

RECENT WORK

MORAL VIRTUE AND INCLUSIVE HAPPINESS: FROM ANCIENT TO RECENT IN WESTERN AND CONFUCIAN TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT: *What is the relationship between moral virtue and happiness? Does having moral virtues make their possessors happy? Can one be happy without them? Philosophers provide diverging answers to these questions due to their different understandings of the concept of happiness which has multifarious meanings and senses. In this essay, I compare the representative Western theories of happiness with what may be called “a classical Confucian view” informed by recent scholarship on classical Confucianism. I argue that for classical Confucian philosophers, especially Confucius and Mencius, there are two kinds of happiness: exclusive (or unshared) and inclusive (or shared) happiness. I conclude that moral virtue is necessary for inclusive happiness shared by the virtuous and the recipients of their virtuous actions and/or policies.*

Keywords: *classical Confucianism, Confucius, good life, happiness, Mencius, moral virtue*

1. INTRODUCTION

Although the topic of how moral virtue is related to happiness is not new, recent years have seen a considerable resurgence of scholarly interest in the relationship between the two (Annas 1993; Bloomfield 2017).¹ It seems that the debate has been mainly

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¹ Julia Annas observes that for most people happiness means wealth and pleasure but they also claim that they want to earn them. She concludes that happiness is something earned (2004, 44-51). The point here is that happiness is not just about having what one wants but also about how one obtains it. This conception of happiness is close to the classical Confucian idea of happiness discussed in this paper, but not quite the same because for classical Confucians, the ethical is overriding; the virtuous may choose not to earn happiness under certain circumstances. Paul Bloomfield makes the case that since virtue is necessary for self-respect, which is necessary for happiness, virtue is necessary for happiness (2017, 2613-2628). His argument also seems compatible with the Confucian perspective because there are certain things the virtuous would not do, otherwise they would not be able to live with themselves.

focused on the following issues: What is the relationship between moral virtue and happiness? Does having moral virtues make their possessors happy? Can one be happy without them? There is also a broader question of why one should be moral. This question, in the context of virtue ethics, may be suitably modified into the question of why one should be virtuous.² This paper examines how contemporary Confucian scholars answer the above questions and evaluates how well their conclusions are supported by two of the most important classical Confucian texts—the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. They seem to agree that for classical Confucian philosophers such as Confucius (551-479 BCE) and Mencius (372-289 BCE), the notions of happiness and the good life are hybrid or integrative concepts with both descriptive and prescriptive dimensions, and as such, moral virtue is necessary for happiness and the good life (Back 2018; Huang 2008; Ivanhoe 2013; Olberding 2013; Shun 2014).

What makes a character trait (consistent attitude, affect, choice, and action) a moral virtue is the role it plays in achieving happiness which is, as the Greek philosopher Aristotle puts it, the ultimate goal of human life. If so, the relationship between happiness and moral virtue may be framed in terms of ends and means. Aristotle claims that every human action seeks some good and the highest good achievable in action is happiness.³ Thus, moral virtue is a means to happiness. However, by “happiness”, Aristotle means *individual* happiness, that is, the happiness of the individual who possesses virtue. While the classical Confucian philosophers Confucius and Mencius would agree with Aristotle that moral virtue is a means to happiness, what they meant by “happiness” was *shared* or *inclusive* happiness (*tong-le* 同樂), i.e., the happiness of both the virtuous and the recipients of their virtuous actions (*Mencius* 1B1). For classical Confucian thinkers, enjoyment in the company of others is superior to enjoyment by oneself (*ibid.*), which the English saying “the more the merrier” corroborates. When asked about why one should engage in self-cultivation (of moral virtue), Confucius replied that it was for the sake of winning respect and making the people happy (*Analects* 14. 42). For classical Confucian philosophers, respect is a natural response to virtue.³ Being respected can make one happy. As we can see, the classical Confucian notion of happiness is inclusive happiness.

2. WESTERN THEORIES OF HAPPINESS

Since antiquity philosophers as well as ordinary people have disagreed about the nature of happiness. As a result, the term “happiness” has multifarious meanings and senses. Consequently, philosophical opinions diverge on how moral virtue is related to happiness and the good life. In order to answer the question of how moral virtue is

² Yong Huang (2008) argues that since “one’s true self-interest is to seek joy in things uniquely human, which is to be moral, self-interest and morality become identical” (321). It seems clear that not just any joy seeking coincides with morality. Only when one’s perspective transcends one’s self-interest and group interests and rises to the height of the humanity, can it become the moral point of view.

³ According to Aristotle, happiness is the best, complete, and self-sufficient good achievable in action (1999, 8).

