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RECONSTRUCTIONIST CONFUCIANISM

Rethinking Morality after the West

by

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Several chapters were revised in the spring of 2008 when I was conducting Fulbright research in Notre Dame Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame. I benefited significantly from conversations with Alasdair MacIntyre and David Solomon on the nature of virtue ethics in general and of Confucian virtue ethics in particular. Due to the time constraint for completing this book, I have failed to integrate everything I have learned from them into the book.

Numerous relatives, friends, colleagues, and students have contributed to the production of this book in one way or another. In particular, I am grateful to my teachers who taught me valuable knowledge involved in this book: those at Baotou College of Medicine who instructed me in medical theories and techniques, those at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences who brought me to the areas of the philosophy of science and philosophy of medicine, and those at Rice University who imparted to me Western philosophy and civilization. Most of all, I wish to thank my intellectual mentor, Professor H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., who has offered incessant love and support to my study, work, and life ever since I came to know him in 1989. Without his invaluable assistance, this book would never have appeared.

Finally, a note of thanks should go to my colleagues in the Department of Public and Social Administration and the Governance in Asia Research Centre of the City University of Hong Kong. They have provided most generous assistance and guidance to my reconstructionist Confucian ethical endeavors since I joined the university in 2000.

A Note on Chinese Sources and Characters

Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from classical Confucian texts are usually adapted from the translations of James Legge. Other translations, especially the Analects and Mencius by D.C. Lau and Xunzi by John Knoblock, were consulted. I have used pinyin romanization and standard Chinese characters to indicate Chinese key words and concepts in each chapter. But I do not attempt to maintain the same English words for Confucian key concepts, especially ren (仁), in different chapters. Rather, I select different words to suit particular contexts.
## Contents

### Part I  Beyond Individualism: Familism as the Key to Virtuous Social Structure

1 Confucian Morality: Why It Is in Tension with Contemporary Western Moral Commitments ............................................. 3

2 Virtue, Ren, and Familial Roles: Deflating Concerns with Individual Rights and Equality .................................................. 11
   2.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 11
   2.2 Are Rights Persuasive? ......................................................... 12
   2.3 The Confucian Virtue-Based Personhood ................................. 14
   2.4 Reflections on Equal Rights Vs. Unequal Virtues ................... 18
   2.5 Towards a Reconstructionist Confucian Bioethics .................... 21

3 A Family-Oriented Civil Society: Treating People as Unequals .. 23
   3.1 Introduction: Civil Society, Rule of Law and Conflicting World Views ................................................................. 23
   3.2 Liberal Democratic Civil Society: Treating People as Equals .......................... 26
   3.3 Confucian Anti-Egalitarian Civil Society: Treating People as Relatives .......................... 28
   3.4 The Family: Stumbling Block for Justice or Keystone of Virtue? ............................................................ 32
   3.5 Is a Confucian Family-Oriented Civil Society Possible? .......... 34
   3.6 Concluding Reflections: Towards a Familist Civil Society .......................... 39

