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RIGHTEOUSNESS VERSUS *YI*: TWO SENSES OF JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT: *The narratives of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in the Old Testament and Shun's renunciation of the throne to save his father, who had committed a crime in Meng-Zi, have had a profound influence on Western and Chinese culture. The two stories are widely known and referenced due to their cultural significance, which is evident in various artistic, literary, religious, and philosophical forms. While the two narratives may be viewed as murder and corruption from a universal ethical standpoint, historical traditions interpret them differently. Abraham's actions are revered as the epitome of righteousness, while Shun's actions exemplify the most appropriate (*yi 義*) course of action in complex moral dilemmas. These narratives offer contrasting values, yet both contribute to the education of justice within the Christian and Confucian contexts. However, when translating classical Chinese texts, the Confucian concept of "*yi*" is often rendered as "righteousness". This paper aims to elucidate the essential distinction between the concepts of righteousness and* yi *by analysing the respective deliberations on justice conveyed in these two stories.*

Keywords: *emotional-rational structure, justice, Kierkegaard, righteousness, Thomas Pangle,* yi

1. INTRODUCTION

Ren (仁) and *yi* (義), the two most important values of Confucian political and ethical philosophy, are frequently discussed together. The foundational characteristic of Confucianism was described by Ban Gu (班固), a historian of the Eastern Han dynasty, in the *Treatise on Arts and Literature* (藝文志): "Immersing in the study of the Six Classics, focusing on matters of *ren* and *yi*" (Ban 1962, 22). The first sentence suggests that the focus of Confucianism is on delving into these classical texts, and the following sentence gives an outline that the primary tenet of Confucianism found in these texts is *ren* and *yi*. *The Book of Changes* (周易) maintains that "the holy sages

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established the path of humans and named it *ren* and *yi*" (Kong, 2009, 17). *Ren* and *yi* are presupposed as the fundamental moral values established by the sages to foster social harmony in diverse relationships. Based on excavated documents, Pang Pu (龐樸) traced the evolution of "*ren*" and "*yi*" from a philological perspective. The original meaning of *ren* was rooted in the emotion of love, emphasizing the feeling of compassion. Conversely, the primitive connotation of *yi* was historically connected to the reasoning behind acts of killing, initially associated with sacrificial ceremonies. Despite their inherent opposition, *ren* and *yi* share a profound interdependence within the framework of Confucian ethics (Pang 2008, 99-115; 2009, 14-30). The term "*yi*" in classical Confucian texts has acquired various meanings over time. It conveys a sense of justice, fairness, impartiality, and legitimacy in modern Chinese. As a core regulatory concept, "*yi*" has also been integrated into the development of Chinese political philosophy. "Justice" is precisely translated as *zheng-yi* (正義). Recently, a Confucian scholar outlined eleven general correspondences between "*yi*" and "just" by sorting out the contexts in which "*yi*" is used in Chinese classical texts, demonstrating that there is clearly much semantic overlap between them (Huang 2013, 22). Several scholars have conducted research on the Chinese theory of justice surrounding the keyword "*yi*" (Chen 2022; Huang 2013; Wu 2020).

In translating classical Chinese texts, the renowned 19th-century sinologist James Legge (1815-1897), a Scottish missionary, selected the term "righteousness" as an equivalent of "*yi*". This translation has been extensively used by Western Sinologists as well as Chinese scholars and has become a standard formula. However, while both "righteousness" and "*yi*" suggest a concept of justice, they carry different connotations and implications. The prominent contemporary comparative philosopher Roger Ames remarked that when the missionaries, typically like James Legge, introduced ancient Chinese culture into the Western academy, they self-consciously chose a Christian vocabulary as equivalences for Chinese philosophical terms, which made Confucian culture most of the accouterments of Abrahamic religion. In regards to "righteousness" as the translation of "*yi*", it is worth noting that "the decidedly biblical associations that attend the word 'righteousness' as obedience to the will of God introduces an independent, objective, and divinely-sanctioned standard of what is right or 'moral' into the equation that has little relevance for *yi*" (Ames 2011, 203). This article examines the stories of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 and Shun's abdication of his throne to assist his criminal father in evading legal retribution in the *Meng-Zi*. The aim is to scrutinize the two narratives' perceptions of justice and explicate the fundamental contrast between "righteousness" and "*yi*". The opening section of the paper explores Kierkegaard's and Derrida's interpretation of the story of Abraham, highlighting the in-depth paradox. It also recounts the story of Shun and reveals another paradox in Confucian ethics. The second section firstly analyses the discussion of divine justice in the Abraham story by Straussian political philosopher Thomas Pangle and then explores the complex implications of *yi* by investigating the historical interpretations of the Shun story in the Confucian tradition. Employing the emotional-rational structure theory from the contemporary Chinese philosopher Li Ze-

hou (李澤厚), the third section illuminates the fundamentally distinct approaches to emotions exemplified in the two stories. The paper's final section examines the divergence between transcendental loyalty and familial loyalty and seeks to identify the cosmological factors contributing to it.

2. TWO STORIES AND THE PARADOXES

The story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as a burnt offering at the command of Yahweh in Genesis 22 is familiar to the Western world. In his celebrated book *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard says that there were countless generations who knew it by heart, word for word, and yet people's understanding was so impoverished that few could tell it accurately. People talked a lot in a way that obscured the excruciating anguish it concealed. To underline the paradox of the story, Kierkegaard presents the reader with a tragicomic picture: while the priest speaks eloquently about how Abraham was so noble that he gave "the best" to God, an audience suffering from insomnia goes home and prepares to imitate Abraham's behavior. When the priest heard this, he rushed to the spot and, with all his authority as a clergyman, shouted at the sinner: "You despicable man, you scum of society, what devil has so possessed you that you want to murder your son." In his full-throated rebuke, the pastor secretly delighted in his indignant righteousness, which he had never felt so much as when he preached about Abraham from the pulpit. Just as the pastor was becoming complacent, a comic scene ensued when the sinner replied calmly and majestically: "But, after all, that was what you yourself preached about on Sunday." Had the sinner, who wanted to murder his own son, not yielded to the priest's reprimand and acted on it, the tragic scene would have been that he was either executed or sent to an insane asylum. In another sense, Kierkegaard claims, the sinner would have been blessed because he at least labored compared to the blind glorifiers who sell cheap versions of the Abraham story (aee Kierkegaard 1983, 28-30). Through this tragi-comedy, Kierkegaard demonstrates the paradox of the sacrifice: "The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he meant to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he meant to sacrifice Isaac - but precisely in this contradiction is the anxiety that can make a person sleepless" (Kierkegaard 1983, 30). He even goes so far as to argue that if a person lacks the courage to think his thoughts through and say that Abraham was a murderer, it's surely better to gain that courage than to waste time on undeserved praise (Kierkegaard 1983, 30).

