Self-Transformation and Civil Society: Lockean vs. Confucian

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Abstract Although contemporary Confucianists tend to view Western liberalism as pitting the individual against society, recent liberal scholarship has vigorously claimed that liberal polity is indeed grounded in the self-transformation that produces “liberal virtues.” To meet this challenge, this essay presents a sophisticated Confucian critique of liberalism by arguing that there is an appreciable contrast between liberal and Confucian self-transformation and between liberal and Confucian virtues. By contrasting Locke and Confucius, key representatives of each tradition, this essay shows that both liberalism and Confucianism aim to reconstruct a society freed from antisocial passions entailing a vicious politics of resentment, and yet come to differing ethical and political resolutions. My key claim is that what makes Confucian self-cultivation so distinctive is the incorporation of ritual propriety (li) within it, whereas liberal self-transformation that relies heavily on a method of self-control comes back to the problem that it originally set out to overcome.

Keywords Civil society · Confucius · Li · Locke · Self-control · Self-transformation

1 Introduction

Among East Asian social and political theorists, the tendency to view modern Western liberalism in terms of a political theory/culture pivoted on assumption of the autonomous individual-rights-bearing citizen is commonplace. Often, it is argued that Western liberalism, cherishing abstract notions of the individual and individual rights, unduly pits the individual, essentially a social being, against society. Much more displeased are contemporary Confucianists, who resist the very liberal idea (and ideal) of the “individual” and therewith the presumed liberal dichotomy between person and society. For Confucianists, a person is not so much an individual, the in-divisible and self-coherent,
self-contained rational entity (be it the Platonic eidos, the Christian soul, the Cartesian cogito, or the Kantian noumena), but fundamentally a “man-in-society” (Tu 1979: 18).

It is true that some versions of liberalism do endorse a stark separation, even antagonism, between individual and society. With all their differences, for instance, Nozickean libertarianism and Emersonian individualism converge on their shared valorization of privacy. Although ultimately anticipating a stable and durable American public life, John Rawls, too, bases his political liberalism on the problematic severance between the “private and public” (Rawls 1993). Yet it is the social contractarians, particularly John Locke, that have provided a classical and most authoritative liberal justification on such a dichotomy (see Macpherson 1962: 194–262; Scalet and Schmidt 2002; Shapiro 1986). What is frequently overlooked, however, is that early liberal theorists, including Locke, hardly thought of a rights-bearing individual as a self-absorbed private person indifferent or opposed to society. In fact, they never intended the rational individual partaking in the social contract to be a radically deracinated self, unencumbered from all social moorings and relations, even though some of them (i.e. British contractarians) often opposed the individual to the state (or government) for “political” reasons. As recent liberal scholarship has vigorously claimed, classical (modern) liberals rather predicated their otherwise precarious political contract, erecting a democratic constitution, upon the tacit assumption of civil society composed of rational, responsible, and mutually reciprocal people; namely, civil individuals. In other words, classical liberalism pivots around so-called “liberal virtues” (Macedo 1990; Galston 1991; Berkowitz 1999; also see Lomasky 2002: 54–55).

If modern liberalism is predicated on its own ideal of virtue, namely, “civility” that underlies a uniquely liberal connection between individual and society, it is imperative for the contemporary Confucianists to reframe their criticism of liberalism and provide a more sophisticated version of it. This is especially so, since some liberal thinkers like Locke considered the family, the central ethico-political institution in Confucianism, as an equally important ethical space to produce liberal virtues and one in which to transform an otherwise archaic and narcissistic individual into a responsible and mutually recognizing citizen. Therefore, to present the contemporary implications of Confucianism in terms of an antidote to the misconceived liberal dichotomy of individual and society lacks persuasion. Instead, contemporary Confucianists should seek a distinctive value of Confucianism by problematizing the way in which liberalism links individual to society—that is, by challenging the way through which the self is transformed, the way in which the family is conceived, and the kinds of virtue that eventually result.

In what follows, I argue that there is an appreciable contrast between liberal self-transformation and its Confucian counterpart (xiushen 修身), and between liberal and Confucian virtues. By contrasting Locke and Confucius, key representatives of each cultural tradition, I show that both liberalism and Confucianism aim to (re)construct a society freed from antisocial passions such as desire for domination entailing a vicious politics of resentment, and yet come to differing ethical and political resolutions. My central claim is that what makes Confucian self-transformation so distinctive and unique is the incorporation of the practice of ritual propriety (fuli 復禮) within it, whereas liberal self-

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1 Rawls’s public-private distinction has been celebrated by many liberals including Richard Rorty and Nancy Rosenblum as a great endorsement of the incongruence between private morality and public citizenship (see Rorty 1989 and Rosenblum 1998).

2 In this essay, I distinguish (modern) liberal virtue from (ancient) civic virtue and, following Seligman, understand it in terms of “civility.” According to Seligman, civility is a uniquely modern-liberal version of virtue that entails a liberal-individualistic citizenship rather than a thick republican civic citizenship (see Seligman 1992).
transformation that relies heavily on a method of self-control (keji 克己) comes back to the problem it originally set out to overcome.

2 John Locke’s Liberal Civil Society

2.1 Family and Liberal Self-Transformation

Locke’s idea of family (in relation to civil society) has invited numerous critical reevaluations from various fronts. Among others, Carole Pateman and Nathan Tarcov, albeit on completely different grounds, have offered the most thorough and systematic critiques. I begin with Pateman’s feminist critique of Locke’s conception of the family, primarily because it helps us to see clearly the role of the family in Locke’s theory of civil society.

In Pateman’s view, a modern social contract is essentially a “sexual contract” that, hidden under the neutral term “individual,” justifies men’s patriarchal dominion over women, particularly in terms of the right of men to enjoy equal sexual access to women (Pateman 1986: 2). Accordingly, the term “individual” is fundamentally gendered, and it indeed connotes masculinity. Although Pateman finds the writings of all major modern social contractarians (Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau) premised on “modern patriarchy,” she levels a heavier criticism against Locke. It is because, while Hobbes admits perfect gender equality in the state of nature and pictures the family as a purely contractual (i.e. “political”) institution, Locke, taking for granted men’s patriarchal dominion over women, completely denies marriage’s contractual and “public” qualities by relegating it to the private sphere (Pateman 1986: 44–56; also see Wagner 1998: 29–31). This “unjust” relegation and “naturalization” of the family to the private domain distorts the entire liberal tenets of social contract—for it tacitly stipulates that the individuals participating in the actual social contract include only the “head” of each family.

