# Against Individualism

90

A CONFUCIAN RETHINKING

OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF MORALITY,

POLITICS, FAMILY, AND RELIGION



HENRY ROSEMONT JR.

Against Individualism

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This Book is Affectionately Dedicated to Three Fellow Confucians

(Whether they admit to it or not)

Marthe Chandler and Michael Nylan

Who have brought much joy to my life for many years

and

JoAnn Rosemont

Who has brought meaning to my life over a lifetime

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# **Prologue**

When society requires to be rebuilt, there is no use in attempting to rebuild it on the old plan.

—John Stuart Mill<sup>[1]</sup>

The genesis of this book has been a long-standing belief that the problems facing the world today—poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, hatred, violence and more—cannot even be addressed properly, much less resolved, within the confines of a capitalist economic system. Based supposedly on competition, even at its best capitalism *must* generate losers as well as winners. And as the winners win more they grow fewer in number while the losers increase. The richness of the resources of the earth have been so great that their rapacious exploitation for the past two hundred years has enabled us to ignore that simple logical fact. But now, as the resources grow scarce it is becoming more expensive to exploit and sell them at an increased profit, and if that is the only way we can secure potable water in the near future, we may expect more and more people to die of thirst. Or suffocate from not being able to afford air purifiers or oxygen concentrators. Or secure medicines for their afflictions. Or quadruple the number of human beings (currently about 1 billion) who go to bed hungry every night—and much more, as these and related evils continue to grow apace. [2]

Worse, championing competition rather than cooperation is certainly not a rational organizing idea for creating and maintaining a peaceful and just society or world order under any circumstances, nor is the notion that people are best motivated by the prospect of material goods when material goods are decidedly finite, and when sought in excess, mind and soul numbing. Such ideas require an ideology<sup>[3]</sup> with a strong moral component to undergird them, and that ideology, generated during the Enlightenment (not coincidentally), celebrated human beings as free and autonomous, rights-holding, rational individuals, (usually adding "self-interested" to the list) with appropriate moralities, political constitutions and legal systems to support both the overall ideology and the economic system. Absent the former, the latter would in all probability have been abandoned some time ago.

It is not only those dimensions of the ideology that holds together an unjust, increasingly inefficient, environmentally destructive and democracy-degrading economic order that I will be challenging herein, but also its psychological and spiritual dimensions. The isolating independence attendant on the rise of individuals as social contractors could be suffered for some time because of the increase in wealth for many, but even more so because of the continuing impact of the Protestant Reformation, wherein each individual was thought to stand in a personal religious relation to God. But God does not seem to be as everywhere any longer as He was earlier thought to be, and despite the efforts of many evangelicals, cannot be expected

to return, leaving us increasingly unrelated to anything, or, as the poet A. E. Housman put it: [4]

I, a stranger and afraid,

in a world I never made.

But that ideology has become so deeply seated in us that it is almost impossible to think in other than individualistic terms morally, economically, politically, religiously, and not least, psychologically. (Of course I'm an individual! And free! What else could I be? Or want to be?) A related reason why it is so difficult to think outside the capitalist box is that this ideology includes the belief that the only possible alternative to being an autonomous individual in a capitalist society is to become a faceless member of a communist (or fascist) one; just another sheep in the herd.

As capitalism has become more global in scope and influence, the ideology of the autonomous individual has followed along, with the United States continuing to lead the way with everything from trade agreements to military invasions and occupations. In the cultural sphere, the materialistic ethos grows more prevalent, with the elites from each nation increasingly appearing to have more in common with each other than with other members of their own culture. As its pervasiveness grows, the ideology that undergirds the capitalist system makes fundamental critiques of it more difficult to come by. It may be that the system cannot undergo basic changes under any circumstances, but they cannot even be seriously contemplated until and unless its regnant ideology is challenged at its core.

