

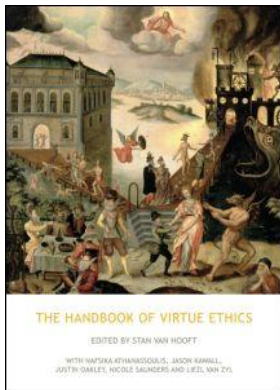
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Classical Confucianism as virtue ethics

Hui-chieh Loy

The interpretation of Confucianism as a form of virtue ethics has been a productive avenue of recent research. Though not without its detractors, this interpretive proposal is fast becoming one of the most recognizable faces of Confucianism's contribution to contemporary discussions in ethics within Anglophone philosophical circles.¹ This chapter will discuss salient features of classical Confucianism that makes it so congenial to its being seen as a form of virtue ethics.

Before proceeding, it would be useful to clarify what is meant by “classical Confucianism” on the one hand, and “virtue ethics” on the other. As indicated above, this chapter will focus on the “classical” variety of Confucianism. By classical Confucianism, I mean the tradition of ethical reflection exemplified by such thinkers as Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi from pre-imperial China (ca. fifth to third century BCE), and the texts associated with their teachings, namely, the *Analects*, *Mencius* and *Xunzi*. So understood, classical Confucianism is distinguished from later developments in Chinese intellectual history, especially those that took place after the introduction of Buddhism from India around the third or fourth century CE (e.g. “Neo-Confucianism”), or with the large-scale intrusion of European ideas into China in the nineteenth century CE (e.g. various forms of “New Confucianism”). Taken as a tradition of ethical reflection, classical Confucianism should also not be confused with various officially promulgated ideologies and their associated social and political forms that claimed the authority of Confucius in different periods of Chinese history. Finally, the discussion will also abstract from the manifest differences (and disagreements) between classical Confucian thinkers in order to focus on the features that they share and that, arguably, mark the distinctiveness of the tradition as a whole.

By virtue ethics is meant, in the first instance, an account of ethics which makes agents, communities, and their excellences of character – that is, virtue – the primary focus of ethical reflection. So understood, virtue ethics is intended to be contrastive with both an ethics of outcome (consequentialism) and an ethics of requirement (deontology). But the formulation above admits of stricter and more permissive interpretations depending on

how much conceptual neatness is sought, or how much untidiness is tolerated, in demarcating virtue ethics from other forms of ethics. At one extreme, one might permissively say that any ethical doctrine that puts a greater emphasis on the assessment of agents and communities (compared with acts and outcomes) counts as a form of virtue ethics (Slote 1992: 89–90). Note that so understood, it has not been ruled out that particular forms of virtue ethics might well be subsumed by either consequentialism or deontology, and virtue ethics is thus not a genuine third alternative (Nussbaum 1999; Hurka 2001). Consequently, one might opt for a more restrictive conception, insisting that only an account of ethics that assigns explanatory priority to agents, communities and their characters counts as virtue ethics. That is, on this type of account, the ethical evaluation of action is conceptually derivative of the prior evaluation of agents or their community. The downside to adopting such a conception of virtue ethics is that doctrines that have traditionally been considered paradigmatic of virtue ethics – that of Aristotle comes to mind – do not actually meet this requirement (Slote 1992: 90).

It will be part of the contention of this chapter that classical Confucianism is a form of virtue ethics, given the permissive rather than restrictive construal of what that position implies. The point must not be overstated: precisely because it is the permissive construal that is being assumed, the claim does not rule out the possibility that classical Confucianism (or the ethical reflection of particular Confucian thinkers) could well have consequentialist or deontological dimensions. To give one example, the interpretation of Confucian (and specifically Mencian) moral doctrine as a form of consequentialism by Manyul Im (2011) need not be incompatible with the claim that Confucianism is a form of virtue ethics permissively construed.

A similar point may be made with reference to the criticisms by Henry Rosemont and Roger Ames against interpreting Confucianism as a form of virtue ethics. Rosemont and Ames grant that while Confucianism “surely bears more of a resemblance to Aristotle than to Kantian or utilitarian ethics”, they do not believe that “virtue ethics” is an “appropriate description of the views on the cultivated moral sensibilities of the Master and his followers” (2009: 45). They believe that classical Confucianism is best described as a *sui generis* “role ethics”.² The worry expressed by Ames and Rosemont, however, seems to assume a rather specific form of virtue ethics – Aristotelian, “grounded in individuals, rationality, and freedom, and with little attention paid philosophically to the family”.³ But if a specifically Aristotelian form of virtue ethics is not assumed to be the standard, there need not be any insurmountable obstacle to seeing “role ethics” as, in fact, an interesting form of virtue ethics (on a permissive rather than restrictive construal of that notion) uniquely espoused by classical Confucianism.

