

RESPECT, *JING*, AND PERSON

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ABSTRACT: *While respect for persons is fundamental to many moral and political theories, its nature and ground remain controversial. According to the standard model of respect, respect is primarily a response to certain inherent features of a person or an object. Importantly, it is in virtue of the value, status or authority of those features that respect is justified or owed. This model, however, faces many serious challenges. Drawing on the classical Confucian notion of jing (敬), I develop an alternative model of respect, which construes respect as an expression of agent's sense of the self and its place in the world. The emphasis is thus on the agent's own self-conception and the corresponding attitudes and dispositions, as opposed to on inherent features of the objects of respect. To further illustrate this distinction, I contrast the traditional Kantian conception of respect for persons with the Confucian, jing-based, conception along three dimensions: the normative ground, the content, and the distribution of respect. The Kantian respect certainly has its merits, and perhaps is indispensable in some contexts, but there is much more to respect than what Kantians can offer. The Confucian conception of respect, on the other hand, has important theoretical and practical values such that it is essential to an adequate understanding of the role of respect in our moral and political life.*

Keywords: *jing, normative ground, person, respect*

INTRODUCTION

Respect for persons is generally regarded as a fundamental moral requirement; moreover, partly due to the influence of the modern egalitarian ethos, it is widely accepted that all persons, regardless of race, gender, social rank and status, accomplishments, etc., are owed *equal* respect simply because they are persons. While respect for persons in this sense is often taken for granted in our ordinary discourse, and in much of contemporary moral and political philosophy, there is a surprising lack of consensus among philosophers with regard to some foundational issues: What it is about persons that makes them worthy of respect? In virtue of what features that all people have in common that they are owed *equal* respect? Indeed, for

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a long time the task of searching for the basis of equal respect “has been strangely neglected by contemporary egalitarians”, as one commentator observed recently (Carter 2011, 539).¹

These questions are not just of theoretical interests. At a time of drastic and still growing economic and political inequalities, it is a genuine worry that basic moral equality will be threatened or even undermined (Waldron 2017). This essay is a close examination of the normative ground or basis of respect for persons. Unlike most of the philosophical literature on the topic, however, it is not primarily concerned with the specific features of or facts about persons that justify respect, but with the *types* of justification available, and in particular, the *structure* of justification. Therefore, the overarching question that drives this inquiry is partly methodological: what *kind* of reason or justification is needed to vindicate the theoretical and practical significance we attribute to respect? Since relatively little has been said about these foundational issues, my exploration will be inevitably preliminary. However, I will show that, by stepping back and reflecting on these issues, and with some help from the classical Confucian philosophers, we can achieve a richer and more nuanced understanding of respect and of its role in our social lives.

This essay proceeds as follows. I begin by distinguishing two models of respect that differ in how they construe the normative ground of respect; then, in section 2, I further elucidate this distinction by contrasting two conceptions of respect *for persons*: the standard, Kantian conception and the ideal of *jing* (敬; respect, respectfulness, reverence) in the classical Confucian tradition. The essay concludes with explorations of the practical implications of the Confucian *jing* for our world today, especially its potential contribution to overcoming partisanship and to cultivating a more open-minded and collaborative public sphere.

1. *OUTSIDE-IN AND INSIDE-OUT*: TWO MODELS OF RESPECT

The main goal of this section is to motivate a distinction between two *models* of respect. The basis of the distinction concerns a simple question about the *normative* ground of respect: What justifies respect? Why is respect an appropriate attitude toward some object? In the vast literature on respect, there are many substantive proposals that seek to answer this question², but my focus here will not be about the specific details of these proposals, but the general *structure* or *form* of justification that different conceptions of respect have in common.

To clarify my target, it might help to begin with some examples. Suppose I have deep respect for a painter and her work. Why? Well, at least part of the answer has to do with her artistic skills and qualities of her paintings. More generally, it seems natural to attribute the *reason* or *basis* of respect for a person, an object, or an action

¹ Similar observations can be found in Waldron 2017, which is dedicated to the project of identifying the basis of moral equality. In recent years, however, issues surrounding the basis of equality have received more attention, thanks for the works of Carter, Waldron and others (see, for example, the essays in Steinhoff 2014).

² For a helpful review, see Dillon (2018).

(e.g., an altruistic sacrifice, a flawless performance of *The Nutcracker*), etc., to certain features of that very person, object or action. Hence, to the extent that my respect for a thing is justified by reason, that reason is rooted in the perceived value of some features of that thing, whatever the relevant features exactly are.