Kierkegaard compares Abraham to tragic heroes such as Agamemnon, who painfully sacrificed his daughter but was able to find rest in universal ethics. God gave the command: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:2). But He did not reveal why such a sacrifice was required. Agamemnon offered the sacrifice to appease the wrath of Artemis, the goddess of the moon so that the fleet to Troy could pass through Orestes and protect the nation. Though severe pain disturbed his heart and mind, he could find rest in the universal ethic, and people would weep for him. In contrast, the meaning of

Abraham's sacrifice cannot be discerned. Kierkegaard expresses Abraham's supreme responsibility in the ethical world as follows: A father should love his son. Isaac was the only son for whom Abraham had waited a hundred years and in whom he had placed all his hopes. In this sacrifice, if there is anyone whose anger must be appeased, the only one who has reason to be angry is Abraham himself. In the absence of the middle term that saves the tragic hero, Abraham remains a murderer in the ethical sphere, and no one would presume to weep for him. Thus the story of Abraham can only be interpreted as a monstrous paradox, "a paradox that makes a murder into a holy and God-pleasing act, a paradox that gives Isaac back to Abraham again, which no thought can grasp, because faith begins precisely where thought stops" (Kierkegaard 1983, 53). Derrida, drawing on Kierkegaard's interpretation, even elucidates the sacrifice of Isaac as a "double secret" that cannot be tolerated by the ethics of universality: a secret between God and Abraham, but also between the latter and his family. Not only did God remain silent to Abraham without any explanation, but Abraham also remained silent to Isaac, Sarah, and Eliezer. Though he spoke, he did not say anything.[1] It was the need to keep "such a nocturnal secret" that led Abraham to transgress ethics (Derrida 1996, 59). Hence the horror of this event, as Derrida puts it, "An infanticide father who hides what he is going to do from his son and from his family without knowing why, what could be more abominable, what mystery could be more frightful (tremendum) vis-a-vis love, humanity, the family, or morality" (Derrida 1996, 67)?

According to Christian tradition, Abraham's monstrous sacrifice made him the father of faith and the embodiment of pious righteousness. As stated in Romans 4:9, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness". Abraham's paradigm-shattering deed allowed his people to understand the concept of the highest good, making Mount Moriah the summit of religious experience. However, according to Kierkegaard, Abraham is considered a murderer in the realm of universal ethics, which creates a paradox that cannot be reconciled. Derrida further interprets this paradox as an irreducible secret that cannot be comprehended. Although Abraham is considered the pinnacle of faith in the religious sphere, it remains an impossible task to justify his "justice" from an ethical standpoint. In his accomplished book, *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, Thomas Pangle, a political philosopher of the Straussian School, addressed this challenging problem. As suggested in the opening statement, Pangle aims to "rejuvenate the relationship between political philosophy and the Bible" (Pangle 2003, I). The second part of this paper will concentrate on Pangle's reasoning.

The account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac appears to concentrate on the divine-human relationship; however, it also serves as a means to examine Yahweh's impact on the relationship between father and son (Zhang 2017). Confucianism, renowned for its emphasis on familial relationships, delves into comparable themes. One of the most

[1] During Abraham's journey to Moriah with Isaac, Isaac asked his father: "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham replied: "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8). Derrida argued that Abraham's words disclosed a truth, but only in the sense that he spoke without knowing the ultimate purpose behind his words, and hence Abraham's words cannot be deemed entirely true or false (Derrida 1996, 59).

contentious cases that highlights the paradox of justice and the father-son relationship is the story presented in *Meng-Zi*:

> T'ao Ying asked, "When Shun was Emperor and Kao Yao was the judge, if the Blind Man killed a man, what was to be done?"
> "The only thing to do was to apprehend him."
> "In that case, would Shun not try to stop it?"
> "How could Shun stop it? Kao Yao had his authority from which he received the law."
> "Then what would Shun have done?"
> "Shun looked upon casting aside the Empire as no more than discarding a worn shoe. He would have secretly carried the old man on his back and fled to the edge of the Sea and lived there happily, never giving a thought to the Empire." (Lau 2004, 153)

The "blind man" in the story was Shun's father, named Gusou (瞽叟). The case of Shun has instigated ongoing discussions on kinship, corruption, justice, and the Confucian concept of "*yi*" (see Wang 2014). The two stories bear significant differences. Firstly, it should be noted that Isaac was innocent, while Gusou had committed a homicide. Isaac was to be sacrificed solely based on God's command without any explanation, while Gusou was spared legal punishment despite perpetrating the crime. Secondly, the sacrifice of Isaac involved ritualistically binding and burning him as an offering with Abraham's own hands, causing great torment. In contrast, Shun does not have to endure the emotional distress of carrying out the execution of his father personally because Judge Kao Yao intervened. As Abraham journeyed for three days to Moriah, he may have reflected on the pleasant memories shared with Isaac whilst imagining the forthcoming gruesome act of slaughtering him. The three-day trek caused immense suffering for Abraham every moment. Shun, on the other hand, willingly abandons the Empire without any hesitation and lives "happily" with his father in seclusion from society. The two narratives provide divergent perspectives on determining the right course of action in extreme scenarios. Abraham's deeds are considered righteous, and Shun's decision seems to be the optimal solution to the moral dilemma. Both Abraham and Shun embody profound teachings in Christian and Confucian traditions. Abraham exhibited faith in God, while Shun personified filial piety in Chinese philosophy. Both of them are highly revered in their respective cultures and have had a significant educational influence throughout history. However, when viewed from a universal ethical perspective, they both violate fundamental principles of justice. Justifying their actions from an ethical standpoint seems to be a daunting task. The following section of the paper will explore this matter.