A different worry is whether, if virtue ethics is construed in a permissive rather than restrictive way, the claim that classical Confucianism is a form of virtue ethics loses its philosophical significance. After all, what is the point of the classification if it does not even allow us to rule out the possibility that it may also be some form of consequentialism, deontology or, for that matter, “role ethics”? This is a difficult issue and I can only be indicative here, making clear my assumptions. Suffice it to say that even though the permissive construal of virtue ethics does not neatly distinguish it from consequentialism and deontology, it nonetheless marks a philosophically interesting characteristic of some ethical systems and theories as against others. That is, something philosophically interesting is at stake in making agents, communities, and their excellences of character,

rather than acts and overall consequences of actions, the main focus of ethical evaluation and, beyond that, theorizing. This interest remains even when upon deeper analysis it turns out that some other explanatory foundations are involved further down, as it were. After all, it is not the position of every ethical doctrine that agents, communities, and their excellences of character count for even this much. Second, as we shall see in the following section, the characterization of classical Confucianism also marks crucial differences between classical Confucianism and its chief opponents in the early period, Mohism: differences that can be understood as such within the intellectual historical context of the two rival schools.

THREE FEATURES OF CLASSICAL CONFUCIANISM

Even from a cursory glance, the ethical discussions associated with Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi lend themselves to the strong impression that these early Chinese thinkers espoused some form of virtue ethics. D. C. Lau, in the introduction to his widely used translation of the *Analects*, noted that “Confucius certainly has far more to say about moral character than moral acts” (Lau 1979: 10–11). To flesh out this impression, this section will discuss three salient features of classical Confucianism that support the thesis that it is a form of virtue ethics. The first is the emphasis placed upon the exemplary ethical agent, or *junzi*, and his attributes in classical Confucian ethical discussions. The second is a certain feature of the Confucian presentation of its ethics – the attention paid to detailed and rich descriptions of individual agents and the narratives of their conduct as exemplifying different grades of ethical achievement. This feature is also strongly related to the particularist tendencies within classical Confucianism. The final point is not so much a feature of classical Confucianism as a set of contrasts between it and its main intellectual rival in the ancient period, Mohism. The virtue-ethical dimensions of classical Confucianism are often best highlighted in the contrast between the two schools.

Before discussing the exemplary ethical agent and his attributes we should explicate the term *junzi*, often translated “gentleman” or “superior person”. In the ancient usage, it referred to members of the aristocracy, literally meaning “ruler’s son”, or “princeling”. But around the time of Confucius, it came to mean someone of *noble character* rather than someone possessed of a *noble birth* – a shift that parallels analogous linguistic transformations in other times and places, for instance, the English term *gentleman* as meaning a member of “gentle birth” before it meant a person of good conduct. With that transition, it became an enduring feature of the classical Confucian tradition that its ethical recommendations are often presented as descriptions of what the *junzi* would do, and its ethical evaluations as statements of what the *junzi* would say about a matter at hand. The *Analects* is littered with passages that describe the conduct of the exemplary ethical agent, making more than a hundred references to the *junzi*. The converse of the *junzi* is the *xiaoren*, the petty or mean man, that is, the morally vicious agent. (Like *junzi*, the term used to refer to a member of a lower social class before taking on an exclusively moral overtone – much as *villain* used to mean a lowly farmhand before it meant a villainous person.) In several passages of the *Analects*, the *junzi* and *xiaoren* are juxtaposed so as to bring the proper conduct of the former into sharper relief (see *Analects* 2.14, 4.11, 4.16, 12.16, 13.23, 13.25–6, 15.2, 15.21, 16.8).