One such challenge is the purpose of this book (I'm pretty sure there are more, but must leave it to others to articulate them). I will first attempt to show that the view of human beings as most fundamentally free and rational, autonomous individual selves is almost certainly false, and more than that, mischievous: its celebration and defense of freedom comes at the expense of social justice, and peace. We will then address the question of what account of being a human being we might entertain other than the properly discredited collectivistic one by describing and advancing the views of the early Confucians on what it is to be a role-bearing person, which, suitably modified for contemporary circumstances and sensibilities, I consider a genuinely viable alternative answer to the question of what it is to be a human being. And what we believe it is to be a human being determines in significant measure the kind of moral view we will adopt, and even more basically, affects the growth and sophistication of our moral intuitions that contribute substantially to the eventual morality we want to live by, and the kind of society we desire to live in. In turn, how we develop our moral intuitions will be significantly a function of our own personality (the specific moral intuitions we already have), and our cultural determinants, which involve particular rankings of value priorities. If we wish, therefore, to make of the world a different and more humane "global village" than the one it is becoming we must first develop a different and more humane overall ideology that is incompatible with the one that undergirds the present system.

Overall, then, this is a philosophical book but with numerous political, social and religious undertones, in that I will be taking up issues of contemporary politics and society, cultural movements, the law, patterns of foreign policy, the media, and religion in addition to philosophy *qua* philosophy—both Western and Chinese. It will be clear from the beginning when and why it was written.

Moreover, I wanted to make its arguments accessible to the general reader, not alone my fellow professional philosophers. As a consequence I have endeavored to keep the body of the work relatively free of detailed philosophical references, allusions, and technical vocabulary to the maximum extent possible consistent with scholarly standards of documentation and narrative. The exceptions are Chapter 1, wherein I place the work in the context of contemporary Western philosophy and Chinese philosophy as I see them, and sketch the lexicon, methods, patterns of description, analysis and argumentation that are employed herein. And in Chapter 2 I take up the field of ethical studies, the nature of the discipline, and how I believe it needs augmentation to be appropriate globally (but not "universally!"). Thereafter, philosophical issues of a more technical nature—Western and Chinese—have been placed in the endnotes whenever possible to achieve a smoother narrative in the body of the text itself.

In Chapter 3 the concept of an individual self is examined in its descriptive dimensions, and found wanting. Chapter 4 makes the same point with respect to the idea of an individual self taken normatively. That is to say, after suggesting why and how the concept of an individual self is on all fours with the concept of a ghost, I will argue that it is equally erroneous to claim that we *should* see human beings as individual selves, because of the seeming necessity of the concept to ground our ideas of human rights, or democracy, or justice seen as solely procedural.

The full logical extension of individualism—libertarianism—is the subject of Chapter 5, concluding with a challenge that the libertarian position cannot be defeated so long as attempted refutations continue to be based on the presupposition that human beings are, or should be seen as autonomous individual selves. Put more generally, I will attempt to show that the more that freedom is championed in politics and law, the less social justice will be achieved, or, in a democracy like the United States where wealth is increasingly all-controlling, *can* be achieved.

I will then take up the alternative concept of human beings, inspired by the texts of ancient Confucianism, namely, seeing ourselves and our fellow human beings not as autonomous individuals, but as fundamentally interrelated role-bearers, who *live* those roles, not merely "play" them. Chapter 6 elaborates this alternative conception in terms of a role ethics with the following chapter devoted to the institution in which roles are first learned and practiced, the family. During the course of the discussion I will incorporate contemporary Western ethical insights and arguments against sexism, patriarchy, homophobia and more to complement and add to original Confucian views, which I believe are sufficiently capacious to incorporate smoothly the Western augmentation without distorting either side. Because families will continue to be

necessary institutions for societies both East and West far into the future, "family values" must be re-ordered so that they no longer remain the sole property of religious fundamentalists and political and social arch-conservatives from anywhere in the world. I will be maintaining, in other words, that a role ethics grounded in a general idea of the family is a prime candidate for a cross-cultural approach to ethics.

Chapter 8 is devoted to brief accounts of first, what a human-centered religiousness might be like without invoking ideas of transcendence, divinity, or an immortal soul. Then I will take up the nature and function(s) of rituals for Confucius yesterday, and ourselves today. The spiritual dimensions of role ethics are seen to be as open to the agnostic or atheist as to the religiously devout, because while truly religious in my opinion, Confucian-based role ethics requires no metaphysics or theology at all, and hence no metaphysics or theology that flies in the face of contemporary physics or biology—or conflicts with the metaphysics or theology of any faith tradition. The discussion then returns in Chapter 9 to role-bearing persons in family life in their religious and ritual dimensions, focusing on concern for the dead no less than the living.