This simple observation is captured by the first kind of respect I will explore in this paper. On this familiar model, respect for an object is, first and foremost, a *response* to certain properties inherent in that object. It is in virtue of such properties that an entity acquires a special kind of value, status, or authority to which proper respect is *due*. In other words, the respect for a particular object is based on the recognition and acknowledgement of its value, status, or authority. Let us call the properties that confer such value, status or authority *respect-worthy* or *respect-warranting* properties. Since on this model, it is the properties of objects of respect that constitute the basis of respect, and, correspondingly, respect is construed as an appropriate or even required response to such properties, I shall call this the *outside-in* model of respect.

Different accounts of respect, understood this way, will have different explanations of which features can justify respect. While I will not enter this debate here, it is important to note that, on *any* account of respect of this kind, in order to justify the respect for an object X, it needs to 1) specify the relevant respect-worthy properties, and 2) justify the claim that X does indeed has these properties. Another important implication of this model is that, as long as the object indeed has such properties, its status as a respect-worthy object will give rise to certain *claims* on us, regardless of what we happen to think about it. In other words, respect is *demanded by* or *owed to* the object just because of its respect-worthiness. For example, consider respect for *persons* as such³, i.e., respect for people simply because they are persons: on this model, respect for persons is a morally required response to the essential properties of *personhood*.⁴ Furthermore, it is often assumed that *personhood* itself is a respect-worthy property (or at least is necessarily correlated with certain respect-worthy properties): the fact that someone is a person automatically gives rise to the moral obligation to respect that person.

What is it about persons that command such respect? This question turns out to be much more difficult than theorists tend to assume. In particular, those committed to *equal* respect for persons will have a particularly hard time in answering this question, given that the capacities invoked as the ground for respect, such as rationality and

³ *Person*, as a metaphysical category that is associated with a distinctive moral status, is traditionally distinguished from *human*, which is a biological category. The exact condition for personhood is controversial, but it normally includes rationality, agency, self-awareness, etc. Hence, in principle, not all human beings are persons, and some persons may not be human beings, provided they possess the relevant capacity required for personhood. That being said, some have suggested that being a member of the human species is sufficient for the special moral status normally attributed to persons, so that every *human being* should be treated with equal respect. However, this view is subject to serious criticisms (e.g., Singer 1990, McMahan 2002); in any case it is hard to see why species membership *itself* is so morally significant. Thanks for an anonymous reviewer for prompting me to clarify this point.

⁴ For various examples of this construal of respect for persons, see Dillon (2018, Sec. 2).

moral agency, usually admit of degrees. Since humans generally possess these capacities unequally, it seems that the best we can justify is *graded* respect. Moreover, questions can also be raised about human beings who lack the relevant capacities altogether: are young children owed the same kind of respect as normal adults? And what about severely mentally disabled adults? It might be tempting to posit certain threshold (of, say, rationality) for the ground of respect, so that those whose are above the threshold would have equal claims for respect, and their other differences would not matter.⁵ But a challenge for this strategy is that any such threshold would be arbitrary, as it allows a small factual difference (in the degree one instantiates the respect-worthy properties) to make an enormous normative difference.⁶

In any case, it is not the goal of this paper to address these difficult problems. Rather, it suffices to note that many of these problems arise precisely because the fundamental, *outside-in* structure of respect: if respect is a morally appropriate or even required response to some external object in virtue of its inherent features, then in order to justify a particular instance of respect, it is essential that the object does in fact possess the respect-worthy properties that confer on it the special status; furthermore, things to which *equal* respect is owed must all possess such a property (and, presumably, possess it equally).

On the other hand, however, this also means that we can bypass these difficult issues if we can drop the *outside-in* structure of respect as is traditionally presumed; or, at the very least, these issues will be as urgent or essential to the justificatory questions if we pursue this alternative strategy. But is this possible? I believe so. In what follows, I will expand the conceptual space and develop an alternative conception of respect for persons that does not have the *outside-in* structure. This alternative conception is inspired by the Confucian notion of *jing* (respect, reverence). But before we delve into the details, it would be useful to first describe, in very broad strokes, the general idea. In order to make the contrast with the standard conception of respect more vivid, I will call this alternative conception the *inside-out* model of respect.

The basic idea of the *inside-out* model is this: respect, as a morally appropriate or even sometimes required attitude, is *not* generated or demanded by the respect-worthy properties of external objects, but is an expression of the appropriate way of positioning *the self* in relation to others. In other words, respect is a manifestation of a *general* attitude or disposition that pertains to one's way of interacting with the world at large. Hence, this form of respect consists, not in *responding to* or *meeting* external

⁵ The *locus classicus* of this approach is Rawls (1999). See also Waldron (2017) for contemporary development of this approach.