### Part II  Virtue as a Way of Life: Social Justice Reconsidered

4 Virtue as the True Character of Social Obligations: Why Rawlsian Social Justice is Vicious .................................................. 45
   4.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 45
   4.2 The Distribution of Instrumental Goods Vs. The Pursuit of Intrinsic Virtues ......................................................... 47
   4.3 Equality Vs. Harmony ............................................................. 51
   4.4 Liberal Democracy Vs. Confucian Aristocracy ....................... 55
   4.5 Liberal Rights Vs. Confucian Rights ........................................ 56
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Neutral Vs. Non-Neutral</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Election Vs. Examination</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 Contractarian Neutrality Vs. Private-Property Economy</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Giving Priority to Virtue Over Justice and Rebuilding Chinese Health Care Principles</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 The Challenges of Health Care in Today’s China</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Two Misleading Ethical Views</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Reconstructionist Confucian Ethical Principles for Health Care</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 The Principle of Ren-Yi (Humanity-Righteousness)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2 The Principle of Cheng-Xin (Sincerity-Fidelity)</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Health Care Policy Reforms</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Which Care? Whose Responsibility? And Why family? Filial Piety and Long Term Care for the Elderly</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 A Shocking Fact: Contemporary Elderly Persons in East Asia Tend to Commit Suicide</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Family Care: Reminiscence or Renaissance?</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Why has Family Care Become Difficult in Contemporary Society?</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Children’s Responsibility: The Manifestation of De (Virtue, 德) and Xiao (Filial Piety, 孝)</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Why Family? A Confucian Account of the Family for Elderly Care</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part III The Market, the Goodness of Profit, and the Proper Character of Chinese Public Policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Towards a Directed, Benevolent Market Polity: Looking Beyond Social Democratic Approaches to Health Care</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 An Introduction to Confucian Health Care Policy and Bioethics</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Beyond Social Democracy and Limited Democracy: A Directed Benevolent Market Polity in the Pacific Rim</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 The Confucian Perspective: Why It Is So Different</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Chinese Health Care Reforms: Towards a Confucian Health Care Policy</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 A View from Asia: Not Bioethics as Usual</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 How Egalitarianism Corrupted Chinese Medicine: Recovering the Synergy of the Pursuit of Virtue and Profit</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Three Varieties of Medical Corruption in Contemporary China</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Distortions of the Medical Market</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Proposals for Policy Reform</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.4 Restructuring Chinese Medical Ethics: Some Reflections on Confucian Moral Resources ................. 128
8.5 Looking to the Future: Taking Both the Market and Traditional Morality Seriously .................... 133

9 Honor, Shame, and the Pursuit of Excellence: Towards a Confucian Business Ethics ...................... 135
  9.1 Understanding Confucian Management Concerns ............................................................... 135
  9.2 Rights Alone Are Not Enough ......................................................................................... 136
  9.3 Honor, Shame, and Motivation ......................................................................................... 139
  9.4 An Honor-Based Vs. a Rights-Based Corporate Ethos ...................................................... 141
  9.5 Why Rights Language is Blind to the Particularity of Culturally-Embedded Management Styles .... 143
  9.6 Conclusion: Beyond Rights and Towards Excellence ..................................................... 144

10 Human Dominion Over Nature: Following the Sages ............................................................... 147
  10.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................... 147
  10.2 A Weak Anthropocentric and Cosmic-Principle-Oriented Account of Man and Nature ............. 150
  10.3 Nature as a Garden ........................................................................................................ 154
  10.4 Placing the Natural Order Within a Human Order that Reflects Cosmic Principles ................. 156
  10.5 Home, Ritual, and Eternity ............................................................................................. 159
  10.6 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 161

Part IV Rites, Not Rights: Towards a Richer Vision of the Human Condition

11 Rites as the Foundations of Human Civilization: Rethinking the Role of the Confucian Li .............. 165
  11.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................... 165
  11.2 Li as the Universal Social Practices of the Confucian Tradition ....................................... 167
  11.3 Two Types of the Confucian Rituals .................................................................................. 171
  11.4 The Function of Ritual and the Feeling of Shame ............................................................. 176
  11.5 Concluding Remarks ..................................................................................................... 180
  11.6 Postscript: A Thesis on Confucian Ritual Reform .......................................................... 181

12 How Should We Solve Moral Dissensus? Liberals and Libertarians Have It All Wrong ...................... 189
  12.1 Introduction: How Should We Deal with Moral Dissensus? ............................................. 189
  12.2 Bioethical Globalization: The Liberal View ...................................................................... 190
  12.3 Bioethical Communitization: The Libertarian View ....................................................... 196
  12.4 Bioethical Localization: The Confucian Insight .............................................................. 201
  12.5 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 211

13 Appeal to Rites and Personhood ................................................................................................. 215
  13.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................... 215
13.2 The “Appeal to Creation” Conception of Personhood: The Judeo-Christian Conception .................................. 216
13.3 The “Appeal to Rights” Conceptions of Personhood: Modern Western Conceptions .................................. 218
13.4 The Transcendental Conception of Personhood: A General Conception .................................................. 221
13.5 The “Appeal to Rites” Conception of Personhood: A Confucian Conception ............................................... 224
13.6 Concluding Remarks ............................................. 229

14 Restoring the Confucian Personality and Filling the Moral Vacuum in Contemporary China .................................. 231
14.1 The Confucian Personality ........................................ 231
14.2 The Communist Personality Disorder .......................... 235
14.3 The Post-Communist Personality Disorder ..................... 238
14.4 Can Confucianism Fill the Moral Vacuum in Contemporary China? ......................................................... 243
14.5 Concluding Remarks ............................................. 248