However, from a traditional liberal standpoint, one that Tarcov adopts, this separation between the family and the state (or civil society) speaks in favor (however ironically) of Locke’s liberal commitment. For by doing so, Locke provides a crucial justification on which to protect the family from the arbitrary infiltration of the state, an intervention that is perfectly justified in Hobbes’s contract/conquest theory. Thus Tarcov argues, “Locke not only strives to protect liberal politics from the authoritarian claims of the patriarchal family [against Filmer]; he also offers a measure of protection of the privacy of the family from civil government [unlike Hobbes]” (Tarcov 1998: 71). However, for feminists who are convinced that “the personal is political” (Okin 1989), this ad hoc restoration of the private and public distinction that is reminiscent of Aristotle’s old dichotomy of oikos and polis is nothing but a violent imposition by masculinity.

The implications of the separation between public (civil society) and private (family) are more far-reaching than the mere liberal protection of privacy. By reserving to the family a transformative ethical force and making it a place of moral education, Locke pictures a qualitatively different type of the individual than that of Hobbes in his vision of the social contract. Locke’s individual in the last stage of the state of nature is not so much, as Hobbes describes, a passion-driven, self-seeking, narcissistic, enormously dangerous human-beast; but rather a mature, responsible, and sociable individual (Berkowitz 1999: 85–89). In short, Locke presents the family as a critical ethical realm for self-transformation. It is important

3 Even though, in the end, the state of nature turns out to be massively patriarchal due to the man’s “conquest” of the woman and her (or their) children by means of contract.
to note, however, that Locke’s ethical enterprise within the family begins with the Hobbesian archaic self. At one point in *The Second Treatise of Government* (hereafter *STG*), to account for the Hobbesian life-and-death struggle in the state of nature, Locke states that “though in the state of nature he hath such a right [natural right], yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the invasion of others: for all being kings as much as he, every man his equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very unsecure” (Locke 1980: IX.123). The key phrase here is “being a king of himself,” the man’s narcissistic illusion. In other words, Locke warns that our fundamental insecurity works out within ourselves in the form of boisterous and untrammeled passions—the passions that put him/her-self on top of others. Therefore, what must come before the social contract, the political resolution of conflict amongst equally domineering individuals, is a process that fulfills one’s inner or moral resolution.

In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (hereafter *TCE*), Locke likens the Hobbesian archaic self to a child. Locke tells us that “they [children] love something more; and that is dominion; and this is the first origin of most vicious habits that are ordinary and natural. This love of power and domination shows itself very early” (Locke 1999: §103). This phrase informs us why, in *The Second Treatise*, Locke, unlike Hobbes, does not allow a contractual (thus at least tacitly equal) relation between parents and children, approving, instead, absolute parental (especially paternal) power over children (Locke 1980: VI.72). According to Locke, for a child (or man) to become rational and free, thereupon entitled to form an equal and contractual tie with his parents (and eventually with others in civil society), it is critical to embrace a severe morality of “self-denial.” Locke believes that “the great principle and foundation of all virtue and worth is placed in this, that a man is able to deny himself his own desires, cross his own inclinations, and purely follows what reason directs as best though the appetite lean the other way” (Locke 1999: §33, also see §36).

But how can a child (and later an adult) command his or her boisterous antisocial passions, especially passion for mastery of others? Here Locke turns to the family. More specifically, he upholds the father’s authority and uses it in the service of reconstructing a rational hierarchy between reason and passion in the child’s (and man’s) soul.

Be sure then to establish the authority of a father as soon as he is capable of submission and can understand in whose power he is. If you would have him stand in awe of you, imprint it in his infancy, and as he approaches more to a man admit him nearer to your familiarity; so shall you have him your obedient subject (as is fit) whilst he is a child, and your affectionate friend when he is a man. (Locke 1999: §40)

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4 Throughout this essay, I employ the concept “narcissism” to refer to the psychological tenets of the Hobbesian archaic and domineering self—tenets that Rousseau conceptualized in terms of *amour-propre* (self-love understood in terms of vanity or pride) as opposed to *amour de soi*, self-love that leads to self-preservation, not the desire to exceed others. So, it is to be cautioned that my use of “narcissism” is not to transform a clinical diagnostic term into a moral judgment; nor is it to apply the psychoanalytic theory of narcissism to philosophy.

5 This is not to deny that, in Locke’s scheme, civil government (and civil society) is created to avoid certain external inconvenience, e.g., conflicts around property in the state of nature. Moreover, unlike Hobbes, Locke deems human nature as originally rational and moral. But Locke’s view of human nature in *STG* (Chapters IV-VII) is not so much a psychological claim as a normative one (see Dunn 1969: 96–119). That is, the original state of nature depicted in *STG* is a teleological account that provides a rational, moral, and transcendental ground of an otherwise shaky human society and/or politics. Locke offers a more realistic and psychological view of human nature in his *Essay* (XII.69), and it is because of this empirical/psychological dimension of human nature that politics is permeated with conflict and thus requires to be transcendentally grounded.
Feminist critics hold only a part of Locke’s maxim when they take issue with complete submission demanded of the child. What they often dismiss is the latter part of the maxim: the absolute dependency of the child to the father (or the absolute authority of the father) is what imparts to him independence and autonomy, enabling him, otherwise subjugated, to become a friend or a peer to his father. Considering that Locke was a vehement critic of patriarchy, it is self-evident that his focus is on this latter point. Furthermore, capturing the father-child relationship exclusively in terms of power disparity does not do justice to Locke’s more vital concern: that the child must “internalize” the father’s authority in him so that he can construct a rational hierarchy between reason (father’s authority) and the passions within. Here the father represents, if only vicariously, the image of God.

The person thus educated is in effect the ideal liberal moral agent that Locke struggles to construct in the Essay when he writes,

[But] the forbearance of a too hasty compliance with our desires, the moderation and restraint of our passions, so that our understanding may be free to examine, and reason unbiased gives its judgment, being that whereon a right direction of our conduct to true happiness depends; it is in this we should employ our chief care and endeavors. (Locke 1975: XXI.54)

The key point is stringent self-mastery. The lines in Education make explicit what is only assumed in the Essay: the internalization of dependency is integral to the constitution of individual agency understood as autonomy and freedom (Tarcov 1998: 93). Thus understood, there is no dichotomy between the condition of submission and that of autonomy. Locke would argue that only those who have successfully mastered one’s self are entitled to participate in the social contract.

2.2 Inventing Inward Civility

Internalized dependency is an important inner resource for sociability, but it is not enough, for it contributes more to person-formation through self-mastery than to relationship-formation. Sociability at this stage is only a potential; its actualization needs a more complex socio-psychological process, a need which Locke was keenly aware of. To unravel such complexity, it should first be warned that by rational self-control, or self-mastery, Locke in no way means a complete insulation of passions from reason as Kant does. Quite the contrary: what Locke emphasizes is “our power to raise our desires in a due proportion to the value of [one’s own] good” (Locke 1975: XXI.47). Put differently, Locke admits that there are some desires that reason can authorize. He singles out these “civilizing passions” in terms of love for esteem and aversion of disgrace, or by combining the two, a “desire for reputation” (Locke 1980: §§56, 61), which takes advantage of the child’s (and man’s) desire to be treated as rational creatures (Locke 1980: §54). Only with the approval of others can one be free: “We would be thought rational creatures, and have our freedom” (Locke 1980: §41, emphasis added).