Classical Confucian texts provided a rich discussion of the various ethical attributes the possession of which defines the *junzi*. The most prominent of the attributes – here citing the version presented in *Mencius* – are humaneness or benevolence (*ren*), ritual propriety (*li*), (moral) righteousness (*yi*) and wisdom or perspicuity (*zhi*), but there is a host of secondary qualities including filial piety (*xiao*), courage (*yong*), trustworthiness (*xin*), respectfulness (*gong*), reverence (*jing*), love of Learning (*xue*), refinement (*wen*), and so on. The items manifestly differ from those found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* II 7, for example, but they are nonetheless readily understood as *virtue* attributes, the possession of which marks the agent out as being morally excellent. An agent with the sort of character defined by his expressing the excellences referred to by these attributes is an agent with moral worth or power (*de*). Consequently, cultivating and expressing these virtue attributes, for the classical Confucians, constitutes following the Proper Way or *dao* – the term referring to the ethical ideal and which plays a role in ancient Chinese ethical discussion analogous to that played by *eudaimonia* in ancient Greek ethics (Yu 2007; Wong 2008). In short, this focus upon the *junzi* and his attributes makes classical Confucianism readily understood within a virtue-ethical framework. Of the virtue attributes listed above, *ren*, *li* and *yi* are of most importance and will be discussed further in the next section.

A second but related feature of the classical Confucian texts that lends itself to a virtue-ethical interpretation is their rich description of individual agents and narratives of their conduct; for example, Confucius, his disciples and the people they come into contact with. These individuals are taken by the traditional readers of the texts to be representative of different degrees of ethical attainment. The description of their character and conduct thus provides a second, more concrete way for the tradition to talk about what it means for someone to be an exemplary moral agent or to exemplify virtue, or to be falling short of such an ideal in different ways and to different degrees. And so we find in the *Analects* X, to cite the paradigmatic case, evocative descriptions of Confucius's comportment and narratives of his specific conduct in various ostensibly concrete and ethically charged situations, including even the way he dressed, ate, travelled, and other details that might appear to a modern reader as mundane preferences.

Now, it is presumably the case that, at some level, if the individuals described are virtuous, it would be because their conduct exemplifies the various virtue attributes, and if they are less than virtuous, it would be because their conduct falls short of the same. These descriptions can thus be taken as illustrative (and thus conceptually derivative) of the more abstract discussion of the *junzi* and his attributes. However, the apparent centrality given to these descriptions and narratives in such texts as the *Analects* suggests that the classical Confucians were inclined to see ethical conduct as being highly contextual in a way that eludes any easy codification. In fact, many of the seemingly more abstract discussions of the *junzi* and his attributes are recorded in dialogues with specific disciples in both the *Analects* and *Mencius*, suggesting that they are ultimately not meant to be abstracted from those contexts without qualification. This feature of the Confucian texts also supports the view that classical Confucianism implies a form of *particularism*; that is, the view that “there are no defensible moral principles, that moral thought does not consist in the application of moral principles to cases, and that the morally perfect person should not be conceived as the person of principle” (Dancy 2009). While virtue ethics is not essentially particularist, there is an affinity between the two.⁴ The fact that the classical

Confucians evince particularist tendencies thus coheres well with its interpretation within a virtue-ethical framework.

Finally, a comparison between classical Confucianism and Mohism, its rival in the ancient period, is also revealing. The Confucians and Mohists were taken by their contemporaries to be the two main intellectual orientations of the age. Apart from various conflicts between them over first-order ethical and political proposals and thus their substantive conceptions of the *dao*, the two groups also disagree over more foundational issues. One such dispute concerns the role of doctrine (*yan*) – verbal formulations meant for guiding and evaluating agents and conduct – in ethical behaviour. The Mohists were confident that the proper way or *dao* can be expressed as doctrines (Loy 2008, 2011). More crucially, they also propounded what are meant to be general purpose and publicly accessible standards for evaluating proposed *dao* and their corresponding doctrines, by means of which they criticized the proposals of their opponents and justified their own proposals. They compare such standards to the compass and set square of the carpenter which can be used as operational criteria for roundness and squareness. One such standard that they consistently cite – the standard of what benefits the people of the world – suggests that they espoused a form of consequentialism in which the proper way of conduct is defined in terms of it promoting the impartial benefit of the world (Van Norden 2007; Fraser 2012). Conversely, they also evinced a comparative lack of interest in talking about the exemplary moral agent and his attributes, or discussing the cultivation of moral virtue, though they do use a virtue vocabulary familiar to Confucians (especially *ren*, *yi* and *xiao*; the signal omission is *li*).

