

# Blind Spots:

## On the Authority of Scholarly Consensus on the *Analects*

William Haines, May 25, 2026

We count on scholars to expose their reasons to readers' consideration, and to criticize each other's reasons and claims so that the scholarly community vets its claims and publications and leaders. Such vetting is the brand of academia; it is the source of scholars' authority. Because of these practices, it can be reasonable for people to trust scholars' conclusions without sorting through the reasons themselves, so that inquiry can be *better* for being collective.

But despite scholars' best efforts, as Thomas Kuhn pointed out, a received general view can have the effect of suppressing observations that challenge it, leading scholars to *avoid thinking* about key objects of potential inquiry. Hence it has often happened that scholars *en masse* leave an object uninvestigated when there is obvious reason to investigate it, overlook it when it is conspicuous, forget it when it has been noticed, and encourage others to do the same.

When we see the community of scholars doing these things, but we wish to have an opinion on the object in question, we must consult the evidence directly.

I shall try to demonstrate here that the relevant community of Anglophone scholars is in that condition regarding each of the following three objects that

are awkward for the view that the Confucius of the *Analects* revolves around the family:

1. 悌 (弟) in the account of the root of the Way at *Analects* 1.2;
2. Youzi (You Ruo 有若); and
3. the absence of evidence in the *Analects* that the Confucius of the *Analects* saw family virtue as the root (and had other associated views).

For each of these objects, I shall try to demonstrate that (a) there is obvious reason to attend to it; (b) it pervasively fails to register—that is, it is widely overlooked, forgotten and denied where it is hard to miss; and (c) some potentially motivating interest is served by overlooking it and encouraging others to do the same.

For each of the three objects, to show that it is widely overlooked and denied where it is hard to miss, I offer many kinds of substantial evidence. Here is just one example for each object:

1. In recent decades, over a hundred scholarly publications have reported that the root proposed in *Analects* 1.2 is filial piety. The omission is not acknowledged, much less defended.
2. In recent decades, over two hundred scholarly publications have attributed to Confucius statements that the *Analects* attributes to Youzi. Scholars do this without announcing any special use of Confucius' name, and sometimes even in the context of distinguishing the views of Confucius from those of his disciples.

3. Scholars offer nine *Analects* passages other than *Analects* 1.2 as presenting the view that family virtue is the root of the Way. One of them is offered quite often for this purpose. In every case (as my reader will agree) it is hard to miss the fact that the passage says no such thing. Each time (or each but one), no argument is offered for the family root reading of the passage.

In what follows, where I generalize about Anglophone scholarship, I am not including my own publications and blog posts (except in one case where I call myself out).

The structure of the paper is very simple. There is one part for each of the three objects. In each part I argue that (A) there are fairly obvious reasons to attend to the object, (B) there is ample evidence that the object persistently fails to register, and (C) there are interests that may be served by its not registering. The reader is invited to skip any of the nine sections whose thesis she already accepts.

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# I. The word *tì* in *Analects* 1.2

## A. Fairly obvious reasons for attention

Few would deny that *Analects* scholars have reason to “attend to the root”—not just half of it. There is no dispute that the string *xiàotì* 孝弟 at *Analects* 1.2, used to describe the root of the Way, is the key term in a key statement for early Confucianism and, more broadly, for the Confucian way of life—especially for those who see Confucianism as the exaltation of family. The root proposed in the statement has two parts. The second part, on the usual understanding, is being a good younger brother to one’s older brother or brothers: *tì*.

A scholar might think that *tì* in the root was not thought to play an important role in supporting further virtue; that the term does not name a practice that makes a significant independent contribution to the functioning of *xiàotì* as a root. This little virtue is just the tail on the pig. But I have not seen that position defended. A defense would give the term some attention.

To take *Analects* 1.2 at all seriously for scholarship or for my life, I must ask myself how someone like me, without an older brother, might nevertheless be able to practice the proposed root. Or I must ask myself what it means that I cannot. If I had an older brother and was considering a practice of deferring to him or emulating him, I might ask myself whether *he* can practice the proposed root. I must think about *tì* in the account of the root.

A reason to attend to *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 is that there are interpretive questions yet to be settled about this term in this place. Mainstream scholars are divided. For example, *tì* might be taken to mean the role virtue of a younger brother, i.e. the whole of what it is to be a good younger brother toward an older. Or else it might be taken to mean some slice of that, such as obedience, respect,

love, friendship or altruism of a younger brother toward an older, or some combination of the above.<sup>1</sup> And many respected translators render the term at 1.2 simply as respect for one's *elders*.<sup>2</sup>

There are many other recognized open questions about how *Analects* 1.2 is to be understood, and the presence of *tì* in the account may be relevant evidence.

A reason some scholars may have for investigating *tì* in general, not just at *Analects* 1.2, is that the status of *xiào* as a term for the virtue of a family relational position has been opposed in effect by the idea that *xiào* should be understood as “family feeling” or “family reverence,” and the word should be translated thus, as though it were not the virtue of a particular family position. Scholars who accept that view must hold that *tì* in one of its senses is the *only* candidate for an established term in Chinese for the virtue of a specific family relational position. That fact would call for explanation.

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<sup>1</sup> In the one main discussion of this term in the scholarly literature, on the one hand we are told, “What *tì* specifically designates is the respect and deference that a younger brother owes his older brother.” On the other hand, “As for the specific actions that embody this virtue, traditional illustrative stories posit three types. They are (1) yielding wealth or food to one’s brother, (2) taking his place when he is in danger, and (3) after his death, supporting his widow and orphans” (Knapp 2003, p. 604). The illustrative list suggests a kind of big-moment altruism for occasions anyone would hope to avoid altogether (and perhaps suggests a rejection of what a good older brother would have preferred). The illustrative list suggests that the virtue is not about respect, deference, obedience, communication or interaction, nor about the sharing of thinking, agency, activities or experiences. Thus the list calls into question the idea that *tì* is the (whole) virtue of the family relational position, or calls into question the quality of early Confucianism’s thinking about close family relations.

<sup>2</sup> Chin 2014, p.; 2.Chong 1999, pp. 299, 306f.; Chong 2007, pp. 20, 29, 151 n.4; Eno 2015, p. 1; Hinton 1998, p. 3; H. Kim 2016, p. 38; M. Kim 2014, p. 273; Leys 1997, p. 83; Slingerland 2003, p. 1; Radice 2017, p. 201; Soothill 1910, p. 120f.; Tan 2014, p. 95. Lau 1979 translates it somewhat similarly, as “obedient as a young man” (p. 59; but see his p. 18).

## B. Evidence that *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 fails to register

(1) One way scholars have displayed and encouraged inattention to this term and virtue at *Analects* 1.2 is that in discussing the passage, I and others have explicitly introduced putative abbreviations of convenience to represent *xiàotì* in English, always choosing abbreviations that seem designed to induce the reader to forget the root's second half.<sup>3</sup>

(2) The most common way scholars display and encourage inattention to the second half of the root is more direct. In translating or paraphrasing Youzi's account of the root at *Analects* 1.2, scholars often simply omit the second half of the account, without acknowledging that anything has been omitted, much less offering a reason to think the omission is fair. Sometimes they do so alongside a quotation from 1.2 that includes both halves of the account. It is as though the second half simply fails to register.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The abbreviation "filial love" is introduced in Chong 2007, p. 151 n. 4. "Filiality" is introduced as an abbreviation in Haines 2008, p. 75. The same abbreviation is introduced in S. Kim 2008, p. 279; S. Kim 2010, p. 481; and S. Kim 2018, p. 124 with n. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Here are examples from more than 100 publications by more than 80 scholars. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi* (SUNY 2014), p. 18.

Roger T. Ames, "Thinking Through 'Practice' in Classical Chinese Philosophy," in R. Ames, M. Ishida, T. Najima and S. Katani eds. *Papers from the 2013 University of Tokyo-University of Hawai'i Summer Residential Institute in Comparative Philosophy* (UTCP 2013), p. 23.

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**(3)** Another way scholars display and encourage inattention to this term is that in representing *tì* as meant in Youzi's root, scholars usually blur their eyes to it, so to speak, and mislead their readers about how to understand it. Specifically, as I imagine all *Analects* scholars know, scholars usually translate or paraphrase *tì* in a way that is uncontroversially false, by omitting all reference to age difference. The alteration of the meaning must be seen as highly significant if it is noticed at all, since the English terms connote equality while the Chinese term is about rank, and even a cursory inspection of *Analects* 1.2 suggests that the rank aspect of *tì* is an operative feature there.

I have not seen a reason offered for this standard practice. Perhaps the scholars' idea is to sacrifice an unimportant point for the sake of smoothness of

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Rodney Leon Taylor and Howard Yuen Fung Choy, "Confucius," in Taylor and Choy, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism A-M* (Rosen Publishing Group 2005), p. 154.

Qingjie James Wang, "Virtue Ethics, Symmetry, and Confucian Harmonious Appropriation of Self with Others," in Yong Huang ed. *Michael Slote Encounters Chinese Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Ethics and Moral Philosophy* (Bloomsbury 2020), pp. 205, 206.

Haiming Wen, *Chinese Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge 2012), pp. 3, 22, 27.

Kuang-hui Yeh, "The Beneficial and Harmful Effects of Filial Piety: An Integrative Analysis," in K. Yang et al., *Progress in Asian Social Psychology* (Praeger 2003), p. 70.

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language. Or perhaps the aim is to conceal an unattractive account of the root for appearances' sake, as a bit of philosophical dirty laundry. Or perhaps the idea is to correct a philosophical mistake in the text. Readers are not told.

Perhaps less thought is given to the matter than the above conjectures suppose. Among prominent scholars, one says in sketching ancient views that in giving an office to his younger brother, the sage emperor Shun “fulfills the duty of fraternal respect (*ti* 悌).”<sup>5</sup> Another reports that the “brotherliness” mentioned at *Analects* 1.2 is “characterized by reciprocal care,” and reports *tì* in *Analects* 14.43 as care for one’s younger brother.<sup>6</sup> Another translates *tì* as “filial” twice in an important *Mencius* passage about *xiàotì*.<sup>7</sup> Another offers a note explaining *tì* in 1.2 that gives only the uncontroversially false meanings “sibling,” “fraternal,” “elder brother,” and “brotherly.”<sup>8</sup> And another reports in the only encyclopedia entry on *tì* that *tì* “is used interchangeably with the word *dì* 弟, which literally means ‘younger brother’.”<sup>9</sup>

**(4)** Many or most scholars recognize that the ancient term *tì* had more than one common meaning, and accounts of its family-specific meaning vary widely. But with one arguable exception,<sup>10</sup> I have found no *reason* ever offered in support of any interpretation of *tì* in *Analects* 1.2, or in any other ancient passage. Consider what it would be like to begin to consider that question about 1.2.