⁶ For more in-depth discussions of these difficulties, see Williams (1973) and Carter (2011). For our purposes it is sufficient to note that while equal (moral) respect is often taken for granted, at least in liberal democracies, the satisfying justification is surprisingly difficult to find. For discussion, see Waldron (2017) and the articles in Steinhoff (2015). In any case, it is not hard to see why these difficulties arise in the first place: since, on this model, the basis of respect lies almost exclusively in the objects of respect, *equal* respect for persons is justifiable only if there is some respect-worthy property that every person possesses equally.

demands, but instead in *directing* one's general disposition of approaching things in the world to specific encounterings. Understood this way, respect is more active in that its focus is less about *perceiving* others accurately (e.g., whether they possess the relevant respect-worthy property?) and *responding* accordingly (e.g., does my action properly express my recognition of their respect-worthiness?), but more about *directing* one's attention to the outside and *positioning* the self appropriately in one's interactions with the environment.

To a first approximation, then, we can understand the standard *outside-in* model of respect as centering on properties of objects *to which* respect is owed, and the alternative *inside-out* model as focusing on the subject's *being* respectful or acting respectfully. The former tends to analogize respect to perception, which is always *about* some external object (and/or its properties). Indeed, this orientation is also reflected in the Latin root of "respect": "*respicere*" (to look back).⁷ The second model, on the other hand, stresses the agent's own attitude or disposition, as manifested in *the way* she interacts with others. Importantly, the difference is not merely *psychological*: on both models, respect can be characterized in terms of the relation between an agent and an object, or as a way the agent treats or responds to the object. Instead, it is primarily *normative*: on the *outside-in* model, the respect for an object is morally justified on the basis of the respect-worthiness of *that object*. In other words, it is morally appropriate to respect an object because that is what the respect-worthiness of that object demands. By contrast, on the *inside-out* model, respect is a manifestation of some morally significant attitude or disposition to *conduct oneself* while dealing with others. It is morally appropriate to respect an object because that is what *being a certain kind of agent*, or *having certain kind of character*, means or implies.⁸

Perhaps the best way to contrast the two models of respect is by systematically examining their similarities and differences with representative examples---and this is what I plan to do in the next section, where I compare Kantian respect for persons with Confucian notion of *jing*. But for now, it is important to make clear that labeling the second model *inside-out* by no means implies that the external objects and their properties are *irrelevant* to respect. The expression is only to highlight the fact that, as far as normative structure is concerned, the point of respect is not to *meet the demand* originated from the value, status or authority of external objects; instead, respect is, on the *inside-out* model, an exercise or expression of the agent's general attitude or disposition of relating the self to others (and the external world more broadly). Specifically, as will be explained later, the general attitude or disposition of *respectfulness* involves, among other things, seriousness, caution, submission, deference, etc. These dispositions are general in that they shape the way the subjects interact with people and things in the world, but they are also context-sensitive, since what *counts as* respectful depends heavily on the features of the objects *as well as* the

⁷ Cf. Darwall (2006, 121).

⁸ Thanks for an anonymous reviewer for suggesting me to highlight this difference between the two models.

specific context in which the interaction takes place. Different people often have different interests, needs, temperament, social status, history, etc., that are crucial for determining the content of appropriate and respectful treatment—that is, for determining *how* to treat other respectfully.

An analogy may help in bringing out the structural difference. Consider the ethical treatment of nonhuman animals. In the animal ethics literature, consequentialists and deontologists alike are very much concerned with the *moral status* of animals (even though they might disagree about its nature and ground). Generally speaking, to have moral status is to be the proper object of moral consideration, and thus to fall within “the circle of moral concern”. A major task of these philosophers, then, is to 1) specify the relevant ground for moral status, i.e., features that confer on a subject the moral status it has, and 2) show that (at least some) nonhuman animals do possess these features. For example, for many Utilitarians, the ground of (at least one type of) moral status is sentience, i.e., the capacity to feel pleasure and pain (e.g., Singer 1990), and since many nonhuman animals are in fact sentient, it follows that they deserve moral treatment and regard. This approach is analogous to the “outside-in” model⁹, for according to these theorists, our obligations toward animals are generated by certain properties *inherent in* animals that confer on them a particular moral status: that is, it is in virtue of these properties the relevant moral obligations are *demande*d by or *owed to* the animals.

By contrast, a virtue-ethical approach to animal ethics promises to do without the notion of moral status altogether. Instead, its focus is on the virtues and vices manifested in our treatment of animals. As a prominent advocate of Aristotelian virtue ethics, Rosalind Hursthouse, has pointed out:

Long before any philosopher invented the notion of moral status, Hindus, Buddhists, and some of the ancient Greeks deplored cruelty to animals and espoused vegetarianism simply on the grounds that it was required by the virtue of compassion or love... Virtue ethics has never needed the concept of moral status. Its principles are the “v-rules,” that is, “virtue- and vice-rules” such as “Do what is compassionate, do not do what is cruel,” and the answer to the question of what groups these apply to is given by the meaning of the terms. (2012, 125)

On this approach, the normative requirements that govern our treatment of animals is rooted, not in the demand generated by the special value, status or authority inherent in them, but in the relevant virtues and vices that can be manifested in our attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, *structurally*, her approach is similar to the “inside-out” model depicted above.