³ The Confucian philosopher Xun Zi says that not respecting a virtuous person betrays a beastly attitude (Xun Zi, 138).

related to happiness, we need to be clear about what the term “happiness” means. As mentioned earlier, the term “happiness” is multiply ambiguous, or as Haybron puts it, it is “a paradigm of unclarity, the Mother of All Swamps” (Haybron 2008, vii). Thus, there is a need for disambiguation. One way to do this is to separate two senses of happiness: a descriptive sense and a prescriptive sense (Haybron 2005: 289).⁴ The former pertains to a particular mental state, i.e., pleasure, whereas the latter refers to a person’s wellbeing. According to Haybron’s taxonomy, wellbeing is a broader concept than happiness in that it includes health, success, friendship, and certain psychological states such as happiness (Haybron 2008, 38). It follows that while wellbeing is a normative concept, it has a descriptive dimension, namely happiness. Thus, the distinction between the two senses is not a clear-cut one. On the other hand, moral virtue is necessary for the good life, but it seems irrelevant to wellbeing or happiness (38).

In addition to the two senses of happiness, there are three theories of happiness to be distinguished from one another. According to Derek Parfit’s tripartite taxonomy (Parfit 1984, 493), the three types of theories of happiness are hedonistic theories, desire satisfaction theories, and objective list theories. For the sake of simplicity, I shall treat them as if there were only one theory in each category. I therefore refer to hedonistic theories simply as “hedonism”, desire satisfaction theories as “desire satisfaction theory”, and objective list theories as “objective list theory”. While each theory has different versions—some of which are more sophisticated and defensible than the basic version, I prefer the basic version to the more complex ones to avoid getting bogged down by complications in a preliminary comparative study like the one I am undertaking.

Broadly speaking, theories of happiness may be classified into two categories: monism and pluralism. Hedonism and desire satisfaction theory are two monistic theories, whereas objective list theory exemplifies pluralism. The classical form of hedonism identifies happiness with pleasure experienced by the individual in question. According to hedonism, the more pleasure one experiences, the happier one gets. If there is little pleasure in a person’s life or there is much pain, that person cannot be happy. While hedonism is intuitively appealing, it has been called a “doctrine worthy only of swine” (Mill 1998, 55). Such notoriety seems to rest on a narrow understanding of the term “pleasure”, that is, pleasure from eating, drinking, or sex. But gastronomic and sexual pleasures are just a tiny part of the vast array of pleasures human beings are capable of experiencing. John Stuart Mill tried to make hedonism defensible by proposing the idea of *higher* pleasure (Mill 1998, 56-57). The contemporary philosopher Fred Feldman takes a similar approach to hedonism by introducing the idea of *attitudinal* pleasure (Feldman 2004). Clearly neither of them defends the classical or

⁴ According to Haybron’s taxonomy, wellbeing, morality/virtue, and other values are subsumed under the notion of good life; psychological states and other goods are subsumed under the concept of wellbeing; happiness and other mental states are subsumed under the category of psychological states (Haybron, 38). It follows that happiness is included in wellbeing. Therefore, the descriptive concept of happiness is hidden in the normative concept of wellbeing. If so, it is hard to make a clear distinction between wellbeing and happiness.

simple version of hedonism. What they have done is to incorporate a cognitive component in the concept of pleasure to make it more respectable.

In its simple form, desire satisfaction theory identifies happiness with getting what one wants (Heathwood 2006, 540). Since the content of desire is not constrained, the door is left wide open for all kinds of desires. This conceptual openness makes the theory broadly applicable, but also vulnerable to objections. Two kinds of desires undermine the basic form of desire satisfaction theory: ill-informed desires and evil desires. The objection that the satisfaction of an ill-informed desire may result in a reduction of one's wellbeing has led to a revision of the theory according to which someone's life goes well to the extent that her *well-informed* desires get satisfied. The problem posed by evil desires for the theory is obvious—it goes against our deeply held moral convictions. For example, it is implausible to say a torturer whose many sadistic desires get satisfied has lived a good life or enjoyed a high level of wellbeing.

As a pluralistic theory, objective list theory states that the good life is constituted by a variety of goods such as knowledge, pleasure, friendship, achievement, virtue, and so on. Many such theories do include an ethical dimension. For instance, some (moral) virtues are included in W.D. Ross's seven *prima facie* duties (Ross 1930, 140). Thomas Hurka seems to hold a similar view (2011). As we shall see, what makes the classical Confucian view different is that the ethical dimension *defines* the good life and plays the fundamental role in the life of the virtuous individual (*Analects* 12.1, 15.24). This salient feature is what Kwong-loi Shun refers to as “the primacy of the ethical” (Shun 2014, 131).