Here arise two ironies: first, self-mastery, however virtuous it is, originally stems from one’s desire for the mastery of others. In other words, self-mastery is still the desire of mastery, only rechanneled toward the self rather than others. Second, the human desire for liberty seems to have the same basis in pride (amour-propre) as the dangerous desire for mastery (Tarcov 1998: 114). Locke himself saw this puzzle clearly when he wrote, “I told you before that children love liberty…. I now tell you they love something more and that is dominion; and this is the first origin of most vicious habits that are ordinary and natural. This love of power and dominion shows itself very early” (Locke 1980: §103). What is fascinating is that the desire to win approval from others has replaced the desire for mastery
over them. As such, man’s unsociability has been transformed into the desire for mutual recognition. In this way, the objects of our desires are made to assist virtue (Locke 1980: §58).

For Locke, desire for reputation that works through a sense of esteem and shame constitutes the source of modern virtue, namely, *civility* (Locke 1980: §§60, 78). In a Lockean civil society, good manners or etiquette play the role of social lubricants through which otherwise mechanically tied individuals in civil society can be more deeply connected. But more important is “inward civility” or “sociability” because civility must be an integral part of the transformed human nature, impervious to both inner desires and outer stimulations. Locke writes,

Be sure to keep up *in* him the principles of good nature and kindness; make them as habitual as you can, by credit and commendation and the good things accompanying that state; and when they have taken root *in* his mind and are settled there by a continual practice, fear not, the ornaments of conversation and the outside of fashionable manners will come in their due time. (Locke 1980: §67, emphasis added)

For Locke, that inward civility constitutes the core of liberal individual moral agency and therefore mediates between individuality and sociality belies the conventional belief that liberalism posits the individual against society. Locke, contrary to his libertarian descendants like Nozick, preserves, rather than destroys, a conservative repository of liberal virtue (i.e. the family) to invigorate a liberal civil society by making it an ethical place for self-transformation. With regard to this liberal-traditional nexus, David Popenoe, though not referring to Locke, argues, “While seeking to maximize individual development and respond to the exigencies of an ever-diversifying social environment, we must at the same time maintain some semblance of tribalism—which boils down to protecting and cultivating the primordial institutions of family and community” (Popenoe 1995: 86). Pateman would find this statement self-contradicting (contracted yet naturalized!), but it does offer a profound insight into the practicality of liberalism as a viable political culture (also see Sullivan 1995: 185–200).

## 3 Junzi and Confucian Self-Control

As noted, the idea of civil society is a Western invention, created to cope with mounting social disintegration in the wake of modernity as the image of the state of nature conveys. But as Locke clarifies, the single greatest problem posed to modern political theorists was the fragmentation of the self into a bundle of passions, that is, the complete loss of rational and moral individual agency, driving the (now liberated) “individuals” to the state of nature (indeed, the state of war). Thus Locke’s moral theory is concentrated on how to reconstruct rational individual agency, thereby reinventing a civil society.

Admittedly, Confucius never advanced a coherent theory of civil society. He never conceived of a “transmission belt” mediating between two mutually distinct ethical realms, i.e. the family and the state, as contemporary social scientists define civil society. Rather, he saw all ethical realms encompassing family, community, the state, and even the world as seamlessly entwined, thus allowing no fixed distinction between public and private

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6 The predominant formal-judicial understanding of civil society understands it as embodying a set of determinate institutions that stand independent of, or even in opposition to, the state. Most often, civil society is conceptualized in “spatial” terms, namely as a realm of organizations, groups, and associations that are formally established, legally protected, autonomously run, and voluntarily joined by ordinary citizens (see Howard 2003: 34–35).
But the exclusive focus on the “society” part of civil society obliterates its other and more important half—that is the question of “civility,” which was after all the greatest concern of Locke (and modern liberal theorists in general). So if we understand civil society in terms of “the virtue of civility” (Shils 1997), and if it is admitted that what constitutes the core of civility depends on the cultural context of a given society, it would not be anachronistic to think of the Confucian social imaginary of civility, or the “Confucian civil society.”

More specifically, if we, following Locke, understand that the essence of civil society consists in agency-building self-transformation, there is ample evidence that Confucius, who was deeply troubled by the massive social disintegration in the late Spring and Autumn Period (the increasing collapse of the li 礼 of the Zhou dynasty for example), was committed to reconstructing moral agency and civil society that would be characteristically Confucian. Junzi 君子 is the case in point.

Originally, junzi 君子 referred to the son (zi 子) of the prince (jun 君) (Waley 1989: 34–35; Creel 1960: 77–78). It was the ideal man-type of ancient China’s warrior aristocratic caste, whose virtue (de 德; translated into Greek as arête) includes military prowess, physical strength, and heroic competitiveness. In other words, junzi 君子 was the man living according to the principle of wu 武, where wu 武 (military skills and virtues) was closely associated with the pursuit of power and strength. Although Confucius is conventionally described as a teacher or philosopher, he was indeed born into the traditional, albeit low, warrior aristocracy. Allegedly, Confucius, whose father, a warrior refugee from Song, died when he was only three, grew up in poverty, and held various low-level jobs until he entered the military at the age of thirty. Later, he briefly held a modest post at court, but that was his only official political career (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 10). What is important in our context is that Confucius, originally a member of the warrior caste, anticipated an entirely new civilization by transforming the old wu 武-oriented ideal of junzi 君子 into a moral paragon broadly immersed in the principle of wen 文, the Zhou culture, which Confucius called “This Culture of Ours” (si wen 斯文), predicated on ritual (li 禮) and music (yue 樂) (Analects 6.27).

In this great civilizational transformation, Confucius made special effort to transvaluate the concept of ren 仁, the moral virtue par excellence to Confucius and later in Confucianism. Even though ren 仁 is casually translated into benevolence, humanity, goodness, love, or human-heartedness (Chan 1955), in the military aristocratic society of

7 Shils, a great contemporary authority of civility and civil society studies, himself was positive toward such an endeavor and actually identified elements of civil society in Chinese classical (mainly Confucian) traditions (see Shils 1996). In fact, a large number of scholars share with Shils the compatibility between Confucianism and civil society, or even a possibility of “Confucian civil society” (see de Bary 1998; Nosco 2002; Tan 2003; Fan 2004; Metzger 2001; Madsen 2002).

8 According to Brooks and Brooks (1998: 3), the core of Chinese society during the Spring and Autumn period was “a warrior elite whose weapons were the compound bow and the horse-drawn chariot…. They were trained in martial skills and a service ethic based on ideals of duty, courage, selflessness, and comradeship” (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 3). For the militaristic social environment of Confucius’ times, see Kaizuka 2002: 13–41.