Appendix Liberalism and Confucianism: A Disputatious Dialogue between Andrew Brennan and Ruiping Fan .............. 251

References ........................................................................ 279

Index .............................................................................. 289
Introduction

This volume has a number of points of departure. First, it is a response to the character of contemporary China: China is regaining its position as a major economic and political power. This development raises the question of the moral resources on which China can draw in order to meet its own challenges and the common challenges of humankind. Another point of departure is the moral crisis of the contemporary West. This crisis is in part socio-economic: the population basis and moral commitment needed to sustain the social welfare state are weakening, a point made by the current Roman pontiff, Benedict XVI in his book with Marcello Pera, *Without Roots* (2007). There has been a radical separation of contemporary Western European culture from its traditional roots, as well as an unwillingness to produce sufficient children for the future. As China is regaining its power, the question is whether it can escape the moral malaise of the West. This volume offers a contribution from Chinese cultural resources to this task. It is written in the conviction that the moral insights of Confucian thought are precisely those needed to fill the moral vacuum developing in post-communist China and to address similar problems in the West.

The term *Reconstructionist Confucianism* identifies the project of reclaiming and articulating moral resources from the Confucian tradition so as to meet contemporary moral and public policy challenges. This term is chosen to indicate a view reconstructed from Confucian cultural resources that have been put in disarray by a number of dramatic events in the 20th century, ranging from the collapse of the last Chinese dynasty (1911) through the May Fourth movement (1919) to the Cultural Revolution (1966). After a period during which traditional Chinese cultural and moral resources were radically marginalized from the public life of China, there is now a critical need to recover these resources.

The term *Reconstructionist Confucianism* is also used to distinguish this account of Confucian thought from Neo-Confucian attempts to recast the Confucian heritage in light of modern Western values. Contemporary Neo-Confucian scholars read back into the Confucian tradition modern Western moral and political concerns so as to bring Confucian thought in line with dominant modern Western conceits. In this way, Confucian heritage is in great measure colonized by modern Western notions, such as justice, human rights, and egalitarianism. This retrospective colonization of Confucian thought effects by translating key Chinese moral and political concepts
in the light of Western moral and political assumptions, and thereby takes from Confucian resources the opportunity to deal with the problems that face the contemporary West as well as China. Accordingly, Neo-Confucian approaches are not only untrue to the Confucian tradition itself, but also disable the capacities of Confucian wisdom to address the problems of our times. As China enters into a period when it can again contribute in its own way to world culture, it must authentically draw on its own resources.

The reader will find that the problems facing the West will look different when seen from a Confucian perspective. This is the case because Confucian thought invites one to step outside of the individualistic moral discourse of the West with its accent on individual rights, equality, autonomy, and social justice, and instead to approach moral challenges within a moral vision that gives accent to a life of virtue (de, 德), the autonomy of the family (jia, 家), and the cardinal role of rituals (li, 礼), the social rites that define and sustain social interactions. The Confucian moral paradigm is not that of the contemporary liberal individualist West.

The first chapter of the first section of this volume develops the claim that Confucian moral thought is embedded in a set of moral-epistemological, axiological, and metaphysical premises quite different from those of dominant Western culture. To begin with, Confucianism affirms that virtue is learned first and foremost in the family, and within the bonds of obligations that structure family relationships. As a consequence, kinship love, the priority of family love over love for others outside the family, is central to Confucian moral epistemology. It is in the family that one first and foundationally learns the life of virtue. Secondly, rules for action gain their significance and force within a fabric of social relations, in particular, family relations. Accordingly, Confucian moral rules, rather than being structured by abstract general principles for right action, indicate ways in which one can achieve virtue. Finally, the family as a whole possesses a moral status and significance independent of its individual members so that the flourishing of the family is more than the flourishing of its individual members. Accordingly, the flourishing of the family cannot be reduced to the flourishing of its members. Within this moral context, favoritism to family members does not ipso facto appear as corrupt until proven otherwise. Instead, when set within a life of Confucian virtue, familial favoritism is itself virtuous. As this chapter argues, a restoration of a Confucian appreciation of virtue in Chinese life will require a restoration of an authentic Confucian familism that can combat corruption not through abstract principles but through the restoration of a lived experience of Confucian virtue. One will need once again to be able to distinguish vicious familism from virtuous familism.