3. THE CLASSICAL CONFUCIAN VIEW

The three theories of happiness each focus on one or more aspects of happiness. As such, they are not necessarily incompatible: hedonism focuses on pleasure, desire satisfaction theory concentrates on desire fulfillment, and objective list theory accentuates major sources of happiness. Happiness can be all those things defined or listed by the three theories, but of a complete theory, they all fall short. A complete theory should provide guidance at least in principle on how to obtain pleasure, satisfy desires, or secure the major sources of happiness. In this regard, classical Confucian philosophers such as Confucius and Mencius do have something important to offer. Their contributions to the discussion concentrate on two aspects of the relationship between moral virtue and happiness: one concerns the nature of happiness; the other concerns the ways in which happiness is obtained.

According to Philip Ivanhoe, happiness (*le* 樂) in classical Confucian literature refers to “a special feeling that comes to those who follow the Way; it is an ethical response to certain features of the world and primarily about how one is living one's life” (Ivanhoe 2013, 266). Notice that this conception fits neither of the two senses of happiness found in Western philosophical and psychological literature—the descriptive sense of happiness as a feeling of pleasure or the prescriptive sense of happiness as wellbeing. It seems that for classical Confucian thinkers, the idea of happiness is a hybrid or an integration of the two senses. On the one hand, it pertains to a feeling (of

joy) while on the other hand, it is an *ethical* response to how one is living one's life. Thus, the Confucian notion of happiness is inclusive of two dimensions—a psychological dimension and an ethical dimension. The ethical dimension has two features. First, it is teleological in the sense that moral virtues are cultivated toward an ethical telos. When asked why one should engage in moral self-cultivation (*xiu-ji* 修己), Confucius replied that the objective of moral self-cultivation was to win respect and to bring happiness to the multitude (*Analects* 14.42). To accomplish such a feat, it would be necessary that the virtuous participate in the government. One could not bring happiness to the multitude in one's capacity as a private individual.⁵ In the historical contexts in which classical Confucians found themselves, they could bring about the universal happiness for the multitude only if they took office. However, for the virtuous, to take office or not to take office would depend on how the state was governed (*Analects*, 8.13). This proviso leads to the second feature of the ethical dimension, that is, moral virtue is about making the right choices. In this connection, Confucius posed a rhetorical question—"If one did not (consistently) choose the all-inclusive virtue (*ren* 仁), how could one be considered wise?" (*Analects* 4.1) Mencius quoted Confucius as saying that there were only two ways to follow—the Way of virtue (*ren* 仁) or its opposite (*Mencius*, 4A2). The virtuous, as Ivanhoe points out, are those who follow the Way (of virtue) of their own volition (266). Following the Way is not easy. What makes it difficult is the temptation of pleasure and other conventional goods such as wealth, honor, rank, and so on. Confucius often praised his best disciple, Yan Hui (颜回), for his steadfast adherence to the Way of virtue (*ren* 仁), in contrast to other disciples who lacked unwavering commitment (*Analects* 6.7).

4. THE HIGHEST GOOD AND INCLUSIVE HAPPINESS

Scholars have made the distinction between two types of goods: one is called "the desirable" or "non-moral goods," the typical examples of which are pleasure, wealth, rank, health, and longevity; the other is what some scholars refer to as "the admirable" or "moral goods," an example of which is virtue (Zagzebski 2006; Olberding 2013; Back 2018). While ideally the good life is understood as consisting of both kinds of goods, in reality one sometimes must make a choice when the two are in conflict. Confucius remarked, "We all desire wealth and honor, but ill-gotten gains are not worth having" (*Analects* 4.5).⁶ When one had to choose between the desirable and the admirable, the virtuous would always choose the admirable. Confucius proposed the following principle to help his disciples make the right decision: "It is shameful to be poor and lowly when the state is well-governed (*ban-you-dao* 邦有道); it is no less

⁵ Even in a contemporary democracy like the United States, you cannot bring the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people unless you run for office. Again, classical utilitarianism was not designed as a moral compass for private individuals.

⁶ My translation.

shameful to be rich and honorable when the state is ill-governed” (*Analects* 8.13).⁷ It would not be hard to tell if a state was well-governed or ill-governed. If it was governed according to the ritual (*li* 禮), it would be well-governed. If not, then it is ill-governed.⁸ Thus, it is not entirely up to the virtuous to lead a good life because it is contingent upon the circumstances that are often beyond one’s control.⁹ It shows that moral virtue is not sufficient for the good life. The virtuous therefore must prepare a contingency plan just in case the Way does not prevail.¹⁰ The good life is achievable when circumstances afford the possibility of obtaining both the admirable and desirable (Olberding 2013, 433). “[W]hat is at issue is not what sort of life, simpliciter, one might want, but what sort of life it is best to seek and to have where conditions force the admirable and the desirable apart” (434). When one must choose between the two types of goods, the virtuous are those who can resist the temptation of the desirable (or non-moral goods) and consistently opt for the ethical (moral goods).