9 More accurately, his grandfather, KONG Fangshu 孔防叔 defected to the state of Lu, where Confucius was born. Song was a small state near Lu. It was a refugee state for the Shang people after Shang’s conquest by Zhou. Ironically, Confucius, a descendant of Song (and thus Shang), was self-consciously dedicated to the revivification of Zhou culture (wen 文), which further led to its reinvention. See Hsiao 1979: 79–142.

10 On the military background of Confucius’ family (especially his father), see Kaizuka (2002: 49–57).

Confucius’ time, it was closely tied with a military ethos—the traits of an ideal comrade-at-arms such as strength, courage, steadfastness in crisis, consideration for others, capacity for self-sacrifice. In short, ren 仁 originally meant “manliness” (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 15). The great Confucian contribution was to see the form of ren 仁 as the internalization of these exterior military/warrior virtues (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 35). It is reminiscent of the Platonic transformation of arête from the Homeric virtue, i.e. excellence in speech and action, especially in battle, into sophrosune, i.e. rational self-control. But the Confucian transformation of ren 仁 was not merely its internalization. According to Fred Alford, it has the quality of internalization that “rejects the distinction between the internal and the external in the first place” (Alford 2000: 113). As Confucius creatively intertwined ren 仁, now internalized or civilized, with the li 礼 of Zhou culture. Junzi 君子, originally a warrior aristocrat, was thereupon reinvented as a ren 仁 person committed to si wen 斯文.

Apparently, there was noticeable confusion between the old aristocratic image of junzi 君子 and the new definition that Confucius promoted. For example, NANGONG Kuo asked Confucius, “How is it that Yi was a master (shan 善) at archery and Ao was strong enough to push a boat on dry land, and yet both met an unnatural end, while Yu and Ji personally farmed the land, and yet came to rule the world?” At the time, the Master did not reply, but after NANGONG Kuo’s departure, he remarked, “There is an exemplary person (junzi 君子)! There is someone who really esteems excellence (de 德)!” (Analects 14.5)

Indeed, Confucius constantly reminded his disciples that the essence of marksmanship (or archery) does not lie in the physical strength to pierce the hide, but self-control in doing so (Analects 3.16), and that a fine steed should not be praised for its strength, but only for its de 德 (Analects 14.33; also see 7.11, 8.16, 17.22). What troubled Confucius most, however, was the prevalence of the existing warrior ideal of junzi 君子 allied with growing commercial interests amongst the newly emerging political elite and its rapid dissemination over the ordinary Chinese populace. Attributing his renewed definition of junzi 君子 to that of the ancient (Zhou), Confucius therefore criticized the popular practice of his contemporaries:

In the old days, the common people had three faults that people of today perhaps have done away with. Of old, rash people were merely reckless, but nowadays they have managed to overcome all restraint. Of old, proud people were merely smug, but nowadays they are quarrelsome and easily provoked. Of old, stupid people were frank and direct, but nowadays they are positively deceitful. (Analects 17.16)

What gravely worried Confucius were the unrestrained passions, especially the desire for the mastery of others masked in the pursuit of power, strength, and profit; it stimulates in the man such antisocial passions as competitiveness, envy, and, more importantly, resentment. Confucius warns by saying, “To act with an eye to personal profit will incur

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12 Brooks and Brooks present Analects 4.7 as evidence where Confucius uses ren 仁 in plural: “[The Master said,] in making mistakes, people stay true to type. If you observe their mistake, you will be able to tell what sort of ren 仁 they have.”

13 Alford goes on to say, “even saying that ren 仁 connects the inner and the outer by making them one is setting up a false dichotomy.”

14 On the dialectical relation between ren 仁 and li 礼, see Tu 1979: 5–16; Shun 1993; Li 2007.

15 As Mark Lewis forcefully demonstrates, militaristic ethos became a paradigm social spirit in the subsequent Warring States period, during which Confucianism, despite its philosophical development, most notably by Mencius and Xunzi, underwent a great political setback (see Lewis 1990). After all, it was Legalism (fajia 法家) that united the Middle Kingdom in 221 B.C.E.
a lot of resentment” (Analects 4.12; also see Mencius 1A1). At one point, he likens junzi 君子 to a perspicacious person who “stays aloof from slander that pollutes the community and from rumor mongering that spreads like a rash” (Analects 12.6). In my view, it is in this context that Confucius’ disownment of eloquent speech as a method of self-cultivation must be understood.

Someone said, “As for Yong, he is truly virtuous (ren 仁) but is not eloquent.” The Master said, “What is the use of eloquence?” A person who disputes with a ready wit often earns the enmity of others. I cannot say whether or not he is truly virtuous (ren 仁), but what need is there for eloquence?” (Analects 5.5, translation modified and emphasis added)

Glib speech, an obsequious countenance, and excessive solicitude—ZUOQIU Ming thought this kind of conduct shameless, and so do I. To seek out someone’s friendship while harboring ill will toward them—ZUOQIU Ming thought this kind of conduct shameless, and so do I. (Analects 5.25, emphasis added; see also Analects 1.3 and 17.17)

Political theorist John Pocock (1971: 43–50) was greatly impressed by Confucius’ non-verbal and ritualistic statecraft. Given the West’s persistent concentration on action (praxis) and speech (lexis) since Aristotle (Arendt 1958), Pocock’s reaction is reasonable. While interesting and even insightful, however, I suspect that Pocock’s understanding of speech in Confucianism is mistaken. Confucius’ discontentment with speech holds deeper and more “liberal” implications than mere efficient governance and “Machiavellism” as Pocock believes. For instance, the above two passages have nothing to do with statecraft or governance. Confucius’ focus is rather on how to avoid such antisocial passions as enmity or resentment (ill will)—the passions that seductive speech in the service of power and profit is likely to generate—in ordinary interpersonal relations, so that the harmony of society can be voluntarily maintained from within. In other words, Confucius was not so much interested in the state (and Machiavellism) as in a viable civil society. In this respect, Confucius is much closer to liberalism, although he did not champion the values of freedom, equality, and right, nor was he preoccupied with nonintervention of government in the private life. Confucius can be a “liberal” precisely in the sense that he painstakingly struggled to avoid what Judith Shklar calls “ordinary vices” like snobbery, misanthropy, and hypocrisy in a society (Shklar 1984), thus trying to make the society civil. Confucius was convinced that “the person who at age forty still evokes the dislike of others is a hopeless case” (Analects 17.26).