Chapter 10 takes the narrative outside the family, first spiritually, then to how role-bearers would think differently than individuals about issues like poverty, retributive and restorative justice, and concludes with the place of role ethics in fostering cross-cultural moral dialogue.

Throughout I will be arguing against rights-claiming, free and autonomous individuals and for role-bearing, interrelated and responsible (thus encumbered) persons. I will of course not be altogether fair to the individualist position. But they have had champions *in excelsis* for over two hundred years, and certainly don't need any assistance from me. And I will press the Confucian persuasion strongly much of the time. But I do not wish to be construed as an apologist therefore, for it is not my intent to legislate how the world really is, or should be, but rather to employ the vision of Confucius as I see it against my own cultural background to help liberate our imaginations about what a better world beyond the ideology of competitive capitalism might be like.

#### **Notes**

#### 1.

Dissertations and Discussions. Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2000, p. 57.

#### <u>2.</u>

Numerous articles have been written on each of these tragedies-in-waiting, most of them gathered together apocalyptically in Jared Diamond's *Guns*, *Germs and Steel*. NY: W.W. Norton, 1999. Matters are even worse now.

#### <u>3.</u>

"Ideology" is often used with pejorative connotations, and I intend that usage here. But not always. One needs an overall belief system in order to give reasons for their actions in the moral, political and social worlds, and that is properly called an ideology. Without an ideology, how do you provide reasons other than self-interest for what you think and do?

#### <u>4.</u>

Last Poems. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1922, Poem xii.

#### <u>5.</u>

The search for the universal, One True Morality cannot any longer be credited in my opinion. Consider the synopsis of the working group of a congress on "global ethics" about the name itself:

Participants from Europe and the U.S. tended to embrace universalist and global language, while those from Africa, Asia, and South America tended to be wary of such language. While all participants were critical of neo-liberal economic policies, those from Asia, Africa, and South America extended this critical view to Western cultural, political, and moral values more generally.

Report of the Organizing Committee on Global Ethics, Lukenya, Kenya, 28 January 2009.

## Chapter 1

# Prolegomena

Everything has already begun before.

— Italo Calvino<sup>[1]</sup>

This book addresses a multiplicity of issues from a variety of fields in a somewhat peculiar way at times. Hence I owe it to readers at the outset to provide additional background materials about how I see and do philosophy, both Western and Chinese, and how I will be proceeding, and why I will be proceeding in such a manner.

There will be many references to the writings of the early Confucians throughout this book, but they are being set against the background of the history of Western philosophy and its contemporary significance, so that is the best place to begin. Because analytic philosophy has been far and away the most important current of philosophical thought in the English-speaking countries, and because that is the tradition in which I received all of my formal training I must confine my attention to that tradition, ignoring others of note, particularly American Pragmatism and the Continental tradition(s). I regret these omissions, for they make this work much less comprehensive than I should have liked it to be. [2]

### On Analytic Philosophy

My colleagues might read the history of that tradition over the past century differently than I have done. But for myself, certain patterns have become increasingly noticeable in recent years. A number of changes in both the form and the content of writings in "the linguistic turn" have been taking place, not alone in the engagement with neuroscientists and psychologists on the nature of consciousness, significant as that has been. One of the major changes, it seems to me, has been increasing awareness that the continued seeking of foundations for human knowledge is much like chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. This turn is by no means due solely to the later work of Richard Rorty, beginning with his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. [4] On the contrary, although Rorty's work has certainly been influential, I would claim that it was through close and extended work in analytic philosophy itself that the intractable nature of foundationalist efforts has become increasingly clear. The spell of foundationalism has also been weakened by ever more sophisticated treatments of non-Western patterns of thought by comparative philosophers, whose work is demonstrating the futility of assuming a be-all and end-all account of the way the world "really is" independently of particular cultures and languages. I will have more to say about comparative philosophy later, but for now want to note how and why the abandonment of searches for the ultimate grounding of any of our ideas parallels the consistent failure to provide an irrefutable argument on behalf of, or contrary to virtually all philosophical claims of any import.

It must be said straightaway that most analytic philosophers have not shown, nor even attempted to show, the futility of foundationalist efforts. On the contrary, a number of them have claimed to have established one. It is when we look at the objections to each philosopher's arguments by other philosophers that we can stand back and ascertain what has been going on in the field.