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<sup>5</sup> Ames 2021a, p. 284.

<sup>6</sup> C. Li 2023, pp. 65, 169.

<sup>7</sup> Van Norden 2008, p. 159 (§2.5).

<sup>8</sup> Cline 2026, p. 166.

<sup>9</sup> Knapp 2003, p. 604

<sup>10</sup> Speaking in the first instance of translation rather than interpretation, a footnote to *Analects* 1.2 in Slingerland 2003 (p. 1) comments,

Although the literal meaning of the term is something like ‘being a good younger brother,’ *tì* often refers more generally to showing respect and being obedient to one’s elders, and the more general reading will be used throughout [the present translation of the *Analects*] to maintain consistency.

**(4a)** One of the obvious *first* steps in thinking about how to interpret that word in that place would be to address the *possibility* that at the time of composition, *tì* in the statement was understood in the way many or most scholars think it was understood in all its other appearances in the *Analects*: as referring to respect for elders generally. For these other statements are each attributed to the person thought to have been Youzi’s teacher, whom Youzi is widely thought to speak for. At *Analects* 1.6, 13.20, and 14.43, Confucius uses *tì* to mean respect for elders,<sup>11</sup> and in each case he is plainly talking about non-family elders. In two of the three passages he casts non-family elder-respect as the partner virtue of filial piety. Such statements were likely part of the philosophical background against which the statement at 1.2 was composed. But the scholarly literature has never addressed this matter of agreement with Confucius as a reason relevant to interpreting *tì* at 1.2 (with the same arguable exception).

**(4b)** Another of the obvious *first* steps in thinking about how to interpret *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 is to address the most obvious *prima facie* objection to the consensus reading: the problem that if the root of the Way is being a good son and younger brother, then most of the people whose virtue was of most concern to early Confucians were incapable of the root of the Way, including Shun, Wen, Taibo, and most heads of states, of clans, of lineages, and of brothers. If an adequate answer to this objection is known, then it belongs in the note to 1.2 in every translation and edition. But the scholarly literature does not mention this apparent problem with the traditional reading.

**(4c)** Another of the obvious *first* steps in thinking about how to interpret *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 is to address the question how subfraternity *could seem* to be a key complement to filial piety in the root. What significant distinct contribution might this second practice have been thought to make that would single it out

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<sup>11</sup> For an extended defense of this point and citations of scholars’ views, see Haines 2026, “Impartiality in the Ancient Root,” pp. 12-24.

as *the* partner to filial piety in the root, at least for men who have older brothers? To my knowledge this question is virtually never mentioned or addressed in the Anglophone scholarly literature.<sup>12</sup>

(5) Another sign and cause of scholarly inattention is that in most of the places where one might hope to find a helpful discussion of a key Confucian term there is no mention of *tì*, although scholars greatly disagree in characterizing even the meaning specific to younger brothers.

There is an entry for the term in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Confucianism*.<sup>13</sup> But there is no entry or account in the massive *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (Cua ed. 2002), nor in the 900-page *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism* (Taylor 2005), nor in *History of Chinese Philosophy Through Its Key Terms* (Y. Wang et al eds. 2020), nor is there any mention of the term in *Keywords in Chinese Culture* (Li & Pines eds. 2020), nor any appearance of the term in *Chinese Philosophy A-Z* (Mou 2009) nor in the lexicon of 21 terms for the *Xiaojing* in Rosemont & Ames 2009. With perhaps just one exception (C. Huang 1997, p. 29), the term is not discussed in the glossaries of key terms one finds appended to English translations of the *Analects*, such as the glossary of 27 terms in Ames & Rosemont 1998, 49 terms in Chin 2014, 17 terms in Dawson 1993, 13 terms in Eno 2015, 28 terms in Ni 2017, 38 terms in Slingerland 2003, 19 terms in Soothill 1910, and 12 terms in Waley 1938.

Similarly, *tì* is not one of the 92 terms with entries in *A Conceptual Lexicon for Classical Confucian Philosophy* (Ames 2022). There is a nominal entry for *xiàotì* that simply directs the reader to the entry on *xiào* (pp. 349-373), whose main comment on *tì* is to gloss *tì* for *Analects* 1.2 as “fraternal deference” (see item (3) above) and a few lines later as “deferring appropriately to elders” without acknowledging the difference, and then in effect to gloss *xiàotì* as *xiào* without

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<sup>12</sup> For details see Haines 2026, “Impartiality in the Ancient Root,” pp. 82-85.

<sup>13</sup> Knapp 2003, p. 604.

acknowledging the discard, all on p. 351. All three things are done also on p. 3f. in the same volume.

The only meaning offered for *tì* in Axel Schuessler's *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese* is "Respectful toward elder brothers, fraternal";<sup>14</sup> though that is a facially implausible reading of the term in at least three of our four *prima facie* earliest records of it: at *Analects* 1.6, 13.20, and 14.43.

**(6)** Another way to enact and support inattention to the second half of the root is to give the impression that first half is something like family virtue in general, by translating *xiào* as "family reverence" or "family feeling."<sup>15</sup> If *xiào* were family virtue in general, the second half of the root (as usually understood) would not be worth noticing or mentioning separately. Or to put the point conversely, the text's inclusion of a younger brother's virtue in the account of the root at 1.2 is a strong signal that *xiào* at *Analects* 1.2 is not to be taken to suggest family virtue in general.

**(7)** Another way to participate in inattention to *tì* in the root proposed in the *Analects* is to cite, in place of 1.2, the statement by the uncontroversially fictitious Confucius in *Xiaojing* 1 that filial piety (alone) is the root of virtue, in the context of a discussion that is more about Confucius than the *Xiaojing*, and without alerting the reader to the point that this text's "Confucius" certainly cannot be identified with Confucius or with the Confucius of the *Analects*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Schuessler 2007, p. 210.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. xii.

<sup>16</sup> Here are some examples:

Roger T. Ames, "Traveling Together with *Gravitas*: The Intergenerational Transmission of Chinese Culture," in Hans-Georg Moeller and Andrew Whitehead eds., *Landscape and Travelling East and West: A Philosophical Journey* (Bloomsbury 2015), p. 191.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Human Becomings* (Sunny 2020), p. 86.

\_\_\_\_\_ *A Conceptual Lexicon for Classical Confucian Philosophy*. (SUNY 2021), pp. 3, 356.

Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., "Were the Early Confucians Virtuous?" in Fraser et al eds. *Ethics in Early China* (2011), p. 20. (The authors do say eleven lines later that "it is not certain that the *Classic of Filial Reverence* records the

### C. What interests are served

One interest that might be served by inattention to *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 is to make the statement seem to propose that *family virtue* is the root of the Way. That is, one takes *xiàotì* as a sort of hand-waving reference to family role virtues in general. This reading is very hard to reconcile with reading *tì* as subfraternity, because then we must read the root as two specific family virtues that happen to be a strikingly unrepresentative sample of men's family virtues. Men are marginally more likely to be older brothers than younger, and perhaps were more likely to be husbands and fathers. And within the most focal image of the *family* as this term is standardly understood in English—a household comprising a couple and their minor children—no adult has filial or sibling relations.

A related concern that might be served by overlooking *tì* is that while one assumes that *tì* here means the role virtue of a younger brother toward an older, one does not know how to believe or explain that this virtue more than the virtues of any number of other family positions would be a valuable complement to filial piety in paving the Way.

Or one's main interest in *Analects* 1.2 might be to explain why the Confucius of the *Analects* gives so much attention to *xiào*. Confucius gives little

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actual words of Confucius." The insinuation is that there is a serious possibility that it does give his words.)

John & Evelyn Berthrong, *Confucianism: A Short Introduction* (2000), p. 58

Ching-yuen Cheung, "The Problem of Evil in Confucianism," in Gort et al eds. *Probing the Depths of Evil and Good* (2007), p. 90

Gordon B. Mower, *Philosophical Forum* 51 (1):67-79 (2020) , p. 68.

Lisa Li-Hsiang Rosenlee, "Why Care? A Feminist Re-appropriation of Confucian *Xiao* 孝," in A. Olberding, ed. *The Dao Companion to the Analects* (Springer 2014), pp. 314.

Virginia Suddath, "Ought We to Throw the Confucian Baby Out with the Authoritarian Bathwater?" in Hershock & Ames eds., *Confucian Cultures of Authority* (2006), p. 230

Weiming Tu, "Interview," in *Philosophy Now* 117 (Dec. 2016/Jan. 2017)

or no attention to how a younger brother should relate to his older brother, though he says a certain man was straight (*zhèng* 正) who took his older brother's dukedom by having him killed.<sup>17</sup> It is as though Confucius did not think being a good younger brother was part of the root.

Another interest that might be served (and created) by overlooking *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 is simply that one does not know understand it. The term is well known to be ambiguous as between being a good younger brother (or something like that) and being respectful of elders. Many respected *Analects* translators render *tì* at 1.2 not as respect for older brothers but as respect for elders. If one is at a loss as to which reading to prefer, one can sidestep the awkward expository moment by quietly suppressing this half rather than visibly "leaving a blank."

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<sup>17</sup> See Haines 2026, "Impartiality in the Ancient Root," pp. 26-30.

## II. Youzi

### A. Reasons for attention to him

If we are looking into early Confucian philosophy for philosophical reasons, then we have at least four kinds of fairly obvious reason to investigate Youzi as a potentially distinct thinker. In brief, by way of preface:

First, there are reports that several of Confucius' core disciples wanted (at least temporarily) to take him as master after Confucius' passing.

Second, several of the many statements attributed to him are widely recognized to be interesting and impressive. They feature prominently in the scholarly literature on the *Analects*, they stand out for their theoretical discursiveness, and many serious interpretive questions about them remain to reward scholarly attention.

