

REFLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE: CONFUCIUS AND VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: *Most of scholars have typically regarded Confucius as an ethical thinker broadly construed and not as an epistemological thinker. This paper seeks to overturn that view and, in doing so, has three basic goals. The first goal is to make the case that Confucian thought of the *Analects* is of epistemological significance. Goal two is to locate the significance of the Confucian thought within epistemology while accounting for the past overlooking of this significance. The third goal is to show that the Confucian thought is not only of epistemological significance, but that it can make a contribution to progressing contemporary epistemology.*

Keywords: *Confucius, Ernest Sosa, reflection, virtue epistemology*

Apt belief, animal knowledge, is better than belief that succeeds in its aim, being true, without being apt. Apt belief aptly noted, reflective knowledge, is better than mere apt belief or animal knowledge, especially when the reflective knowledge helps to guide the first order belief so that it is apt. In such a case the belief is fully apt, and the subject knows full well. (Ernest Sosa 2011, 12-13)

The Master said, “When you know, to know (recognize) that you know; and when you do not know, to know (recognize) that you do not know; that is knowledge.” (*Analects* 2.17)¹

1. CONFUCIUS’ THOUGHT IS OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

While the Confucius of the *Analects* has been regarded as providing a virtue-based approach in ethics, he is not commonly noted as providing anything of epistemological significance. (Yao, 2000: 33). In this paper I will argue that the Confucian thought of the *Analects* is of epistemological significance, in particular for virtue epistemology. In this section, I am simply making the case that particular epistemological stances are taken in the *Analects* that are not merely commonsensical

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¹ See translation and discussion by Sosa (2015).

or obvious. Yet, in the context of the vast literature on Confucius, my claim is a bold one. I am making a claim that runs counter to much ancient and contemporary treatment of Confucius. In this section I will defend this claim. I had better also account for why Confucius has not been seen as making a contribution to epistemology. My focus shifts to this task in the next section.

Confucius is undoubtedly concerned with moral issues. In fact, on some interpretations of the *Analects*, morality is the main concern. Jeffrey Riegel (2013), in the *Stanford Encycloedia of Philosophy*, suggests just such an interpretation. He writes that the Confucius of the *Analects* appears most concerned with moral matters. In fact, because of the central place of virtues in Confucian thought, virtues such as *ren* (universal benevolence), and Confucius' discussion of such virtue in relation to the *junzi*, an exemplar of the virtuous person, Confucius is naturally seen as doing virtue ethics.² To be clear, I am not saying that those who see Confucius as making a contribution to moral thought are mistaken. However, it would obviously be a mistake to see Confucius as only having such a concern. Just like Aristotle, Confucius is clearly concerned with what it is to be an exemplary person or good agent in a much broader sense than a solely moral sense. For example, the inherent partiality of *xiao*, translated as 'filial piety', is not *obviously* a moral virtue, though it is a virtue discussed by Confucius: depending on whether morality is best seen as necessarily requiring impartiality, it may be best to see *xiao* as a filial virtue (or an ethical virtue) but not a moral virtue *per se*. In other words, on this view, *xiao* is a non-moral virtue, which nevertheless the exemplary person possesses. This provides one basis for thinking that it is a mistake to see Confucius as only being concerned with morality. This claim, however, does not rest on that.

Confucius also lists *zhi*, wisdom, as a virtue. In fact, it is listed in the *Analects* as one of three virtues that lead the way to becoming a *jun-zi*: "The wise (*zhi*) are free from perplexities; the virtuous [actually *ren*] from anxiety; and the bold from fear". (*Analects* 9.29, discussed in Mi 2015, 365). *Zhi* is, therefore, a significant virtue in Confucian thought and an intellectual virtue at that.

A concern for what it is to be a good agent in a sense that is not reducible to the moral is still within the domain of ethics. This is surely right in that the notion of good agent is used in ethics not necessarily just to refer to the moral agent but rather to the agent who lives well. We can categorize discourse on how to live well or theories of the good life as ethics without taking either to necessarily be reducible to moral theory. Confucius is, in fact, concerned with how to live well.

As with Aristotle, part of this living well in Confucian thought is constituted by an epistemic component, of which there is detailed discussion. Confucius, unlike Aristotle however, did not leave us any writings through which we could discover his ideas. Rather, like Socrates, we learn about Confucius' ideas through records kept by

² Early translations of the *Analects* rendered *jun-zi* as 'gentleman', though a more recent and perhaps more apt translation from Ames and Rosemont (1998) translates *jun-zi* as 'exemplary person'. (Wong 2013).

his students. The record kept of Confucius' ideas was a series of short descriptions of situations and what Confucius said in those situations. The form in which we have Confucius' ideas is not such as to lend itself to comprehensive unambiguous accounts of theoretical positions; interpretations of Confucian thought are required.

