom. He writes,

> [T]he indifference that I observe when no reason moves me more in one direction than in another is the lowest level of freedom; it evinces no perfection in it, but rather a defect in my knowledge, or a certain negation. Were I always to see clearly what is true and good, I would never deliberate about is to be judged or chosen. Thus, although I may be entirely free, I could never for that reason be indifferent. (Descartes 1980, 81)

The kind of freedom that Descartes upholds is called by David Hall and Roger Ames the "formalist" notion, a notion shared by Pythagoras, Plato, Spinoza and Hegel. According to the formalist position, freedom is the knowledge of the eternity or the necessity (see Hall & Ames 1995, 167 and 97-98). A. C. Graham interpreted Confucianism exactly in terms of formalism. For Graham, the Confucian sages are those who are wise; and the wisest, he says, are those who know all the relevant facts (Graham 1995, 302). But this interpretation renders Confucianism far too intellectual than it could permit. For Confucianism, being wise in the sense of knowing relevant facts or truth is not the only qualification, and not even the most important qualification, of a sage or even a *junzi* (君子 exemplary person). To know what is good by the intellect alone is not only impossible (one has to embody the good to know its goodness), but even if it were possible, it would not be enough for a person to be free in the Confucian sense of cultivated spontaneity. One must fully embody the knowledge and make it her own disposition. A person who has to fight against dispositions and desires to stay good is not as free as one who does not have to fight against these forces. Confucius advises a person to be

cultivated in music, in literature, in rituals, in one's habits and temperament, etc., and become a well-rounded human being. "Those who know are not perplexed," Confucius says; but there is more. He also says that one must be *Ren* (仁 benevolent) to be not worrisome, and courageous to be not afraid (9:29). From a Confucian perspective these qualities are no less important than knowledge is with regards to freedom.

For the same reason, the Confucian cultivated spontaneity is also different from the Kantian absolute spontaneity (see Kant 1960, 45n). The Kantian absolute spontaneity is the spontaneity of pure reason, which is separated from inclinations such as desires and aversions. For Kant, our desires and aversions reflect the natural aspect of us. They are governed by causation, and cannot govern themselves. Only pure reason, in John Rawls's words, can be the "court of appeal concerning its own constitution and its principles and guidelines for directing its own activities" (Rawls 2000, 280). The Confucian would say, however, that absolute spontaneity is still spontaneity—it is impossible for reason to appeal endlessly of its own decisions. Secondly, if it makes sense to call the absolute spontaneity a state of freedom, it makes more sense to speak of the cultivated spontaneity as a state of freedom. In the Kantian absolute spontaneity, pure reason is not yet in harmony with inclinations, and is therefore endangered by the predeterminism from the natural forces of desires and aversions. In the Confucian cultivated spontaneity, the desires and aversions are attuned and are therefore no longer purely "natural" forces. They have been modified and purified by the subject and are therefore in harmony with the moral reason. They become the embodiment or the materialization of moral reason. This harmony allows the individual's moral actions to be more fully his or her own than the Kantian absolute spontaneity, in which the moral actions are still partially against the agent him/herself.

II

I have more than once indicated, in the previous section, that the autobiographic statement of Confucius entails that for Confucius, freedom is a state achieved after, or gained through, long time cultivation. In Confucius' own case, he set his mind at learning since the age of fifteen, and he was not free in the sense of being able to follow his heart's will (P1) without overstepping the lines (N2) until the age of seventy. This point is not only important to the Confucian account of the positive freedom, including his approach to the freedom of the will, it is also important to the Confucian account of the negative freedom, the freedom from constraints and coercion. It is natural to infer from the statement that freedom of action in general, and political freedom as a particular part of it, is not simply a matter of some natural rights that a person is born into and enjoys without having to do anything to earn them. Though Confucius' failure to advocate basic human rights is a drawback of his theory, the recognition of the importance of cultivation is his contribution. An individual's personal cultivation is certainly relevant to his or her freedom, political or non-political, both in the sense of how much one is able to exercise or gain one's rights, and in the sense of not "overstepping the lines" and consequently losing the rights one already possesses. In this section, I want to draw some further implications from the Confucian cultivation with regard to the concept of negative freedom, or more specifically, the relationship between N1 and N2.