Ideally, happiness consists in the commensurate relationship between the desirable and the ethical. In other words, the virtuous should be rewarded with the desirable. Youngsun Back refers to such a relationship as “moral economy” (Back 2018, 41). This idea, however, is not new. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) calls the condition in which happiness is commensurate with virtue “the highest good” (Kant 2002, 141-142). For Kant, human beings cannot realize the highest good without the help of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good being, namely God. While the Kantian model of moral community consists of equal, rational, and free individuals, the classical Confucian model of community is communal in nature comprising a hierarchical structure of a ruler governing the people through his ministers and officials of lower ranks. Classical Confucian thinkers believed that in order for the virtuous individual to make the people happy, they would need to participate in the government that followed the Way (*Analects* 2.19). For the virtuous, true happiness was not an egotistical or self-centered concept, but a communal one. Mencius referred to it as “inclusive (or shared) happiness” (*tong-le* 同樂) (*Mencius* 1B1). Mencius (372-289 BCE) perhaps was the first to propose the idea of “inclusive (or shared) happiness” (*tong-le* 同樂). By “inclusive happiness”, Mencius did not mean the happiness of one person shared with another. What he meant was the enjoyment of a ruler shared with his people. Although Mencius’ theoretical rival Mo Zi (479-381 BCE) was famous for his signature idea of inclusive (or universal) love (*jian-ai* 兼愛), and we may draw the idea of inclusive

⁷ My translation. Both D.C. Lau and Raymond Dawson translate “邦有道” as “when the Way prevails.” It makes the Way sound mysterious. But there is nothing mysterious about Confucius’ Way. It is not a Platonic form, nor is it mystic metaphysical entity. By “the Way”, Confucius means the way a state should be governed. It is either governed correctly or incorrectly. When it is governed correctly, that’s what 邦有道 means. When it is governed incorrectly, that’s what 邦無道 means.

⁸ Confucius says, “A state should be governed according to the ritual” (*Analects* 11.26).

⁹ Classical Confucians put this idea in the following form: “Life and death is determined by fate; wealth and honor is up to heaven” (生死有命, 富貴在天) (*Analects* 12.5. my translation).

¹⁰ Again, the “Way” is not some mysterious metaphysical entity. It refers to the virtuous rulership. For Confucius, there were long historical periods in antiquity during which the Way prevailed, that is to say, a sage ruler was at the helm. The exemplary sage rulers were Yao, Shun, Yu, Duke of Zhou, and so on.

happiness from his theory, Mozi did not use the expression of *tong-le* (同樂). When classical utilitarian thinkers in the Western tradition talked about happiness, they did not mean the agent's own happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people, which can be understood as inclusive happiness. Thus, the greatest happiness principle of classical utilitarianism is more of a guideline for governments and international organizations such as the United Nations, than a moral compass for the individual moral agent. If I help a stranger in need, the result of my action is a far cry from the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Many people do not understand this and they try to use the greatest happiness principle as their personal moral guidance, which is like shooting mosquitos with a bazooka. In his conversation with the King of the state of *Qi*, Mencius exhorted him to share his happiness with his people (ibid.). He argued that the king's inclusive happiness would help him win the respect and support of the people, which in turn would make both his desirable (non-moral) and admirable (moral) goods secure. Inclusive happiness is ethical happiness. In general, if a ruler shared his happiness with his people, he would be morally virtuous. Thus, moral virtue is necessary for (inclusive) happiness.

5. HUMAN NATURE

Another argument for virtue being necessary for happiness is what I call “the argument from human nature.” According to this line of reasoning, attributed to the Cheng (程) brothers of Neo-Confucian persuasion, one can achieve happiness (*le* 樂) from a variety of sources—eating, drinking, sex, and so on, but these sources are what human beings share with other species. What differentiates us from other species is morality. Therefore, the unique joy we can obtain is from doing things related to morality such as performing altruistic actions, making sacrifices for the common good, exercising moral virtue, and so forth (Huang 2008, 342). Notice that this Neo-Confucian argument has its origin in the famous classical Confucian idea that human nature is good, proposed by Mencius (6A2). For Mencius, human beings have four innate tendencies (*si-duan* 四端) that can develop into full-fledged virtues of benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and moral wisdom, if cultivated properly. Each of the four tendencies is necessary for humanity (2A6). According to Mencius, the greatest happiness comes from the self-realization upon reflection that one has moral integrity (*cheng* 誠) (Mencius 7A4). It may be argued that moral integrity is the totality of all four cardinal virtues of benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and moral wisdom. If so, then it seems to follow that for Mencius, moral virtues are not only individually *necessary*, but also jointly *sufficient* for happiness. However, Mencius may have overstated his case and overestimated the extent to which human beings are capable of taking great delight in morality. In this regard, Confucius' idea seems to be more plausible. He stated that the virtuous would have no worries and fears if upon self-reflection they could find themselves not guilty of immorality (*Analects* 12.4). This sense of (ethical) happiness as freedom from negative psychological states such as fear, worry, anxiety,