Now, Confucius does sometimes speak as if he endorses a maxim implying a general principle for guiding action. In *Analects* 15.24, he tells a disciple that *shu* (roughly, “reciprocity”) – “what you do not desire, do not impose upon others” – is a *yan* by which one may conduct himself throughout his life. But such examples are exceedingly rare and never completely free from ambiguity, given that he also said elsewhere that his verbal instructions to his disciples are meant to be tailored to the specific circumstances and character of their recipients, so much so that he was once noted to have given ethical recommendations to two students that appear to be formally contradictory to each other (*Analects* 11.2). For Confucius, ethical instruction must put the maximal attention upon individual agents and their context, thus necessarily sidelining impersonal doctrines addressed to an indefinite audience and the general principles they imply. Mencius also warns against giving doctrine too much of an emphasis in moral cultivation (*Mencius* 2A2). Deliberately referring to the Mohist analogy previously mentioned, he denies that it is the compass and set square that makes carpenters skilful (*Mencius* 7B5). In contrast, he emphasizes the role of “discretion” (*quan*) and insists that what is objectively the right thing to do given any circumstance will depend upon the details of the context. The more specifically virtue-ethical (as opposed to purely particularist) dimension of his account comes to the fore when he insists that different but equally virtuous agents will all come to the same conclusions if presented with the same circumstances (*Mencius* 4B29). He also explains the difference between the morally accomplished agent (the Sage) and the rest of us in terms of their having a connoisseur-like expertise to perceive order and rightness, and to act accordingly (*Mencius* 6A7).

The upshot of the above discussion is that the virtue-ethical dimensions of classical Confucianism are all the more highlighted when the tradition is contrasted with its

main intellectual rival in the classical period. Conversely, the interpretation of classical Confucianism as a form of virtue ethics has the virtue of tracking crucial differences between it and its rival, differences that can be understood as such within the ancient intellectual historical context.

THREE VIRTUES IN CLASSICAL CONFUCIANISM

As indicated above, three key virtue attributes current in classical Confucianism are *ren*, *yi* and *li*. Given the limitation of space, the discussion of these attributes can only be indicative, the main focus being on how they might relate to the interpretation of classical Confucianism as a form of virtue ethics.

The term *yi* is cognate to a homophone word that means “appropriate” or “fitting”, and thus means, in the ancient usage, something in the region of “the fitting thing to do in relation to parents, rulers, and also to self” or more generally, “conduct that is fitting to one’s role or status”, and by extension, “proper” or “right” conduct. Between *ren*, *yi* and *li*, *yi*, at first glance, is least suggestive of a virtue-ethical interpretation. For one thing, just as *ren* is most naturally taken to be an attribute of character, *yi* is most naturally construed as a quality of actions (Lau 1979: 27); a concern with *yi* thus seems to be a concern with right action rather than good character. Second, *yi* is also the ethical concept most emphasized in Mohism. In fact, the Mohist ethical ideal is articulated primarily as a conception of *yi*. Tang Junyi (1986: 156–9) speaks of Mozi’s *yi dao*, that is, “way of *yi*”, contrasting it to Confucius’s *ren dao*, that is, “way of *ren*”. Thus, to the extent to which the virtue-ethical aspects of classical Confucianism are highlighted when the tradition is contrasted with Mohism, the Confucian concern with *yi* is not as readily fitted within a virtue-ethical framework as the concern with *ren* or *li*.

Nonetheless, the above does not constitute any insurmountable problem for the interpretation of classical Confucianism as a form of virtue ethics, given the permissive rather than restrictive construal of what that means (see p. 286 above). Here, keep in mind also the difference between the Mohist and Confucian treatment of *yi*. For the Mohists, *yi* comes to the fore most of all as a set of objective requirements or constraints upon individual action and social arrangement. But more importantly, they are requirements and constraints that can be formulated as a doctrine and justified in light of publicly accessible standards – something deeply at odds with the more particularist tendencies of classical Confucianism (see the section “Three features of classical Confucianism” above). In addition, Confucians also pay more attention to *yi* as an ethical attribute of an agent with a firm commitment to conducting himself in light of the objective ethical requirements and constraints. Mencius, furthermore, identifies the naturally felt revulsion against insulting treatment as the starting point for cultivating the attribute. He gives the example of a starving beggar who would nonetheless rather die than accept food given in an abusive way as indicative of a natural and deeply human concern with *yi* (*Mencius* 6A10).