Confucius' autobiographic statement informs us that the Confucian cultivation, as a way of achieving freedom, is primarily a cultivation of oneself, not fighting against others or removing external constraints. The *Analects* of Confucius contains quite a number of passages that advise people to cultivate themselves rather than to put restrictions on others. For instance, "If one sets strict standards for oneself and makes allowances for others when making demands on them, one will stay clear of ill will" (15:15). "When you meet someone better than yourself, turn your thoughts to becoming his equal. When you meet someone not good, look within and examine your own self" (4:17). "It is not the failure of others to appreciate your abilities that should trouble you, but rather your failure to appreciate theirs" (1:16). When things go wrong in a country, the Confucian ideal ruler blames himself (20:1). "What the gentleman seeks, he

seeks within himself; what the small man seeks, he seeks in others" (15:21). Confucius even describes *ren*, the central quality of an exemplary person, in part as "overcoming the self" (12:1). Through self-cultivation a person should become morally sensitive, compassionate, courageous, and wise. With these qualities, one's heart-mind is able to remain undisturbed (*budongxin* 不動心) confronting seductions and threats. The *Daxue* (大學 *Great Learning*) shows clearly how this self-cultivation will bring one freedom to make great achievements, such as regulating a family, governing well a state, and bringing peace to the world.

Indeed, all major Eastern philosophical traditions stress self-cultivation as a way of achieving freedom. The fundamental teaching of Hinduism is that "Atman [the true self] is [identical with] Brahman [the 'self' of the universe]." For the Hinduist, to achieve freedom is to eliminate the illusory self, which people normally conceive to be an entity separated from, and in opposition to, the world. Buddhism denies the existence of any substantial self, whether Atman or Brahman. Buddhists believe that the craving for getting a hold of the self is the very source of suffering. To achieve freedom (mainly from suffering) is for the Buddhist essentially getting rid of the illusion and living accordingly. Daoism advocates harmony with nature, and for that purpose it teaches the virtue of non-striving. By "daily drop" (of conventional knowledge and moral codes, of desires and expectations), and "sitting forgetfully," one achieves the freedom of being in harmony with the universe. In an overall comparison to these other Eastern traditions, Confucianism stands out as the most positive and constructive one. The other three major Eastern traditions are all predominantly oriented toward some kind of "negation,"—as their emphasis on "elimination," "detachment," "drop" and "non-striving" indicates. Confucianism aims more at constructing and establishing the moral subjectivity. If we say that all the four major Eastern traditions aim at the unity between "Heaven and human," and they all try to achieve the unity through self-cultivation, we may say that the other three tend to get the unity by negating the self so that there will be nothing to be constrained, but the Confucian tradition tries to construct a self and let Heaven be displayed through human moral subjectivity. No other tradition had the aspiration to say "to establish

the heart for Heaven and Earth 爲天地立心" like the Confucians. The sense of mission makes the secular sacred, and it turns external constraints into conditions through which the moral subjectivity (and thus autonomy) is able to display itself and realize its value. Mencius discovered through his own experience that this is not a mere devotion of faith, for he was able to actually feel his vital energy, *qi* 氣, filling the space between Heaven and Earth.[4] Mencius says: "An exemplary person steeps himself in the Way because he wishes to find it in himself. When he finds it in himself, he will be at ease in it; when he is at ease in it, he can draw deeply upon it; when he can draw deeply upon it, he finds sources of help wherever he turns" (4B:14). The cultivated person can have such a powerful presence in front of others that he or she can affect others without using physical power. The force is much more effective than physical power—while physical power enforces from without, moral power affects others from within. Physical power can only result in uniformity; internal affection results in harmony. Mencius even claims that "the myriad things are all here at my disposal" (7A:4).[5] This level of "freedom to" do whatever one likes to do does sound quite mystical, but the philosophical point relevant to our current topic is that the passages in Mencius show how the Confucian cultivation is a positive construction of the greater self, in which the autonomy becomes more than the autonomy of an individual person, but an extended autonomy of the unity between the individual and Heaven.