3. DIVINE JUSTICE VERSUS OPTIMAL APPROPRIATENESS

Kierkegaard defends the absolute supremacy of faith and argues that Abraham's frightful sacrifice suspends ethics. He states: "If faith cannot make it a holy act to be willing to murder his son, then let the same judgment be passed on Abraham as on everyone else" (Kierkegaard 1983, 30). On the contrary, Kant takes a skeptical view of

this event, asserting that since it is totally against the moral law, Abraham should regard the voice of God's call as an illusion.[2] Pangle, who seeks to reconcile the conflict between faith and reason, encounters challenges from both Kierkegaard and Kant. The challenge from Kant is that justice must comply with the moral law. Is there any action more intolerable to the universal moral law than the killing of an innocent young child? Pangle reviews previous events, such as Abraham's attempted deceit of Abimilech for his own safety, and contends that the biblical concept of justice is not confined by absolutely unexceptionable moral laws, as the highest dimension of justice is the common good. God is the Creator, and even the moral law itself is created by God. The happiness of all creation is in God's sagacious but inscrutable plan. Of all these goodnesses, the most supreme is God's own desert accorded to Himself. "Justice demands that Creation pay tribute to a perfection in the Creator that transcends even His justice or creating" (Pangle 2003, 164). In the case of Isaac, as Isaac was granted to Abraham by God's grace through a miracle, God had the authority to demand that Isaac be devoted to him. It means that instead of Abraham being Isaac's father, God is the genuine father and the ultimate source of life. This is the reason why Abraham, who had previously dared to reaffirm God's intelligible justice through relentlessly questioning in the judicial investigation of the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 18: 22–33), was startlingly obedient on this gruesome occasion. This interpretation echoes Aquinas' theological explanation of the sacrifice. Aquinas explained that "[Abraham] did not consent to murder because his son was due to be slain by the command of God, Who is Lord of life and death ... [If] a man be the executor of that sentence by Divine authority, he will be no murderer any more than God would be" (Aquinas 1947, I–II q. 100 a. 8, ad 3). Pangle's interpretation also resolves the challenge presented by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard drew a distinction between the tragic hero and the knight of faith Abraham：

> The tragic hero is still within the ethical. He allows an expression of the ethical to have its τελος in a higher expression of the ethical; he scales down the ethical relation between father and son or daughter and father to a feeling that has its dialectic in its relation to the idea of moral conduct. Here there can be no question of a teleological suspension of the ethical itself. (Kierkegaard 1983, 59)

[2] Kant firmly establishes the moral law by asserting that any voice that encourages disregard for it, no matter how revered, must be treated as phantom-like. The command of God that Abraham heard ordering him to slaughter his beloved son was such a voice. He writes: "In some cases man can be sure that the voice he hears is not God's; for if the voice commands him to do something contrary to the moral law, then no matter how majestic the apparition may be, and no matter how it may seem to surpass the whole of nature, he must consider it an illusion. We can use, as an example, the myth of the sacrifice that Abraham was going to make by butchering and burning his only son at God's command (the poor child, without knowing it, even brought the wood for the fire). Abraham should have replied to this supposedly divine voice: 'That I ought not to kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God - of that I am not certain, and never can be, not even is this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven' " (Kant 1979, 115).

Kierkegaard firmly asserts that for Abraham, there is no higher expression of the ethical in his life than that the father shall love the son. Since the sacrifice lacks the middle term that saves the tragic hero, it can only be a murder and Abraham overstepped the ethical altogether. "Abraham's act is totally unrelated to the universal, is a purely private endeavor" (Kierkegaard 1983, 59). According to Kierkegaard, Abraham suspended the ethical teleologically and faith is precisely such a purely personal virtue that the single individual is higher than the universal. However, Pangle's interpretation in fact makes Abraham another tragic hero more worthy of tears, for a higher ethical purpose does exist in his slaughter of Isaac. And this ethical purpose is even more sublime and magnificent than the one for which Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, that is, to utterly dedicated to the common good of the universe, which is first and foremost the good of God in Himself, a demanding good that transcends and is the source of the overflowing good for devoted humans.

However, Isaac was also the very person appointed by God to maintain the covenant between Him and Abraham (Genesis 17:19). In requesting the immolation of Isaac, how would God have fulfilled the covenantal promise? Wouldn't this be a self-contradiction? In light of Pangle's perspective, no matter whom God bestows a divine promise upon, since the person is pledged a wholly undeserved benefit, justice requires the beneficiary to accept God's proviso which is temporarily unknown to humans. In this case, the test of offering Isaac as a sacrifice was precisely such a proviso, and only if Abraham passed this test could he receive the rewards. What was God testing? The purpose of the test was to evaluate Abraham's piety. As the most righteous judge, God will definitely accord more recompenses and precious goods to those who piously obey His will. From a divine perspective, it appears that God knew from the beginning that the commandment of sacrifice would be a pre-established hurdle that Abraham must and will vault. God was always confident that Abraham, the one chosen after many trials and much education, would ultimately pass this final test. Therefore, there was never a moment when God was uncertain about fulfilling the covenant He had sworn.

Nevertheless, this rasises the "deepest and most momentous puzzle in divine justice" (Pangle 2003, 167). For the purpose of this extraordinary test was to confirm Abraham's trust to God as the most righteous Judge of the whole earth, then how could the pious Abraham really believe that God would actually demand him to brutally slaughter his much-loved son with his own hands if he was convinced that God's justice was as unshakable as granite? In this regard, the New Testament responds that Abraham's utter confidence to God was so enormous that he believed even if Isaac did die, God could resurrect him and cause the promised benediction to spring up again (Hebrews 11:29). However, wouldn't this test then become a theatrical performance? While temporarily "sacrificing" Isaac, Abraham did not set aside his guiding concern of long-range prospects -- that a great and mighty nation would come out of him, and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed by him. If this is the case, how can Abraham be the embodiment of "justice", when he is more akin to a politically

ambitious man with cunning schemes? [3] In response, Pangle argues that, when God gave this command, He left Abraham with no hope, but simply plunged him into a self-contradiction. At that moment, God, the highest friend whom Abraham trusted the most, seemed more like an enemy and a tyrant. When Abraham raised the knife, he did believe that all his expectations had come to naught, and this was exactly what God had ordered (Pangle 2003, 169). What would Abraham conceive of God, to whom he was proving his utmost dedication by sacrificing his only son? In this almost inexplicable contradiction, reason is entirely irrelevant, and he had only one consolation in this incredible ordeal: he has received a commandment from God. However, the teaching of God's justice does not end here. The unexpected turn at the end of the story, when God stops Abraham through His angle and extends the promise to reward him with more blessings, reveals another dimension of "justice": the justice of the outcome guaranteed by God's overwhelming power to do infinite good and inflict infinite suffering in proportion to merit.