The next chapter critically explores the attempt to read into Confucian moral and political theory liberal social democratic concerns with liberty, equality, and human rights. Not only do such attempts involve a naïve presentism, but they distort the significance of such cardinal Confucian concepts as ren (仁, humanity) and li (ritual) as well as the authenticity of an interdependent family life. The result is that rather than gaining genuine Confucian insights upon which one can draw in confronting contemporary moral challenges, one has only secured shadows of already established Western concepts. A Confucian future is made to
resemble the West’s liberal democratic present. Rather than finding guidance about how to become a junzi (君子), an exemplary person of good character and moral integrity, one is instead given Western moral principles with a Chinese flavor. This chapter shows that such rights-based concerns and their focus on moral principles abstracted from a life of virtue distorts what Confucian thought can contribute to a better appreciation of proper moral life and bioethical inquiry.

Given these distinguishing features of Confucian moral and political thought, what kind of civil society would it support? This question is a difficult one from a Western moral and political perspective because the commitments to liberty, equality, and meritocracy that frame the contemporary social democratic, egalitarian ethos of the West have no roots in Confucian thought. As already noted, Confucianism is non-egalitarian in treating persons as relatives, not as anonymous equals. A Confucian civil society will therefore be framed by harmony (he, 和), love (ai, 愛), and respect (yi, 義). As a result, rather than holding that society should promote individual interests by letting each choose the form of life one wishes to live, Confucian familism embeds individual choices within a commitment to the flourishing of the family. Because Confucian morality is built around rituals, civil society will be structured in terms of rituals that, following ren, require one first to love one’s family members, then to extend this love to others in proportion to the importance of one’s relationship. Confucian civil society will therefore be characterized by an interaction and interconnection of affective relationships. A Chinese civil society will therefore require both a robust commitment to the rule of law as well as to the nurturing of a familism which sustains virtue for both the flourishing of the individual as well as of the family. Seen in this light, the family is a keystone of virtue rather than a stumbling block in the pursuit of justice.

The second section of this volume is an exploration of the Confucian approach to issues of social justice. The first chapter of this section shows why the Rawlsian attempt to pursue social justice is vicious rather than virtuous. Because John Rawls (1971) is concerned about the proper distribution of resources and social status, not the pursuit of virtue, his concerns contrast foundationally with, and are distinct from, those of a Confucian account of virtue. Where Rawls focuses on equality, Confucian thought is directed to harmony. Rather than affirming liberal democratic values, the Confucian understanding of social interconnectedness affirms an aristocracy grounded in virtue. These differences arise because Rawls offers an account that is intended to bind persons who share a thin theory, but not a thick account of the good. Although Rawls takes his account as comprehensive, it is nevertheless insufficient, from a Confucian perspective, to frame a proper structure of society. It lacks a thick appreciation of virtue and human flourishing to which Confucians invite us all in order to build an appropriate society.

Among the difficulties of the Rawlsian account is that it is incompatible with the Confucian insights regarding ren and li; namely, that family love should be given a priority in one’s pursuit of universal human love through ritual practice. In virtuously pursuing that which is right and dealing in a sincere and faithful fashion with others, one will need to acknowledge both the importance of assisting society’s weak and poor while at the same time nurturing a family-centered, virtue-oriented,
and non-egalitarian approach to public policy. The point is that a thoroughgoing commitment to fair equality of opportunity would not only require setting aside the family and the favouritism that family-centered virtue nourishes, but it would as well undermine the intimate relations that within the family educate in virtue. Since the development of virtue is always family-centered, it is non-egalitarian and non-individualistic. Confucians cannot accept the liberal individualist conception of human rights. What they can uphold is only a list of rights derived from virtue obligations as a fallback apparatus.