Third, the literature so far has interpreted his statements only in isolation, toward understanding not Youzi but Confucius or the *Analects*. Scholars have not yet made use of any of his statements toward interpreting any of his other statements, so there are promising untapped resources for interpretive progress. Indeed we have *much* more reason to think that the statements attributed to Youzi are authentic and give us Youzi's actual views than that the statements attributed to Confucius are authentic and give us Confucius' views.

Fourth, in several ways, attention to Youzi's statements as a *group* is one of the obvious first steps toward doing what we can to judge the authenticity of statements attributed to Youzi and statements attributed to Confucius.

## 1. Youzi's early reputation

One reason to attend to Youzi is his early reputation. *Mencius 3A4* reports that after Confucius' death, Ziyou and two other core disciples wanted to make Youzi their new master. They wanted someone like Confucius, and they thought Youzi fit the bill. The picture would seem to be that these disciples were convinced that Youzi was exceptionally wise and that they had things to learn from him, i.e. new things.<sup>18</sup> The ability to judge the qualities of others and oneself is prominently central to the method that the Confucius of the *Analects* claims, advises, and teaches.<sup>19</sup> If the tale in the *Mencius* has any connection with the truth, it suggests that Youzi as a thinker is worthy of *some* interpretive effort.

Similarly, the main account of Youzi in the *Shiji* is a story about how Confucius' disciples *stopped* taking Youzi as their master. The tale is that a disciple challenged Youzi to explain how, on one occasion, Confucius had successfully predicted rain on stated grounds that did not work in general, and predicted the number of sons a man would have by a certain year. In response Youzi said nothing, and thereby lost his seat. There is enough odd detail to suggest that the story reflects reality in some way more than being an imaginative elaboration of the story in the *Mencius*. The story reflects better on Youzi than on Confucius.

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<sup>18</sup> The passage is sometimes read to say the three disciples chose Youzi because he looked like Confucius. I do not see how that reading can be entertained if we ascribe to Confucius, the disciples and the *Mencius* anything like an ordinary human level of working wisdom about people's qualities (cf. *Mencius* 6B2 on physical height). Granted, the tale in the *Mencius* is an attack on the three disciples' judgment; but the attack is presumably not so extreme as to be a great disparagement of their long-time teacher, as it would be on the resemblance reading.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. *Analects* 1.3, 1.6, 1.11, 1.14, 1.16, 2.9, 2.10, 4.1, 4.7, 4.17, 5.10, 7.22, 9.30, 11.22, 12.19, 12.22, 13.6, 13.24, 15.8, 15.10, 15.28.

## 2. Youzi's philosophy

Several statements attributed to Youzi have long been exalted by scholars and recognized as meriting philosophical attention. That much is uncontroversial.

I shall first review some of the individual statements and propose that (a) their merits give us reason to think that Youzi was an interesting thinker and thus worthy of attention, and that (b) there is much disagreement on how his statements should be understood, calling for attention.

Then I shall offer a number of what I take to be fairly obvious reasons for trying to interpret Youzi's putative work as a whole, not just each statement separately.

### ***a. Individual statements***

**Youzi's statement at *Analects* 1.2** might be the most influential and frequently quoted short passage in East Asian philosophy. It stands out in the *Analects* for its articulated theoretical depth. Arguing at least notionally from statistical correlations, it suggests a vision of moral psychology especially for political participation.<sup>20</sup>

It is widely recognized that this statement sees great virtue as growing from and depending on humbler virtues that set its pattern. (The same general idea is also easily visible in the statements about other virtues attributed to Youzi in Book 1). This idea has been very influential in the tradition, but (as has been pointed out in the literature<sup>21</sup>) it is plainly not articulated in the Confucius material in the *Analects*, nor (to my knowledge) in earlier texts.

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<sup>20</sup> I do not agree with that reading of the statement myself, but our concern here is to list obvious reasons a scholar has to investigate Youzi.

<sup>21</sup> Haines 2008, pp. 473-481.

Fortunately for scholars, much interpretive work on this keystone statement remains to be done. Even if we have identified all the key interpretive questions, there appears to be significant difference of opinion on the following questions.

- Is the statement mainly, or mainly not, or not at all, about the impact of *childhood* life on a man's character?
- By *xiàotì* does the statement actually mean *xiào* and *tì*? Or are those offered as a *sample* of family virtues, standing somehow for good family relating in general?
- Is the first half of the root, *xiào* 孝, best understood as filial piety, the specific virtue of the filial relational position? Or is it best understood as family feeling or as revering one's family as such, suggesting a focus not on differentiating among roles but rather on what is common to every family virtue?
- How could *tì* (more than other virtues) plausibly have been thought to the right partner for filial piety in the root, worth distinct mention?
- Did *tì* in this statement originally mean a man's being a good younger brother to his older brother; or some slice of that such as obedience or respect or love; or respect for elders (as in many respected translations)? And would respect for elders here have meant mainly family elders, or mainly non-family elders,<sup>22</sup> or both?
- Does the passage envision the Way of the *jūnzi* 君子 as "docility," so that the passage does not associate the *jūnzi* or *rén* 仁 with leadership or the position of the ruler?

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<sup>22</sup> Granted, this reading has been advocated only by one unaffiliated scholar in non-refereed blog posts. On the other hand, to my knowledge those posts are a very prominent part of the Anglophone scholarly literature offering any reason for any reading of *tì* in in this or any pre-Qin passage, because they are virtually the entirety of that literature.

- What was the original operative vision of *how* the root supports great virtue? Is it that we tend to treat all people the way we treat our parents and other elders, and *xiàoti* is analogous to the way we *should* treat all people—the root is the blueprint? Or is it that one’s parents and other elders are the prime transmission channels by which one *receives* lessons from elsewhere on how to act—the root is receptivity to the forms of excellence? Or is it some combination of the above, or something else?

**Youzi’s statement at *Analects* 1.12** is the *locus classicus* for the Confucian idea that harmony is the purpose of ritual, a plausible idea that harmonizes with the rest of the *Analects*. This statement stands out in the *Analects* for its theoretical articulation. It is very often quoted in the scholarly literature. It is the root of Joel Kupperman’s papers “Confucius and the Problem of Naturalness,”<sup>23</sup> and “Naturalness Revisited: Why Western Philosophers Should Study Confucius.”<sup>24</sup>

Fortunately for scholars, much interpretive work on the passage remains to be done. Even if we have identified all the key questions, there is difference of opinion on the following questions.

- Does *lǐzhīyòng* 禮之用 here mean the manner of practicing ritual or the function of ritual (as in “What’s the use of ritual?”)?
- Does the statement’s key term *hé* 和 mean social harmony or the ease of what has become second nature? (Or music, or aptness to the season?)
- Does the central line *xiǎodà yóuzhī* 小大由之 refer to following ritual or harmony in fine detail, or in every little thing? Or does it refer instead

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<sup>23</sup> Kupperman 1968.

<sup>24</sup> Kupperman 2002.

to everyone (great and small) in society carrying out ritual together, symbolically performing their harmony and so strengthening it?

- Should the statement from *xiǎodà* 小大 to the end be parsed to express a balanced point—mere punctilious ritual won't do, mere harmony won't do?<sup>25</sup> Or should the statement from *yǒusuǒ* 有所 to the end be parsed to say, “Pursuing harmony *directly*, i.e. not by way of ritual, won't work”?

**Youzi's statement at *Analects* 1.13** was chosen by Benjamin Schwartz to illustrate the point that Confucius sometimes theorized very abstractly about virtues.<sup>26</sup> On one reading the statement proposes that two cardinal virtues are respectively supported by two humbler face-to-face virtues by way of similarity. In each case the verse explains how the humbler supports the greater, using a phrase that expresses the similarity by simultaneously describing the root and the branch.

Fortunately for scholars, much interpretive work on the passage remains to be done.

- Within each of the three couplets, are the two lines related as the antecedent and consequent of a conditional, or does the first line describe a phenomenon that the second line explains?
- Does *xìn* 信 in the first couplet refer to the content of promises or to the virtue of trustworthiness?
- Does the third couplet mean one of the following, or something else? (My own reading is different from these.)
  - Simply following these [abovementioned] virtues, never letting them out of your sight—one cannot deny that this is worthy of respect.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> As at Slingerland 2003, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Schwartz 1985, p. 80.

<sup>27</sup> Slingerland 2003, p. 6.

- One who can accord with these [above points] and not depart from his father's way – such a one may truly be revered.<sup>28</sup>
- When one makes no mistakes in what he favors, he can serve as a leader.<sup>29</sup>
- Make no mistakes about what or for whom you have affection and you can go on to guide others.<sup>30</sup>
- When the parties upon whom a man leans are proper persons to be intimate with he can make them his guides and masters.<sup>31</sup>
- When he in whom you confide is not one who fails his friends, you may trust him fully.<sup>32</sup>
- Accordingly, do not fail to keep the right persons close as kinsmen, indeed as if part of one large ancestral family.<sup>33</sup>
- Those who are accommodating and do not lose those with whom they are close are deserving of esteem.<sup>34</sup>
- The best support is provided by one's own kinsmen.<sup>35</sup>
- If you do not lose the affection of those who are your relatives by marriage, then you could have the respect of your clan.<sup>36</sup>
- When a person does not lose close relationship with one's own kinsmen after being married, the person can be considered reliable.<sup>37</sup>
- If, in promoting good relationship with relatives by marriage, a man manages not to lose the good will of his own kinsmen, he is worthy of being looked up to as the head of the clan.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Eno 2015, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Watson 2007, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Cline 2026, p. 193.

<sup>31</sup> Legge 1971, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Soothill 1910, p. 137.

<sup>33</sup> Roberts 2020, p. 129.

<sup>34</sup> Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> Leys 1997, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Chin 2014, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Ni 2017, p. 91.

<sup>38</sup> Lau 1979, p. 61.

- Marry one who has not betrayed her own kin, / And you may safely present her to your Ancestors.<sup>39</sup>
- If he marries one who has not wronged her own kin, she can be part of his clan.<sup>40</sup>

**Youzi's statement at *Analects* 12.9** offers a trickle-up theory of why taxation should be light, anticipating the “root and branch” fiscal theory at *Xunzi* 10,<sup>41</sup> and expressing its argument by way of phrases that seem to strain for ambiguity, simultaneously making the economic point that the fisc depends on a prosperous tax base and the psychological point that high taxes impede fellowship or the sharing of enjoyment between ruler and ruled—a desideratum the *Mencius* would later emphasize.