⁹ While for Singer and his followers, sentience itself is not the ground for *respect*, it is nevertheless as the ground for benevolence and care. It is open to these Utilitarians to accept that human beings, in virtue of their rationality or other higher capacities, have a higher moral status than animals. But the point to bear in mind here is that *structurally*, it is an instance of “outside-in” way of thinking: benevolence or care is owed to animals because of the qualities, such as sentience, inherent in the animals themselves.

2. KANTIAN RESPECT VS. CONFUCIAN *JING*

In this section I will further elaborate on the distinction, sketched above, by way of describing and contrasting the Kantian and Confucian conceptions of respect for *persons*.

The Kantian conception, extracted from Kant's own writings and various contemporary Kantian proposals, represents the dominant approach to respect for persons in contemporary moral philosophy. Hence, contrasting it with the Confucian *jing* helps to illustrate the distinctive features of the Confucian approach to respect and its potentials to enrich the relevant discourse. While contemporary Kant scholars disagree on various exegetical details, the interpretation of *Kantian* respect I am going to outline is, I believe, largely uncontroversial.

Another methodological note: for the ease of exposition, I sometimes use *jing* and *respect* interchangeably, but I do not pretend that the English term *respect* is strictly *synonymous* to the ancient Chinese term *jing* (or any other Chinese concept); instead, I will try to elucidate a *conception* of respect for persons (or something close enough) based on the analysis of *jing* and a cluster of related concepts, in order to explicate a promising way of developing the “inside-out” model of respect for persons in greater detail.

2.1 THE KANTIAN CONCEPTION

For Kant and his followers, respect for persons, a fundamental moral requirement, is grounded upon the intrinsic value or worth of persons. More precisely, Kantian respect for persons can be seen as a species of what Stephen Darwall calls *recognition respect* (Darwall 1977). According to Darwall, recognition respect “consists in giving appropriate consideration or recognition to some feature of its object in deliberating about what to do.”(38)¹⁰ For Kant, the relevant property that grounds respect is *rational autonomy*, which confers on persons an absolute and incomparable worth (“dignity”), as opposed to a relative worth (“price”).¹¹ Furthermore, rational autonomy, understood as the capacity of self-regulation and self-legislation, gives persons a special kind of status or authority, i.e., the authority over their own actions, in virtue of which she can make legitimate *demands* or *claims* on other rational beings.

This Kantian picture is familiar, I believe, to contemporary readers, so I shall just briefly highlight three of its key aspects that will serve as interesting points of contrast in our discussion of the Confucian notion of *jing* in the next subsection.

(1) The *normative ground* of respect: Kantian respect is not just a *response* to other persons and their rational nature, but also is *demanded* by their rational nature. As Kant puts it in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, “a human being ... possesses a dignity

¹⁰ Recognition respect is contrasted with what Darwall calls *appraisal respect*, which consists in a positive appraisal of persons, their achievements or their merits.

¹¹ 4:434. Page numbers refer to the Prussian Academy edition of Kant's collected works. All translations are by Mary Gregor from Kant (1996).

(absolute inner worth) by which he *exacts* respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world...Humanity in his own person is the object of the respect which he can *demand* from every other human being, which he must not forfeit.” (6:435; my emphasis) To respect someone in the Kantian sense is to *acknowledge* her authority to *make* certain claims on us, an authority she possesses in virtue of her rational nature, and to *take into account* this authority in our deliberations. Since Kantian respect for persons is grounded upon the essential feature of its objects of respect, i.e., the rational nature of persons, it is clear instance of an *outside-in* type of respect for others

(2) The *distribution* of respect: according to Kant and his followers, all persons are owed respect *equally*, in virtue of their humanity or rational nature. Their social status, achievements, merits, or excellence of character are simply irrelevant as far as the obligation of respect for persons is concerned.

(3) The *content* of respect: Kantians tend to characterize the requirement of respect *negatively*, that is, in terms of restriction or restraint. This is only to be expected, given how they understand the ground of respect. For example, Kant himself famously claims that persons must be treated always as *ends in themselves*, that is, “something that may not be used merely as a means, and hence to that extent limits all choice (and is an object of respect).” (4:428). Likewise, Darwall defines recognition respect for persons as follows: “[to] have recognition respect for someone as a person is to give appropriate weight to the fact that he or she is a person by willing to constrain one’s behavior in ways required by that fact” (45). Hence, the idea shared by Kantian writers is that, persons, as autonomous, rational beings, are entitled to a special *authority* over their ends, values and lives in general, an authority that in turn should regulate the way we treat them in the pursuits of our *own* goals and self-interests.¹²

Later we will see how, from a Confucian perspective, these issues surrounding *normative ground*, *distribution*, and *content* of respect are addressed. But before that, let us begin with the meaning and use of the term in early Confucian texts.