According to Pangle's analysis, there are two dimensions of justice in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. The first dimension is Abraham's piety and compliance with the Will of God, while the second dimension is God's justice in rewarding and punishing. These two dimensions inherently create tension. Abraham's righteousness and unqualified dedication mean that subjectively, he cannot hope for any benefits, forcing him to abandon any thoughts of securing his interests. From a perspective of the relationship between rights and duties, this is a typical theory of deontological justice (see Chu & Tang 2015). The duty is owed to God. Justice is not focused on human-to-human connections, but rather on humanity's relationship with God. Among the justice theories in traditional Chinese philosophy, the Mohism's concept of *yi* based on the will of Heaven closely resembles the logical structure of justice in the story of Abraham.[4] Firstly, on the ultimate source of *yi*, Mo Zi emphasizes that "*yi* does not originate with the stupid or lowly; rather, it must arise from the eminent and wise. who is noble and who is wise? Heaven is the noblest and the wisest. That being so, *yi* must, in fact, originate with Heaven" (*Mo-Zi* 27.1, also see Knoblock & Riegel 2013, 230). Furthermore, Mo Zi asserts that "Obedience to the wishes of Heaven is the standard of *yi*" (*Mo-Zi* 27.9, also see Knoblock & Riegel 2013, 240). Secondly, in terms of justice as an outcome, Mo Zi underscores that "obeying the intentions of Heaven receive the reward of Heaven; opposing the will of Heaven receive the punishment of Heaven" (*Mo-Zi* 27.8, also see Knoblock & Riegel 2013, 238-239). Evidently, Mo Zi's theory proposes that "Heaven", the powerful and all-knowing entity, is capable of justly rewarding virtuous actions and punishing wrongful ones. "*Yi*", derived from the "will of Heaven", serves as an objective and external measure of moral correctness and incorrectness. Meng Zi emphasized the differentiation between *yi* and "personal

[3] Jules Gleicher argues that God attached a promise to every call of Abraham, and every response of Abraham reinforced and expanded such a promise. Compared to Moses, Abraham was more of a great political ambitious, glory-seeking man (Gleicher 1998).

[4] Wing-tsit Chan (陳榮捷) once pointed out that "Modern interest in Moism arose in the West because of its superficial resemblance to the Christian teachings of the will of God and universal love" (Chan 1969, 212).

advantage (*li* 利)", which contradicted the Mohism's perspective of *yi*. Before examining Meng Zi's conception of *yi* in the Story of Shun, it may be useful to use his criticism of the Mohism's doctrine to infer his understanding of justice in the Story of Abraham. Meng Zi consistently refuted the assertion made by the Mohism's scholar Gao Zi (告子) that *yi* is an objective external standard that has little relevance to the human heart (*Meng-Zi* 6A4). Instead, Meng Zi contends that *yi* is not derived from the will of Heaven, but resides within the human heart-mind (*xin* 心). He asserts that "our heart-mind in feeling shame at perceived crudeness disposes it toward *yi*" (*Meng-Zi* 2A6). He further states "What then do heart-minds have in common? I would say that it is a sense of the principle of our nature (*li* 理) and a sense of *yi*" (*Meng-Zi* 6A7). It implies that *yi* is inherently linked to moral intuition. After explaining Meng Zi's point that *yi* is not bestowed by Heaven, this paper then attempts to interpret his considerations of *yi* in Shun's story from within Confucian perspective.

In the story of Shun, Liu Qing-ping, who had initially mounted an attack on Meng Zi's position to solve the intractable problem, maintains that Shun's act of secretly carrying his father away obstructed justice. He claims that this case illustrates the conflict between filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and humanity (*ren* 仁), and that Meng Zi's resolution to the hypothetical moral dilemma is a typical case of preserving filial piety at the cost of humanity (Liu 2007a, 2007b). Acknowledging that Shun does indeed confront a moral dilemma, Huang Yong contends that it is not a conflict between filial piety and *ren*, but rather a conflict between love of family and love of others, both of which are manifestations of *ren* (Huang 2007, 6). In the interpretive history of Confucianism, the correlation between filial piety and *ren* has been metaphorically compared to the relationship between the roots and the canopy of a tree (see Wang 1996, 27). Ideally, the branches and the roots grow in tandem, however, due to the idea of "love with distinction", this tree argument is theoretically difficult to be tenable (Li 2012). This paper proposes that the crux problem in this case is the tension between *ren* and *yi*. [5] The story of Shun clearly illustrates the conflict between love and reason.

[5] It is important to note that there is no inherent conflict between the concepts of "filial piety" and "*ren*." The *Analects* contains 105 references to the term *ren*, which are dedicated to exploring its meaning. Ruan Yuan (阮元), a Qing Dynasty scholar, provides an analysis of these chapters in relation to Confucius' core teachings on *ren* in his work. Ruan argues that to explain the meaning of *ren*, it is unnecessary to search for distant references. Instead, he emphasizes two passages from the *Li-Ji* (禮記) that shed light on its significance. One passage compares dealings with others to the cooperation between boats and carriages, highlighting the necessity of mutual support and interdependence. The other passage from the *Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸) states, "*Ren* (仁) is the characteristic element of *ren* (人)" (仁者, 人也) -- a statement interpreted by Zheng Kang-cheng (鄭康成) as relating to the pairing of people. According to Ruan, Confucius' concept of *ren* is manifested in specific, relative relationships between individuals, rather than being an abstract, universal principle. Ruan also distinguishes between the concepts of "*sage*" (聖) and "*ren*" in the *Analects*. He argues that although emperors Yao and Shun were unable to fully achieve the act of "being generous to the people and benefiting the multitude," the statement "establishing oneself and then establishing others; attaining one's goals and then helping others attain theirs" exemplifies the idea that *ren* can only emerge through mutual relationships. Confucius believed

In the early Confucian classics, *ren* served as the foundation for upholding emotion, while *yi* was centered on reason (see Pang, 2008, 99-111). Meng Zi's emphasis of the "distinction between *yi* and personal advantage (義利之辨)" was conventionally regarded as the principal focus of Confucianism. In the case of Shun, the real challenge may be how Meng Zi identifies *yi* in this arrangement. Yang Shi, a prominent Neo-Confucian scholar of the Song Dynasty, took on the role of expounding on Meng Zi's reasoning:

> The connection between father and son embodies familial love (*en* 恩), while the law represents justice (*yi* 義) under heaven. If familial love takes precedence over justice, it may be necessary to compromise the law to uphold family values. If justice triumphs over familial love, family values may need to be overshadowed to adhere to the law. If familial love and justice hold equal importance, it is best to take both into account. When Shun was the emperor, his father Gusou committed murder, and Kao Yao apprehended him. As the Emperor, could Shun not have pardoned his father's crime by utilizing his supreme power? However, releasing a criminal who had taken someone's life would have rendered the law ineffective, and executing his father would have damaged their father-son bond. Perhaps Meng Zi thought that the world could not be lawless for one day, nor could a son lose his father for one day. However, the people would not suffer from the absence of a particular ruler. Therefore, he chose to initially detain his father to ensure justice, and then secretly took him away to show his deep love for his father. This is how Shun balanced both sides. (Yang 2018, 223-224)