Confucius’ resolution for this agency problem (and by implication, civil problem) is akin to Locke’s because he, too, emphasizes self-control, though not as rigorous a rational self-mastery as what Locke recommends. In the opening of the Analects, for example, Confucius advises the would-be junzi 君子 not to harbor frustration even though he was

16 So, when Confucius says in Analects 14.12, “on seeing a chance to profit, the junzi 君子 thinks of appropriate conduct (yì 義)” (also see Analects 14.1), it is not that he opposed a pursuit of worldly interest itself (otherwise he could not have advanced his commitment to the people’s economic well-being in Analects 12.7), but because he was immensely worried about its pathological psychological and political-moral ramifications when it has become a dominant norm of society. In this respect, it is highly dubious that he would have supported capitalism of the kind Locke promoted. On Confucius’ economic ideas and their contemporary implications, see Chan 2003.

17 It is not to argue that Confucius (and Confucianism) did not think seriously about the restriction of state or political intrusion. Confucianism does entail a kind of communal, authoritarian anarchism—authoritarian in the sense that it is still premised on a definite hierarchy of roles, if not persons (for all persons are inherently equal or the “same”).
unrecognized by others (Analects 1.1, also see 1.16, 14.30). De Bary famously interprets this passage as follows:

When he [Confucius] said that the noble man \textit{junzi 君子} is “unembittered even though unrecognized,” he was not simply talking about gentlemanly accommodation or acquiescence in one’s lot. As we know from other passages in the Analects, rather than accepting whatever comes as natural and inevitable, he called for a life of determined striving against adversity, taking part in an unceasing struggle to change the world (De Bary 1988: 4).

De Bary’s interpretation underscores the “this-worldly” transcendental “moral heroism” of Confucianism, the theme that he extensively discusses in his other works on (neo-) Confucianism (see de Bary 1983). Nevertheless, I suspect that de Bary downplays the frustration or bitterness that an ordinary man/woman would have to wrestle with before he/she is transformed into a \textit{junzi 君子} as a Confucian moral hero. What Confucius points out, however implicitly, is the narcissistic injury any ordinary person is likely to suffer when he or she is unrecognized. In such a case, the ordinary person, swung by his or her boisterous (antisocial) passions, will be easily frustrated, provoked, or even enraged. But here Confucius exhorts not to harbor any such passions because it is the surest way to keep resentment at bay (Analects 15.15, also see 15.22).

Master Zeng (Zengzi) goes even further, complicating the issue. Allegedly having YAN Hui in mind, he says that in order to become a \textit{junzi 君子} (and if he is \textit{junzi}), even if transgressed against himself, he must pay it no attention (Analects 8.5). Again, as de Bary reminds us, this should not be understood as a kind of fatalism or pessimism. At stake is indeed one’s state of mind: that is, whether or not he succumbs to his self-love (amour-propre) that renders him to feel transgressed. All the self-transformed \textit{junzi} does is to be attuned to Heaven’s mandate, without fluctuating along with the boiling passions aroused by outer stimulations. Confucius himself confesses to have arrived at this state of maturity only after age sixty. He also says that it took another decade or so for him not to transgress the boundaries even unwittingly—the boundaries that are both internal (\textit{ren 仁}) and external (\textit{li 礼}) (Analects 2.4).

In sum, just like Locke, Confucius was greatly concerned with antisocial passions threatening moral integrity and agency of the self, and by extension, civil society. My argument has been that in order to resolve this problem, both Locke and Confucius strove for self-transformation in terms of self-control that aims to make the self more mature and in control of antisocial (if not all kinds of) passions. My only reservation in this comparison is whether or not Confucius also had in mind a type of rational self-control in dealing with the problem of antisocial passions, as he seldom discussed human nature, nor did he advance a sophisticated argumentation on the relation between reason and passion.\footnote{Recently, some scholars have suggested that there is room for rational agency in Confucianism that is in command of indeterminate passions considering the logical operation of the method of shu 恕 (reciprocity) in achieving \textit{ren 仁}. (see, for example, Chan 2000).}

\section*{4 Confucius versus Locke}

Indeed, as a way of overcoming antisocial passions and thus creating moral agency, Confucius stressed the virtue of self-control. Is self-control, then, what transforms the resenting and domineering self into a mature and receptive self, tantamount to Confucian
self-cultivation (xiushen 修身)? But Confucius is far from being content with this simple equation, as demonstrated by the following conversation with Yuansi:

Yuansi: “If in one’s conduct one refrains from intimidation, from self-importance, from ill will, and from greed, can one be considered virtuous (ren 仁)?”
Confucius: “I would say that this is hard to do, but I don’t know that it makes one’s conduct virtuous (ren 仁).” (Analects 14.1, translation modified)

“Intimidation” (ke 克), “self-importance” (fa 伐), “ill-will” (yuan 恨), and “greed” (yu 欲)—this is the most detailed list of antisocial passions ever shown in the Analects, and these passions are the very evils that Confucius took pains to avoid or overcome. Nevertheless, he says that the virtue of self-control, as difficult as it may be to attain, is insufficient to be equivalent to ren 仁.

From the Confucian perspective, one critical problem with self-control as a method of self-transformation is that, while resorting to rationalism, it employs the way of mastery. As noted, antisocial passions are singularly directed and driven toward mastery of others. It is not only so with passions like intimidation, pride, or greed, but also with resentment because it is nothing but a frustrated self-love (amour-propre). Put differently, resentment is a narcissistic injury of the otherwise domineering self. Self-control is a method that puts a rein on a dangerous self, one that threatens to disrupt a civil society. And yet, in controlling the will to power, it still resorts to power. It only substitutes the mastery of others with mastery of the self.

Lockean liberalism is indeed founded upon this remarkable exchange between the mastery of others and self-mastery. As we have seen, Locke did redirect the evil in the creation of virtue as he judiciously redefined liberty as originating from desire for mastery. He was never troubled by this great interplay (a la Machiavelli) between vice and virtue, because he was preoccupied with a more pragmatic and directly political project—to maintain a governable constitutional state and viable civil society by moderating the explosive social enmities amongst sects, factions, and individuals in the period of religious wars. As Harvey Mansfield rightly noted, Locke’s greater concern was with statecraft rather than soulcraft (Mansfield 1989: 181–211). In Locke, therefore, soulcraft (or self-transformation) holds its political significance only against the backdrop of statecraft (or constitutionalism). It is indisputable that Confucius, despite admitting a need of a type of self-control, would reject this Machiavellian ethic of self-mastery as a method of self-transformation. It is not only because his idea of ren 仁 refuses both masculinity and rationalism that it entails, but also because, from the Confucian ethical standpoint, Locke, as much as Hobbes, confounds liberty and power. And it is because of this typical liberal confusion that liberal virtue, otherwise honorific, becomes so problematic to Confucian moral sensibility. Let us investigate this further.