For this reason, I am not making the case that Confucius is a virtue epistemologist, though, given the sophistication of his thought as evidenced in the *Analects*, I am not saying he is not either. This is why in this section I defend the more restricted claim mentioned earlier—that some of what Confucius said, as recorded in the *Analects*, was of epistemological significance, particularly of virtue epistemological significance.

Let us now turn to Confucian thought that is of epistemological significance. The view that there is nothing of epistemological significance in the Confucian thought of the *Analects* overlooks the fact that Confucius in the *Analects*, does have things to say about epistemological matters. It is true, however, that Confucius does not approach epistemological matters the way epistemologists in the modern era have tended to do so. Confucius shows his concern for epistemological matters within an agent-based approach. This is just the same way that he shows concern for moral matters. This agent-based approach in Confucian thought is in keeping with the agent-based approach of virtue epistemology more generally.

For example, according to Confucius, the exemplary person, in order for that person to be exemplary, must carefully scrutinize what we would today call first-order beliefs. If we want to have the epistemic status characteristic of the superior man, then those first-order beliefs must be subject to appropriate reflection. This idea is developed by distinction between two sorts of knowledge, *shi* (識) and *zhi* (知) in the *Analects*. I (2015) have discussed this distinction in more detail and highlighted the parallel with Sosa's distinction between animal and reflective knowledge.³ *Shi*, which usually stands for “recognizing” or “memorizing” in Chinese, can be understood as first-order knowledge, or information acquired. *Zhi*, on the other hand, is second-order and is ascended to when first-order knowledge has been subject to the right sort of reflection and thereby undergoes development. It is in the following passage knowledge (*zhi*) is characterized as reflective knowledge:

The Master said, “When you know, to know (recognize) that you know; and when you do not know, to know (recognize) that you do not know; that is knowledge.” (*Analects* 2.17).⁴

In the passage quoted below, there is also a description that indicates the significance of the *zhi* and *shi* distinction for the exemplary person and, from the second sentence, a characterisation of *shi*:

The Master said, “There may be those who act without knowing why. I did not do

³ Mi (2015) highlights that sources of *shi* are the senses and memory. Such knowledge allows us to recognize, identify, differentiate, and simply to know certain things. As Mi points out, however, Confucius is not very much concerned with first-order knowledge.

⁴ For further discussion of the epistemological significance of this passage, see Sosa (2015).

so. Hearing much and selecting what is good and following it; seeing much and keeping it in memory—this is the second style of knowledge [or a lower level of knowledge].” (*Analects* 7.28).

What is important to note here is that Confucius, an exemplar too, indicates that *zhi* is required for action, not merely *shi*. He does so by saying that he does not act without *zhi*. In fact, aside from getting a distinction between two different sorts of knowledge, we also get an indication as to why epistemological matters are significant for moral matters. The virtuous person should have the right sort of knowledge, reflective knowledge, before acting. From these passages, fragmentary though they are, we can see that Confucius’ thought is of epistemological significance. In what follows, I will explore the significance of that thought in greater depth.

2. LOCATING THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFUCIAN THOUGHT⁵

Within traditional Chinese scholarship there was not an epistemology on the modern Western model, or, to simplify, a science of knowledge. There was no isolated study of knowledge abstracted from daily concerns. It is therefore unsurprising that Chinese scholars did not categorize Confucian thought as making a contribution to epistemology as well as ethics.

In Western scholarship, certainly since Western scholars first came into contact with Confucian thought and up until very recently, a strongly contrasting practice hold sway. Knowledge and related theoretical issues, such as skepticism and justification, have been studied in isolation from what it is to be a good agent. In fact, for this reason, it is understandable that the epistemological significance of Confucian thought has been overlooked. Confucian thought could not be seen as being of epistemological significance by Western scholars, when that thought looked so unlike epistemology as practiced by Western scholars.

So what is changed? In recent years, epistemology in the West has undergone a significant shift. There has been “a virtue turn”.⁶ (Mi, Slote, and Sosa 2015). This has meant that in much epistemology there has been a move away from the examination of epistemic issues in isolation from one another to a theoretically unified agent-based examination of epistemological issues.