Consider first the many and varied rigorous investigations into the foundations of mathematics and the nature of mathematical objects throughout much of the twentieth century. The limits of formalism (David Hilbert, Wilhelm Ackerman), intuitionism (L.E.J. Brouwer, Arend Heyting), and logicism (Frege, Russell and Whitehead) as providing just that foundation were only ascertained after each theory had been elaborated, challenged and defended at length over the course of several decades. All three philosophical candidates provided insights into the nature of mathematics, but ground the discipline they did not; they all ran into problems that did not seem capable of resolution within the theory itself, and hence agreement was never reached (nor is it now) on the ultimate grounds for mathematics, or the nature of mathematical objects. Even so, mathematicians have continued and advanced their work, seemingly unconcerned with the "foundationlessness" of their discipline. [5]

As a second example, pressing at length his empiricist *cum* pragmatist views, Willard Quine, in his *Ontological Relativity*, [6] claimed that there are a number of possible

views of what there is, and is not, in the universe, most of them with at least some claim on our allegiance, but incompatible with each other, and no way of ultimately deciding among them on the basis of the available evidence and argumentation. This view has been gaining acceptance in the discipline, along with his arguments that epistemology is not a distinctive discipline, but a sub-field of psychology, and that ultimately his position was a circular (but not vicious) one. He also worked to put to rest (for the most part) the idea that a difference between so-called "analytic" and "synthetic" statements was somehow written into the nature of things independently of cultural and linguistic contexts. In other words, Quine concluded what few other philosophers, but anthropologists began claiming long ago, that "We're all natives now."

A more recent example of how detailed analytic investigations have advanced the discipline of philosophy—even if, in all probability, unintentionally—is the general acceptance once again of the definition of "knowledge" as "justified true belief," despite the inadequacy of all efforts to explain away a seemingly telling counterexample produced by Edmund Gettier in a brief paper. The extensive writings dealing with the issues raised by Gettier were not at all a waste of time, money and ink, it seems to me, for Gettier obliged philosophers to rethink the notion, among others, of whether and why a universal statement should be taken as falsified by a single counterexample, or even a group of them that share similar properties, despite the fact that formal logic requires it. (We all know that if (Ex)—Fx is true, (x)Fx *must* be false.) These writings equally obliged methodological reflection on when it is and when it may not be appropriate to bring the formal apparatus of symbolic logic into analyses otherwise dealing with and in natural language(s).

Closely linked to the change of orientations toward these and other foundationalist efforts, I believe, is the decreasing usage of the words "rational" and "rationality" in the literature of analytic philosophy—often preceded by "pure"—being commonly replaced now by "reasonable" and "reasonableness," in some measure because the latter terms permit an intrusion of the affective into the deliberative process no less than the cognitive that the former does not. Pure rationality will not get us to either intuitionism, logicism or formalism as foundations for mathematics, but all three are eminently reasonable theories, and whichever one a person might accept will be largely a function of which conclusions the investigator finds the *least* counterintuitive or objectionable. Quine's epistemological views, too, can be subjected to this kind of investigation, both for those who are and are not willing to enter into his circle. And while we will continue to live with Gettier examples, they should not interfere unduly with other epistemological and related philosophical investigations being conducted. As logicians we must accept that "All *p*'s are *q*'s" is indeed contradicted by "Here is a p that is not q." But in a great deal of our philosophical efforts it remains that justified true belief is a good working definition of knowledge, and not all counterexamples are telling. These are highly reasonable assumptions on which to base our work, as Robert Brandom did in *Making it Explicit* when he dismissed Gettier counterexamples in an endnote, saying that for his own epistemological analyses, "justified true belief" was a

#### sufficient definition of "knowledge." [11]

In the same way, still another related trend in contemporary analytic philosophy is the examination of beliefs and belief systems in terms of their reasonableness, investigating the patterns of argumentation employed in the presentation of these beliefs and belief systems, as Gary Gutting, [12] for example, has done. Nicholas Rescher has advanced similar analyses in his more recent work on *aporia*, [13] namely, the problem of how to reconcile, in terms of plausibility, a series of premises which individually all have a claim to truth, but are inconsistent taken together.