Among the various consequences of this state of affairs is that a Confucian bioethics is not grounded in principles, a lâ Beauchamp and Childress (2001), but rather in a way of life that nurtures virtue through specific ritual rules. The result is that when Confucians use the term “principle” to summarize a set of moral considerations, they are addressing issues radically different from those engaged by Beauchamp and Childress in their appeal to their so-called middle-level principles. First, unlike Beauchamp and Childress, Confucians recognize that general principles cannot, and should not, dominate over and even substitute for specific ritual rules in directing moral conduct or policy formulation. Secondly, the Confucian principles of ren-yi (仁義, humanity and righteousness) and cheng-xin (誠信, sincerity and fidelity) identify particular groundings of, and ways to, a virtuous mode of life. Rather than being middle-level principles, they sum up important considerations foundational to a virtuous life through ritual practice. They invite one to a life of virtue in which one performs suitable rituals to become a virtuous physician, nurse, patient, or family member of patient. Accordingly, a Confucian bioethics through its appeal to such principles calls on physicians, patients, and families to enter into a virtue-oriented engagement in medicine. It is for this reason that a reform of the contemporary Chinese health care system and its successful integration in the market will need to work, at least in part, from the bottom up, from virtue to policy, not just from the top down, from principle to particular choices.

The final chapter in this section explores a particular instance of the challenge of applying Confucian moral resources to contemporary health care policy: it addresses the question of how Chinese moral values such as de (virtue) and xiao (孝, filial piety), which are embedded in Confucian moral and social philosophy, should guide policy for the long-term care of the elderly. This chapter recognizes that the family has become a puzzle and a challenge in most contemporary societies. Family members are often both geographically and morally distant from each other. Moreover, many family members have lost the appreciation of filial piety, which would bring them to accept the responsibility on the part of children to care for their elderly parents. In fact, in many societies the idea of children having moral duties to their parents has largely fallen into disarray. This can be remedied only by the Confucian bonds of filial piety realized in the rituals that interconnect children to parents and parents to children. Indeed, Confucians regard filial piety as the supreme virtue of the fundamental dao (道), the way in which humans should live. As this chapter argues, the issue of long-term care for the elderly is not simply one among many bioethical questions, but instead a cardinal moral issue central to the life of virtue.
Health care policy in Singapore, Hong Kong, and mainland China is framed by a set of background moral and political commitments foundationally different from those in Western Europe and North America. In part, the differences lie in the Confucian commitment to a directed benevolent moral polity rather than to the moral vision underlying liberal social democracies. The first chapter of the third section of this volume develops through the concrete issue of health care financing, a point raised more generally in the first two chapters of the previous section. Confucian moral and political thought does not affirm liberal social-democratic structures, such as those framed in the light of Rawlsian commitments. Nor does it endorse limited democracies that could be justified in the light of classical liberal or libertarian commitments. Rawls states that his account of justice as fairness should be understood as a political, not a metaphysical or moral vision (Rawls, 1985). Indeed, Rawls seeks to draw on intuitions that underlie liberal political constitutions to construct his account, while Robert Nozick attempts to establish his libertarian account in terms of individual rights as side constraints (Nozick, 1974). Such intuitions or assumptions are not those that are at roots of the political arrangements structuring Singapore, Hong Kong, and mainland China as well as their health care institutions. Indeed, the Confucian moral and political theory that drives health care policy in much of the Pacific Rim has its roots in quite distinctive understandings, such as those of “benevolent governance” (ren zheng, 仁政). The Confucian moral and political view is grounded in moral experiences of ren and li (namely, rightly-directed ritual behaviour) that do not easily map onto Western moral concerns with rights, duties, and social justice. As this chapter argues, one will not appreciate the Chinese moral and political situation until one has appreciated the quite distinctive roles of such moral considerations as ren and li. Further, one will not be able to craft appropriate Chinese health care reforms unless these reforms are embedded in these foundational, albeit different, moral considerations. Rebuilding an adequate system for the provision of health care, as this chapter argues, will more naturally draw on family-oriented health care savings accounts (as currently illustrated in Singapore) than on social-democratic social insurance systems (as currently illustrated in Canada and Western Europe).