As mentioned, this agent-based approach in epistemology, marks a new trend in the field. The virtue turn has been a welcome response to the blockages and sclerosis

⁵ To be sure, there is a long Confucian tradition from the classical Confucianism, Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, all the way up to the contemporary Neo-Confucianism. However, the Confucian thought I am focusing on here is mainly the Confucian thought of the *Analects* in the first three sections, and moves on to the Confucian thought of *The Great Learning* in Section 4. Instead of doing the scholarly interpretation work on the Confucian thought, I opt for doing philosophical work and setting up the philosophical problematics plus their solutions.

⁶ Actually, this can also be described as a virtue return, as it marks epistemology's return to the approach of Aristotle and Plato. (Mi, Slote, and Sosa 2015).

that epistemology faced. The lack of a plausible theoretically unifying approach in epistemology, and the lack of such an approach that was agent-based in particular, have meant that there was an apparent undue, to many outside of the fielding, perplexing focus on one particular sort of cases—Gettier cases; an inability to provide a convincing account of a core, perhaps the core, concept of epistemology—justification; and a failure of the narrow, theoretically ununified approach to produce theoretical consistency across areas of specialization—the value problem.

The virtue turn has led to dialectical progress across all of these areas, though, unsurprisingly, in none of these areas has the matter become settled. Virtue theorists such as Sosa (2007) and Greco (2010) have offered robust virtue epistemological solutions to Gettier cases, while Pritchard (2010) has offered an anti-luck virtue epistemological solution.⁷ It should be noted that other virtue epistemologists have regarded the decades long concern with the problem as mistaken and have developed new areas of epistemology which are unconcerned with the analysis of knowledge and solving the Gettier problem. (Baehr 2008).

Arguably the virtue turn was initiated by Sosa's (1980) paper in response to the problem of epistemic justification mentioned above. It was his pioneering work, "The Raft and the Pyramid", which introduced a virtue epistemological approach as a solution to a mainstream epistemological problem. In the paper Sosa argues that both foundationalist and coherentist accounts of justification suffer from fatal flaws but that a virtue theoretic account can take the best from each approach while avoiding the fatal flaws of each.

Linda Zagzebski (2003), a pre-eminent virtue theorist makes the case that a widely supported account of epistemic justification—reliabilism, an account of justification claimed by its proponents as necessary for knowledge, creates difficulties in accounting for the value of knowledge. Plausibly, a good theory of knowledge will not only be informative with regard to the nature of knowledge, but a good theory of knowledge will also allow us to account for the value of knowledge—in particular, the superior value of knowledge vis-a-vis mere true belief. The swamping problem that Zagzebski identifies for reliabilists is addressed by leading virtue theorists such as Greco (2011, 2010, 2009). Greco's agent reliabilist response is to defend the claim that knowledge is a kind of achievement, an achievement being a success from ability, and that achievements have value that mere true beliefs lack.

The virtue turn in epistemology with its agent-based approach enables Western scholars who examine Confucian thought to see its epistemological significance. In fact, engagement by Western scholars with Confucian thought as virtue epistemological has been almost non-existent up until now. Nonetheless, Sosa (2015), a leading virtue epistemologist, does engage with an epistemological aspect of Confucian thought. I have also worked on this matter for years, and make a further effort and development here in this paper.

⁷ Pritchard (2010, 24) defines robust virtue epistemology as theories of the nature of knowledge that account for knowledge exclusively on the basis of virtue and don't retain a separate anti-luck condition.

3. CONFUCIAN THOUGHT – PROGRESSING THE DEBATE

Having made the case that Confucian thought is of epistemological significance, in particular of virtue epistemological significance, I now turn to making the case that Confucian thought can contribute to progressing contemporary virtue epistemological discourse.

The recordings of Confucius' sayings are indicative of well-thought out positions, which chime with positions in contemporary debates in a number of areas of philosophy. In fact, in my own virtue epistemological work, I have drawn on some Confucian thought. The distinction in the *Analects* between different types of knowledge is just one example.

There are, however, areas in Confucian thought, even with regard to the good intellectual agent, which are unique and are worthy of further examination. Confucius, for example, gives special place to reflection in what he has to say about the good epistemic agent. While several philosophers in the contemporary literature are developing positions with regard to reflection (see Kornblith 2012; Kvanvig 2014), Confucius offers innovations in this area. These ideas are not merely of epistemological significance, but have the potential to progress virtue epistemological discourse. To see where Confucian thought can help progressing the virtue epistemological discourse, it's important to provide some background to that discourse.