The term *ren* admits of both a broader and a narrower sense in the *Analects*, both of which, however, are more easily understood as qualities of an agent’s character rather than of his actions. In its broader sense, *ren* refers to all-encompassing virtue, or complete goodness of character. Taken this way, the notion is definitive of the *junzi* (*Analects* 4.5); in fact, the *ren* person is synonymous with the *junzi* as the agent who possesses each of

the (particular) virtue attributes. Translators attempting to capture this dimension of *ren* render it with terms such as “goodness”, or “true virtue”. Taken in the narrower sense, *ren* is one particular virtue attribute that the *junzi* possesses (*Analects* 14.28) and is explained by Confucius in terms of loving or caring for other people (*Analects* 12.22) and closely tied with the natural affection that children have for parents (*Analects* 1.2). A usual way to capture this aspect of *ren* in translation is to render it as “benevolence” or “humaneness”.

Generally speaking, between *ren*, *li* and *yi*, *ren* is the attribute most naturally understood within a virtue-ethical framework. This is trivially the case when *ren* is considered in its broad sense as referring to complete goodness of character, since to define the *junzi* or exemplary ethical agent as a *ren* person is already to put the emphasis on virtue of character in ethical evaluation rather than on acts and outcomes. Apart from its connection with the notion of loving or caring for people, Confucius also connects *ren* in the narrow sense with the disposition to not impose upon others what one does not desire for oneself, and with helping others take their stand in so far as one wishes to get there (*Analects* 12.2, 6.30). These formulations relate *ren* with *shu*, “reciprocity”, or perhaps “empathetic understanding” (*Analects* 4.15). The overall impression, however, is not that an agent who is *ren* (in the narrow sense) conducts himself in accordance with the Golden Rule understood as a maxim of conduct, but that he acts from a felt insight about the subjectivity of the people he interacts with: a sort of spiritual capacity to “feel with the feelings of others, to see with the seeing of others, and to think with the thinking of others” in the words of one Sinologist (Henry 2004). In the same spirit, Mencius relates *ren* in the narrow sense to the feeling of compassion or commiseration that one experiences when witnessing or contemplating the suffering or potential suffering of other people (*Mencius* 2A6, 6A6). Mencius’s understanding of *ren* is probably the closest point of contact between Confucianism and a sentimentalist conception of virtue ethics exemplified, for example, by Michael Slote.

The term *li* refers in the first instance to Ritual – a system of regulations for religious ceremonies in particular, and the social and political intercourse between people (especially among the social and political elite) more generally. The system was ostensibly inherited from the Sagely founders of the ancient Zhou Dynasty, the golden age in the classical Confucian worldview. By extension, *li* also refers to the quality of conduct and comportment that accords with the regulations of Zhou Ritual, and beyond that, the sort of character that reliably issues in such conduct – hence “ritual propriety”. In classical Confucianism, ritual propriety is a definitive characteristic of the exemplary agent.

A potential ambiguity in Confucius’s teaching regarding ritual propriety concerns how *li* relates to *ren*. One type of interpretation sees ritual propriety as constitutive of *ren*. Replying to his favourite disciple Yan Hui’s question regarding *ren*, Confucius speaks of “returning to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self”, with the added emphasis that one should not look, listen, speak or act unless in accordance with the prescriptions of ritual (*Analects* 12.1). More crucially, the passage has generally been read as saying that ritual conduct *constitutes* or just *is* goodness, and is rendered so in many translations.⁵ Kwong-loi Shun has dubbed this the “constitutive” interpretation of the relationship between *ren* and *li* (Shun 1993). Given that Zhou Ritual took the form of customary rules, and was thought to be inherited from the institutions of a past era, this emphasis on ritual propriety might suggest that classical Confucianism sees morality as conventionalist in character, and as defending a form of moral conservatism. Both characterizations, however, are inaccurate.

In a telling passage in the *Analects* (9.3), Confucius is presented as giving his assent to one widely adopted change in ritual form (the substitution of a silk cap for the linen one prescribed by the inherited ritual) on the one hand, and his dissent from another such change (the practice of prostrating after one has ascended the steps to the ruler's dais rather than before). The passage implies that Confucius distinguished between what is conventionally accepted by the majority, what is inherited from the usages of the past, and what is the proper thing to do. The same passage is also significant as, in it, Confucius implies that ritual practices are meant to express seemingly independent values such as frugality or respect. It is by reference to these that both his decision to go along with the majority in one case and his refusal to do so in the other were meant to be justified.