Although Locke tries to overcome the Hobbesian archaic self, and does succeed in ameliorating it by virtue of stringent self-mastery, he never challenges the very Hobbesian (or Cartesian) epistemology that conceives the individual as originally discrete, monadic, and essentially narcissistic. That is, the mutual impregnability, and thus mutual hostility, between individuals is the very baseline of Locke’s theorization of man and society. Certainly, the Lockean liberal self is far more mature than the Hobbesian self, who is so inchoate, that fear, desire, and the will to power become one in him (Alford 1991: 130). Nevertheless, this mature Lockean liberal self remains merely an individual. Self-mastery, in this regard, provides a rational shield that keeps the otherwise unbridled passions at bay, but still leaves the narcissist core largely intact. What is even more problematic is that the unresolved question of

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19 According to Dunn, Locke’s civil society ultimately refers to the state (Dunn 2001: 55–57).
narcissism renders Locke’s psychological mechanism that produces liberal virtue (or civility) as precarious. At first glance, the desire for reputation or approval gives rise to liberal virtue, through which individuals can be treated as rational beings amongst themselves, and also be held mutually responsible to each other. By way of this particular desire, therefore, the politics of resentment, prevalent in the state of nature, can be dialectically sublimated into the politics of recognition—the foundation of a democratic civil society according to Charles Taylor (Taylor 1994). What is often forgotten, however, is that the reverse direction is always a possibility. As Hegel recognized, the life-and-death struggle of recognition can turn a civil society into the dismal state of nature. In short, the politics of resentment and the politics of recognition (or reputation) are two sides of the same coin, insofar as the reputation-seeking narcissistic self persists, encapsulated in the shield of reason.

Locke does attempt to internalize the desire for reputation within the self in the form of inward civility (or sociability) in order to prevent the politics of recognition from deteriorating into the vicious politics of resentment. He further takes pains to differentiate the desire for reputation from affectation that can cause resentment in others by calling it “the weeds that grow not in the wild uncultivated waste, but in garden plots under the negligent hand or unskillful care of a gardener” (Locke 1980: §66). In spite of this cautious distinction, however, it is highly dubious that liberal virtue can be safely insulated from the lure of affectation, given that Locke creates it by employing the (Epicurean) hedonistic psychology of rewards and punishments (Locke 1980: §§52–55). Interestingly, it is Confucius who clarifies that the desire for reputation cannot be a trustworthy foundation of a Confucian ren 仁-based civil society:

Zizhang inquired, “What does the scholar-apprentice (shi 士) have to do to be described as being ‘prominent’?” “What can you possibly mean by being ‘prominent’?” replied the Master. “One who is sure to be known, whether serving in public office or in the house of a ruling family,” answered Zizhang. “That is being known,” said the Master, “it is not being ‘prominent.’ Those who are prominent are true in their basic disposition, and seek after what is most appropriate (yi 義). They examine what is said, are keen observers of demeanor, and are thoughtful in deferring to others. They are sure to be prominent, whether serving in public office or in the house of a ruling family. As for being merely known, they put on appearances to win a reputation for being virtuous (ren 仁) while their conduct belies it. They are wholly confident that they are authoritative, and sure to be known, whether serving in public office or in the house of a ruling family.” (Analects 12.20, modified)

From the Confucian viewpoint, to make virtue rely on the “appearances to win a reputation” is to “live for others,” not to be true to one’s own self or to “the Way.” It is merely “to be known” in the world, yet far from being ren 仁 in his conduct. Critics of liberalism have always taken issue with its extravagant subjectivism, but Locke’s liberal individuals are actually too sensitive to others. This sensitivity, however, hardly takes the form of altruism or affection. It is rather rooted in the desire for reputation and, more deeply, in one’s profound self-love. When Confucius repeatedly contrasted “learning for one’s self” (wei ji zhi xue 爲己之學) with “learning for others” (wei ren zhi xue 爲人之學) and by implication “life for one’s self” with “life for others” (Analects 14.24), his concern was precisely with the problem of narcissism that exacerbates interpersonal relationships, undermines the backbone of a (Confucian) civil society, and, ultimately, jeopardizes one’s self-development. In fact, Confucius thought that the person seeking others’ approval, yet negligent of one’s inner growth, was the single most serious enemy of virtue: “As for the
person who would give the outward appearance of being stern while being pulp inside, if we were to look to petty people for an example of this kind of deceit, it is the house burglar who bores holes in walls or scales over them” (Analects 17.12).

Confucius abhorred such a person of appearance whose inner self and public persona are polarized, and called the person “village worthy” (xiang-yuan 鄉愿)—a person who is loved by everyone in the village due to the person’s apparent virtue, but who, in reality, is the “thief of virtue” (Analects 17.13). According to Mencius, Confucius once said,

The only people who pass my house by without causing me regret are perhaps the “village worthy.” The village worthy is the enemy of virtue…. I dislike what is specious. I dislike weeds for fear they might be confused with the rice plant; I dislike flattery for fear it might be confused with what is right; I dislike glininess for fear it might be confused with the truthful; I dislike the music of Zheng for fear it might be confused with vermillion; I dislike the village worthy for fear he might be confused with the virtuous. (Mencius 7B37)

The village worthy is not merely a person of affectation that Locke also vilifies. What is striking is that the village worthy is very close to the type of person Locke took pains to re-create from the Hobbesian narcissist. In other words, the ideal person of Locke’s society is very similar to the village worthy of Confucius’ society. One may claim that the village worthy is equivalent to the person of affectation rather than a liberal gentleman. But Locke’s problem with affectation, it should be recalled, is only to the extent to which it causes the vicious circle of resentment to resume. As long as the liberal constitutional order is unchallenged and civil peace maintained, the borderline between a person of reputation and a person of affectation is not of great significance. To repeat, for Locke, soulcraft is fundamentally analogous to self-mastery and it is primarily in the service of statecraft of liberal constitutionalism. Locke’s supreme concern, therefore, consists in keeping the Hobbesian narcissist dormant within the liberal man under vigilant check by virtue of self-mastery and by desire of reputation. As such, his ethics are negative rather than positive. From a liberal standpoint, the village worthy, just like a good liberal gentleman, is virtuous given the person’s diligent adherence to social convention, meticulous observation of the rule of law, and rigorous exercise of negative liberty.

In marked contrast, Confucius’ greatest passion was to cultivate the self to the extent that one becomes a junzi 君子, who refuses to embrace such a strict inner/outer and private/public distinction. The social and political order, which is to be grounded in the Zhou ritual system, would then be extended from the cultivated self (see Mencius 1A7, 4A5). Traits like roughness, boldness, vulgarity, or impropriety can, in his view, be refined through relentless immersion in the education of wen 文. Thus Confucius never refrained from educating crude men like Zilu who was characteristically a man of wu 武 (Analects 5.7, 5.8, 7.11, 11.18, 17.23), rather than a cultivated junzi 君子. And yet, Confucius was sternly critical of the village worthy, the man wrongly cultivated, because for him statecraft (zheng 政) was predicated on soulcraft (xiu-shen 修身 or xiu-ji 修己) rightly practiced. In other words, Confucius was convinced that “the personal is political” (Analects 12.17, 13.1, 13.4, 13.6, 13.11, 13.13, 14.41, 19.21). Zengzi’s following words best capture the central spirit of Confucian ethico-politics as distinct from liberal ethics and politics with regard to civil society:

There are three things that exemplary persons (junzi 君子) consider of utmost importance in making their way (dao 道): by maintaining a dignified demeanor,

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20 Although throughout The Analects this is the only passage in which Confucius alludes to xiang-yuan, there are indeed several other passages (directly and analogically) referring to this type of person or action. See Analects 13.23, 13.24, 15.28, 17.18.
they keep violent and rancorous conduct at a distance; by maintaining a proper countenance, they keep trust and confidence near at hand; by taking care in choice of language and mode of expression, they keep vulgarity and impropriety at a distance.  