An interest in the epistemological significance of reflection has been growing in contemporary epistemological discourse. On the one hand, we can find a challenge to its epistemological significance posed by Hilary Kornblith (2012) and, on the other hand, Sosa (2014, 2011) has also been advocating its epistemological significance.⁸

As I have discussed, Kornblith (2012, 1) charges philosophers with having a mistaken view of the nature of reflection and its potential as a capacity. For example, philosophers' views of reflection, according to Kornblith, conflict with an empirically informed view according to which reflection is not capable of bringing about philosophical progress. In fact, he claims that many of the processes involved in reflection are "terribly unreliable". (Kornblith 2012, 1). In support of his position, Kornblith (2012, 23) cites various studies purporting to show that belief formation is unduly affected by colours, anchoring effects, and so on.⁹

Kornblith's charge poses a challenge to Sosa's (2014) theory of knowledge, which accords a special place for reflection. Sosa (2014, 13) conceives of reflection as being "something directed or turned on itself" or "meditation, or careful thought". As discussed, Sosa distinguishes animal knowledge from reflective knowledge. The former is a brute knowing, while the latter is a meta-competent knowing.

Sosa (2011, 1-13) articulates this through his AAA (Accuracy, Adroitness, and Aptness) model, which treats belief as a kind of performance. According to the AAA model performances have three aspects by which they can be assessed. These three

⁸ See Mi and Ryan (2015) for examination of these two positions.

⁹ For further discussion of Kornblith on reflection, see Mi and Ryan (2015).

aspects of performance are accuracy, adroitness, and aptness. Knowledge is a case of a well performing belief and, as such, each of the three aspects are present in cases of knowledge. In cases of knowledge, belief is accurate and so true, belief is adroit and manifests competence, and a belief is apt—it is true because competent. Sosa calls such well performing belief animal knowledge. Simply speaking, knowledge for Sosa is simply an apt belief.

Reflective knowledge is a meta-competent knowing. It is a type of knowledge that goes beyond animal knowledge. Sosa defines meta-competent knowledge as apt belief aptly noted. Such belief also follows the AAA model of performance, though the well performing belief of meta-competent knowledge is an order higher than apt belief, requiring as it does belief. Such meta-competent knowing is belief recognized as apt because of competence. For Sosa, this meta-competence is a reflective competence. If, however, Kornblith is right that the processes involved in reflection are 'terribly unreliable', then it is hard to see how reflection could qualify as a competence and, in turn, how we can say there is such thing as reflective knowledge, at least the sort of reflective knowledge that Sosa has in mind. If Kornblith is right that philosophers don't understand the nature of reflection, then the task facing the defender of reflective knowledge looks daunting.

In my own work, I attempt to answer that challenge and a crucial part in doing so is informed by Confucian thought. In Confucian thought, it is the *jun-zi*, the virtuous or exemplary person, who is properly reflective. This inspires the move to differentiate between skillful reflection or virtuous reflection from unskillful reflection or unvirtuous reflection, which in any case is a plausible distinction that bears on the empirical data that Kornblith offers in support of his position that reflection is 'terribly unreliable'.

My next step is to elaborate on the nature of reflection. Again, Confucian thought shapes the account I have been setting out. While part of what I say about the nature of reflection, and skillful reflection, draws on dual-process theory in psychology and cognitive science, another part draws on what is said about reflection in the *Analects*.

In the *Analects* there is a distinction between two sorts of reflection. The exemplary person's has a reflective capacity with two key components. There is a perspective component and a retrospective component in the exemplary person's reflective capacity and dispositional responses. This perspective component involves perception and reasoning, which are directed at a certain goal or good.¹⁰ In other words, reflection that takes place draws on these capacities and does so with a particular goal or goals in mind. The perspective component of reflection disposes the virtuous agent to carefully look ahead when appropriate.

The retrospective component, on the other hand, utilizes memories and trained responses. In this case, these responses aren't directed at reaching certain goals but at moving away from or avoiding their opposites. The retrospective component of reflection disposes the exemplary agent to carefully draw on learning from past mistakes when appropriate.

¹⁰ The exemplary agent will have goods or appropriate ends as their goals.

The Chinese ‘省’ is used for the retrospective component, while ‘思’ is used for the perspective component, as we can see from the *Analects*:

The philosopher Zeng said, “I daily reflect (省) on myself with regard to three points: whether, in transacting business for others, I may have been not faithful; whether, in intercourse with friends, I may have been not sincere; whether I may have not mastered and practiced the instructions of my teacher.” (*Analects* 1.4).

The Master said, “When we see men of worth, we should *think* (思) of equaling them; when we see men of a contrary character, we should turn inwards and *reflect* (省) on ourselves.” (*Analects* 4.17).