These observations—and many others that could be adduced—should not be taken to imply that analytic philosophy writ large is little more than a meta-argument for cognitive relativism. The observations do strongly suggest, however, that foundations for our knowledge are probably not going to be found, and that there will always be more than one *reasonable* position, belief, or belief system that one might adopt or maintain on any philosophically non-trivial issue. Or put another way, with another nod to Quine, reasonable people may well differ on what values to assign to their variables. A thoroughgoing relativism is a fairly unpalatable position to maintain, for if standards of rationality might vary arbitrarily, all positions are equally tenable. But *pluralism* in beliefs or belief systems is not only possible, it seems highly probable, as can be seen even more clearly when we turn from metaphysics and epistemology to moral philosophy, which is the subject of Chapter 2.

## Confucian, and Comparative Philosophy

Although this work is not primarily a study in comparative or cross-cultural philosophy, there is much philosophy of a comparative nature in it, consisting of modifications for today of ideas that I have learned from studying the texts of classical Confucianism for many years. I will be advancing a number of those ideas as the best interpretive reading of the *Analects* and other early Confucian texts. But even more will I be advocating the applicability of many of those ideas to the world of today. That is to say, I will basically be advancing what I believe is the best philosophical reading of the *Analects* and related writings, and hence wearing the hat of a Confucian scholar. But I will equally be pressing the Confucian persuasion as a Confucian philosopher, which is a related, but different form of headgear. Hence in addition to what I have said about analytic philosophy I should also say something about comparative philosophy in a sinological context in order to better familiarize readers —not least sinological colleagues—with some additional assumptions not adumbrated earlier, and which will not always be explicit in the main body of the text.

Nuances aside, [15] there are two basic approaches one may take to the study of non-Western philosophical and religious writings with respect to their content (as opposed to their origin, philology/etymology, history, etc.). The first, and by far the most common, has been to seek fundamental similarities between the text(s) under examination against the conceptual history and present background of the Western philosophical and religious heritages. Thus the meta-question most commonly used to interrogate Non-Western texts has been "To what extent do these texts suggest answers to philosophical questions that vex us?"

Some other philosophers, however, more absorbed in the breaks and diversity in the history of Western philosophy than the continuities, and finding non-Western writings not fitting neatly into many Western categories and concerns, tend to ask something more like "To what extent do these texts suggest we could be asking different philosophical questions?" Or to put it another way, we should work hard to understand non-Western texts *in their own terms*, not ours. And in my particular case, I have found the different kinds of questions as helpful both as aids to my translation efforts, and for helping me to see my own intellectual heritage in a different light, less allencompassing and more culture-bound than I had earlier believed.

Both the similarities and the differences approaches, however, can fall afoul, as Ni Peimin, for example, has warned in pressing the importance of personal cultivation in Confucianism:

Even those who insist on differences between mainstream Western philosophy and Confucianism tend to interpret the latter in intellectualistic ways. The consequence, in many cases, is that the more Confucianism is accepted by mainstream Western philosophy, the less it is itself. Ironically, those who pushed Confucianism in this direction thought, either consciously or subconsciously, that

they were doing it a favor. [16]

As an example of the first approach—and to introduce my readers to an unusual dimension of the Confucian persuasion that may aid later understanding—a contemporary scholar might be attempting to find once for all conclusive arguments for a "deflationary" theory of truth as against correspondence, pragmatic, coherence, or semantic theories, and consequently seek insight into the matter by looking at how truth, or a close analogue thereof, was conceptualized in one or more non-Western traditions. Other scholars, of course, might investigate different topics in a similar vein: justice, beauty, logic, human rights, the existence of God, theories of reference, and almost every other topic of current philosophical interest in the West.

Many scholars of a comparativist bent have addressed the non-Western texts in this way, beginning with the early missionaries to East and South Asia in the seventeenth century, (and continuing today). Most such comparativists were and are highly accomplished scholars and translators of the non-Western writings they studied, beginning with the first of them to go to China, Matteo Ricci, who acquired highly sophisticated Chinese skills and practices. He not only studied the classics at length, he memorized many of them. This approach has the salutary effect of giving the "Other" some otherness, yet not so much as to lead to their objectification; seeking proximate similarities rather than differences cross-culturally makes the other less wholly other. [17]