(*Analects* 8.4)

It is now apparent that Confucius neither believed that the Machiavellism of harsh self-mastery can truly transform the self, nor was he persuaded that the hedonistic social utilitarianism that works out through the desire for reputation can exert a transformative effect on the self and broader social relations. Above all, Confucius, *contra* Locke, never thought of soulcraft as a service to statecraft. To him, the contrary made more sense, although the separation between the two was by no means the Confucian *problematique*. True, Confucius admitted that a type of self-control is necessary to construct a moral agent, but he was also assured that self-control alone could not exhaust his idea of self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身). In the remainder of this essay, I delve into the unexplained part of Confucian self-cultivation.

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5 *Keji Fuli* 克己復禮 and Beyond Narcissism


At first glance, Confucius’ reply is almost enigmatic: Why is repaying resentment (*yuan* 怨) with beneficence wrong (or rebuked), while repaying beneficence with beneficence is encouraged? And what does he mean by “remaining true” (*zhi* 直) in dealing with resentment? First, from the passage we can infer that Confucius thinks “repaying beneficence with beneficence” is tantamount to “being true.” Second, we can interpret “remaining (or being) true” in two ways: as being truthful to one’s own nature and as being truthful to (ritual) propriety.\(^{21}\) Since Confucius seldom talked about human nature and, as Herbert Fingarette has brilliantly shown, he in no case understood human beings in psychological terms (like Locke), and considering the centrality of *li* 禮 (ritual propriety) in his ethico-political vision (Fingarette 1972), it can be cautiously concluded that “being true” means to be according to *li* 禮. It can then be further inferred that Confucius didn’t believe repaying resentment with beneficence is commensurate with the moral precepts guided by the *li* 禮.

In my view, when Confucius advised not to repay resentment with beneficence, he never meant a rigorous and unreflective adherence to the *li* 禮. His intention seems to lie in exactly the opposite—that is, it is reflectively appropriate to follow the *li* 禮 rather than to act upon personal sentimental judgment, especially in dealing with resentment. It is because antisocial passions like resentment can hardly be recompensed appropriately solely according to personal judgment; what, then, can be an appropriate recompense? If the recompense was too much (or so conceived by the beneficiary), it can be construed as condescension by the benefactor. Or, reversely, if it was too little, the beneficiary would

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21 James Legge translates *yuan* 怨 into “injury” and *zhi* 直 into “justice” (Lege 1971: 415), but I am not quite persuaded that words like *yuan* 怨 and *zhi* 直 have to be understood in the context of criminal justice, while *yuan* 怨 can be incurred by psychological causes in ordinary interpersonal relations that do not involve physical injury. More problematic regarding Legge’s translation is its anti-Confucian implications, for Confucius taught to refrain from litigation (or a legal system of justice) in resolving social problems. See *Analects* 12.13.
become even more resentful. In either case, the pathological chain reaction of resentment can be far from resolved; in fact, it is only exacerbated. Locke might advise the resentful beneficiary to control his boiling passions and act like a rational being. Yet, how long can one, however virtuous in self-mastery, hold the cooling container of reason while antisocial passions continue to boil up? The Confucian advice is to use the *li* 禮 as an authoritative guideline of one’s moral behavior; not because it is a rational imperative, but because it embraces accumulated wisdom of human beings from the past and present. That is to say, *li* 禮 can provide an appropriate (if not rational) middle ground on which to resolve the pathological feelings threatening social harmony, potentially injuring both personal and interpersonal growth.22 According to Confucius, “Deference unmediated by observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) is lethargy; caution unmediated by observing ritual propriety is timidity; boldness unmediated by observing ritual propriety is rowdiness; candor unmediated by observing ritual propriety is rudeness” (*Analects* 8.2).

Confucius’ point is that when unmediated by the *li* 禮, the borderline between virtue (e.g. candor) and vice (e.g. rudeness) is blurred. Their distinction is completely subject to the differing (often contrasting) subjective interpretations of the persons involved, which is troubling from both moral and political perspectives. It is for this reason that ritual propriety must be incorporated in the process of self-transformation alongside self-control that initially reconstructs moral agency. Together, these two practices complete the Confucian notion of self-cultivation. Here we can garner the full implications of the *Analects* 12.1 with regard to self-cultivation:

**YAN Hui inquired about ren. The Master replied, “Through self-discipline and observing ritual propriety one becomes a ren person (ke ji fu li wei ren 克已復禮為仁). If for the space of a day one were able to accomplish this, the whole empire would rally to one’s moral power of ren. Becoming a ren one is self-originating—how could it originate with others? (wei ren you ji er you ren hu zai 爲仁由己而由人乎哉).”**

Clearly, Locke’s idea of self-transformation touches23 only the first half of the Confucian self-transformation—self-discipline, or in Chinese, *keji* 克己. Indeed, *keji* 克己 is essential to creating a moral agent who thinks reflectively and acts responsibly. Nonetheless, because liberal self-control has to rely on certain passions for peaceful social coexistence, and since these passions are inherently indeterminate and originate from the desire for dominion, it is still vulnerable to the politics of resentment and the state of nature that it originally set out to overcome. Because of such profound indeterminacy to which the liberal self-control is exposed, liberalism in the end resorts to the rule of law, a system of justice to which litigation that Confucius tried to avoid is central.

The Confucian practice of ritual propriety (*fuli* 復禮) fills this important liberal lacuna by providing certain criteria in dealing with otherwise indeterminate passions (especially antisocial ones) in interpersonal relations. What is so attractive about *li* 禮 is that it not only

22 In social theory, civil society is often equated with a contractual *Gesellschaft*. For instance, Ernest Gellner believes civil society can be achieved only if so-called “the tyranny of cousins or of rituals” is overcome (Gellner 1995: 7–12). However, Ferdinand Tönnies, upon whom Gellner is implicitly drawing, never thought elements of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as empirically (if not conceptually) separable from each other (Tönnies 2001: 64–65). That is, for a modern civil society to be functional, both *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* must be dialectically interwoven. In this regard, a Confucian *li*-oriented civil society is not in itself self-contradictory. Recently, Tan has shown how Confucian ritual can be used as a civilizing and moral vehicle to personal-communal empowerment (Tan 2004).