Yang Shi's explanation apparently interprets the story of Shun on two levels. Initially detaining his father to ensure justice means that, as the emperor, Shun did not prevent Kao Yao from enforcing the law, which is itself a manifestation of *yi*. On the other hand, by secretly taking his father away, Shun preserved *ren*.[6] This interpretation is associated with the pre-Qin Confucianism theory that separates ethical priorities between "within the family gates" and "beyond the family gates". The text of *Six Virtues* (*Liu-De* 六德) inscribed on the excavated Guodian bamboo states: "*Ren* is a matter of the internal, *yi* is a matter of the external. . .The internal positions are father,

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that Zi Gong's (子貢) understanding of *ren* as "being generous to the people and benefiting the multitude" was an overestimation and a confusion with the realm of sagehood. (Ruan 1993)

With regard to Meng Zi's example of the "young child about to fall into a well," Liu Qing-ping emphasizes that this passage highlights the moral subject's empathetic response toward a stranger, someone who is neither family nor friend. However, this does not necessarily imply the "universality" of *ren*. Zhu Xi (朱熹) explains empathy as "deeply feeling the pain and suffering of others" (Zhu, 1983, 237). Since both "pain" and "suffering" are direct, immediate biological sensations, they are emotions that naturally have degrees of intensity depending on proximity. Therefore, interpreting "*ren*" as a principle of universal equality contradicts the original intention of Meng Zi's argument. In conclusion, both Confucius and Meng Zi emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships and moral conduct within those relationships when discussing the concept of ren. It is not a purely abstract or universal principle but rather something that is enacted through specific interactions between individuals.

[6] In pre-Qin Confucian theory, the terms *en* (恩) and *ren* often overlap semantically. Zhuang Zi, in his exposition on the core value of Confucianism, articulates the following dictum: "To regard *ren* as the standard of *en*, *yi* as the standard of principle (以仁為恩，以義為禮)" (*Zhuang-Zi*, "*Tian-Xia*").

son, and husband; the external positions are ruler, minister, and wife. . .The ruler may be forsaken for the sake of the father, but the father may not be forsaken for the sake of the ruler…In the order within the [family] gates, *en* (恩) holds check over *yi*; in the order beyond the [family] gates, *yi* cuts short *en* (恩)" (Li 2007, 171).[7] As Cook comments, this is a guideline on how to resolve conflicts between competing yet complementary virtues (Cook 2012, 156). When Shun was emperor, his primary social role was monarch of the state, and the main problem was "beyond the family gate", which decided that he should give priority to *yi* in the context of national ethics. When he renounced his position as emperor, he was restricted to dealing with matters "within the family gate". Only then could he secretly take his father away. Yang Shi's interpretation closely aligns with the principles of the *Six Virtues*. Applying the theory of distinguishing "order within the family gate" and "order beyond the family gate" as a transitional framework, it becomes clear that the tension between filial piety and *yi* is equivalent to the tension between loyalty to the family and loyalty to the state. As Rosemont and Ames point out "If we ask about the relative importance of the state and the family in effecting cosmic harmony, we must allow that family is the ultimate ground of political order, and without it, political order is a sham" (Rosemont and Ames 2008, 17). Hence, taking all factors into consideration, Meng Zi suggests that saving his father's life would be Shun's paramount duty in this scenario.

The conflict between filial piety and justice has long been a subject of ideological differences between China and the West. A comparison can also be drawn between the stories of Shun from *Meng-Zi* and that of Euthyphro from the Platonic dialogues, highlighting contrasting perspectives on this matter. Socrates believed that Euthyphro's decision to prosecute his father for killing the family servant was a display of piety, whereas Meng Zi held the opposite view, stating that Shun's act of helping his father evade punishment was the right thing to do. Meng Zi's views are consistent with the development of Confucianism as a whole. In a conversation with Confucius, the Governor of She mentioned a person in their village known as the "true person" who reported his father to the authorities for stealing a sheep. Confucius responded by highlighting the difference in behavior exhibited by true individuals in his own village. In his village, a father would cover for his son, and a son would cover for his father. This, according to Confucius, is what it means to be true (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 166-167). To understand the discrepancy in attitudes between Confucius and Socrates, it is necessary to examine their differing approaches to filial piety. According to Bo Mou's in-depth and nuanced cross-tradition examination of a mutually shared moral concern by Socrates and Confucius, Confucius viewed filial piety as a principle deeply embedded within specific contexts, which Mou described as a "situational-aspect-concerned" perspective. Confucius provided varied answers about what filial piety entails, suggesting that its expression may differ based on the context (Mou 2020, 237-244). In contrast, Socrates sought universal truths and definitions through the elenchus method, an approach Mou referred to as a "universal-aspect-concerned" perspective (Mou 2020, 228). Socrates' reasoning aimed to establish universal principles of virtue

[7] The quotation of the Guodian bamboo-strip text *Six Virtues* is adapted from Cook 2012, 156-157.

beyond situational contexts. Socrates' pursuit of universal definitions aligns with the Christian Golden Rule's emphasis on universal love and compassion. Mou insightfully points out that *ren* and its primary manifestation in treating others "occupy the counterpart status of the First Commandment and Second Commandment in the Christian divine version of the Golden Rule" (Mou 2020, 246). Confucius' Golden Rule emphasizes *ren* as a foundational virtue and applies the principles of reversibility and extensibility to specific situations, potentially bridging his "situational-aspect-concerned" perspective with a more universally concerned "across-the-board-*ren*-virtue-concerned" perspective (Mou 2020, 244-249). On the one hand, in both traditions, love for others is an expression of the most fundamental virtue, whether that love is rooted in divinity in Christianity or in moral character and social responsibility in Confucianism. On the other hand, they differ significantly in their understanding of the relationship between love and emotion.