One may raise the objection that two things normally considered vital to the freedom of action are not stressed by Confucius. One is the availability of alternatives to choose from, and the other is the availability of information about options or alternatives. One may also argue that Confucius' self-cultivation is in fact a way of internalization or indoctrination of social norms that restricts freedom. However, it is not difficult to understand the reason behind this. What is more vital to freedom, the availability of many alternatives to choose from or the ability to choose what is good for oneself? Which of the two gives me more freedom, the availability of drugs that destroy myself or the knowledge and disposition to stay away from them? When the latter is absent, the availability of the former is actually a threat to my freedom. Before one can reach the stage of cultivated spontaneity, one still needs to be constrained by "the lines," and the lines are necessary guides for one to reach the stage. Confucius' saying that "the common people can be made to follow a path, but not to know" (8:9)[6] is often criticized, for nothing seems more evident than from this saying that Confucianism is authoritarian, and is oppressive of human freedom. But it does not take much investigation before one realizes that by this saying Confucius could not have meant that it would be better to keep the common people ignorant and powerless unconditionally. The entire spirit of Confucianism is to establish humanity and not to just establish an elite class. One obvious indication is that his school was open to anyone who sincerely wanted to learn (7:7, 15:39). What he meant must be that, before a person reaches a certain level of maturity in cultivation, the person is unable to understand the reason for following the lines. Therefore, pedagogically, the rulers (as common people's guardians) should first work on letting people follow the correct path rather than trying to let them understand it and have the power to go astray. His intention must be like the intention behind today's movie ratings and drug regulations—it is for their own good that we keep our children away from seeing or having something. Because the availability of these things tends to deprive the availability of what is genuinely good for them. In this sense, too much freedom in the sense of N2 is deprivation of the

[4] *Mencius*, Book 2, Part A, Section 2. Further references to the book will be marked by relevant book numbers, parts and section numbers in parentheses. The translation is mainly D. C. Lau's (New York: Penguin Books, 1970).

[5] Here I use A. C. Graham's translation in his *Disputers of the Tao*, which I think to be closer to the original Chinese text than the translation "all the ten thousand things are here in me," by D. C. Lau.

[6] There can be (at least) two mutually compatible interpretations of the saying, —I mean they can both be right—one descriptive and the other normative: Under one interpretation it is saying that it is a fact that the common people are difficult to be made to understand, and under the other it is saying that the rulers should just let the common people follow and not let them know. As the two are not incompatible, I take it both ways.

possibility of the freedom in the sense of N1, that is obtainable only through self-cultivation.

III

There is yet another important dimension of the Confucian account of freedom—relatedness. Though the dimension is not as clearly entailed in the autobiographic statement as those discussed in the previous two sections, it can be readily seen from the overall spirit of Confucianism. The "lines" that Confucius was able to follow effortlessly at the age of seventy are not absolute commandments issued from God or from some lawmakers, nor are they totally subjective choices of autonomous individuals. They are insights about what is most appropriate in one's encounters with others, mostly formalized as ritual proprieties and passed down from generation to generation as traditional social customs. One metaphysical background of the "lines" is the Confucian notion of a human being as essentially a social existence, not an abstract autonomous choice maker. Every person is an axis of social relationships, and is defined by the relationships. It implies that, for any one to be free, he or she has to achieve the freedom within the relationships, and not in isolation from them. David Hall and Roger Ames made this point very clear in their classical work *Thinking through Confucius*:

> Western social theories are weighted in favor of the notion of individual absoluteness which suggests that they have difficulty making an appropriate case for social interdependence without challenging the viability of the notion of freedom and autonomy. The case is the opposite for the classical Confucian view. There the preference for individual relativity is quite evident. Any attempt to shift that view in the direction of individual absoluteness threatens the very structure of the Confucian social vision. (Hall & Ames 1987, 152.)

According to Confucianism, not only is an individual unable to be isolated from others, whether it is one's family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, rulers, the society, or *tian* 天—Heaven; one's relatedness to others is in fact a necessary condition for one to be free. The point

can be illustrated nicely by comparing two stories. One is Sartre's story about a student who came to him for advice on whether he should leave France to join the forces against Nazi Germany, or stay with his mother and help her to carry on. The young man was torn between two moral duties that apparently couldn't both be fulfilled at the same time. On the one hand was his duty to take care of his mother, who was suffering tremendously from the half-treason of her husband and the death of her older son, and on the other hand was his duty to his country.