These differences in moral and political perspectives bear on what counts as an appropriate response to the corrupt practices that have come to characterize a significant dimension of Chinese medical care. First, it must be observed that these corrupt practices, which include the over-prescription of indicated drugs, prescription of more expensive medication than needed, and the requirement of more expensive diagnostic work-ups than indicated, resulted not from the introduction of the market into China, but from a moral and health care policy context that perversely diverts the normal human pursuit for better care and better financial rewards. There has been a loss of a Confucian appreciation of the proper role of financial reward to physicians and hospitals in the provision of health care. If one cannot appreciate why profit and reward for quality service is appropriate, one cannot properly direct such concerns for personal gains. Moreover, misguided governmental policies have established artificially low salaries for physicians while providing bonuses to physicians and profits to hospitals from the excess prescription of drugs and the use of
diagnostic procedures that are expensive but are not clearly indicated. This state of affairs, characterized by perverse incentives, has been made worse by a prohibition against patients paying physicians more for higher-quality care resulting in a practice of illegal cash payments (i.e., “red packages” [hongbao, 紅包]). A way out of this maze of corruption will only be found by recognizing both the appropriate role of remuneration for those providing superior service and a regained appreciation of profit as appropriate within a Confucian life of virtue. One needs both a rule of law that rewards virtue and an appreciation of virtue that acknowledges the goodness of profit.

The next chapter turns to the proper role of honor in a Confucian business ethics. Rather than placing centrally concerns regarding forbearance rights, claim rights, and the contractual responsibilities of employers and employees in corporations, a Confucian business ethics recognizes, first and foremost, the indispensable role played by concerns for honour, disgrace, and shame in a proper management ethos. Instead of attempting to promote moral behaviour through an appeal to a network of rights and obligations within a corporation, Confucian business ethics has an other-regarding character that accents honour, disgrace, and shame so as to be community-directed, hierarchy-accepting, supportive of loyalty, evocative of supererogation, and productive of excellence. In contrast with the usual concerns of Western business ethics, a Confucian business ethics invites owners, managers, and employees to enter into a way of life for which rights alone are never sufficient. Confucian morality recognizes that an accent on the rule of law in the absence of the rule of virtue will be incomplete for a proper and prosperous business culture. Absent virtue and given only the rule of law, there will be corruption, despite the presence of apparently well-crafted laws and mission statements concerning rights and obligations.

Confucian moral reflection bears not just on the interrelation of humans in the family, society, the market, and corporations, but it also gives important direction regarding the appropriate relationship of humans to nature. Confucianism affirms an environmental ethic that places the natural order within a human order that reflects cosmic principles. This ethic supports a wise dominion over nature, a dominion guided by the spirit and virtue of sages. The Confucian environmental ethic is not simply anthropocosmic, it is also an anthropocentrism. One could distinguish, for example, among three forms of anthropocentrism regarding their relationship with nature, the differences being illustrated by different sets of obligations to one’s pets. First, a robustly individualistic humanism may claim that humans are in authority over their pets even to the point of being at liberty to torture them. Second, a contractual humanism would hold that different societies are at liberty to establish different rights over pets so that in some societies it would be forbidden and in other societies allowed to serve one’s pets for dinner. Third, a religious humanism would understand one’s obligations to the environment as established by a decree of God (shangdi, 上帝) or Heaven (tien, 天) or one’s general relationships to God or Heaven and the cosmos. The Confucian approach is a special instance of the third understanding. The decree of Heaven is manifested in the anthropocosmic principles of transformation disclosed by the sages. Nature is understood as a
garden to which one must attend and which one must transform in the light of the
anthropocosmic principles. Confucians have always affirmed the agricultural role –
transformation of nature to feed families and build homes within which families can
live. Moreover, because Confucians understand the connection between families
and ancestors, there is a commitment to burial rites which establish the continuity
among persons, family, and eternity. The transformation of nature through the
digging of graves, the burying of bodies, and the building of monuments humanizes
the environment, just as does the tilling of soil and the building of houses. Such
transformation of nature properly embeds nature in human history and brings it
more completely into harmony with Heaven.

This volume closes with a section that explores the centrality of rites in the moral
life. The first chapter provides an account of rites as the foundations of human
civilization by reflecting on the role of the Confucian *li* (ritual) in the Confucian
tradition. Unlike the Neo-Confucians who have attempted to defend Confucian
morality by diluting the role of ritual practices and their specific rules in the tradi-
tion, Reconstructionist Confucianism recognizes that the cardinal Confucian virtue,
*ren* (humanity), cannot be comprehended without referring to the Confucian rit-
ual performance. Neither can *ren* be cultivated and mastered without appeal to
the observance of the rituals. *Pace* the Neo-Confucians, this chapter shows that
Confucian morality is not rooted in any Confucian general principles in separa-
tion from the Confucian rituals, much less the liberal general principles of liberty,
equality, and individual rights. Instead, this chapter argues, the Confucian rituals are
best understood as the Confucian community’s universally-employed, closed social
practices, with their internal goals created and defined by a series of Confucian
constitutive rules, and such internal goals are indispensable to the essential mean-
ing of Confucian culture and morality. Accordingly, the Confucian rituals provide
specific content to Confucian ethics. From this Confucian view, if a society merely
emphasizes or relies on regulative principles (such as the liberal principle of self-
determination) to maintain order, the society cannot be kept in good order for a long
term in which individuals can pursue human flourishing. This is because individuals
need the guidance of constitutive rules to form a stable character for living a good
life, as well as peacefully cooperating in society.