2.2 THE CONFUCIAN CONCEPTION¹³

In the early Confucian writings, *jing*, often translated as “respect” or “reverence”, is typically manifested in the seriousness and attentiveness of one’s regard for or treatment of people, things or states of affairs. Moreover, *jing* is closely associated with notions like *shen* (慎, caution), *gong* (恭, respectfulness), *ci rang* (辭讓, deference), and is considered to be fundamental to *li* (禮, ritual propriety). Crucially, treating an object with *jing* typically involves both behavioral and psychological components, such as having serious regard for that object, paying devoted attention to

¹² See also Hill (1997, 26) and Velleman (2008, 201).

¹³ My discussion of *jing* is greatly indebted to the works of Sin-ye Chan (2006) and Kwong-loi Shun (1997, 2013), although my interpretation differs from theirs on the details, especially those concerning the underlying normative structure of *jing*.

it, *and* expressing that regard through *li* or appropriate manners and demeanors. Consequently, the proper expression of *jing* is extremely sensitive to the context in which the action takes place: whether one succeeds in displaying *jing* correctly always depends on the relevant social norms that govern our conducts in that context.¹⁴

The potential objects of *jing* are multifarious: they include not only people, such as parents (Analects 4.18), the ruler (Analects 4.20), the elder brother (Mencius 6A:5), the honored person (*Xun-Zi*, 96/27/16), but also inanimate objects such laws, rituals, roles, etc. *The Analects* in particular contains a number of passages linking *jing* to *shi* (事), i.e., affairs or official duties (1.5, 13.17, 15.10). For our purposes, it is important to note that in these passages, *jing* is not primarily about acknowledging or responding to the value inherent in one's duties (although such value may well be presupposed)¹⁵, but about the *way* or *manner* in which one performs them. Some passages even seem to suggest that the attitude of *jing* needs not have any particular object as it target at all (6.2, 12.5; see also *Xun-Zi*, 6/3/11-12); rather, in these places, *jing* designates a general way the gentleman leads his life, e.g., a state of being cautious and on guard, the disposition to be respectful, modest, and attentive to the things he interacts with. To borrow Sin-ye Chan's apt phrase, these occurrences of *jing* is best understood as a "frame of mind" that tones the way one deals with others, rather than an intentional mental state that has specific target(s) (Chan 2006, 230-233).¹⁶ According to Chan, *jing* as a frame of mind means *seriousness*, and to the extent that this frame of mind has lasting duration, it is "more related to the character of the person."¹⁷ (231)

I think Chan is exactly right about this, and indeed understanding *jing* as (similar to) a character trait points to an unorthodox conception of *respect for persons* that squarely nicely with the *inside-out* model sketched in the previous section. Just as virtue ethicists such as Hursthouse can potentially justify the moral obligation of humane treatment of animals without invoking the notion of moral status, Confucians can advocate the ideal of treating other people *respectfully* without presupposing anything about the inherent worth, status or authority of persons *as such*. To a first approximation: on the Confucian account, respectfulness toward people and things is a manifestation of a frame of mind, or a character trait, that guides one's way of life generally, and that involves, among other things, caution, attentiveness, and seriousness.

¹⁴ In this regard, *jing* is similar to the virtue of civility. For an illuminating discussion of civility from the Confucian perspective, see Angle (2012, Chap. 6).

¹⁵ Cf. Shun (2013)

¹⁶ Thus the difference between frame of mind and intentional state is similar to that between mood and emotion.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that, according to Chan, sometimes *jing* does refer to an intentional state, which involves "recognizing/appreciating the worth of the objects of *jing*." (233). While I am inclined to agree with her that some objects of *jing* are perceived as valuable, this is not necessarily the case. Furthermore, for reasons to be explained below, I think this way of putting things is too narrow or misleading as far as the normative structure of *jing* is concerned. See also Shun's criticisms of Chan's view in Shun (2013, 45-50).

To further explicate this account, it is again helpful to contrast *jing* with the Kantian conception of respect, and in particular along the three dimensions discussed earlier.