Ji Wen thought (思) thrice, and then acted. When the Master was informed of it, he said, “Twice may do.” (*Analects* 5.20).¹¹

So, skillful reflection has the model like a dual-sided mirror: On the one hand, perspective reflection as thinking forward (or “思”), let us call it *forward-looking reflection*, plays a role *like a guiding light* which lays out and shines through objective evidence, information, and models in the conscious and conscientious mind of the agent (who is thinking and making a choice of the right way to perform and endeavor to attain his aim, whatever the aim may be). On the other hand, retrospective reflection as thinking backward (or “省”), call it *backward-looking reflection*, plays a role like a *searching alarm* which retrieves and inspects beliefs, thoughts, and representations in the short term or long term memory of the agent (who is examining any wrongdoing of his or hers in the past and is seeking his or her best way to avoid or improve them in the future).

Reflection in both directions, has a great deal to do with Confucius's conception of knowledge. As I have shown in my work¹², perspective (forward-looking) reflection and retrospective (backward-looking) reflection can square very nicely with the ideas of “to know that you know” and “to know that you don't know”, both of which can go hand in hand and make a joint contribution to our acquisition of knowledge and the pursuit of the ultimate epistemic goal.

To understand what knowledge is and why we should want to acquire the kind of knowledge Confucius proposes pursuing (to his students and to human beings in general), the best way to proceed is to focus on the important concept of “learning” (“學”) and the relationship between learning and reflection. A key passage from the *Analects* of Confucius may help clarify matters here:

¹¹In these translations of the *Analects* ‘thinking’ is used for ‘思’. Elsewhere I make the case, following John Dewey (1933, 9) that reflection is characterised by ‘active, persistent, and careful consideration’. It's clear that where ‘思’ is being used in the passages, it is described as an action with the above characterization, hence I think reflection is the appropriate translation.

¹²Mi (2015) emphasizes that for Confucius “to know that you know” together with “to know that you don't know” will constitute what he redeems to be the best kind of knowledge (or wisdom).

The Master said, “Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous.” (*Analects* 2.15)

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of learning in Confucius's teachings and in his own career. He teaches his students (at the very beginning of the list of his teachings in *Analects*) through rhetorical question that it is “pleasant (enjoyable) to *learn* with a constant perseverance and application” (*Analects* 1.1).¹³ He also vividly describes his own autobiographic career as follows:

At fifteen, I had my mind bent on *learning*. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had *no doubts*. At fifty, I *knew* the decrees of Heaven¹⁴. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right. (*Analects* 2.4)

Without learning, many desirable qualities of character or performance (moral as well as intellectual) will become defective. Confucius gives six examples of the flaws that result from supposedly good qualities when combined with a lack of effort at learning. Let me just mention the one which is related to our topic here: “There is the love of knowing without the love of learning - the beclouding here leads to dissipation of mind.” (*Analects* 17.8) The love of knowing counts as a very good virtue and one of the epistemic goals Confucius has set up for pursuing knowledge, but it will lead to an empty mind and become fruitless if one has no desire to learn.

When we learn, we learn to *acquire* knowledge, to *possess* knowledge, and to *enjoy* knowledge, be it common knowledge, practical knowledge, craft knowledge, moral knowledge, or theoretical knowledge. That is why Confucius also compares different degrees of dealing with the acquisition of knowledge, which we will see reflected in three different grades of knowledge. He says: “They who know the truth are not equal to those who love it, and they who love it are not equal to those who delight in it.”¹⁵ (*Analects* 6.20) Those who simply know the truth are people who can acquire knowledge through their basic (cognitive) functions. Those who love (not emotionally but intellectually) knowledge show their willingness and consciousness

¹³ Some may object that the point of *Analects* 1.1 here is to emphasize “practice”, but not “learning”. However, it is quite obvious from what is being said here that Confucius emphasizes that it is pleasant to “learn” and to “constantly practice what is learned”. Both “learning” and “practice” make a great contribution to our reflective knowledge.

¹⁴ We also need to figure out what kind of knowledge Confucius has in mind in “knowing the decrees of Heaven”.