and so on, seems to be more defensible. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, we can summarize the classical Confucian idea of ethical happiness as follows: it is obtained through ethical means; it is inclusive; it is free from negative psychological states.

6. TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

In this section the main focus is on two most well-known and authoritative classical Confucian texts—*The Analects* and *The Mencius*—to see how well they substantiate the tenor of the Confucian view. As mentioned earlier, a salient feature of Confucianism is the primacy of the ethical, but this does not mean that classical Confucian philosopher would flatly reject *the desirable* such as wealth and pleasure (Shun 2014, 131). They were, however, scrupulous about the way in which non-moral goods are obtained. For example, Confucius taught his disciples to distance themselves from pleasures obtained through immoral means (*Analects* 4.5). This can be seen as the classical Confucian critique of hedonistic theory of happiness. I argue that for Confucius and Mencius there are two kinds of happiness: ethical and unethical. “Ethical happiness” is a term one rarely, if ever, finds in the literature of ethics and/or moral philosophy. In everyday parlance, the expression “good, clean, wholesome, family fun” is akin to “ethical happiness.” I said “akin” because they may be overlapping but not identical. Pleasure obtained by watching porn or doing drugs does not belong in the category of good, clean, wholesome, family fun.¹¹ I think “ethical happiness” can represent and integrate two classical Confucian ideas: (1) happiness obtained through ethical means; (2) inclusive (or shared) happiness. Ethical happiness is obtained through ethical means, whereas unethical happiness by unethical means. Ethical happiness is inclusive (or shared) happiness, but unethical happiness is exclusive or unshared. The same Confucian critique applies to desire satisfaction theory. In his autobiographical sketch, Confucius claimed that at seventy he could freely follow his desires without transgressing the bounds of morality (*Analects* 2.4). If happiness is defined as desire satisfaction, then how does one go about satisfying one’s desires? Again, there are two ways: ethical and unethical. As for objective list theory, classical Confucian thinkers would ask the same question. Many items on an objective list tend to be non-moral goods.¹² If there is a choice to be made between the desirable (non-moral goods) and the ethical (moral goods), the virtuous will consistently choose the latter. Confucius remarked, “Wealth and rank are what people desire, but if one can’t get them by means that accord with the Way, one will not accept them” (*Analects* 4.5).¹³ Mencius made essentially the same point when he said, “In ancient times men were

¹¹ According to an article in the *Atlantic*, most people (in the United States) think that watching porn is morally wrong. <<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/03/most-people-think-watchingporn-is-morally-wrong/284240/>>

¹² It is called “objective list” because items on the list are supposed to contribute to one’s wellbeing objectively, that is, regardless of whether you want them or not. To illustrate, you may not like broccoli but it is good for you.

¹³ Burton Watson’s translation (2007).

indeed eager to take office, but they dislike seeking it by dishonorable means...” (*Mencius* 3B3).¹⁴ Concerning the basic sources of happiness such as food and sex, Mencius had this to say,

Suppose you would manage to get something to eat if you took the food from your elder brother by twisting his arm, but would not get it if you did not. Would you twist his arm? Again, suppose you would get a wife if you climbed over the wall of your neighbor on the east side and dragged away the daughter of the house by force, but would not if you did not. Would you drag her away by force? (*Mencius* 6B1).¹⁵

Of course, the questions Mencius posed in this passage were meant to be rhetorical. Food and sex give one pleasures, but one should not obtain such pleasures by force or other unethical means. Speaking of his best disciple Yan Hui, Confucius gushed,

What a fine man Hui was! One container of rice, one dipperful of drink, living in a back alley—others couldn’t have endured the gloom of it, but he never let it affect his happiness. What a fine man Hui was! (*Analects* 6.11)¹⁶

In this passage, Confucius did not simply use “happiness” (*le* 樂) as a descriptive term; he was saying that Yan Hui’s happiness was *morally* praiseworthy because Yan remained cheerful and optimistic in spite of the adversity and hardship he experienced.¹⁷ Confucius’ approbation of Yan, however, should not be construed as evidence that classical Confucians would endorse asceticism—deliberately shunning the desirable (non-moral goods) even when their attainment would not deviate from the Way. Yan was indeed cheerful and virtuous, but did he lead a good life?