The above suggests an “instrumentalist”, as opposed to the previous “constitutive” interpretation of how *ren* and *li* relate to each other, in which the concern with ritual propriety is essentially reducible to more fundamental virtue concerns. One way this could go is to take conduct in accordance with ritual as the means by which an agent cultivates goodness, something that is also highlighted in *Analects* 12.1. This is a notion akin to Aristotle's point that people come to be correctly habituated to virtue by living in accordance with good laws. Another way that *li* may be instrumental to *ren* is that the former is the means by which various virtuous attitudes such as respect, deference, and even morality more generally speaking (*Analects* 15.18), may be expressed in social intercourse. In one passage, Confucius asks the rhetorical question: “What can a man do with Ritual who is not *ren*?” (*Analects* 3.3; the implied answer is “nothing”). The implication is that *ren* – whether understood as goodness or the narrower benevolence – is not only something independent of ritual propriety, but is also the thing that is more fundamentally at stake in ritual practice.

While the instrumentalist interpretation rescues Confucianism from the worry that it is a form of conventionalism, and distinguishes it from moral conservatism, the downside is that it does not seem to do enough justice to the manifest emphasis placed upon *li*, especially in its guise as a set of socially inherited practices. Shun himself favours a hybrid view: mastery of ritual forms conventionally practised in a given society is both necessary and sufficient for goodness, so much so that we could say that *li* is, in a manner of speaking, constitutive of *ren*. The caveat is that goodness can be operationalized in different ways across societies with different conventionally accepted forms of behaviour.⁶

More troublesome for the virtue-ethical interpretation of classical Confucianism, however, is the thought that *li* as ritual propriety appears to be derivative of *li* as a system of objective prescriptions of behaviour. If that is so, the Confucian emphasis on ritual propriety is ultimately not an emphasis on the virtue of character at all, but rather an emphasis on a set of external requirements upon behaviour. There are a couple of points to be made here.

First, the emphasis on ritual propriety implies that for classical Confucianism, the exemplary ethical agent is assumed to be learned in the knowledge of these traditional forms and habituated to virtue through his continuing practice of these forms. Virtue – as it is instantiated in the *junzi*'s ritual propriety – is thus compared to the refinement that can be effected upon an underlying, rougher, native substance. “Like bone cut, like horn polished, like jade carved, like stone ground” as one passage puts it (*Analects* 1.15). Relatedly, Confucian ritual practice is best not understood as the mechanical application or observation of a series of external rules, but as the embodiment of a type of learned

refinement that issues in the effortless ability to behave according to the minute requirements regarding one's dress, behaviour and comportment. To give an analogy, the agent possessing ritual propriety is like someone who is able to *dance*, as opposed to someone who is following a recipe of steps.

The analogy is deliberately chosen as the Confucians seem to prize ritual performance not just for its being a species of *ethical* behaviour, but for *aesthetic* considerations as well (Ihara 2004). This brings up the further point that apart from its status as a quality of the exemplary individual, ritual propriety is in fact better taken as an excellence expressed in the coordinated mutual interaction of an entire community – the virtue of a society of individuals rather than individuals considered in isolation. This aspect of *li* is implied by various passages of the *Analects* but is given its most extensive treatment in Xunzi's "Discourse on Ritual Principles". With the above in mind, it might be said that out of *ren*, *yi* and *li*, while *ren* is the attribute most readily understood within a virtue-ethical framework, *li* is the one that brings out many of the more distinctively *Confucian* elements of the form of virtue ethics.

NOTES

1. The main books in the genre include Yearley (1990), Ivanhoe (2002), Chong (2007), Sim (2007), Van Norden (2007), Yu (2007), Angle (2009) and Olberding (2012). This does not count the journal articles, book chapters, several international workshops, conferences and panels. Tiwald (2010) contains an excellent overview of the field.
2. A more recent statement of the position is in Ames (2011).
3. For an example, see Slingerland (2001).
4. See e.g. Crisp (1996), Crisp & Slote (1997) and Stohr (2006). For a dissenting voice, see Hursthouse (1999). For the view that Confucian virtue ethics is particularist, see e.g. Van Norden (2007).
5. See e.g. Waley (1938), Lau (1979) and Slingerland (2003); cf. Yang (1984). For a dissenting view, see Leys (1997), who renders the line as saying that the "practice of *ren*" is what is spoken in connection with ritual conduct. See also the discussion in Li (2007).
6. For a further development of this view, see Li (2007).