(1) The *normative ground* of respect. There is certainly a sense in which the attitude of *jing* toward an external object is generated on the basis of one's perception or appreciation of its relevant properties, otherwise why direct one's *jing* at this particular object at all? And what *causes* one to *jing* an object in the first place? However, it is important not to conflate the *cognitive* or *psychological* process of *jing* with its *normative structure*. As noted above, the key difference between the *outside-in* conception of respect and the *inside-out* conception is one that concerns the normative ground of respect. Kantian respect is a paradigmatic example of the *outside-in* model, for it presupposes the *normative ground* of respect resides in the inherent features of its objects, i.e., the rational nature of persons. By contrast, *jing*, on my interpretation, is an instance of the *inside-out* model: *jing* is rooted in certain virtuous attitudes and dispositions that constitute one's general way of dealing with the world and one's own place in it. Specifically, these attitudes and dispositions include, but are not limited to, seriousness, caution, modesty, etc. Hence, these two approaches will give different answers to the justificatory question: "why should we respect people?" Kantians would say that (roughly) it is because their status or nature as rational beings gives them a special authority to demand certain treatment from other rational beings, and Confucians, on the other hand, would say that (again, roughly) it is because respecting others expresses one's caution, modesty, and serious regard for them (or, perhaps more naturally, because it is *respectful*, *modest*, *cautious*, etc., to do so.) In other words, while both Kantian respect and Confucian *jing* can be regarded as an appropriate *response* to other people, only Kantians would construe it as a response required by the inherent nature or status of persons as such.

None of this, however, implies that when we *jing* someone their properties lack normative significance. Given the close ties between *jing* and *li* (ritual propriety) in the Confucian tradition, and especially its emphasis on manner, demeanor and other aspects of the external manifestation of *jing*, properties of *jing*'s objects are highly relevant to *how* to appropriately express *jing* in a given context. For example, even if I have in my head a serious regard for you, I might still violate the relevant social norms and thereby fail to *jing* you in the right sort of way. Hence, a person's status, identity, and other properties are important factors that partly determine when and what kind of *jing* is called for. But there is an important difference here too: unlike the Kantian conception, no special emphasis is given to the *inherent* properties of persons as such: a person's social status, her relation to the agent, and the social circumstances they find themselves in, are also as important (if not more so) as her inherent properties. On the Confucian conception, the properties of a person are seen as an aspect of a larger context that determines of the appropriate form of *jing*. Hence, we may *jing* the same person in different ways in different contexts, and priorities of *jing* are also assigned differently, depending the nature of the relevant context (*Mencius*, 6A:5). In short: *jing* is context-sensitive as it is object-sensitive.

(2) The *distribution* of respect. The normative structure of *jing* has interesting implications for distribution of respect. Unlike the Kantians, early Confucians do not seem to be committed to the existence of an essential, or in any case fundamental, property that all persons share *and* that command equal respect. While they do seem to endorse that idea that we should *jing* or respect all people, they never seek to justify this by invoking any inherent property of persons that confers on them a special respect-warranting value or authority.¹⁸ For example, Xun Zi famously says:

The person of *ren* is sure to show respect (*jing*) for others...If a person is a worthy and one does not treat him with respect, then this is to be a beast. If a person is unworthy and one does not treat him with respect, this is to offend a tiger...There is a proper way to show respect for others. If they are worthy, then one values them and shows them respect. If they are unworthy, then one fears them and shows them respect. If they are worthy, one draws near to them and shows them respect. If they are unworthy, one keeps them at distance and shows them respect. There is to be respect for one and all, but the dispositions (*qing* 情) involved are different. (51/13/37-41)¹⁹

Here Xun Zi is concerned with the reasons and appropriate ways to *jing* an individual, which are, as noted above, partly determined by the relevant properties of the individual. Most tellingly, the considerations he invokes for respecting the unworthy is *not* that the unworthy, for all his flaws and vices, is still a person and as such should be respected. That is something one would expect from a Kantian advocate of equal respect. Instead, the reasons Xun Zi cites are almost entirely prudential. However, we can easily make sense of this form of justification with the present interpretation of *jing*: unlike Kantian respect, the Confucian *jing* for a person is not based on the recognition of some universal and inherent value of personhood; rather, it is a manifestation of one's general dispositions such as seriousness, caution and attentiveness in ways that are suitable to one's relation to that person and to the concrete situation one is dealing with. The gentleman can maintain this basic stance of being serious, cautious, and attentive in all sorts of contexts, although the specific reason for maintaining this stance may vary from situation to situation. Being careless and reckless when one deals a dangerous, morally depraved person clearly is failing to maintain this basic stance at one's peril. Therefore, an object of *jing* needs not be

¹⁸ Of course, this does not imply that Confucians deny that human beings *have* essential or fundamental property. The potential for morality, for example, might be such a property. Some might be tempted to conclude for this that early Confucians endorse the ideal of equal respect because the respect is based on the universal human potential for morality (Herr 2010, Li 2012) If my arguments are correct, however, this strategy fundamentally misconstrues the Confucian justification of respect for all people.