**The eulogy credited to Youzi at *Mencius* 2A2** makes an argument on human nature and greatness, grounded in an analogy between great virtue and great size. On its face the statement is an ancestor of Mencius' celebrated barley argument at 6A7.

**One can find other statements** attributed to Youzi in the *Hanfeizi*<sup>42</sup> and the *Liji*,<sup>43</sup> and statements about him in various early texts.

### ***b. Potential benefits of attending to the statements together***

Another reason to invest one's time attending to Youzi's statements is that we have always had obvious resources for their interpretation that are as yet

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<sup>39</sup> Waley 1938, p. 87.

<sup>40</sup> Brooks & Brooks 1998, pp. 147, 299.

<sup>41</sup> Hutton 2014, p. 95.

<sup>42</sup> *Hanfeizi* 32, Harbsmeier 2025, p. 543f.; cf. p. 535.

<sup>43</sup> *Liji: Tangong* I 75, II 159, 164, 185f.; *Zaji* I 33.

largely untapped by Anglophone scholars. We scouted some of these on p. 14f. above. Further, toward understanding any one of the statements attributed to Youzi, we can look at the others. We can try to attend not just to the statements individually, but to the philosophy of Youzi.

To my knowledge, in Anglophone scholarly publications to date, no discussion of any statement attributed to Youzi references any other statement attributed to Youzi. This state of affairs has not changed since it was reported in *Philosophy East and West* eighteen years ago.<sup>44</sup>

What could an awareness of Youzi's general *oeuvre* possibly help us see in one of his statements that we do not already see in it? Granted, there are no *specific* payoffs that are obvious before one has tried the exercise. But there is no reason to think there are none to be had. (In a footnote I propose nine.<sup>45</sup>) And

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<sup>44</sup> Haines 2008, p. 470. An arguable exception is the brief summary of part of my view at Peterman 2015, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> **First**, it is only by being aware *which* statements have been attributed to Youzi that one can be able to *notice* a certain kind of relevant interpretive evidence in other texts. For example, [Xiaojing 1](#) appears to offer a descendant of *Analects* 1.12 immediately followed by a descendant of 1.2, and [Liji: Yanyi 4](#) appears to offer a descendant of *Analects* 12.9 immediately followed by a descendant of 1.12. In each case the apparent descendant of 1.12 matches the social harmony reading of 1.12 and the “great and small follow it” reading of *xiǎodà yóuzhī* 小大由之 at 1.12.

**Second**, it is by looking at Youzi's statements in Book 1 together that we can best see that he has the *general* idea that great excellences grow from humbler ones. What the humble virtues do concretely in a narrow field of action, the greater virtues do abstractly on a wider field. In *Analects* 1.2 and 1.13 Youzi offers roots for three of the four virtues of individuals for which the *Mencius* offers *duān* 端. And his statement at 1.12 makes the same sort of point about two virtues of a community.

**Third**, once one has noticed that general idea (and noticed its absence from the Confucius material in the *Analects*), one can see it as evidence leaning in favor of the authenticity of the Youzi statements in Book 1 as products of a single author. Each statement is a potential resource for understanding the rooting relation in each of the other statements.

**Fourth**, among many statements attributed to Youzi we may notice strong *similarities of style*, mostly connected to the arguments' operative similarities between items. Stylistic similarity would be evidence in favor of the authenticity of the statements

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as products of a single author. For example: The argument at *Analects* 1.2 is bookended by two noun phrases whose homophony suggests similarity between the root (“his personal life”) and the branch (“his practicing humanity”). The statement at *Analects* 1.12 centers on a line that is ambiguous as between “great and small follow the ritual together” and “great and small follow harmony together.” By the ambiguity between ritual and harmony, that line articulates the analogy between ritual and harmony that explains how ritual models and supports harmony, as a community’s ritual depicts and affirms its harmony. The statement at *Analects* 1.13 first says that X is the root of Y. Then it explains how it is the root, by way of a single phrase that describes both X and Y and thus articulates their similarity. Then the statement does the same with another root-branch pair: G and L. Next, the concluding couplet has been thought to make a third point loosely similar to the point of the first two couplets; but I have proposed that it is instead a metaphorical account of both previous pairs at once, saying that the branch virtue depends on holding fast to the root virtue. The argument at *Analects* 12.9 is presented in phrasing that strains to articulate simultaneously a fiscal argument and a psychological argument. The eulogy at *Mencius* 2A2 presents several different cases and then offers language that applies equally to each case, thus articulating their proposed similarity or commonality.

**Fifth**, we might note that the eulogy’s metaphor of great virtue as great size (having more of the same kind of stuff) can be seen as an expression of the theory of moral psychology Youzi sketches in *Analects* 1. Great virtue grows from similar humbler virtue, so in an abstract sense great virtue is “more of the same.” This observation leans in favor of the authenticity of the eulogy. It grounds an interpretation of the eulogy, as appealing to an interesting vision of moral psychology rather than appealing implausibly to a poor theory of natural kinds.

**Sixth**, even if we do not accept the details of the stories in *Mencius* 3A4 and the *Shiji* about Youzi’s candidacy to be Confucius’ successor, they may convince us that **(a)** the idea of Youzi as successor to Confucius was indeed afloat around the time that Youzi would have delivered the eulogy in *Mencius* 2A2 about the special greatness of the Sage. This point may direct our attention to three facts about the eulogy that are in some tension with its arguing that Confucius is vastly greater than others, *viz.* **(b)** the theoretical focus of the argument is on underlying similarity; **(c)** the conclusion is that “nobody has been greater than Confucius” (未有盛於孔子也), not “there has never been another Confucius” (未有孔子) (the formula Mencius uses in the passage); and **(d)** in the eulogy all the examples of great things of other kinds than humans are examples of *two greats* in each kind. These four points together lean in favor of the authenticity of the eulogy. (One might be tempted to speculate that there was some historical connection with the fact that the candidacy of the man with the artificial-sounding name You Ruo 有若 was associated specifically with the idea of similarity or *si* 似.)

it is generally accepted in other contexts that in order to interpret a challenging philosophical passage responsibly, or to try to settle interpretive questions that have resisted settling, the interpreter should at least have a look at some other passages attributed to the same author to see whether they might help.

It may be objected that we do not know that the statements attributed to Youzi are actually his. Skepticism is always easy. But we have not *tried* to judge whether they are his until we look at them together, to see whether they display a distinctive vision or style.

On their face, many of the reasons for skepticism about whether the statements attributed to Confucius in the *Analects* give Confucius' views do not seem to apply with the same force to the Youzi statements.

- Unlike the Confucius statements, the Youzi statements are mostly clustered in one corner of the *Analects*.

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**Seventh**, especially if we do not too hastily pigeonhole each of his statements in *Analects* 1 as being either about virtues of individuals or about virtues of communities, we may attribute to him the view that harmony is rooted in humble respectfulness. For harmony is rooted in ritual (1.12) and ritual is rooted in humble respectfulness (1.13).

**Eighth**, the seventh point suggests a hypothesis about how Youzi could see the upward virtues *xiào* and *tì* as models for the virtue of a leader (the Way of the *jūnzi*), not just for the docility of a follower. For on the “social harmony between great and small” reading of 1.12, the seventh point suggests that Youzi thought it is the task of all people, the small and the great, to be humbly respectful toward one another. Many other people have thought that it is helpful to conceive general excellence in that abstract way, as respect for others in general.

**Ninth**, that picture of morality as universal respect has also been described as living by maxims that one could commend for all—an idea kin to the Golden Rule. Youzi may express a similar vision when he associates moral rightness with words that bear repeating (*Analects* 1.13). His thought may have been that just as trustworthiness is choosing words I am willing to stick to even if it should prove awkward for me, living rightly is living by watchwords I am prepared to endorse as general principles, i.e. for all, even when someone cites them back to me to challenge or persuade me. An honest person's word *means* something, and a moral person means her maxims objectively (as Kant would phrase the point). Youzi's thoughts could have been drawn to this idea by Confucius' different approach to watchwords.

- None of the Youzi material is in the part of the collection whose authenticity is least plausible.
- There are no obvious tensions among the Youzi statements.
- Because of the power of Confucius' name, it is easy to think that the development of the *Analects* probably includes the addition of statements falsely attributed to Confucius, or that we may be too hasty in attributing all of the unattributed philosophical sayings in the text to Confucius, or that a question or mistake was put in the mouth of a disciple to frame a real or imagined speech by Confucius. But probably there was much less temptation to add fabricated statements of "Youzi" to which no reply is recorded.
- Many of Confucius' words in the *Analects* seem to be bits of conversations. If they are based on actual conversations they were probably written down from memory by someone other than Confucius, perhaps years later. (Granted, memories were much better then than now.) But most of the Youzi statements read like intricate written compositions, more or less in verse. They may have been writings during his lifetime.
- We have reason to think many of the philosophical-sounding statements attributed to Confucius, if authentic, were intended more to nudge particular people as needed than to articulate the man's view. Many of his statements were recorded without context that could help us to infer his view. But most of Youzi's statements read like treatises meant to stand on their own feet. And one of Youzi's statements suggests that he aimed to offer sayings that could bear repeating in different contexts (*Analects* 1.13).

Much is lost by giving up on the hunt for authenticity. If *per impossibile* we found evidence that every attribution of words to a character in the *Analects*

is true, or evidence allowing us to divide the *Mencius* into sections each the work of a single author, the news would be exciting, and not just to historians. It would bring much new energy and new respect to *philosophical* interpretive work on the texts, and it would allow for much better and more interesting interpretive arguments. More generally, as we can infer from publishers' choices on book covers and scholars' choices of phrasing, much of the philosophical *interest* in and *respect* for pre-Qin Chinese philosophical materials by Western general readers and mainstream philosophers, weak as that interest is, depends on the casual assumption that we have some collections that are more or less identifiable as the work of one individual. And quite reasonably so. Material of mixed unknown origin is not without potential philosophical interest, but curricula must be ruthlessly selective among things that are clearly of great philosophical interest. *Analects* scholars should be critical of the text, but we should not give up on trying to find thinkers while there are obvious lines of inquiry yet untried.<sup>46</sup>

An interest in *investigating* the potential authenticity of material attributed to Youzi or even to Confucius would give us three reasons to attend to the Youzi statements *as a body*.