While happiness is “a special feeling that comes to those who follow the Way,” the good life is a broader concept that consist of more than a feeling. According to Haybron, the good life consists of wellbeing, morality/virtue, and other values, and wellbeing in turn is inclusive of psychological states such as happiness, and other goods like health, success, friendship, and so on (2008, 38). It is true that Yan Hui was cheerful and virtuous, but he was poor and unhealthy. Thus, we cannot say that he led a good life. Youngsun Back argues that in spite of his effusive praise of Yan, Confucius would probably insist on moral virtue only as a necessary condition for the good life. Back compares the life of Emperor Shun (舜) with that of Yan Hui and points out that while both Emperor Shun and Yan were renowned for their virtues, there is a striking contrast between their lives: Shun became a sovereign and enjoyed longevity, whereas Yan lived in poverty and died prematurely. Thus, Confucius would say that Shun had lived a better life (Back 2018, 39). Shun’s life contained both moral goods and non-moral goods such as virtue, wealth, honor, political power, and longevity, while Yan’s life contained virtue and happiness, but also poverty, illness, and untimely death.

¹⁴ Lau’s translation (1970).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Burton Watson’s translation.

¹⁷ Yan did not resort to unethical means to extricate himself from his poverty and hardship.

Emperor Shun's life was both admirable and desirable as his virtue was richly and deservedly rewarded, whereas Yan Hui's virtue was not. To an unbiased observer, Yan's life left something to be desired. If happiness means desire satisfaction, what was lacking in Yan's life was the desirable (or non-moral) goods. Moral virtue is necessary for happiness, and happiness is necessary for the good life. Therefore, moral virtue is necessary for the good life.

As mentioned earlier, ethical happiness is either obtained by ethical means or shared (inclusive). No other passage in the *Mencius* shed a better light on the relationship between moral virtue and (inclusive) happiness than 1A2. Mencius went to see King Hui of Liang (梁惠王). Standing over a pond, the king asked Mencius if the virtuous could enjoy looking at the large geese, deer, and the enchanting scenery. It seems that the king assumed that the virtuous would be too high-minded and uptight to enjoy the simple pleasures of the senses. To his surprise, however, Mencius replied that *only* the virtuous could really enjoy such pleasures. Mencius explained, "It was by sharing their enjoyments [*tong-le* 同樂] with the people that men of antiquity were able to enjoy themselves" (ibid.).¹⁸ Clearly, passage 1A2 shows that first, there are two kinds of happiness—shared (or inclusive) happiness and unshared (or exclusive) happiness; anyone can enjoy unshared pleasures, but only the virtuous can truly enjoy shared pleasures, not just with one's family members or friends, but with the people in general, and the capacity to enjoy inclusive happiness is what distinguishes the virtuous from the rest;¹⁹ second, (having) moral virtue is a prerequisite for inclusive happiness, which unites the self and non-self. If rulers were not virtuous, even though they owned aesthetically exquisite gardens and lakes, they would not be able to enjoy them. But why not? It seems that by looking at a beautiful scenery or frolicking animals almost anyone can be happy in the psychological sense. However, it is not the case that you can always enjoy yourself unconditionally—you need to be in a suitable frame of mind to be happy.²⁰

The most important of the conditions that contribute to the frame of mind conducive to happiness is a harmonious social relationship. In the case of King Hui of Liang, in order for him to enjoy himself, it would require at the very least that his people not harbor animosity toward him. How could a ruler be happy if he knew that the multitude resented his regime and wanted to dethrone him? A good case in point is King Jie (桀 1728-1675 BCE) whose rule was allegedly cruel and oppressive, and as a result, his

¹⁸ Lau's translation (1970).

¹⁹ In the philosophy of mind, qualia are said to be subjective and private. If they are private, they cannot be shared. Then how can there be shared pleasure or inclusive happiness? By "shared pleasure", Mencius does not mean that one person can directly share her pleasure with another like sharing a meal. What he means by "shared pleasure" is this: I am happy that you are happy. That you are happy is the reason that I am happy. Of course I cannot literally feel how you feel, but I can be happy because you are happy. In the case of rulers, if they cared about the welfare of the people, the latter would reciprocate. They would be happy if their rulers enjoyed themselves. If they treated their people unkindly, they would resent their rulers' happiness.