¹⁵ Two points should be noted here. We should see each comparison as marking a step on one journey to the highest standing. In other words, while loving the truth is superior to knowing the truth, loving the truth also involves knowing the truth, and while enjoying the truth is superior to loving the truth, enjoying the truth also involves loving the truth. The second point regards the object of each of the stages (the object of knowing, loving, enjoying). I interpret “之” as “truth”, though my point would also hold if “*dao*” was the interpretation. Furthermore, I am not taking truth here to refer only to empirical propositions. I take it also to include such truths as moral truths. I reject therefore, a purely intellectualist interpretation of this passage, just as I reject a purely moralist interpretation of this passage.

to employ a higher cognitive mechanism in order to grasp what they have learned and secure the possession of knowledge. Finally those who delight (with no doubts and no regrets) in knowledge possession can savor the love of knowledge and enjoy the highest epistemic status, that is, they can achieve comprehensive understanding.

The following two questions bring into focus the relevance of what has been discussed in the previous section. First, what role can reflection play in our overall learning and acquisition of knowledge? Second, what are the proper epistemic goals in our pursuit of knowledge? The two questions are closely related.

Let's first see how reflection and learning interact with each other, and further contribute jointly to the acquisition of knowledge. Learning, according to Confucius, requires the learner to frequently revisit what he has learned and to make good use of it. Most translations emphasize the importance of putting what you have learned to good use, repeated practice, and repeated application. However, if we take into account and consider Confucius' observation that "learning without thought is labor lost" ("學而不思則罔") and his advice to "keep cherishing old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new" ("溫故而知新", *Analects* 2.11), then we will not only see the equal importance of repeatedly revisiting and cherishing the old knowledge we have learned, but also realize the real point of constantly practicing and applying it.

The real point of Confucius' "learning and practice" ("學習" in Chinese) has to do with reflection in both directions (forward-looking and backward-looking). Without perspective reflection (careful and conscious deliberation) as guidance for learning, our pursuit of knowledge will be puzzling and fragile. Without retrospective reflection (cautious and conscientious examination) as an inspector of learning, our acquisition of knowledge will be labor lost and go nowhere.

Learning without reflecting (with both directions), not only results in failure to improve, but may also lead to us making easily avoidable mistakes as well. However, Confucius also understands that we cannot simply reflect without new learning either. Without having inputs from learning, our reflection will become empty and eventually fade away. Without the kind of first-order knowledge in hand—what we learn from seeing, hearing, touching, practicing, or even reasoning—we will have no objects that we can reflect upon. While we learn, we learn our everyday knowledge, be it practical knowledge, craft knowledge, or knowledge about the external world. While we reflect upon what we have learned, we learn even more and know even better. As such, reflection can help us reach the highest grade of knowledge.

4. CONFUCIAN CONTRIBUTION TO VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

I have been concerned here to show that not only is the Confucian thought of the *Analects* of epistemological significance, but that it can help us progress contemporary virtue epistemology. By focusing on reflection as a virtue, we can account for the possibility that reflection is 'terribly unreliable' in some cases, while defending the claim that in some cases, for agents with the requisite virtue, it is not.

In my discussion of Sosa's virtue epistemology, I have highlighted the central role that reflection plays in one of the leading theories of knowledge. While the place of reflection in Sosa's theory demonstrates the significance of reflection, the Confucian understanding of reflection is of importance as it tells us about the nature of this epistemologically significant element. This provides a basis for understanding an aspect, plausibly a central aspect, of the epistemically virtuous agent that has been under explored in the contemporary literature.¹⁶ Next I highlight a number of other areas in which Confucian thought can progress virtue epistemology.

Aside from helping us understand the nature of reflection as a virtue, Confucian thought on the reflection of the exemplary agent, together with the Confucian distinction between two different sorts of knowledge, helps us diagnose what goes wrong in the Fake Barn County case, and why, were there to be knowledge in such a case, it would be of a superior sort of knowledge.¹⁷ (Mi 2015, 366). Let's consider the Barney case, as described by Pritchard (2012, 251):¹⁸

Using his reliable perceptual faculties, Barney non-inferentially forms a true belief that the object in front of him is a barn. Barney is indeed looking at a barn. Unbeknownst to Barney, however, he is in an epistemically unfriendly environment when it comes to making observations of this sort, since most objects that look like barns in these parts are in fact barn façades.