First, if we want to *find out* how far it may be reasonable to accept the *Analects*' attributions of authorship of particular statements, an obvious early step is to divide all the *Analects* materials (at least from the better Books) by putative author (assigning to Confucius also the statements that seem tacitly attributed to him), and then study each collection while carefully avoiding being

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<sup>46</sup> Insofar as our real reason for talking about the *Analects* as a unit rather than about the real people in it is that the *Analects* is a historically important item in the long tradition, important for understanding the tradition, then we justify our claims about what the *Analects* meant mainly by citations from those to whom the *Analects* meant those things; and we do not aim to offer original readings of *Analects* passages, and we do not suppose or suggest that we are investigating pre-Qin philosophy. And there is no cognitive dissonance pushing us to avoid the names of characters.

influenced by the other collections, to see whether and how each collection hangs together internally in language and style and thought, and differs from the other collections. If a collection hangs together well, that is a weight on the scales for its authenticity, and vice versa. The *Analects* is a small book; the project is not daunting for a scholar. Obviously among the first two or three collections to look at is the Youzi collection. Hence an obvious early step in inquiry into the authenticity of the material in the *Analects* is to study the Youzi statements in the *Analects* as a group, looking to see whether they embody a distinctive vision and style. (One might next look also at the statements earliest attributed elsewhere to Youzi and Confucius, so far as these can be identified.)

A more specific reason that should be obvious to *Analects* scholars today is suggested by an important consideration Paul R. Goldin has offered in favor of the general authenticity of the materials in the *Analects*. Goldin points out that although other early texts (even the *prima facie* comparable “Mohist Analects”) addressed the ideas and terms of their contemporaries and predecessors, there are many main philosophical topics, ideas and terms from the 300s BCE and later that we do not find addressed in the *Analects*. Hence “the weight of the evidence suggests that whoever was responsible for compiling this textbook included an overwhelming proportion of genuine material within it.”<sup>47</sup>

We could take a page from Goldin’s book and *try* comparing our Youzi collection from the *Analects* to our Confucius collection to see whether just one of those collections looks like it is recognizing ideas from the other and offering new comment. Does the Confucius material comment on the Youzi theories? Does it recognize the idea of virtues growing from other analogous virtues? Alternately, does the Youzi material put most of the key terms from the Confucius material into a new unified theoretical framework that relates them to each other, based on a vision of moral psychology that does not appear in the

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<sup>47</sup> Goldin 2018, p. 109.

Confucius material? The latter finding, if we make it, would favor the dual hypothesis that (a) the Youzi material comes from a single author and (b) the Confucius material is chronologically prior. If the single author of the Youzi material was Youzi, it follows from that hypothesis that the Confucius material is largely prior to Youzi and thus largely authentic.

Third, there is a famous old reason to think that attention to Youzi's thought as a whole might help us better understand the provenance of *Analects* materials not attributed to him.<sup>48</sup> It has been thought that Book 1's use of the honorific ("Youzi" or "Master You") suggests that he or his students had a role in putting together at least that Book and thus perhaps others. The idea makes enough sense to suggest that we investigate it in the ways we can, which would begin with *looking to see* whether Book 1 as a composition in its own right makes one or another kind of sense from the point of view of Youzi on the hypothesis that he composed the Youzi statements and that the ancient reports about him have a kernel of truth.

If we are not interested in knowing about authenticity and authorship, but instead prefer to interpret a text like the *Analects* as though the text itself were the author, then, again, we must respect the fact that the *Analects* does not *make* the statements attributed to Youzi. Instead, it says that Youzi made those statements. The *Analects* manifestly does not present all its speakers as masters of Confucius' thought, nor as correct, nor as in agreement. On the contrary, it shows Confucius disparaging and perhaps misleading some of his students, it shows Confucius being corrected by his students on more than one occasion,

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<sup>48</sup> We might note in this connection that the degree to which early Chinese philosophy is in fact seen as worthy of study as philosophy by the academy (as against the many competitor materials), and by the general reading public and, I submit, by ourselves, depends very greatly on the attributability of the material to distinct authors. We see an appreciation of this dependence in the way book covers and academic phrasing tend to hide any doubts about authorship.

and it shows significant disagreements among seasoned disciples about how to carry on the project after Confucius' passing.

Granted, we might reasonably hold that the *Analects* as a composition suggests that the Youzi statements speak for Confucius, by its foregrounding of the Youzi statements and by the absence of disapproving comment. But we might also reasonably hold that Book 1 as a composition strongly suggests that the Confucian project is the project of a number of people worth listening to (three of whom are masters), for the Book quotes five people in ways they could be proud of, and embarrasses none. This Book suggests that the Way can grow independently in different people, for the Way is a matter more of familiar virtues than of specialist arcana (1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.13). Book 1 reports statements from multiple disciples speaking as creators: "I examine myself on three counts" (1.4), "I would call such a person learned" (1.7), "How about this saying?" (1.15). And it welcomes friends from afar (1.1). So in quoting Youzi, this Book suggests that Youzi is engaging in a collective project with understanding, not that he is speaking for Confucius in particular. Even the *jūnzi* is still studying and growing (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.8, 1.10, 1.14). The text does not suggest that no progress in theory has been made after Confucius.

## **B. He is overlooked**

Let us now examine four kinds of direct evidence that scholars overlook Youzi and encourage others to do the same: (1) they attribute his statements to nobody; (2) they conceal the fact that they are attributing his statements to nobody; (3) they mistakenly suppose the *Analects* attributes those statements to Confucius; (4) when scholars seem to offer an overview of his thought, either they do so as a groundless encouragement to look past him, or they offer a disparaging overview designed with literally no thought of him at all.

## 1. Attribution to nobody

Usually when Youzi's words are quoted, paraphrased or cited, they are not attributed to anyone. Or at least that has been true until very recently.

For example, in the essay "Family Reverence (孝) in the *Analects*: Confucian Role Ethics and the Dynamics of Intergenerational Transmission," it discusses relevant remarks by Confucius, Zengzi, and Youzi,<sup>49</sup> it comments at length on the root metaphor from *Analects* 1.2, and it attributes the remarks of the three Masters consistently to Confucius, Master Zeng, and the *Analects* respectively. Youzi is never mentioned.

And in *Confucian Role Ethics*, though it quotes Youzi's words in four places<sup>50</sup> and discusses them elsewhere, it attributes the statements of Confucius, Zengzi, and Youzi consistently to Confucius, Master Zeng, and the *Analects* respectively. Youzi is never mentioned.

In *Human Becomings* it does the same.

The scholarly literature usually introduces Youzi's statements, in quotation or paraphrase, in the following manner.

"In the *Analects*, where it insists that ..."

"As it states in the *Analects* 1.12, ..."

"As it says in the *Analects* (1.2), ..."

"As it states in the *Analects*, ..."

"As it says in the *Analects*, ..."

"It is stated in the *Analects* that ..."

"As it is asserted in the *Analects* 1.12, ..."

"As written in the *Analects of Confucius*: ..."

"In the *Analects*, the chapter 'Xue'er 學而' states that the root ..."

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<sup>49</sup> In Olberding ed. 2013. It discusses Youzi on pp. 125ff. and 134.

<sup>50</sup> Pp. 88f., 170, 176 and 205.

“The *Analects* observes, ...”  
 “The *Analects* says, ...”  
 “The *Analects* recommends ...”  
 “*Analects* 1.13 tells us ...”  
 “*Analects* 1:13 notes ...”  
 “1.2 mentions ...”  
 “The *Analects* speak of that process ...”  
 “the *Analects* notes that harmony ...”  
 “the *Analects* notes that filial ...”  
 “The *Analects* says that these two virtues ...”  
 “1.12 offers a historical endorsement of ...”  
 “In the *Analects*, filial piety is defined as the foundation ...”  
 “As we learn from *Analects* 1.12, ...”  
 “A passage of the Confucian *Analects* reads, ...”  
 “The *Analects* reads,”  
 “*Analects* 1.2 formulates the view that ...”  
 “The answer given in the *Analects* is that filial piety is the ‘root’ ...”

“At the very beginning of the *Analects*, we read ...”  
 “Confucians have consistently asserted that ...”  
 “the *Lunyu* (1.12) famously observes, ...”  
 “It is famously stated in the Confucian *Analects* that ...”  
 “The received *Analects* is famously fond of *xiào*, filial piety, as the “root” from which ...”  
 “as it says clearly in the *Analects* ,”  
 “*Lunyu* describes it in precisely these words:”  
 “the *Analects* states clearly that”  
 “passage 1.12 of the *Analects* makes it clear that”  
 “as *Analects* 1.2 states explicitly,”  
 “the *Analects* 1.2 states explicitly that”  
 “the *Analects* is quite explicit in this regard:”  
 “*Analects* 1.2 explicitly states”  
 “This rationale is explicitly stated in the *Analects*:”  
 “In 1.2, the *Analects* insists that”

etc.

The intensifiers in the last set may be cover for the evasiveness of the attribution to the “*Analects*” – as when a politician, asked “But did you accept any actual *money* from Smith?” answers, “I have already said *quite clearly* that I did nothing wrong.”

An attribution of a Youzi statement to nobody is not just one person’s lapse. It is a blockage by the scholarly community in one of its organs. It invites and helps the reader to overlook Youzi. And it is a departure from the usual practice of citing *Analects* speakers by name.

## **2. Obscured attribution to nobody**

Obviously there is a good chance that a casual reader would interpret the abovementioned non-attributions as attributions to Confucius.

But often a scholar adduces a Youzi statement in a way that suggests more strongly that the statement is by Confucius, without exactly saying so, such that a reader at normal speed can be expected to think she is seeing a definite attribution to Confucius. And, predictably, even a slow and careful reader who is somehow unfamiliar with this trope for Youzi’s statements would reasonably think she is supposed to understand an attribution to Confucius. I have found this apparent threading of the needle in about six dozen places in the literature. Hence it appears to be a familiar practice, an accepted device. Here are a few examples.