The biblical narrative reflects Abraham's God-fearing stance, demonstrating his reverence for God and trust in His just nature. This reverence is manifested when Abraham shows readiness to sacrifice everything in adherence to God's will. This action correlates with the first commandment of the Christian Golden Rule. Although both the Christian and Confucian Golden Rules emphasize love for others, these two kinds of love differ significantly. Divine love in Christianity is framed as a moral command, requiring individuals to transcend natural emotions in compliance with God's unilateral will, as exemplified in Abraham's story. Conversely, Confucian love, based on *ren*, emphasizes genuine and sincere emotions. The Guodian text *Five Modes of Proper Conduct* (*Wu-Xing-Pian* 五行篇) explains *ren* and *yi* in Confucian thought as follows:

> Consummatory conduct (*ren* 仁) taking shape within is called acting upon excellent habits (*de* 德); where it does not take shape within, it is called merely doing what is deemed consummate. Appropriate acting (*yi* 義) taking shape within is called acting upon excellent habits (*de*); where it does not take shape within, it is called merely doing what is deemed appropriate. (Ames 2011, 145)

These distinctions in Confucian thought underscore a crucial point: virtues must originate from genuine sentiments, not external commands. Practicing virtues guided by one's inner nature can bring a profound sense of peace and joy. While Christianity's foundation in the love for God emphasizes overcoming natural emotions, Confucian love, grounded in *ren*, must stem from heartfelt emotions. Recognizing this theoretical basis allows us to discern the contrasting emotional-rational structures presented in the stories of Abraham and Shun. This point will be further elaborated upon in the fourth section.

4. THE CONTRASTING EMOTIONAL-RATIONAL STRUCTURE

Abraham exhibited the highest degree of pious righteousness in attempting to slaughter Isaac, yet the experience was a total ordeal. After a hundred years of waiting, he was

finally given a son but had to immediately sacrifice him in a shocking and horrific way. Regardless of what recompense or justice bestowed by God, Abraham's three-day journey to Mount Moriah was filled with fear, sorrow, and torment. In order to convey the extreme anguish of expressing one's absolute duty to God, Kierkegaard discussed a related passage from the New Testament: "If any man comes to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke,14:26). Recognising the exceptional rigor of this teaching, Kierkegaard dismissed all exegetical approaches that would lessen its gravity, emphasizing that the words must "be taken in their full terror" (Kierkegaard 1983, 72). He asserts that "hate" here must be understood precisely in a way that reinforces the paradox. "God is the one who demands absolute love" (Kierkegaard 1983, 73), whereas all of the ethical must be relegated to the relative, and furthermore, "absolute duty can lead one to do what ethics would forbid" (Kierkegaard 1983, 74). Abraham's justice was demonstrated precisely at the moment when his action contradicted his emotion. As Kierkegaard noted, "Only in the moment when his act is in absolute contradiction to his feelings, only then does he sacrifice Isaac" (Kierkegaard 1983, 74). His absolute love for God sustained him to completely surrender, overwhelm, and subdue his deep love for Isaac. On the other hand, Shun's solution of carrying his father away is a contented journey.

Li Ze-hou (李澤厚), the prominent contemporary Chinese philosopher, examines Abraham's act of killing his son in terms of emotional-rational structure. He comments: "Reason not only absolutely dominates the emotions, but also establishes its authority … in the painful masochism, struggle, and sacrifice of the natural emotions" (Li 2005, 75). On the surface, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son might seem to directly contradict the moral imperatives defined by Kant. Yet, the philosophical intrigue emerges from Li's insightful exploration of the parallels between the story of Abraham's preparedness for such a sacrifice and Kantian moral philosophy. Both emphasize rational control and unconditional obedience. Li observes that both the narrative of Abraham's resolve to obey God's command to sacrifice his son and Jesus Christ's acceptance of suffering, as depicted in the New Testament, reflect a common pattern -- forgoing fundamental emotions and instincts for the sake of a higher principle or command (Li 2005, 74-78). From the Kantian perspective, moral actions are grounded in universal rational principles, encapsulated in the notion of the Categorical Imperative. Hence, Abraham's readiness to act in complete obedience to the divine will, despite the profound personal sacrifice it entails, and the emotional agony associated with it, mirrors Kant's concept that moral actions should be dictated by reason rather than by personal inclinations or emotions. Even though Kant's philosophy hinges on the principle of rationality and steers clear of theological commands, while Abraham's story is replete with absolute faith and divine obedience, Li emphasizes the spiritual harmony between the reason behind Abraham's sacrifice and Kant's advocacy for action in accordance with reason, overriding personal emotions and interests. In essence, Li underscores the similarities between these two expressions of obedience: in both scenarios, there is a pronounced expectation for the individual to rise above their personal feelings and desires to adhere to a more sublime principle or command.

This highlights an alignment between the obedience to rational or divine authority manifested in both Abraham's narrative and Kantian ethics.

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, epitomizes the consummate expression of unreserved obedience to and faith in God's command. Kierkegaard's work *Fear and Trembling* delves into the exceptional philosophical significance of faith, examining how religious conviction may inspire moral actions that transcend the bounds of rational explanation. In philosophical and ethical discourse, Kant's moral philosophy introduces a contextually similar notion by emphasizing the importance of moral obedience that is reminiscent of Abraham's story. Kant differentiates between "hypothetical imperatives," which are conditional, and "categorical imperatives," which are universal and necessary. His argument, as outlined in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, contends that moral actions must adhere to the imperatives of pure reason, embracing principles of universality and dismissing consequence considerations. Even amidst formidable trials, categorical imperatives demand compliance, a fundamental tenet of Kantian ethics (Kant 2012). Green interestingly considers the potential intersections between these two schools of thought. While they might seem entirely distinct moral frameworks at first glance, there are underlying philosophical connections: particularly the unconditioned obedience to a moral command that surpasses individual preferences. Despite distinct motivations and natures of obedience, both share an innate congruence in following such imperatives (Green 1992, 89-90).

Abraham's resolve to sacrifice Isaac is a quintessential allegory illustrating the primacy of dutiful compliance above familial love, thus mirroring Kant's call for the primacy of reason. By carefully analyzing the intersections between Abraham's deference to a divine command and Kant's insistence on rational supremacy in ethical behavior, one reveals their common advocacy for unwavering fidelity to a commanding principle that takes precedence over personal emotions. Abraham's assent to sacrifice his son, notwithstanding the extreme emotional anguish to his paternal heart, symbolizes the ultimate victory of reason--or a reason-like demand--over human emotional tendencies. His act of obedience, while seemingly an ethical paradox, transcends subjectivity and achieves a universal dutifulness, akin to Kantian ethics, where the Categorical Imperative holds sway. This imperative dictates moral actions not through consequence, but through the intrinsic rectitude of the act itself.