¹⁹ The translation is from Hutton (2014). Hutton translates *qing* as "disposition". I'm not sure "disposition" is best English word for it in this particular context ("emotion" or "feeling" is another plausible translation), but in any case, it does not contradict my interpretation of *jing* as (involving) a disposition. This is because here it refers to the more *specific* dispositions involved in one's dealings with the worthy and unworthy, whereas on my account, *jing* involves a more general and deeper disposition of seriousness, caution, etc., which is certainly compatible with Xunzi's depiction in this passage.

(or be perceived as) particularly valuable in itself; as long as it has features that call for serious consideration, caution and attentiveness, Confucians would urge us to treat it as such.

(3) *The content of respect.* Suppose my arguments are on the right track, and there is no single respect-worthy property that all persons (things, affairs, duties, etc.) have in common that demand *jing*, what, then, is the point of *jing*? Is there a deeper rationale that underlies all these different ways of *jing*? While there is little explicit discussion of these issues in the classical Confucian texts, I believe we can extract from their general moral outlook a potential response. But I submit that it is a tentative response, and a more thorough investigation has to wait for another occasion.

As we have seen, the content of Kantian respect is, by and large, negative or restrictive. To respect a person in the Kantian sense primarily consists in eschewing interference with the exercise of her own rational agency. As a prominent contemporary Kantian philosopher puts it, "...respect for a person checks our self-interested motives toward him, its motivational force tends toward restraint, abstinence, and noninterference." (Velleman 2008, 201) Each person has their own self-interest, which sometimes are in competition or tension with one another. The *point* of respecting others, then, is to give (equal) *protection* to their legitimate, autonomous pursuits of their self-interests, and to refrain from imposing one's own will on that of others.

Jing or, as I would call it, *Confucian respect* also has an important restrictive dimension. However, its focus is not so much about restraining one's pursuit of one's *self-interest* as about restraining one's *arrogance* or *self-importance*. By self-importance, I mean the tendency to overestimate one's role or significance, and especially to take one's own desires, likes, feelings, and so on as the main, or even the only, determining factors in one's action and deliberation. While some degree of self-importance is perhaps inevitable and even valuable, Confucians, by advocating the virtue of caution and seriousness (i.e., the core of *jing*), remind us of the existence of potential sources of values, reasons, or most generally, considerations outside ourselves, which we, given our natural tendency of self-importance, tend to neglect, or at any rate fail to take seriously enough. These sources of considerations include not just other people, but also laws, rituals, conventions, one's social roles and duties, i.e., embodiments of values that are independent of, and typically "larger than", oneself. In other words, emphasizing the importance of *jing* amounts to a reminder that we are just part of this extremely rich social and cultural world, from which most, if not all, our actions derive their meaning and significance. For this reason, *jing* is closely related to the virtues of modesty, humility and open-mindedness.²⁰ This, of course, does not imply we should subject our own will to that of others, or that social practices or traditions can never be challenged, just as being humble and modest does not imply the loss of agency. From a Confucian perspective, a person with *jing* (understood as a frame of mind) is less self-centered and, partly for this reason, has a more accurate sense of her place in the world. She is able to interact with others self-

²⁰ See also Shun (2013, 54-55).

consciously and effectively, as she is extremely sensitive to the needs, values, or practical significances of other people and things, and their specific bearings on her own actions. Therefore, *jing* as a moral ideal is also positive in that it facilitates active and harmonious engagement with the world.²¹

3. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this essay, I first have distinguished two ways of construing the normative structure of respect, and then argued that the standard, Kantian conception of respect for persons can be seen as an example of the first, *outside-in* model, and the Confucian conception of *jing* as an example of the second, *inside-out* model. While I have contrasted and compared the two conceptions, it is not my main aim in this paper to assess their relative plausibility or merit. So I shall just conclude with some brief remarks that hopefully can stimulate more reflection and conversation between these two traditions.

First, strictly speaking, these two conceptions of respect for persons are compatible. Since my discussion have focused on their normative structures, it might be tempting to think that they are just two justificatory routes to the same virtue: that is, the *outside-in* Kantian model and *inside-out* Confucian model bring out the two distinct *reasons* for respect. But given that the contents of respect in these models also differ significantly, it is perhaps more precise to say that they elucidate different kinds of, or at least different aspects of, respect for persons.

Second, thanks to its *inside-out* structure, the Confucian conception of respect/*jing* avoids the challenging task of identifying the respect-worthy property or properties inherent to personhood. This can indeed be seen as an important theoretical advantage: for the Confucian, some of the most vexing questions for the Kantian approach would not arise in the first place, such as whether there are any inherent property or properties, shared equally by all persons, that command equal respect. This, of course, does not mean moral equality is unjustifiable for the Confucian; rather, given the focus the social contexts and interpersonal relationships, her way of understanding respect might open up more situational and less individualistic routes for moral equality, where other people are seen as fellow participants of concrete social interactions and practices.