A large proportion of Confucius' sayings focus on *hsiao* (filial piety); it is often referred to when discussing virtue. At one point it is even referred to as the root of *jen* (*Analects* 1:2)—an assertion of the priority of *hsiao* in the order of human relationships.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Lai 1995, p. 258.

Confucius would maintain that obedience and responsibility to one's parents and brothers prepare obedience and loyalty to one's ethical superiors (1.2).<sup>52</sup>

Confucius believes that it is one's ability to carry out duties at home toward one's family members that can lead one to attain the highest virtue of humanity (ren ). It is by choosing the same filial, respectful, and loyal behavior toward one's family and friends that enables one to achieve the virtuous character that can be extended to others in the broader community.<sup>98</sup> The point, once again for Confucius, ...

**98.** *The Analects* 1.2.<sup>53</sup>

In advocating filial piety, Confucius is ascribing a special ethical significance to the family. The family is not just an ordinary part of the overall moral education project; rather, it is the root for the cultivation of all other virtues, the root for a person to be an excellent person. Being a good son is the basis for being a good social animal.

“Few of those who are filial sons and respectful brothers ...”<sup>54</sup>

Confucius talked about humaneness when explaining ritual propriety, so it was directly relevant to the upholding of ritual propriety. As described earlier, ritual propriety was based on blood relationships and served a system of clan governance based on hierarchy. To maintain or revive it is the fundamental aim of 'humaneness.' Therefore:

It is rare for someone who is filial to parents and deferential to elders ...<sup>55</sup>

Few realize that Confucius was in search of [unchanging principles] and especially their coherence, the “one” thread through them. ... Three examples suffice. One, he confessed to advancing his search

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<sup>52</sup> Sim 2009, pp. 103 n.44.

<sup>53</sup> Sim 2009, pp. 96, 105 n.98.

<sup>54</sup> Yu 2007), p. 125.

<sup>55</sup> Z. Li 2020, p. 8.

for the “One penetrating” his Dao, his principles (*Analects* 15.3), and even asked Zengzi to do it, who cited two (*Analects* 4.15), but many others can be cited as equally central (*Analects* 1.2, 2.1, 2.3, 15.9).<sup>56</sup>

As Confucius sees it, *ren* is a virtue that stems directly from the family (see *Analects* 1.2).<sup>57</sup>

For Confucius, filial piety and fraternal affection are the roots (*ben*) of *ren*.<sup>38</sup>

**38.** D. C. Lau, trans., *Confucius: The Analects* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1978), 1.1 (*sic*).<sup>58</sup>

Since virtue is rooted in the family for Confucius,<sup>38</sup> ...

**38.** *Analects* 1.2<sup>59</sup>

This would be consistent with Confucius’ belief that behavior within the family is the root of character (*Lun-Yü*: 1.2).<sup>60</sup>

In order to cultivate and develop such a root of *jen*, Confucius taught the doctrine of filial piety and brotherliness in the family. So, in *The Analects* it is said, "Filial piety and brotherliness-are they not the root of *jen*?"<sup>61</sup>

Of course, it is not as though Confucius did not see the social value of rituals. See, for example, *Analects* 1.12.<sup>62</sup>

In short, the reliable goodness that Confucius thought can and should be developed extends to a refined style in everyday interactions as well as to correct moral choices. A telling passage in the *Analects* (1.12) about ritual speaks of the importance of a

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<sup>56</sup> Y. Huang 2009, p. 31.

<sup>57</sup> Behuniak 2011, 508 n.10.

<sup>58</sup> Cua 2005, p. 277.

<sup>59</sup> Sim 2013, p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Chong 2008, p. 193.

<sup>61</sup> Hsieh 1967, p. 319.

<sup>62</sup> Radice 2017, p. 204 n.9.

personal harmony and “harmonious ease.” Developing and internalizing such a harmony, Confucius believed, will lead to predictably good moral choices and personal interactions.<sup>63</sup>

This means that Confucius valued the personal aspect of ritual performance, paying close attention to its expression and harmonization of human sentiments instead of its mechanical forms and rules (e.g., *Analects* 1.12).<sup>64</sup>

A fundamental aim of Confucius’s teaching in *The Analects* is also to help people see the deeper ethical values of rites—values such as harmony, benevolence, righteousness, and deference—which are very close to the spirit of the Grand Union.

Of the things brought about by the rites, harmony is the most valuable. (1.12)<sup>65</sup>

The last criterion signifies a consequentialist strain in Confucius's ethics. Indeed, according to *Analects* 1:12, "Achieving harmony (*he* 和) is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety."<sup>66</sup>

One scholarly book, in large part about the *Analects*, attributes Youzi’s statement at 1.2 to “Kongzi” near the end.<sup>67</sup> At the bottom of a long endnote to a passage at the opposite end of the book is the claim, “When I refer to Kongzi, I am referring to the family and lineage of thinkers and the philosophical vision that are associated with him in the *Analects*.”<sup>68</sup> (A chapter in another book by the same author attributes *Analects* 1.2 to “Kongzi” two or three times,<sup>69</sup> with a

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<sup>63</sup> Littlejohn 2016, p. 116.

<sup>64</sup> Jiang 2021, p. 72.

<sup>65</sup> J. Chan 2013, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Sarkissian 2010, p. 13 n. 6

<sup>67</sup> Cline 2012, p. 258.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273 n. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Cline 2015, pp. 4, 8, 15.

similar endnote not attached to a mention of “Kongzi.”<sup>70</sup>) What concern is served by that buried contrivance? When weaving the *Analects* words of someone other than Confucius into the unified picture, as it does 20 times,<sup>71</sup> the book attributes the words to “Kongzi” only twice. Most often the book uses no name at all. And the endnote’s claim is not true. For the main text never flags the special usage. For often throughout the book, “Kongzi” is not meant in the way the author claims to mean it, and cannot be read that way; it must be taken to refer to the historical individual or to *one* of the figures in the *Analects*. In any case a pre-existing name’s actual reference does not depend on the user’s unpromulgated fiat.

Even if the technical term were clearly flagged at the outset and consistently used, it would be confusing, likely misleading, and unnecessary. We already have such terms as “Confucians”, “the earliest Confucians”, “the general outlook of the *Analects*”, “a follower of Confucius’, etc.

### **3. Simple misattribution**

The more one looks *through* Youzi, the less one sees him. One highly respected *Analects* scholar has misattributed the statement at *Analects* 1.2 to Ziyou 子游 in a prominent place.<sup>72</sup>

While the most common practice is to attribute Youzi statements to nobody in particular, perhaps the next-most-common practice has been to attribute them explicitly and definitely to Confucius. This has been done in over 200 scholarly publications from the middle of the last century, and sometimes earlier. I submit that an adequate referee would catch such an error before publication,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 296 n. 5.

<sup>71</sup> The 20 do not include cases where the book is recounting the person’s conversation with someone else, where it would be even odder to call the person “Kongzi.”

<sup>72</sup> Lau 1979, p. 18, attributing it to “Tzu-yu.” (Elsewhere in the book, “Tzu-yu” is always and only 子游.)

at least regarding *Analects* 1.2. I do not know how often the error has been corrected before publication.<sup>73</sup> (Also his words at Mencius 2A2 are commonly misattributed to Mencius.)

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<sup>73</sup> **Analects 1.2:**

Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi* (SUNY 2014), p. 18.

Roger T. Ames, "Confucius: His Life and Times," introduction to C-C. Tsai, ed.; B. Bruya, trans., *Confucius Speaks* (Anchor Doubleday 1996), p. 16.

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Roger T. Ames and David Hall, *Thinking Through Confucius* (SUNY 1987), p. 120 .

Yanming An, "Family Love and Its Extension: A Comparative Evaluation," in Yanming An and Brian Bruya eds. *New Life for Old Ideas: Chinese Philosophy in the Contemporary World: A Festschrift in Honor of Donald J. Munro* (CUHK 2019), p. 371..

Richard M. Barnhart, *Li Kung-Lin's Classic of Filial Piety* (Metropolitan Museum of Art 1993), p. 74.

Jim Behuniak, *Mencius on Becoming Human* (SUNY 2004), pp. 63, 73.

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- Xunwu Chen, “The Value of Authenticity: Another Dimension of Confucian Ethics,” *Asian Philosophy* 25:2 (2015) pp. 181f., 1851
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- New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (1991), pp. 139, 300.
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- "Why equality? Which inequalities?" *Philosophy East and West* 66:2 (2016), p. 494.

A scholar who is not on my list has told me that the scholars don't really mean it.<sup>74</sup> Can that be right?

With just one arguable exception that I have noticed,<sup>75</sup> the publications I have listed do not flag a special sense of the term "Confucius" by which one could attribute a Youzi statement to "Confucius" without falsehood (and similarly for "Mencius").

Perhaps some scholars tell themselves that their readers understand a *tacit* linguistic convention that allows a scholar to attribute a Youzi statement correctly to "Confucius." But I think it would be difficult to contrive and describe a clear sense of the term "Confucius" that would allow one consistently *both* to attribute Youzi material correctly to "Confucius" *and* to use the name in saying that Confucius had this or that disciple, died in a certain year, described Zengzi as slow, etc.; as scholars often do. Anyway scholars do of course know that their

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———"Merit and Inequality: Confucian and Communitarian Perspectives on Singapore's Meritocracy," *Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 41 (2024), pp. 50, 54.

Baosan Wu, "On the Major Fields and Significance of the Study of the History of Ancient Chinese Economic Thought," in Cheng Lin, Terry Peach, and Wang Fang eds., *The History of Ancient Chinese Economic Thought* (Routledge 2014), pp. 52f., 60.

<sup>74</sup> The scholar adduced the practice of attributing to "Zhuangzi" what is said by the *Zhuangzi*, for scholars do not really mean that Zhuangzi said the things.

But that practice encourages and can reflect a false and enticing approach to the text. And the case is off-point; the actual parallel would be attributing to Zhuangzi what the *Zhuangzi* attributes with some plausibility to a different historical thinker not presented as an opponent, if scholars thought the *Zhuangzi* had any pretensions to historical accuracy.