Sartre tells us that nothing could help the student to make his decision. Ethical theories could not help because he had to choose which theory to follow and how to interpret a theory in the given situation. Instincts or feelings could not help because it was his decision and his final action that would give a feeling value, not the other way around. Other people could not help because before others could offer him advice, he had to choose whom he should go to for advice; in that case, he already knew, more or less, what advice he was going to get. Sartre's answer to the student was: "You are free, choose, that is, invent" (see Sartre 1993, 24-28). By using this example, Sartre wants to show the "forlornness" of a free individual, and show that the forlornness will inevitably be accompanied by the feelings of anguish and despair.

Interestingly, there is a well-known Chinese story that parallels the Sartrean story cited above, yet the Chinese story leads to an opposite conclusion. Song dynasty Chinese general Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142) had a dilemma similar to Sartre's student—He had to choose between either to defend his country against invaders, or to stay at home to take care of his aged mother. The solution, however, did not come from his own "invention," it came to him from his mother—she urged him to go to defend his country so strongly that she even tattooed four Chinese characters, "*jinzhong baoguo* [盡忠報國, to exert absolute loyalty and repay your country]" on his back. Her action dismissed Yue Fei's dilemma; because given her action, he would be going against her will if he would still chose to stay with her, and that would not be a way of caring for her.

The difference between the two stories is not that Yue Fei was simply lucky and the young man in Sartre's story unlucky, or that the

Chinese society and the French society were different. The Confucian would say that a person is not a "nothingness" who in loneliness faces all the choices. A person lives in a particular society and is in particular relations with the people around him or her. As Henry Rosemont puts it,

> For the early Confucians there can be no me in isolation, to be considered abstractly: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others. Moreover, these roles are interconnected in that the relations in which I stand to some people affect directly the relations in which I stand with others, to the extent that it would be misleading to say that I 'play' or 'perform' these roles; on the contrary, for Confucius I am my roles. (Rosemont 1991, 72)

In other words, the Sartrean idea of a human being as an absolute autonomous, self-determining individual, detached from all the relations and lonely makes decisions, would be considered by the Confucians to be fundamentally flawed. Neither Yue Fei nor Sartre's student was an isolated individual. The fact that Yue Fei became a model of both a good son and a patriot was not simply the result of his own choice. His mother made it possible for him to become both. She did not stand outside as a passive observer, waiting for her son to make a decision. The original dilemma was one of human relationship, and it was resolved through the human relationship. The deciding factor in the solution was not Yue Fei's decision of accepting his mother's help; it was his mother's help that made his consequential decision part of a good solution. Certainly it was possible for Yue Fei's mother to offer no help. But even if that were the case it would still not change the fact that Yue Fei and his mother were related in a specific way and they were both responsible for the outcome of the situation. Yue Fei would still not be alone, and the result would still be the consequence of the actions of all the parties involved.

In Sartre's student's case, Confucius would say that whether the student came to Sartre or not, he and Sartre were in a student-teacher relationship. This relationship was not the student's choice. It was a fact that both the student and Sartre had a moral obligation to acknowledge. As a teacher, Sartre could have given his student some

more practical suggestions or help, such as making some arrangements for taking care of his mother, suggesting that there may be ways of joining the resistance against Nazi without leaving France, so that he can take care of his mother at the same time, etc. Even if after all these efforts, the problem still remained, it would still be different from what he actually did—a cold rejection of offering any help. What Sartre did to the student was not simply telling the student a factual situation about the student; it was a demonstration of his attitude toward the student. Furthermore, Sartre's words were not simply descriptive; they were also performative. His advice was an action that had effects on the student—it deepened the student's feeling of loneliness, anguish and despair. The difference between the two stories, according to the Confucian, is that in one story, the related individuals' joint action led to a solution of a dilemma whereas in the other, the related individuals' actions deepened a dilemma. In both cases, the dilemmas did not belong to one individual. They were both dilemmas confronting all the relevant parties.

Just like water is a necessary condition for swimming, and adjusting bodily movement according to the nature of water increases a person's freedom in the water, one's relationship with a specific environment is a necessary condition for an individual to be free within the given environment, and adjusting the relationship accordingly increases the person's freedom in it. Separated from social relations, one cannot even talk about being free in the society. In order to be free in a given society, a person has to deal with the people that he or she is in a specific relationship with. To be free in a given society requires a clear sense of one's own social position and relationship with others, and adjustment of the relationships to the best possible state. To "let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son" (12:11), looking from this perspective, is also advice for getting freedom. Of course, one should not misinterpret the Confucian point of having a harmonious relation with the "other" as having no conflict with the "other" at any cost. The state of "harmony" is different from the state of a peaceful co-existence. People can have a peaceful co-existence with a tyrant in a totalitarian state, as long as they submit to the force of the tyrant. Harmony means a peaceful, pleasant, and mutually benefiting and constructive state of co-