Third, one attractive feature of the Kantian conception is that it implies that each person, *qua* individual person and in virtue of her autonomous will, has a special kind of moral worth and moral authority, which in turn ground a set of entitlements and rights that exerts normative force on others. For all its problems and obscurities, it does seem that something like this is central to an important part (though not the only part) of ordinary morality: i.e., the *morality of respect*, as Warren Quinn calls it, which is “made up of constraints on our behavior toward others that spring from our recognition of others as mature agents on an equal moral footing with ourselves. The fundamental attitude underlying virtuous action of this type seems to be respect for

²¹ See also Xu (2001, 18-22).

what can be thought of as the moral authority of others.”(1984, 49)²² It is thus an interesting open question whether a counterpart of the morality of respect is readily available to the Confucian, and, if it is, what that sphere of morality would look like from her perspective. While some initial steps have been made here toward such an account, a complete articulation has to wait for another occasion.²³

Theoretical issues aside, I also believe that the Confucian ideal of *jing* as a model of respecting other people has many valuable *practical* implications for our daily interactions, especially in areas where the Kantian conception provides little practical guidance. For example, since Confucian respect/*jing* for persons involves, among other things, taking others seriously, attending to their interests, values, and needs (and treating them as potential sources of reasons for our own deliberation), etc., it can generate some *positive* requirements in democratic practices: for example, the requirements of being modest, considerate, and open-minded²⁴ when one engages in a public debate about a controversial issue. But it is not obvious how these requirements can be derived from the Kantian conception of respect, given that its force is, as noted above, largely negative. For example, suppose you and I are debating about the morality of abortion, and as I believe in the freedom of expression, I decide not to interfere with your speech, although I very much disagree with your view. But as you speak I start to examine my fingernails carefully, or to intentionally let my mind to wander to other, irrelevant things. Arguably, I have *not* failed to respect you in the Kantian sense (since I have not interfered with your rational autonomy), but I am certainly being *disrespectful* and have not, as a Confucian would put it, treated you with *jing*. Furthermore, given its context-sensitive nature and its essential connection to *li* (ritual propriety)—*jing* has to be suitably expressed through the relevant social norms (including norms of etiquette and manner), it is unsurprising that the virtue of *jing* is closely related to civility.²⁵ The relation between civility and respect, however, would be much less direct if we take Kantian respect as the paradigmatic form of respect.

The *politics* of respect is another field that can fruitfully engage with the Confucian ideal. It has been argued that the Kantian (and more broadly, liberal) conception of equal respect is in tension with the ideal of respecting social/cultural *identities* or “differences”, partly because it is arbitrary to assign any respect-commanding authority to mere identity or “difference”. After all, it is hard to see how identity or “difference” *alone* can have the kind of inherent worth or status that commands respect.²⁶ Again, Confucians seem to have an easier time accommodating this form of respect, for they do not, if my interpretation is correct, presuppose that

²² Another part of morality is called the morality of *humanity* or *interest*, which concerns the effects of our action on others’ level of well-being. See also McMahan (2002, Sec. 3.2).

²³ Again, it seems to me that a *less* individualistic conception of moral authority is essential to any such the project.

²⁴ Indeed it would not be far-fetched to claim that these are what “being respectful” requires in such contexts.

²⁵ Cf. Calhoun (2000).

²⁶ Cf. Bird (2004).

respect for something is justified only if it has some kind of (inherent) worth or status that warrants respect. In a multicultural context, what matters for respect, from the Confucian perspective, is being cautious, modest, and open-minded in dealing with others, not only because these virtues help to restrain our arrogance and self-importance, but also because other cultures and traditions may well be important sources of knowledge and values that can enrich our own ideas and lives.

For similar reasons, in a politically polarized society (such as the U.S. today) filled with intense disputes over legislation, policies, and judicial decisions, these virtues are also highly relevant. With regard to such divisive issues, Confucians would remind us that respect is not just about self-constraining so that other people can exercise their rational autonomy, but is also, and perhaps more importantly, about being aware of the limitation of each individual *qua* individual, and thus the need to take seriously what others can contribute to our understanding of the right and the good. Therefore, in respecting others, we are not just *acknowledging* their status as autonomous individuals; we are also recognizing them as fellow inhabitants of the social world, with whom we can create a constructive, harmonious and mutually supportive environment. While there is certainly no guarantee that all disputes can be resolved simply by respecting others this way, it can at least help us to mitigate the pernicious effects of political polarization by facilitating dialogue and collaboration. This, I believe, is yet another way that emphasizing the central aspects of Confucian respect can be extremely valuable for contemporary society.

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