<sup>75</sup> The prefatory "Apologia" to *Thinking Through Confucius* says that from one point of view, "'Confucius' is a community, a society, a living tradition" (Hall & Ames 1987, p. 24). But there is no warning that the term will be used in this sense in the book, and this sense of the term would include too much. Certainly the term is not used consistently in this sense. Indeed the context of the remark suggests that the intent of the special sense is to allow us to attribute ideas correctly to "Confucius" on the grounds that a commentary or old text attributes them to Confucius, not on the grounds that the *Analects* attributes the words to someone else.

readers do *not* in general recognize such a tacit special convention about the name “Confucius.” One’s expected audience commonly includes general readers and scholars in adjacent fields; and even many or most scholars of early Chinese philosophy do not *assume* such a special sense of “Confucius.”

The more charitable reading of the cited attributions to Confucius is that they are errors of fact about the attributions in the *Analects*. The next section includes some positive evidence for that reading.

#### **4. See No Oeuvre, Speak No Oeuvre: A Survey of Anglophone Scholarship on Youzi as a Philosopher**

In Anglophone scholarly publications (other than my own), none of the interpretive effort expended on Youzi’s statements is interpretive attention to Youzi. His statements are cited or discussed in isolation, toward illuminating Confucius or the *Analects* or early Confucianism or life in general; not toward developing a picture of Youzi’s philosophy or seeing whether such a picture might be discoverable.

One might search a stack of reference works in vain for a comment, even a very brief one, on Youzi’s general outlook.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> In the *Dao Companion to Classical Confucian Philosophy* (Shen ed. 2014), the titles of two essays aim to distinguish “The Philosophy of Confucius” from “The Philosophy of Confucius’ Disciples.”

“The Philosophy of “Confucius” (Ni 2014) quotes from three of Youzi’s statements, but never uses his name (pp. 63, 64, 67).

“The Philosophy of Confucius’ Disciples” (Lo 2014) has substantial sections on the philosophy of Yan Hui, Zengzi, Mi Zijian, and the better part of a page on the philosophies of three others. The essay quotes from Youzi’s statements four times (pp. 95, 106, 108), but never connects these statements or uses them to present the philosophy of Youzi.

The volume’s index has entries for eleven disciples, but no entry for Youzi, though he is quoted, paraphrased and/or cited on twelve pages in seven articles (pp. 47, 63, 95, 106, 110, 294 309, 322, 342, 369, 370, 383), seven times by name. →

Still, in Anglophone scholarship I have found two purported overviews of Youzi's philosophy (aside from my own). One is a tool for looking past him, and is apparently not serious. The other, offered in several publications, was prepared with no thought of him at all.

**a. First overview: Youzi as mere mouthpiece**

Readers occasionally encounter the allegation that Youzi's views were similar to Confucius' views. I believe it is generally understood that the reason for interest in such a claim is that if it is true it can support inferring "Confucius believed P" from "Youzi said P" in cases where we cannot show that "Confucius believed P" from words attributed to Confucius. One does not expect to be able to *establish* the similarity claim for that purpose by direct examination of the words attributed to the two men, though the claim is open to refutation in that way. One's interest in the claim cannot be served, but could in principle be thwarted, by our looking at that evidence, our only direct evidence; and in fact

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The ***Dao Companion to the Analects*** (Olberding ed. 2013) quotes or paraphrases Youzi's statements on fifteen pages in nine articles (pp. 66, 84, 98, 113, 122, 125, 134, 141, 166, 274, 298, 307, 314, 320, 331), only thrice mentioning Youzi (accounting for his three entries in the index) and twice misattributing the statements to Confucius. Youzi is never discussed as a thinker.

The entry on Youzi in the ***Routledge Encyclopedia of Confucianism*** (Yao ed. 2003, p. 783) does not touch on his thought. Instead it gives a few facts about his life and posthumous honors.

The essays in the ***Norton critical edition of the Analects*** (Nylan ed. 2014), including "Visualizing Confucius and His Disciples from the Analects" and "The Sage and His Associates: Kongzi and Disciples across Early Texts," make no mention of Youzi.

Scholars sometimes offer general **rundowns of Confucius' disciples**, or introduce disciples in notes to their words. These materials avoid general comment on Youzi's outlook (with exceptions that I shall discuss), though notes to particular statements elsewhere in the volume may discuss the meaning of those statements. Youzi does not appear in the rundown of seven key disciples in Ames & Rosemont 1998 (pp. 5-7). The rundown in Slingerland 2003 misreports his name as "有弱" (p. 244).

the literature does not report a distinct investigation of that kind. What one wants rather is *testimony* from people who knew the men better than they can be known from our best records. Indeed the suggestion that we can infer Confucius' views from Youzi's words is generally offered in the form of an appeal to some such authority, identified or unidentified.

For example, Qingping Liu calls Youzi "one of the most distinguished disciples of Confucius whose words have often been regarded to resemble those of the Master himself ..."<sup>77</sup> Henry Rosemont, Jr. and Roger T. Ames declare more definitively that "the disciple Master Yu (the only other protégé in addition to Master Zeng to be accorded the honorific "Master") is known for reflecting accurately the views of Confucius himself."<sup>78</sup> When scholars are more specific about what testimony we have on the point and from whom, the claim about agreement is much weaker and no particular confidence in it is expressed.

Master You was always referred to with the honorific by Confucius' inner circle.<sup>79</sup> He was said to resemble Confucius, probably in terms of what he had to say. In *liji* 3.70/18/8, Ziyou says that Master You's words resemble those of the master.<sup>80</sup>

The suggestion that Youzi is a reliable mouthpiece for Confucius, at least regarding abstract theories such as Youzi offers in *Analects* 1, is made in part by exalting Youzi among the disciples, as in the quotations above. Sometimes the

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<sup>77</sup> Liu 2003, p. 236; and similarly in Liu 2013, p. 88.

<sup>78</sup> Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 23.

<sup>79</sup> This claim would not be true historically unless Youzi was a master when Confucius' inner circle first met him. No disciple is represented in the *Analects* as using any name for him. The uses of the honorific in the *Analects* are traditionally taken as suggesting that Book 1 was compiled by Youzi's students, who would thus have been the unnamed authors of the phrase "Youzi said." This group might have included some of Confucius' inner circle. When Youzi is represented as interacting with disciples of Confucius (as never happens in the *Analects*), some narrators call him Youzi and others You Ruo.

<sup>80</sup> Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 230 n. 3.

point is suggested in that way alone, as when a scholar calls Youzi e.g. “one of Confucius’ most prominent students”<sup>81</sup> or “perhaps Confucius’ leading disciple”<sup>82</sup> in introducing a statement by Youzi to make a point about Confucius, as though it were understood all around that a top student of a great teacher can be counted on not to have any new ideas in the decades after the teacher has passed.

The entry on Youzi in the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism* says that Youzi was likely “an independent, yet thoroughly Confucian thinker.”<sup>83</sup> The statement might or might not be taken as endorsing the view that we can infer Confucius’ views from Youzi’s words. A thoughtful follower might agree with all of Confucius’ main ideas while adding to them or systematizing them in his own novel way. But I do not know of evidence suggesting that Youzi agreed with all of Confucius’ main ideas.

The testimonial basis for trusting Youzi’s theoretical statements as evidence of Confucius’ theoretical views does not come from Confucius (or Youzi). It comes mainly from Ziyou, in two brief passages, each involving disagreement between Ziyou and Zengzi, in the *Liji* and the *Mengzi*. I submit that the testimony is not such as could actually move a scholar to think that Youzi’s statements are reliable evidence of Confucius’ views.

***Liji: Tan Gong I, 75*** shows Youzi inquiring about Confucius’ views on losing office, and learning from Zengzi a remark of Confucius that Zengzi and Ziyou seem to have known for some years: that an officer “should wish to become poor quickly after dismissal, as one should wish to decay quickly after death.”

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<sup>81</sup> Wong 2009, p. 17.

<sup>82</sup> Roberts 2007, p. ix.

<sup>83</sup> Taylor 2005, p. 738. The entry provides paraphrases of his three *Analects* 1 statements, with no comment on any possible relation among them, but with an indication that the encyclopedist was unaware of Youzi’s fourth statement in the *Analects*. Not noted is the material about or attributed to Youzi in the *Mencius*, *Liji*, *Han Feizi*, *Xunzi*, and *Zuozhuan*.

Youzi replied that this doesn't sound like something a gentleman would say; that there must have been a special context. Indeed it doesn't, and there was—two points Zengzi had not appreciated. Ziyou then praised Youzi's superior judgment to Zengzi, exclaiming "Youzi's words are so like the Master!" (甚哉，有子之言似夫子也). That is the testimony. The literal reading is of course problematic. Possible interpretations are, "Youzi speaks so like the Master!" and "What he said really gets (literally: gives) the Master!"

The exclamatory particle leans toward casting Ziyou's statement as a surprised reaction to Youzi's one remark this occasion, rather than a conclusion from long observation about Youzi's words in general. But Youzi's display of insight here was not spectacular.<sup>84</sup> What might Ziyou have been thinking? Was he just taking advantage of an opportunity to score a point over Zengzi?

There are some obvious obstacles to our taking any *one* of Confucius' disciples as a significant witness that Youzi stood out from the other disciples in that any theories Youzi put forth were probably also held by Confucius. First, after years of teaching, Confucius' disciples disagreed on major matters,<sup>85</sup> but none presents himself as disagreeing with Confucius in any enduring way. Second, as commentators often point out, Confucius said *prima facie* conflicting things to different people.<sup>86</sup> Third, the *Analects* gives the impression that Confucius' disciples had to ask him many times about the great virtue *rén* 仁, and even today we puzzle over his diverse replies. His favorite disciple was

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<sup>84</sup> The insight might have been impressive if Ziyou was struck by Youzi's articulation of the point that Confucius' statements were often highly misleading without the context. As someone asking to be told things that Confucius had said (assembling a collection perhaps), Youzi might have found the fact especially salient. *Analects* 1.13 says that at some point Youzi expressed a concern about the repeatability of words as a mark of *yi* 義 and its kinship with honesty.

<sup>85</sup> *Analects* 19, *passim*.

<sup>86</sup> *Analects* 2.5, 11.22, etc. Youzi would have disapproved: *Analects* 1.13.

mystified.<sup>87</sup> And fourth, of course, the views of the timely sage may have changed over time.