existence. It is a state in which one is both autonomous and essentially dependent on others. The dependency on others is such that one is unable to be free without the others, and the autonomy is such that one is able to express one's own humanity and individuality within the relationships, as one engages oneself in dynamic interactions with others, including transforming and being transformed by others. Self-cultivation and interaction with others are not two separate stages, as we can see that Confucius himself did not wait until the age of seventy to teach his students.

It is said that by stressing the importance of self-cultivation, of relationships and social responsibilities of the traditional feudalistic Chinese society, Confucius should be held responsible for China's lack of the concept of human rights, which in turn implies the lack of freedom. Individuals should be respected as such, and have the right to make their own choices, not merely act as a part of a social structure. From the Confucian point of view, however, the idea of human rights is justifiable only if the people will be better off with the rights than without the rights, and that is not always the case. It would be silly to grant young children the right to play with fire. When common people have not cultivated themselves to a certain level, some amount of paternalism is always needed. On the other hand, for those who have well cultivated themselves, and harmoniously interact with each other, the emphasis of rights is not only redundant; it impairs the very harmony itself.[7] It would be silly and hurtful for Yue Fei to claim to his mother that it was his choice, and she had no right to give him an order. The idea of human rights entails a contractual relation to bind the government and the people externally, not a reciprocal correlative relation that connects people internally in harmony.

We must not gloss over the fact that partly because Confucianism lacked some features of the right-oriented idea of freedom that is prevalent in the West, the Chinese suffered greatly from totalitarianism, from exploitation and manipulation by their corrupted rulers. It

[7] Chenyang Li also made this point in his book, *The Tao Encounters the West* (see Li 1999, 175).

seems to me that the Confucian view of freedom can be applied mainly in two stages of human/social development. One is an early stage of human civilization when common people needed more guidance than the exercise of autonomy, and sage rulers were in power, and the other is a stage when common people on average and the society as a whole are civilized enough to live harmoniously in a reciprocal and correlative way. Between these two stages, the right-oriented idea of freedom ought to be on duty to a great extent, since Confucianism provides ordinary individuals no powerful protection against tyrants, nor does it put legal restrictions on rulers. However, it does not mean that Confucianism has no value today. In today's world, the spirit of self-cultivation needs to be revitalized. Under the strong influence of modern Western individualism, self is assumed and even worshipped as simply an entity that deserves respect, understanding, and satisfaction, not something that also needs to be cultivated, rectified, and transformed in its relationship with others. Lacking proper cultivation within human relationships, many young people are now slaves of the "wants" created by the public media. To cultivate oneself and regulate wants/desires is an important way of achieving freedom. Education must help a person to get freedom by transforming a person, rather than just letting the person know relevant information on how to remove external constraints. More humane personal relationships must be built in our more and more right-oriented individualistic societies for people to re-acquaint with others as conditions of, rather than limitations to our freedom.

IV

To summarize the discussion, with the conceptual "map" provided at the beginning of this paper in mind, we find that for Confucians, "positive freedom" or freedom to do what one wants should be defined as a cultivated spontaneity, and not a fictitious state of indifference. The Confucian autonomy is a state of embodied moral subjectivity, and not merely the possession of knowledge about what is good and right, nor the dictatorship of the pure practical reason. We also find that, with regard to "negative freedom" or freedom from constraints, Confucians placed self-cultivation over the removal of

external constraints. Their cultivated spontaneity requires positive establishment of moral subjectivity, and not merely negative removal of constraints, whether internal or external. The presence of some constraints can be constructive to the development of freedom. Furthermore, we find that for Confucians, inter-relatedness between individuals is not only inescapable, it is a necessary condition for an individual to be free in her social environment. The notion of an autonomous decision-maker separated from social relations is conceptually flawed and practically prohibitive to the emergence of genuinely free members of a free society. In comparison to this account of freedom, the conceptual map of the "negative" and the "positive" senses of freedom looks pale, mechanical, and disintegrated, even though it served the purpose of guiding us to see the fully embodied, integrated parts of the Confucian account.

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