But because he was looking for it with great care, we should not be surprised that Ricci found the concept of the Abrahamic God in Chinese texts, which almost all non-Christian scholars have had difficulty finding since then. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz followed Ricci in his interpretation of Chinese thought, and the German polymath continues to deserve the approbation of all cross-cultural philosophers today for being the first—and for two centuries almost the only—major Western philosopher to take Chinese thought seriously in ethics and politics as well as theology, composing his lengthy *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese* in 1716, the last year of his life. We may still learn much from reading the *Discourse*— about Leibniz's patterns of argumentation, his concerns both political and religious no less than philosophical, and for what the work reflects of the European intellectual *milieu* at the turn of the seventeenth century—still under the influence of the horrors of the earlier Thirty Years War—and why Leibniz defended rigorously the Riccian "accommodationist" position in the Rites Controversy that was raging in Rome at the time. [18]

But we should not read it to learn about the basic philosophical and religious traditions of China. I will have more to say about those traditions in the endnotes, but whatever insights my remarks might provide for readers on this score will come from elaborating what a cosmology, ethics and spirituality might be like that did *not* involve an all-powerful creator god, immortal souls, a transcendental realm, or require beliefs that contradicted some basic laws of physics or biology, common subjects in the *Discourse*. Leibniz richly deserves his stature in the Western philosophical pantheon—and more, because of his ecumenical orientation—but cannot be construed as an

intellectual historian of ancient China.

To illustrate further the problems of addressing non-Western texts with specific modern Western philosophical questions in mind rather than trying to understand them on their own terms to the maximum extent possible, let us return to the seeker of assistance in buttressing arguments on behalf of a deflationary theory of truth.

Any concept or theory of truth claimed to be found in non-Western texts must not, if it is to be useful philosophically, be too dissimilar from our own; [19] traditional Chinese court astronomers were quite advanced in observation and prediction; but the cosmological theory within which they worked is not of much value to contemporary astrophysicists. Since the eighteenth century the concept of truth and attendant theories have been tied to formal logic, language, and linguistics; "is true" and "is false" are predicates of sentences in the indicative mood. Thus, the investigation of truth theory in modern philosophy includes in its concept-cluster (see chapter 2) such additional concepts as *validity*, the *sentence* (as opposed to the word) and its philosophical corollaries *statements* and *propositions*, plus several others like *semantics*, *denotation*, *connotation*, etc.

My readings of early Confucian texts has not turned up lexical equivalents for the terms in the contemporary concept cluster surrounding "truth," *including the term* "*truth*" *itself*, and consequently I would argue that the concept of truth as Western philosophers are interested in it today cannot be found in those texts, and consequently in turn, no theory of truth can be attributed to Kongzi (Confucius) or his early followers.

It may seem highly counterintuitive at first blush that a text like the *Analects* that basically chronicles brief conversations between Kongzi and his students has no statements at all of the form "That's true," but such is indeed the case. How is that possible? [20]

The counterintuitive nature of the claim is largely due to the unspoken presupposition that the basic function of human language is to describe and explain the world in which we live (the sciences have been importantly determinative of this orientation). We use language basically to state the facts. If one's culture sees language primarily as a vehicle for conveying information in this way it had better have terms for distinguishing the accurate from the inaccurate information conveyed, which 'true' and 'false' do very well.

But if we keep in mind that language use is a social practice, it will be easier to appreciate that different cultures may see its basic functions in different ways. In my view the Kongzi (Confucius) of the *Analects* is best understood as using language not to describe the world but as *praxis-guiding discourse*. He is not overly concerned with his students knowing *that*, but rather knowing *how*, knowing *about*, or knowing *to*. He is basically concerned to get them to act and react in certain ways, and to have certain motives and responses to and for their actions and situations. An especially clear

example of the Master's orientation is in 11.22—to which I will return again—when Master Kong gives contradictory answers to the same question about how to proceed in a filial situation, asked by his students Ranyou and Zilu. A third student then asked him why he gave such conflicting answers, to which he replied, "Ranyou is diffident, and so I urged him on. But Zilu has the energy of two, so I sought to rein him in." [21]

Moreover, he is not only devoted to affecting behavior, but cultivating the proper attitudes and feelings toward that behavior, as when he insists that simply providing materially for one's parents does not make one a filial offspring, for even dogs and horses are given that much care. "If you do not revere your parents," he asks, "What is the difference?" (2.7)