²⁰ Suppose you owe a large amount of money and your creditors are constantly harassing you. Would you be able to enjoy the sight of a beautiful sunset?

people detested him so much they wished him dead. Clearly, he did not share his happiness with his people; his was exclusive happiness, which he obtained by exploiting his people. Mencius asked, “Even if the tyrant had terrace and pond, birds and beasts, could he have enjoyed them all by himself?” (*Mencius* 1A2).²¹ His question of course was rhetorical. If a ruler wanted to be happy, he would need to make his people content. If he could make them happy, people from other states would flock to him and live under his rule. As a result, his state would become more populous, prosperous, and powerful. Needless to say, only a virtuous ruler could make his people happy. As H.G. Creel puts it, “[The common people] can be made happy only by a government that is good by their own standards” (Creel 1949, 156). Confucius made the same point when the Duke of She consulted him about government: “If you could make the people of your own state happy, those in faraway states would come” (*Analects* 13.16).²²

So far the passages from the *Analects* and the *Mencius* in support of the classical Confucian perspective on the relationship between moral virtue and happiness have an overt political context. Are there any passages in classical Confucian texts that make a similar point in an apolitical context? The answer is yes. Besides the passage in the *Analects*, where Confucius praised his best disciple Yan Hui for his optimism in adversity, 7A20 in the *Mencius* is an apolitical passage where Mencius famously declared that a virtuous person would delight in three things none of which had anything to do with political power.

His parents are alive and his brothers are well. This is the first delight. Above, he is not ashamed to face Heaven; below, he is not ashamed to face man. This is the second delight. He has the good fortune of having the most talented pupils in the Empire. This is the third delight (*Mencius* 7A20).²³

While some parts of this quotation seem outdated to contemporary sensibility, Mencius’ basic idea is not, because his point is that happiness is not a self-centered mental state involving only one’s own pleasure. As mentioned earlier, the classical Confucian conception of happiness is that it is inclusive or shared: I am joyous because my family members are well; I am happy because I have not intentionally harmed anyone; I am delighted because my students are brilliant. We cannot literally share qualia of happiness with others. That is not what it is meant by “inclusive happiness”. Inclusive happiness means that *x*’s happiness is the source of *y*’s happiness and vice versa. Apply this to the relationship between a ruler and his people: If the people rejoice in their ruler’s happiness, then the ruler’s happiness is inclusive. On the other hand, if the people resent their ruler’s happiness and rejoice in their ruler’s unhappiness, it is an indication that the ruler’s happiness is exclusive; he is not a virtuous leader because he does not care about his people’s welfare.

²¹ Translated by D.C. Lau (1970).

²² My translation.

²³ Lau’s translation (1970).

7. TWO SENSES OF HAPPINESS: PSYCHOLOGICAL VS. ETHICAL

Confucius famously condemned the head of the Ji family for having eight rows of dancers performing in his courtyard: “If this can be tolerated, what cannot be tolerated?” (*Analects* 3.1). According to the Rituals of Zhou (*Zhou-li* 周禮), only the Emperor or Son of Heaven was entitled to the dance performed by eight rows of eight dancers.²⁴ While the head of the Ji family ranked far lower than the Emperor, he craved the same grandiosity and fanfare, and indulged in fantasies of being the supreme ruler of the land. According to Confucius, his enjoyment was reprehensible not merely because it was not grounded in reality, but more importantly, he was taking something that was not rightfully his. Confucius was not saying that the head of the Ji family was not happy in the *descriptive* or *psychological* sense while watching the dance; he was saying that the means by which he obtained his happiness was wrong. The virtuous would be scrupulous in choosing their means to happiness.

In the normative sense, there are two kinds of happiness: one is ethical in that it is gained within the bounds of morality; the other is unethical because it is obtained by contravening the moral prescriptions. Of course there are cases where happiness falls outside the domain of morality. Thus, the classical Confucian perspective on the relationship between moral virtue and happiness may be stated as follows: the virtuous would only pursue and enjoy the ethical (inclusive) kind of happiness and shun the unethical kind. If you pursue and enjoy only ethical (inclusive) happiness, then you are morally virtuous.

When scholars debate about whether or how moral virtue is related to happiness, the two senses of happiness are not always clearly distinguished. For example, when some say that virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness, they seem to use the term “happiness” in the psychological sense. If someone who embezzles a large sum of money goes to the Bahamas to soak up the sun on the beach, is he happy? In the psychological sense, he is. While his happiness is obtained through unethical means, there is no denying that he is nevertheless happy. It is this kind of cases that some scholars have in mind when they assert that moral virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness (in the psychological sense).