This does not suggest that the Confucian rituals should not be reformed in con-
sideration of Confucian virtue principles. A postscript is added to this chapter to
address the logic and legitimacy of Confucian ritual reforms. A crucial issue is what
a proper relation is between Confucian general virtue principles and specific ritual
rules. Some may want to stress that the general principles of *ren*, like that of “loving
the people” (Analects 12.22), do not refer to the rules of *li* but provide totally inde-
pendent guidance. However, just as it is misleading to understand that *ren* can be
cultivated by mechanically observing the rules of *li* without the need to follow these
principles, it is also misleading to understand that *ren* can be realized by following
these principles alone, without the need to observe the rules of *li*. This postscript
argues that a complete Confucian view is not one-sidedly towards either the general
principles or the ritual rules, but rather insists that both the principles and the rules
are necessary – and together are sufficient – for one to nurture and express Confucian
virtue. The ritual rules are necessary because they provide concrete guidance for moral conduct. The general principles are necessary because they provide reasons for the defenses, excuses, and exceptions of the application of a ritual. Accordingly, the Confucian virtue principles are primarily the ritual principles to play their function along with the ritual rules for the Confucian moral life. They hold a dialectical, mutually-affecting relation which may be called a Confucian reflective equilibrium: all things considered, sometimes a principle trumps a rule, and other times a rule trumps a principle. This Confucian “reflective equilibrium” (between Confucian virtue principles and ritual rules) is remarkably different from the reflective equilibrium that Rawls adopts (between principles of justice and considered judgments) in constructing his theory of justice. Rawls’ considered judgments are not specific rules entrenched in practices or rituals, but are rather “new” beliefs resulting from reflections – reflections made under conditions guided by principles, or senses of principles. As a result, from the Confucian view, Rawlsian liberalism fails to give due respect to established practices and rules.

The proper character of the relationship among cultures and societies in an age of globalization is not a matter of little controversy. Social-democratic liberals affirm a globalization grounded in individual liberty and rights, along with an accent on egalitarianism, all without an appeal to any particular conception of the good life or of human flourishing. In liberal social-democratic accounts, a pattern for globalization is rooted in diverse claims regarding human rights, but without any substantive vision of human virtue. Libertarian approaches step back from an affirmation of a web of claim rights and the endorsement of a long list of human rights, but nevertheless affirm the centrality of permission as a universal principle when persons meet as moral strangers within global markets. A Confucian approach to globalization is critical of these visions for interaction across the world because of the Confucian recognition that humans are ritual-centered beings. Even global interactions must be ritual-governed. That is, proper international communication and cooperation must be embodied and fulfilled through human rites (li), no matter how sparse. The view is that one should perform different rites with different people in order correctly to achieve relational love, a love that is by its nature not egalitarian. Because rituals are realized in their fullness in particular families and in particular communities, the Confucian approach to globalization will have an accent on localization. It will not regard the whole world as a community, as would social-democratic liberals. Nor will it regard the world as constituted out of isolated moral communities bound together merely by the market, contracts, and agreements, as would libertarians. Instead, Confucians will recognize that communities are always local and that we can only collaborate virtuously at a global level through appropriate ritual.