There is nothing strange about seeing the basic function of human language in this way, because when not philosophizing and asking "Is that true?" We often say very unusual things regularly, like "A watched pot never boils.," or saying to one person "You're never too old to learn," and the next day "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" to another. This orientation obliges us to attend not simply to *what* is said, but equally, and often more importantly, *why* it was said in the social context in which all language use takes place, in which case we may evaluate the *appropriateness* of what is said, to whom, and when. And altogether unsurprisingly, although classical Chinese has no close lexical equivalent for 'truth' (or 'false')—or any of the terms in its concept-cluster—it does have a graph ( *yi*) which is properly translated as "appropriate," and can be negated as "inappropriate," with reference to speech. [22] "Exemplary persons," said the Master, "would be ashamed if their words outran their deeds." (14.27) Or again: "I am not sure anyone who does not make good on his word is viable as a person." (2.22) Or yet again: "Exemplary persons first accomplish what they are going to say, and only then say it." (2.13)

One way of accounting for what Kongzi is about in these and similar passages throughout the *Analects* would be to use the term *truthfulness*, which, after giving the Chinese text its due difference, reminds us that propositional truth is not the only meaning of the word in English either, however ubiquitous today, for there is another concept-cluster for "truth" in the Western tradition as well, employing such related concepts as *sincerity*, *authenticity*, *efficacy*, *commitment*, *engagement*, *integrity*, and related terms. A medieval gentleman would pledge his honor to his bride-to-be, and she in turn would "plight her troth (truth)" to him. "He who *does* the truth comes to the light" (John 3.21, italics added) might well be understood by Kongzi, and surely so by Pontius Pilate as an answer to his question of Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18.38), as would the meaning of the title of Vaclav Havel's *Living in Truth*. [23]

Thus we may carefully ascribe something like a concept of "truth" to the early Confucians, but it is not a *theory* of truth and it is not what logicians or philosophers of language and mind today are seeking theories of. Rather must we look to the ordinary, and the moral, and the religious life in our own culture to appreciate fully the Chinese on their own terms—and thus our own as well, cast in a new (or very old) light.

I will be using this pattern of narration frequently in the rest of the book, which is the way I have always done comparative philosophy: present as clear a window of Chinese culture as possible, endeavoring thereby to make it a mirror of our own as well. At the same time I must note that while I believe, and shall argue further in the endnotes, that an ethics of roles is the best interpretation of the *Analects*, I certainly would not want to discourage other comparativists from seeking a better one. I haven't found any yet, and have argued at length, with Roger Ames, against proffered alternatives. [24] And much that is not said about role ethics in this book, especially in the Chinese context, will be found in Roger's recent work, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. But even if we are both interpretively mistaken in attributing an ethics of roles to the early Confucians, it would not alter my basic position about the importance of challenging individualism and advancing an ethics of roles, for I could simply re-title this work "Role Ethics: A Different Approach to Moral Philosophy Based on a Creative Misreading of Early Confucian Writings." I will have a bit more to say about the importance of efforts to interpret those texts in their own terms, not ours, in the section on "Concept-clusters" in the next chapter.

I know that some comparativists have rejected my earlier, brief claims about the lack of the concept of individualism in classical Confucianism, but not so much on the basis of argumentation as misunderstanding, believing that I was pointing out a deficiency in Confucian thinking, or that I was focusing on terminological instead of substantive issues. To the contrary, however, I have wanted to maintain that it was a strength of their position, and I make no apologies for being very concerned with terminology in my work, close attentiveness to language being a hallmark of the analytic philosophical enterprise. At the same time I confess to being partly to blame for being misunderstood at times. When I first wrote explicitly about rolebearing persons in Mary Bockover's *Festschrift* for Herbert Fingarette I allowed some space for the individual, and only later did I come to the conclusion that a clear vision of the good life for persons and society did not require any conception of individuals in the modern Western sense at all. This book is the result of the research and reflections that led to that conclusion.

A brief concluding note on this comparative section. First, colleagues who might wince at the use of the blanket "Western" to encompass all Greek and later thought derived therefrom should bear in mind that few people have shrunk from using "Non-Western" philosophy to bring together the intellectual heritages of three-quarters of the human race; for good or ill, the terms complement each other, and greater specificity on both sides will be proffered herein when needed.