For Sosa, Barney has animal knowledge and so is fully competent though he doesn't have the complete second-order competence necessary for the apt belief to be aptly grasped.¹⁹ By distinguishing animal knowledge (apt belief) from reflective knowledge (apt belief aptly noted as such) and explaining the Barney case as a case of animal knowledge, Sosa provides a position that goes some way to reconciling competing intuitions with regard to the case.²⁰

While concurring with much of Sosa's position in this matter, we can identify the problem in the Barney case as a failure to manifest a competence of skillful reflection (some kind of metacognition). Certainly Barney is unfortunate. How could he have known that he was in such a situation? This, however, is beside the point – sometimes knowledge, especially reflective knowledge, is hard.²¹ That we deny that he has

¹⁶ While there is a contribution to contemporary virtue epistemology from the *Analects*, of course what is said there requires careful interpretation and isn't elaborated upon the way positions in contemporary epistemology tend to be. So while we might like to know more about reflection on Confucian thought, what we have from the *Analects* on reflection is limited. Yet as evidenced from the quoted passages and the discussions of those passages, what we do have is intricate, plausible, and interesting thoughts on reflection that fit well with our pre-theoretical image of the epistemically virtuous agent.

¹⁷ The Fake Barn County case appears in a paper by Goldman (1976), though the author credits Carl Ginet with the example.

¹⁸ The original barn façade case first appeared in a paper by Alvin Goldman (1976). Goldman credits the example to Carl Ginet.

¹⁹ This is owing to his situation. (Sosa 2012, 12).

²⁰ Greco (2010), by arguing that abilities are environment-relative, offers a different way for dealing with Barney-type cases. For criticism of this response, see Author B (2014).

²¹ Exercising the relevant metacognition in a given situation does not imply engaging in a lengthy

reflective knowledge on the basis of his failure to manifest metacognition does not imply that we think that an agent has to exercise the same carefulness in every situation. Of course, when a situation doesn't call for such carefulness, there is no need to manifest such carefulness.²² Recall, the reflection of the exemplary agent aims both at goods and seeks to avoid bads. While Barney in Fake Barn County is, let's assume, aiming at truth when he forms his belief, a plausible interpretation of the case is that Barney does not exhibit the retrospective component of virtuous reflection, though this is precisely the sort of case when such retrospective reflection is required to avoid going wrong. If he were to engage his retrospective reflection, then we would at least expect him to be more cautious and sensitive in his belief. It's also the case, that were Barney or any agent to get something right because of competence in the face of a hostile epistemic environment, then that competence would likely involve a reflective capacity to overcome the misleading appearances that hostile epistemic environments typically involve. This indicates an epistemic contribution of virtuous reflection.

Confucian thought, this time in *The Great Learning*, has another contribution to make to epistemology.²³ In this case, it most obviously does so in the area of social epistemology. While *The Great Learning* is concerned with reflection, it is also concerned with 'extended knowledge'. At the very beginning of *The Great Learning*, we learn what it is about: "The way of great learning consists in the manifestation of manifesting virtue, in reaching out to others, in achieving ultimate goods".

According to the text, when reflection and extended knowledge are appropriately developed, then final goods may be attained. More specifically, second-order virtue, of which virtuous reflection is an example, puts us in a position to work towards obtaining the best kind of epistemic goods. We should begin by trying to comprehend the world around us. This means taking in information or a subject matter in a way that is systematic. By doing so we are better positioned to weed out errors from our own mind and eventually reach understanding and wisdom—the best kind of epistemic goods. The other theme of *The Great Learning* regards 'extended knowledge' which concerns epistemic cooperation with others, and requires reflection and consensus. By establishing consensus a group has peace or harmony which allows it to persist as a social unit and facilitates learning cooperation within the group. This attention to the need for consensus within epistemic groups is an alternative to the common knowledge requirement for group knowledge. While we're not going to make the case for preferring consensus to common knowledge as such a requirement here, our point is to draw the reader's attention to the alternative we get

process of reflection every time one forms a belief. As we have seen, reflection may lead to a metacognition that is immediate.

²² We're not saying that Barney is blameworthy. The point is purely the epistemic point as to what would need to happen in order for Barney to have knowledge. He is not in an environment in which what look like barns are barns, rather he is in an environment in which lots of things that look like barns are actually barn façades.

²³ Aside from the *Analects*, *The Great Learning*, along with two other texts make up what are regarded as the canonical Confucian texts. (Mi and Ryan forthcoming).

from Confucian thought, which, even if ultimately rejected, can help develop the discourse on this topic. Now let's consider Jenny the Chicago visitor's case for a further different, though related, point:

Our protagonist, whom we will call "Jenny", arrives at the train station in Chicago and, wishing to obtain directions to the Sears Tower, approaches the first adult passer-by that she sees. Suppose further that the person that she asks has first-hand knowledge of the area and gives her the directions that she requires. Intuitively, any true belief that Jenny forms on this basis would ordinarily be counted as knowledge. (Pritchard 2010, 40).²⁴