The third chapter of this section turns to a ritual-centered personhood. Rather than embedding the status of personhood within a creative act of God (as with Christian accounts), within an abstract understanding of moral law (as with Immanuel Kant), or within a set of moral considerations (as with certain contemporary conceptions), Confucianism appeals to rites as the source of personhood and as the expression of its significance. Persons are ritual-engaging beings so that to be a person is to be able to participate in communal ceremonial rites; that
is, to understand and engage in *li* activities. The Confucian appreciation of ritual is always concretely present in human ceremonies, such as sacrifices, marriages, funerals, and the complex rituals governing the relationships between parents and children, princes and their subjects, husbands and wives, the older and the young, and friends with friends. The complex and rich Confucian notion of humanity (*ren*) can only be parsed by reference to this fabric of rituals. Accordingly, the Confucian conception of personhood is practice-oriented, relation-based, and degree-relevant. It is practice-oriented because the importance of personhood is derived from and embedded in the Confucian rites. It is relation-based because a Confucian cannot be identified independently of one’s roles in the basic human relationships. And it is degree-relevant because one can always become even more of a “true” person through ritual practice.

Contemporary China is characterized by a moral crisis, a moral vacuum. This moral vacuum has been produced by the disconnect between the immense success of China since the market reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping and by the disarray of many traditional Confucian moral structures. The astonishing transformation of the economic realities of China over the last three decades can only be explained by the presence of vital elements of Confucian morality. Chinese were at once able successfully to enter into the market and transform China into one of the most productive market economies of the world. The operative morality of the economy of China is Confucian, although incomplete and even distorted. Yet the announced morality of the public forum and of the public discourse has remained socialist, if not communist. The result is a moral vacuum, moral disorientation, and corruption. In this last chapter of the book, I argue that the so-called moral vacuum facing current China is not due to the emergence of a new post-communist, social-moral personality, as some contend (Wang, 2002). It is rather in great measure due to a deformation, distortion, or disabling of morally healthy Confucian moral agency, the Confucian personality. This chapter adopts the concept of personality disorder to coin two particular Chinese personality disorders to account for the contemporary Chinese circumstances: “the communist personality disorder” for the Chinese communist nightmare from 1950s to 1970s and “the post-communist personality disorder” for the moral vacuum from the 1980s onward. Accordingly, the problems that face China, and indeed the world, can only be remedied by the restoration of a healthy Confucian moral personality marked by a family-centeredness, an appreciation of the goodness of material wealth within the constraints of virtue, a recognition of the relation-specific character of obligations of altruism, and a relation-skilled attention to harmony and cooperation within families, societies, and markets.

Much of the West is characterized by a similar moral vacuum. This vacuum has been engendered on the one hand by the collapse of traditional Christian understandings of morality and pursuit of virtue, and on the other hand by a successful production of widespread wealth that has nurtured egoistic and hedonistically-directed personalities. It is for this reason that the subtitle of this volume is *Rethinking Morality after the West*. The dominant morality of the West is in disarray and cannot be called on to aid China in this crisis. An appreciation of the threat of this moral vacuum has pushed Russia, for instance, to a de facto re-establishment
of the Orthodox Christian faith. China must make its contribution to addressing and curing this global moral crisis. This volume takes seriously what China can and must contribute to world culture in order to address this global moral disorientation. Most accounts of the human goods and human flourishing within the dominant secular individualist culture of the West are too insubstantial to direct a life of virtue. Help must come from the East.

Appended to this volume is a dialogue between the author of this volume, characterized as “Mr. Con” (i.e., the author as both Confucian and conservative in the sense of affirming the enduring values of Confucian thought) and “Dr. Lib” (i.e., Professor Andrew Brennan) who defends a liberal position. The dialogue explores the question whether the Confucian family-based communitarian ethic can be rendered compatible with liberal individualism. The answer is in the negative. In this dialogue, I advance the position that a tradition develops through reconstructing, not changing, its core values. Reconstruction is needed because a tradition often faces incomplete interpretation, misunderstanding, malpractice, or even distortion of its core values, just as what has happened to the Confucian tradition in the last century. However, reconstructing is not changing – if the core values of a tradition are changed, the tradition is ended. The core Confucian moral and political understandings are rooted in a virtue ethics, structured by unique cardinal notions, such as ren and li, shaped by a non-individualistic appreciation of the centrality of the family as an ontological entity with its own sovereignty and commitments, and sustained by a series of shared ritual practices. They are in tension with those grounding social democratic moral and political principles. Accordingly, an attempt to “modernize” Confucianism by bringing it within the ambit of liberal ethical commitments would be a way of destroying it. The authentic Confucian familist way of life through virtue cultivation and ritual performance cannot, and should not, be changed.