23 I say “touches” because Confucian self-discipline does not aim at the rigorous Machiavellian self-mastery that Locke recommends.
performs a self-transformative function that simultaneously resolves social conflicts, but because it is not as rigid as legal arrangements, it allows room for moral discretion of the agent. On the one hand, li 禮 appears to be rigorous, as Confucius says, “Do not look at anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety; do not listen to anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety; do not speak about anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety; do not do anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety” (Analects 12.1). On the other hand, it must be self-originating (you ji 由己).

Moreover, fuli 復禮 is predicated on the principle of jing 敬 (respect) (Analects 15.6). According to CHAN Sin Yee, “jing prompts one to treat others in accordance with the rules of li, since jing is about appreciating the worth of others and being serious with them, especially in the form of deference” (Chan 2006: 237). That is, jing 敬 not only reveals an agentic moment in the practice of li 禮 but also vindicates that li 禮 is fundamentally grounded in deference and respectfulness to others. Likewise, pointing out the inextricability between li 禮 and yi 義 (ethical appropriateness), Karyn Lai (2006) argues that reflective thinking and independent inquiry are integral to the practice of li 禮, and to the process of Confucian self-cultivation, rendering li 禮 flexible as opposed to cumbersome and restrictive. However, the agential element in the practice of li 禮 (fuli 復禮) should not be misconceived as a purely rational action. In this regard, Fingarette’s words deserve our attention.

If all are “self-disciplined, ever turning to li,” then all that is needed—quite literally—is an initial ritual gesture in the proper ceremonial context; from there onward everything “happens”… It is important that we do not think of this effortlessness as “mechanical” or “automatic.” … The truly ceremonial “takes place”; there is a kind of spontaneity. It happens “of itself.” There is life in it because the individuals involved do it with seriousness and sincerity. (Fingarette 1972: 8)

I interpret these lines to mean that human spontaneity is not rational action; rational action involves too much purposeful or instrumental endeavor (what the Chinese call youwei 有為) due to Machiavellism and utilitarianism behind it; fuli 復禮 is instead effortless and spontaneous, and yet serious and sincere, since it is cleared of one psychological struggles or social endeavors. In short, fuli is, by way of wuwei 無為, effortless action. Otherwise stated, only through the process of fuli 復禮 can man attain true freedom from his own beast within. Eventually, what we get through this process of keji fuli 克己復禮 is junzi 君子—that is, a ren 仁 person. Junzi 君子 is distinguished from a Lockean gentleman, not because

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24 Also see Analects 3.26 and 4.13, where Confucius discusses the indispensability of both jing 敬 and rang 談 to the practice of li 禮.

25 One may argue that if Lockean self-mastery creating a moral person is narcissistic, the same charge can be leveled to the Confucian self conceived in Mencian-Confucianism that upholds yi 義 alongside ren 仁 (Mencius 1A1, 2B2, 4A10, 6A11, 6B4)—a sense of appropriateness for Confucius, but for Mencius, occasionally referring to righteousness or justice or even honor. According to Mencius, yi 義 is one of the Heaven-endowed moral qualities innate in human nature and develops from one’s sense of shame or what he calls xiu wu zhi xin 羞惡之心. I do admit that Mencius’ unique sensitivity of yi 義 and (its metaphysical justification) presents a kind of “moral narcissism” (if not a Lockean kind), especially when he uses it as a moral weapon against the political power (see Mencius 4A3, 5B7, 6A10). But it is important to note that moral narcissism and self-righteousness characteristic of the person and teaching of Mencius (c.f. Mencius 3B9) should not be thought to represent original Confucian ideas. Unlike Mencius, Confucius admitted that moral self-cultivation was his life-long process of person-making, and he hardly understood it in terms of a (sudden) recovery of human goodness a priori given by Heaven. Moreover, compared with Confucius, Mencius does not give a full account of how li is dialectically entwined with ren 仁, despite his sporadic allusions to it. In my judgment, Confucius’ ethics is much richer and more profound than Mencius’ moralism.
he is completely insulated from the lure of self-love (*amour-propre*), but because he, instead of sublimating it through stringent self-mastery, dissolves it by rendering the self porous to others in the ritualistic relations across multilayered life realms, thus allowing no reified inner/outer distinctions. The Confucian moral self is “relational” precisely in this sense.

### 6 Conclusion

In closing, I want to briefly discuss the ethical implications of the family in both liberalism and Confucianism in its relation to self-transformation. Even if the family has been largely dismissed as a key political institution in modern Western liberalism, liberalism has never overlooked the family completely in transforming a person into an ethical being. As we have seen, to Locke, the family is critical because it is through proper domestic education within the family that a person, otherwise archaic, can be re-created into a rational and responsible social creature who can participate in the social contract in the public space. However, in Lockean liberalism, the family holds an instrumental value only to the extent that it can produce a sociable citizen. That is, the Aristotelian superiority of public over private remains unchallenged. Moreover, the Freudian internalization of the father’s authority within the child with a view to generating “liberal virtue” is too harsh and too Machiavellian a method to cultivate a human being who is genuinely other-caring (not just other-sensitive). Some Western psychologists go even further to say that pathological public violence is in effect rooted in the hidden cruelty in child-rearing that emphasizes self-denial and self-discipline (see Miller 2002).26

The Confucian family has nothing to do with such liberal repression; nor does it have to do with closed consanguinitism that opposes the family to both individualism and civil society (see Liu 2003). Although “Confucian familism” does not aim to produce a rational self-mastered individual, it is not anti-individualistic. I wholly agree with de Bary (1998: 25) when he argues that a stern dichotomy of individualism and collectivism cannot grasp a uniquely Confucian mode of individualism—what he calls “personalism.” Central to Confucian personalism that is promoted in the Confucian family is the self’s continuous growth by constructing relations through interactive ethical practices. Therefore, Confucian familism as an ethic of self-transformation, essentially relation-based, is much more fluid and accommodating than one preoccupied with self-mastery (Rappa and Tan 2003: 92). Indeed, Confucius believed the ethic of familism to be central to self-transformation and interpersonal conflict resolution (*Analects* 12.21). The Confucian lesson is: not by means of rigorous self-mastery, but by invoking filial piety (*xiao* 孝), a special ethical bond between child and parents, can we come to terms with our antisocial passions in a moment of rage.

After all, as Confucius firmly believed, the self, the family, and civil/public relations are all seamlessly intertwined. Then, East Asians must ask whether liberalism, even its best, is resonant with their moral sensibility and their ideal of the family in constructing their own civil society or civil societies in their unique post-Confucian social contexts.

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26 But this is not to argue that Western rationalism is inherently oppressive. The account of reason I take issue with is the modern account and Miller, too, traces the tradition of what she calls “poisonous pedagogy” to the seventeenth-century, especially Locke’s *Education* (Miller 2002: 15–16).
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