However, when a distinction is made, as done by classical Confucians, between the ethical kind of happiness, i.e., happiness gained through moral means, and the psychological kind, then the loophole between moral virtue and happiness seems to disappear. Can a fraudster be happy in the ethical sense? Confucians would say no. How could a person be happy if he reflected on his behavior and felt guilty about it? Furthermore, a virtuous person would not commit fraud in the first place. On the other hand, a morally depraved person would not feel guilty about his wrong doings. The negative emotion he might experience would not be guilt, remorse, or shame, but fear

²⁴ One might say that this sort of musty feudal ritual is archaic and outdated. I would like to remind the reader that even in a modern democracy like the United States in which egalitarianism is highly valued, old, inegalitarian, ritualistic tradition is still very much preserved. For example, a 21-gun salute is reserved only for current and former presidents, president-elect, the head of state of a foreign country and so on.

of getting caught. Of course such fear would diminish his enjoyment. A word of caveat is in order here. Sometimes even an immoral person uses ethical means to gain happiness. For example, he may hold a job and use the money he has honestly earned to buy ice cream to get pleasure. But he also spreads malicious rumors about a colleague and cheats on his taxes. Just because he buys ice cream with his own money does not necessarily mean he is morally virtuous. Moral self-cultivation is a long-term, purposeful enterprise and cannot be achieved haphazardly or by luck. Just because you are ethically happy does not necessarily mean you are virtuous. But if you are consistently happy in the ethical sense, then you are morally virtuous. It is in this latter sense that ethical happiness implies virtue. On the other hand, even an immoralist may occasionally use moral means, but that does not detract from his fundamentally immoral character. Moral virtue does not even guarantee ethical happiness precisely because under some circumstances the virtuous would choose a course of action of self-sacrifice (unhappiness). Confucius said, “When the state follows the Way, being poor and lowly is a cause for shame. When the state is without the Way, being rich and eminent is a cause for shame.” (*Analects* 8.13).²⁵ When the Way prevails, the virtuous should *strive* for eminence, wealth, and honor. Possessing moral virtue in and of itself is not enough for happiness, not even the ethical kind because the virtuous need the cooperation of the social environment in which they find themselves. Sometimes, being virtuous may result in unhappiness, as shown by an example given by Richard Kraut. He argues that under certain circumstances, an honest person may suffer greatly *because* of his honesty. He gives the imaginary example of an honest person who discovers that the farm owned by his family has been obtained fraudulently. His honesty leads him to divulge his family’s dirty secret. As a result, he suffers a devastating financial loss (Kraut 2007, 192). What may be concluded from the above discussion is that moral virtue is not sufficient for happiness; it may even result in great unhappiness on the part of its possessor.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have seen that happiness is a concept with multifarious meanings and senses from which much of the confusion and controversy arises. There are two senses in which Western philosophers and psychologists use the term “happiness”: a descriptive sense and a prescriptive sense. With regard to the nature of happiness, there are three representative theories: hedonism, which identifies happiness with pleasure; desire satisfaction theory, which defines happiness in terms of desire fulfillment; and objective list theory, which views happiness as being constituted by a number of important goods. Recent literature on classical Confucianism *vis-à-vis* the subject of happiness suggests that the classical Confucian notions of happiness and good life do not fit neatly into the aforementioned Western conceptual framework, mainly because they have an integral ethical dimension. Scholars agree that for Confucius and Mencius there are two types of goods: *the admirable* such as moral virtue and the Way, and *the*

²⁵ Burton Watson’s translation (2007).

desirable (nonmoral) goods like wealth, rank, pleasure, health, life, and so on. Moral virtue, or the lack thereof, is understood in terms of how these two types of goods are prioritized in one's attitudes, choices, and actions. The classical Confucian texts I have examined and cited, namely the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, largely support their interpretations. My contribution to this discussion is the following: I proposed the idea of *inclusive* (or *ethical*) *happiness* which I have argued can better represent the classical Confucian understanding of the concept. The Confucian idea of inclusive happiness may be summarized as having two senses: (1) it is happiness obtained through ethical means; (2) it is inclusive (or shared). If one consistently obtains happiness through ethical means or consistently enjoy inclusive happiness, then one is morally virtuous. Clearly, moral virtue is required for inclusive happiness. Its opposite, of course, is exclusive or unshared happiness. A criminal, for example, is someone who pursues exclusive happiness, i.e., happiness at the expense of others. A rapist who killed his victim personifies the idea of exclusive happiness. In the Confucian tradition, King Jie and King Zhou are considered the quintessential evil rulers. But what defines such villainous tyrants? A defining characteristic of them is their pursuit of exclusive happiness. Another defining characteristic of villainy is the tendency to spread one's pain to others. The virtuous are those who consistently rather than haphazardly follow the Way and prefer inclusive happiness to exclusive happiness. Consequently, I conclude that the classical Confucian perspective on the relationship between moral virtue and (inclusive) happiness is that the former is necessary, rather than sufficient, for the latter.

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