Through this lens of stringent rationality, Abraham's actions may be interpreted not as mere blind faith but as representative of a rational ethic similar to that of Kant. The connection between the two is stark: Abraham, under a divine edict, exhibits an exemplary forfeiture of personal emotions in deference to a command that, within its context, aligns with the rational ideal. Duty, unyielding and removed from the temporal, is a shared theme--the patriarch obeys a divine directive, while the philosopher's construct adheres to the immutable prescriptions of reason. Kant's Categorical Imperative, which instructs individuals to act only in a manner that could be willed into a universal law, echoes Abraham's readiness to part with his son. Both Kant and Abraham submit to imperatives that demand a sacrifice of personal desires on the altar of reason. The result is an ethical stance that, for both figures, surpasses

primal instincts and affirms the predominance of a universal moral order, whether it is divinely ordained or dictated by pure practical reason. The parallels drawn are substantial, reflecting a deep congruence in the moral frameworks proposed by the Biblical narrative and Kantian philosophy. Both coalesce around the tenet that reason--or a comparable substitute, such as divine command--must prevail over emotional impulses when determining moral righteousness. Thus, a philosophical kinship emerges: both frameworks, despite differing in their fundamental origins, espouse the dominance of a duty-driven rationality over the influences of emotional responses and physical desires.

Compared with Abraham's fearful journey, the Confucian sage Shun would happily live near the edge of the sea with his father after "casting aside the Empire as no more than discarding a worn shoe". In the pre-Qin period, "happiness (*le* 樂)" and "apprehension (*you* 憂)" are very important philosophical concepts that repeatedly appear in tandem. The contemporary Confucian scholar, Xu Fu-guan (徐復觀), points out that the fundamental characteristic of Chinese culture is the awareness of "apprehension (憂患意識)" (Xu, 2001,13-30), whereas Li Ze-hou suggests that Chinese culture is "a culture of optimism (樂感文化)" (Li, 2005). The excavated text *Five Modes of Proper Conduct* meticulously analyzed the relationship between "happiness" and "apprehension":

> If the noble man has no inner-heart apprehension, he will have no inner-heart knowledge; lacking inner-heart knowledge, he will have no inner-heart [gratification]; lacking inner-heart [gratification, he will not be] secure; insecure, he will not be happy (/musical); and unhappy (/unmusical), he will be without virtuosity. (Cook 2012, 151)

As this passage reveals, the source of "happiness" is "apprehension", and the essential characteristic of apprehension is a sense of responsibility. Which responsibility holds more significance for an individual -- the responsibility for the state or the responsibility for his father? Meng Zi responded to this question when one of his disciples asked why Shun would weep and cry to heaven when he was not in harmony with his parents. According to Meng Zi, becoming an emperor did not alleviate his anxiety and apprehension. As long as he failed to maintain a harmonious relationship with his parents, he felt as if he had nowhere to return, despite his high position (*Meng-Zi* 5A1). The distinction between "fear" and "happiness" highlights the stark contrast in emotional-rational structure between these two stories.

The Confucian emphasis on parent-child love has faced criticism from many scholars. Fei Xiao-tong (費孝通) introduced Shun's case to illustrate that in the traditional Chinese kinship-based "differential mode of association (cha-xu-ge-ju 差序格局)", when there was a conflict between the public and the private spheres, even the emperor, who was responsible for governing the empire, had to first fulfill the obligations of his personal relationships (Fei 1992, 77). He also argued that religious piety and beliefs were the source of Western morality. According to Fei, God symbolized "the universal organization (tuan-ti-ge-ju 團體格局)", administering equal

justice to all. By addressing God as Father, Jesus publicly rejected his own parents, thus eliminating the influence of the special father-son relationship to ensure the justice of the "universal organization" and the equality of each individual member (Fei 1992, 72). In a similar vein to Fei Xiao-tong's critique, Russell also stated that "Confucian emphasis on filial piety prevented the growth of public spirit" (Russell 1922, 40). He compares the "son-covering-father" story in the *Analects* with the historical execution of his rebellious son by Elder Brutus, a member of the Roman Senate, to highlight the inadequacy of public spirit in Confucian ethics. Elder Brutus is also mentioned in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* as a model of a tragic hero who abandons his fatherly duty to his son in order to uphold a higher ethical duty -- the duty to defend the Roman Republic. However, perhaps this comparison is not appropriate. According to the Confucian theory distinguishing "order within the family" and "order outside the family", the relationship between the father who stole the sheep and his son remains primarily in the private sphere of the family, and the theft of sheep is not a very serious transgression. On the contrary, the Elder Brutus held the position of consul, with the highest political authority, and his son's plotting jeopardized the foundation of the Roman state, which involved the most central domain of politics. There is, in fact, another account chronicled in *Zuo-Zhuan* (左傳) that is more comparable to the story of Brutus. In 719 BCE, Shi Que (石碏), an elderly minister of the state of Wei, executed his son Shi Hou (石厚) because Shi Hou had participated in the regicide of the king and had abused the military power, leading to tyranny and chaos in the State of Wei. Shi Que's act was highly praised by Confucius as "killing his intimate family member to demonstrate great *yi* (大義滅親)" (Kong, 2000, 86-88). If a comparison is drawn, this story in *Zuo-Zhuan* is more comparable to the deeds of Brutus. The GuoDian Bamboo text "*Nature from the Mandate* (*Xing-Zi-Ming-Chu* 性自命出)" provides a detailed explanation of the relationship between emotions and *yi* in Confucian ethics: "The true ethical code (*dao* 道) begins with the unshaped feelings; unshaped feelings [in turn] are begotten by human nature. In the beginning [the true ethical code (*dao*)] approximates the unshaped feelings; in the end [it] approximates rightness" (Meyer 2012, 312). The Confucian notion of *yi* highlights the significance of emotions, yet the emotions need to be regulated. While it is not a moral imperative that applies to every circumstance, *yi* serves as the criterion for emotional regulation.