What is important about this case is that Jenny plausibly is required to exercise a relevant counterfactual sensitivity (Pritchard 2010). For example, were the delivery of the testimony to be relevantly strange, say it is delivered with suppressed sniggers, or the content strange, suppose the testifier were to say to her to take the next train back to New York, the agent would be appropriately responsive to such factors. Such a responsiveness could involve not believing the testifier. Such a response to the Jenny case is not unique but appears somewhat ad hoc in that we don't get such a diagnosis from virtue epistemologists in other cases. Let me diagnose this case by bringing the Confucian ideas:

- (1) On Sosa's account, a cognitive agent is in the running for knowledge if her belief is formed competently, by some intellectual virtues, a particular sort of reliable process. The cognitive achievement of attaining knowledge is creditable to the agent because the achievement (arriving at the truth) manifests the agent's abilities.
- (2) Our protagonist, whom we called "Jenny", arrives at the train station in Chicago and, wishing to obtain directions to the Sears Tower, approaches the first adult passer-by that she sees. Suppose further that the person that she asks has first-hand knowledge of the area and gives her the directions that she requires.
- (3) Intuitively, any true belief that Jenny forms on this basis would ordinarily be counted as knowledge (testimonial knowledge). However, it is also intuitive that we should give the credit to the testifier (the adult passer-by), since it is him that has first-hand knowledge of the area.
- (4) It seems to be right to think that Jenny's true belief is of some credit to her as well. After all, having arrived in the city and not knowing where one of the city's famous sights is, asking someone how to get to that sight is the right kind of thing to do; and it's not as if she would ask a young child, she asks adult, and she didn't ask one who obviously looked like a tourist.
- (5) Furthermore, Jenny wouldn't have just believed the testifier she asked no matter what that testifier said. Had the testifier given Jenny directions while say trying to suppress sniggers, then Jenny wouldn't have believed him. As well as how the testimony is delivered, what testimony is delivered, or in other words the content of the testimony, may also influence Jenny's judgment. If Jenny were told, upon

²⁴ This example is originally from Jennifer Lackey (2007, 352). She used the case to support her claim that we don't deserve credit for everything we know and challenge Greco's virtue epistemology.

asking how to get to the Sears tower, to take the next train back to New York, then she wouldn't have believed the testifier. If all this is right then it seems correct to say that Jenny's true belief is of credit to her as well.

- (6) Defenders of an extended cognition thesis already employ a requirement very much like the appropriate integration requirement. This requirement has sometimes been expressed as a coupling relationship. (Clark and Chalmers, 1998). The requirement is that for extended cognition to take place, the organismic agent must be properly integrated with an object (or subject) beyond that organismic agent. Jenny in this case can be seen as exhibiting her extended cognition.
- (7) Extended knowledge requires not only extended cognition, but also social institution. Extended cognition in turn requires an appropriate coupling relation, and extended knowledge involving social institution requires epistemic consensus. One can't have an appropriate coupling relation and epistemic consensus without reflective knowledge.
- (8) In the Jenny case, the agent's belief is guided by reflective knowledge. Her first-order testimonial beliefs have been guided by her reflective knowledge. More specifically, her belief about the location of the Sears Tower has been informed by her reflective knowledge about the reliability of testimonial knowledge in the sort of circumstances that she is in.
- (9) Jenny plausibly has an apt belief, her belief is accurate because it's adroit and so is apt. Jenny, given the description of the case, plausibly also qualifies as enjoying reflective knowledge (knowing full well). It's not as though she doesn't know why she believes as she does, she would presumably say something along the lines of she believes as she does because she knows testifiers are reliable about the location of famous landmarks in their city.

This paper has made the case, contrary to traditional readings of Confucius, that Confucian thought, Confucius in particular, is of epistemological significance. I provided an explanation as to why it's unsurprising that the epistemological significance of Confucian thought has previously been overlooked, while locating that significance in the contemporary epistemological literature. Each of these tasks were, in fact, complementary, with the epistemological significance of Confucian thought best being located within virtue epistemology, and the only recent re-emergence of virtue theoretic approaches in epistemology helping us understand the overlooking of the epistemological significance of Confucian thought. Next I made the case that Confucian thought is not just of epistemological significance, but that it also can contribute to the development of the contemporary discourse. For this we focused on reflection on the significance of reflection in the contemporary debate and what we learn from Confucius about the nature of reflection in the *Analects*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Bo Mou, Yong Huang, and one anonymous referee for their helpful comments and discussions of this article. Warm thanks are also due to Shane Ryan, who assisted with preparation of the text and deserved 50 % credit.

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