5. TRANSCENDENTAL LOYALITY VERSUS FAMILIAL LOYALTY

Perhaps another point deserves comparison as both Abraham and Shun were tested before becoming political leaders. Abraham was tested by God while the *Book of Documents* (*Shang-Shu* 尚書) records the story of "Yao (堯) testing Shun", detailing how Shun was selected by Yao to become emperor：

> The emperor said, "Oh, Si Yue, I have been on the throne for seventy years." If you can execute Heaven's mandate, I shall cede my high position. Si Yue responded, "I am not virtuous enough and would disgrace the emperor's esteemed position." The emperor said,

> "Promote and elevate someone already renowned among the humble and mean." Si Yue replied, "There is an unmarried man called Shun of Yu, who is in a low position." The emperor asked, "Yes, I have heard of him. What is his character like?" Si Yue responded: "He is the son of a blind man; his father was not right-minded, his mother was deceitful, his brother Xiang was arrogant; he has been able to be concordant and to be grandly filial; he has managed to harmonize with his family members and led his parents and brother to self-improvement, preventing them from falling into wickedness." The emperor said: "I will test him; I will marry my two daughters to him, and through them, I will closely observe his behavior." He sent his two daughters to the banks of Gui River to become wives in the Yu household. (Ruan 2009, 258)[8]

When Emperor Yao grew old, he asked his ministers for advice on the successor to the throne. Shun, who was of lowly status at that time, was recommended for his ability to mediate family conflicts under difficult circumstances. Yao did not approve of candidates such as his own son and other capable ministers but took a keen interest in Shun, who at that time demonstrated only family reverence and no talent for governing (see Zhang 2014). Then, Yao put Shun to the test. In a radically different way to Yahweh's test on Abraham, Yao took an unusual course -- he married two daughters to Shun and through them closely observed his behavior in the household. Rather than directing Shun to go to the capital and engage in political affairs, Yao sent down his daughters to Shun's remote homeland to live with his troublesome family. This was viewed as a test of his ability to govern the state by observing whether he could rectify his family situation, according to the Confucian scholar Kong Ying-da (孔穎達) in the Tang dynasty (Ruan 2009, 258). When Abraham received the first call of God, God commanded him: "thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Genesis.12.1). Along with the imperative came the promise that a great nation would come out of him. The two tests go in diametrically opposite directions: Shun must return to his remote household, while Abraham has to leave his homeland. Shun could only ascend to the position of emperor by successfully navigating the intricate web of family relationships, while Abraham had to sacrifice Isaac to demonstrate his unwavering devotion to God. This contrast highlights the issue of ultimate loyalty in terms of the father-son relationship. Robert N. Bellah, a leading American sociologist, compared the differences between Christianity and Confucianism on this problem. He concludes that in the West, only the absolute God, in the final analysis, possesses the legitimacy to exercise power, and that family and political authority must be based on derived power. With this conviction, Luther, Calvin and other Reformers dared to question the justice of every accepted authority during the process of social innovation (Bellah 1991, 92-93). Bellah criticizes the lack of transcendental loyalty in Confucian ethics. He states "Confucian phrasing of the father-son relationship blocks any outcome of Oedipal ambivalence except submission -- submission not in the last analysis to a person but to a pattern of personal relationships that is held to have ultimate validity" (Bellah 1991, 95). He notes that while Meng Zi justified King Tang's and King Wu's rebellion against tyrannical

[8] The translation is adapted from Kern and Meyer 2017, 85-86.

monarchs, it was far from mainstream in subsequent historical periods (Bellah 1991, 94). In fact, the legitimacy of the Tang and Wu revolutions is a controversial issue among Confucian scholars. [9] In the evaluations of Confucius and Meng Zi, Yao and Shun were superior to them (Analects 3.25; Meng-Zi 7A30; Meng-Zi 7B33). Shun's nomination as well as his succession to the throne is largely attributed to his reverence for his family and his ability to create family harmony in a hostile environment. It is reasonable to assume that Shun's decision to abandon the empire was consistent with his being selected for the high position. While Shun has been accused by critics of neglecting his duties to the state for the sake of his father, Confucius advocates that prioritizing family reverence is a superior approach to governance compared to strict implementation of laws (Analects 2.21).

Nonetheless, Bellah raised a thought-provoking question concerning the profound importance of paternal veneration within Confucian ethics. Considering that Confucianism is not a religion and "there was no Chinese equivalent to Yahweh" (Bellah 1991, 84), what is the underlying philosophical basis for Confucianism to regard the symbolism of the father-son relationship as absolute? This can potentially be understood from a cosmological perspective. The examination of the justification of Isaac's sacrifice in the second part of the paper demonstrates that God bestowed Isaac with life from the very beginning. Aquinas argues that all creatures, regardless of their moral character, are ultimately created by God. Consequently, all ethical relationships in the natural world are subject to change and lack ultimate stability. The cosmology of Chinese philosophy, however, does not adhere to creationism. The allegory of the death of Chaos after being drilled with seven holes in *Zhuang-Zi* exemplifies the refutation of creationism (*Zhuang-Zi*, "*Ying-Di-Wang*"; also see Ziporyn, 2020, 72). Meng Zi once engaged in a debate with the Mohism's scholar Yi Zhi (夷之), asserting that "When Heaven produces things, it always gives them one single root" (*Meng-Zi* 3A5). However, Yi Zhi posited a "dual one", suggesting that one root is biological parents while the other is the supreme Heaven. Confucianism deliberately rejects this idea. In Zhu Xi's interpretation, the concept of the "single root" in Meng Zi's philosophy elucidates that every living entity, including humans, derives its existence solely from its biological parents and possesses no other root (Zhu, 1983, 262). Unlike the creationism found in the Abrahamic religions, Chinese cosmology is prominently represented in the *Book of Changes*. The text states: "There is an intermingling of the genial influences of heaven and earth, and transformation in its various forms abundantly proceeds. There is an intercommunication of seed between male and female, and transformation in its living types proceeds" (Legge, 1963, 393). This demonstrates that the union of *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽) to create everything embodies the fundamental understanding of human existence in Chinese cosmology. Filial piety, as a reflexive acknowledgment of one's life's origin, represents a significant recognition of the value of life as well as the inception of human nature.

[9] Regarding the political legitimacy of the Tang and Wu's revolution, a heated debate took place between the ministers of the two factions of the Han Dynasty in front of Emperor Jingdi of Han (漢景帝), see Wu 2020, 3-4.

6. CONCLUSION

The narrative of Abraham's (almost) sacrifice of his beloved son Isaac illustrates the teaching of righteousness in Christian ethics, whereas the story of Shun's abandonment of the empire to assist his father in evading punishment by the state captures the contextualized approach to *yi* in Confucian ethics. Righteousness, characterized by God's divine justice, entails obedience to God's Will, while *yi* refers to the Confucian concept of justice, which involves conducting oneself appropriately in specific relationships. Righteousness, grounded in an emotional-rational structure, demands the complete subjugation of natural emotions to uphold the paramount importance of fulfilling one's duty to God. On the other hand, *yi* embodies the integration of emotion and reason. Righteousness assumes a theory of divine creation, which necessitates prioritizing the divine-human relationship over the parent-child relationship. In contrast, the Confucian notion of *yi* is based on the cosmological presupposition of the generative theory, asserting the absolute nature of the father-son relationship. The values and cultural foundations underlying these two terms differ significantly. Consequently, translating "*yi*" as righteousness is unsuitable in the context of comparative philosophy.

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