If we take Ziyou to have been asserting Youzi's fine-grained doctrinal similarity to Confucius, and if we suppose that Ziyou would have held the views he imagined Confucius held, his testimony is perhaps better evidence of doctrinal similarity between Youzi and Ziyou. But scholars do not note the distinctive similarity of Ziyou's philosophy to Confucius' philosophy, nor highlight Ziyou's statements as evidence of Confucius' views. And ancient texts report Youzi and Ziyou disagreeing on a fairly basic point about mourning.<sup>88</sup>

**Mencius 3A4** reports that at some point after Confucius died, Ziyou along with Zizhang and Zixia wanted to follow You Ruo as master because You Ruo was like Confucius (or like a sage: *sì shèngrén* 似聖人). But it would be difficult for these three to agree on Youzi's exceptional doctrinal similarity to Confucius if they disagreed on doctrine among themselves, as the *Analects* seems to report at 19.3, 19.12, and 19.15, if we assume that they did not mean to be disagreeing with Confucius, i.e. that what they sought in a new master was doctrinal agreement with Confucius.

It is hard to imagine each of the three thinking, "You Ruo's theories are more similar to Confucius' than mine are. That is, I see that he holds theories that Confucius held and I do not. So I will follow him." The report in the *Mencius* rather suggests the opposite: that they thought Youzi was admirably wise and knowledgeable like Confucius and with a similar outlook, so that they could expect to learn something from him, i.e. something they had *not* already learned. On this reading they were not testifying that any theories Youzi would ever assert would be theories Confucius held.

The same *Mencius* passage testifies that Zengzi opposed the plan of Ziyou and the others, saying, "Though you may wash something with the Jiang and

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<sup>87</sup> *Analects*. 9.11.

<sup>88</sup> *Liji: Tangong I*, 164; cf. *Analects* 1.12 and 19.14.

Han rivers, bleach it in the autumn sun—his gleaming purity simply cannot be surpassed!”<sup>89</sup> Hence, according to our source, a man on the scene thought the three were expecting from Youzi something beyond what Confucius had to offer.

**Other ancient texts** seem to testify in the negative about Youzi’s similarity to Confucius in wisdom. For example, Zigong is reported to have said that there is nobody remotely like Confucius.<sup>90</sup> (The context in the *Mencius* suggests that Zigong knew Youzi at the time.) And the *Shiji* tells of a time when Youzi was accepted as Master by a number of people who had been disciples of Confucius. The story shows the students becoming dissatisfied with Youzi and unseating him, because he could not explain how Confucius predicted the weather from the position of the moon and predicted how many sons a certain man would have by age 40. For what it is worth, this passage testifies that if Confucius’ students had thought Youzi relevantly “similar” in the time to which the *Mencius* and *Liji* stories refer, they changed their minds upon better acquaintance.

On the whole, ancient testimony tends positively to oppose the theory that we can infer Confucius’ views from Youzi’s statements.

### ***b. Second Overview: Youzi Who?***

By looking into the massive *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (Cua ed. 2002) on the topic of Youzi, we can learn much about how the invisibility of Youzi affects the state of scholarship on him and has led to the publication of many flatly false statements about his life and words in the kind of book on which a leading *Analects* scholar might rely in researching Youzi.

The *Encyclopedia* has no entry on Youzi, and never attributes any statement to him. Ten of its articles quote or cite Youzi’s statements. Four of the

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<sup>89</sup> Van Norden 2008, p. 72.

<sup>90</sup> *Analects* 19.25, *Mencius* 2A2.

ten articles attribute the words to Confucius,<sup>91</sup> with no sign that the reader is to take that name in a special sense. The rest all attribute the words blankly to the *Analects* or (once) to an unnamed “disciple.”<sup>92</sup> I shall show that this last is the closest the *Encyclopedia* comes to mentioning Youzi.

The *Encyclopedia*'s only use of Youzi's name (outside the derivative Glossary) is in a disapproving one-sentence overview. This overview is one of the briefer entries in the *Encyclopedia*'s rundown of Confucius' disciples, within the article “Confucianism: Confucius,” by Roger T. Ames. Here are the two relevant paragraphs in full (between them is the account of Zengzi):

Ziyu, whose formal name was Tantai Mieming, was a protégé of the Ziyu described below, and as such invested a great deal of importance in protocol.

Zeng Can, known as Ziyu or Zengzi, ...

If Zixia erred on the side of book learning, Yu Ruo—he too is known as Ziyu—went too far in the direction of the other Ziyu, emphasizing the formal side of the Confucian teachings, the rites and rituals, at the expense of warmth and good humor.<sup>93</sup>

The 2002 *Encyclopedia* article is a minimally revised version of the same author's introduction to a 1996 English-language comic book version of a Chinese paraphrase of about a third of the *Analects*.<sup>94</sup> The 1996 version uses the more conventional Romanizations, speaking of “You Ruo”, aka “Ziyou,”<sup>95</sup> and

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<sup>91</sup> Ames 2002a, p. 61f.; Fu 2002b, p. 697; Shun 2002a, pp. 794, 795; Wong 2002, p. 56.

<sup>92</sup> Cheng 2002a, p. 718; Cheng 2002b, p. 869; Chong 2002, p. 242f.; Cua 2002, p. 182; Fu 2002a, p. 639; Shun 2002b, p. 886.

<sup>93</sup> Ames 2002a p. 63f.

<sup>94</sup> Tsai 1996.

<sup>95</sup> The source for Youzi's style 子有 is the *Kongzi Jiayu*. If Youzi was 子有, he shared the style with Ran Qiu, not mentioned in the rundown. Ran Qiu is elided with Youzi in Tang 2014, p. 111.

makes it clear that the cross-references are meant to connect Tantai Mieming (Ziyu 子羽) with You Ruo, not to connect either of them with Zengzi.<sup>96</sup>

The *Encyclopedia's* rundown covers twelve disciples, saying that the reason to attend to their views is to understand Confucius, because Confucius tailored his remarks to his interlocutors (not because one or more of the disciples might be an interesting thinker).<sup>97</sup> But in the *Analects* Confucius both addresses and describes several disciples not chosen for the rundown, and never addresses or describes Tantai Mieming or Youzi. Hence the *Encyclopedia's* choice of disciples likely reflects the comic book's disciple section, which is a corresponding set of twelve disciple pages in the same order, each cartoon page illustrating one passage.

We might be surprised at the *Encyclopedia's* disparagement, for elsewhere the encyclopedist very often quotes Youzi's statements with approval. And as noted above, he and a collaborator would report a few years later that Youzi "is known for reflecting accurately the views of Confucius himself,"<sup>98</sup> whom the encyclopedist admires. What accounts for the *Encyclopedia's* disapproval?

Since the rundown was originally composed in service to the 1996 book, presumably a main text informing the rundown's overview is the statement in Youzi's cartoon, which is a translation of Youzi's statement at *Analects* 1.12.

The practice of propriety should emphasize harmony. The way of the kings of antiquity, in affairs small and large, was to act according to harmony. But this in itself did not assure success. If harmony is not regulated by propriety, it cannot be put into practice.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Tsai 1996, p. 20. The scholars who prepared the *Encyclopedia's* Glossary misunderstood and reported that Tantai Mieming was Zengzi's protégé, not Youzi's (Cua ed. 2002, p. 956). On a side note, E. Bruce and Taeko Brooks propose that Tantai Mieming and Zengzi were the same person: Brooks & Brooks 1998, p. 280.

<sup>97</sup> P. 63.

<sup>98</sup> Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 23.

<sup>99</sup> Tsai 1996, p. 158.

The overview of You Ruo in the *Encyclopedia* does not appear to reflect any other statement attributed to him in ancient sources. And yet it has been said of the statement at *Analects* 1.12,

Confucius valued the personal aspect of ritual performance, paying close attention to its expression and harmonization of human sentiments instead of its mechanical forms and rules (e.g., *Analects* 1.12).<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, Youzi's statement at 1.12 has been a favorite of the encyclopedist. Between the two versions of the essay containing the rundown, to help summarize the *Analects* the encyclopedist and a collaborator had quoted the passage in full without demurral, except for its opening "Youzi said."<sup>101</sup> And he has quoted the statement in full with warm approval in at least 15 other publications, three before the *Encyclopedia*.<sup>102</sup> He has said, for example, that the statement "describes that quality of conduct that makes relations stronger and thicker and more enduring"<sup>103</sup> and expresses "the inseparability of ritual life forms and personal contribution in the achievement of communal harmony."<sup>104</sup>

I shall argue that the answer to the riddle is that the encyclopedist thought the You Ruo cartoon page was about Ziyou 子游, so the overview aims to describe Ziyou.

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<sup>100</sup> Jiang 2021, p. 72.

<sup>101</sup> Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 30.

<sup>102</sup> Ames 1997, p. 151; Hall & Ames 1998, p. 181; Hall & Ames 1999, p. 177; Ames 2003, p. 415; Ames 2004, p. 285; Ames 2010a, p. 161; Ames 2011, p. 170; Ames 2014a, p. 41; Ames 2017, p. 77; Ames 2018c, p. 289; Ames 2020, p. 107; Ames 2021a, p. 43; Ames 2021b, p. 148; Ames 2023a, p. 363; Ames 2023b, p. 71.

<sup>103</sup> Ames 2011, p. 170.

<sup>104</sup> Ames 2003, p. 415

One reason to think the overview is about Ziyou and not Youzi is that between the 1996 and 2002 versions of the essay with the rundown, the encyclopedist and a collaborator published an annotated translation of the *Analects*, preserving the distinction between Ziyou and Youzi throughout; and in a note attached to Ziyou's first appearance in the *Analects*, the book offers the following overview of Ziyou, identical to the rundown's account of "You Ruo."

If Zixia erred on the side of book learning, Ziyou was too much like Ziyu,<sup>105</sup> emphasizing the formal side of the Confucian teachings, the rites and rituals, at the expense of warmth and good humor.<sup>106</sup>

Why would the encyclopedist have thought the You Ruo page is about Ziyou? One possibility is suggested by the rundown's report that Tantai Mieming was You Ruo's protégé. This idea does not appear elsewhere in the literature, and no records connect the two men. It can be explained by the disciple cartoons. Tantai Mieming's page shows "Ziyou" praising Tantai Mieming to Confucius at *Analects* 6.14. The Chinese "子游" is nowhere in evidence. Two cartoon pages later, You Ruo's page says he has the style "Ziyou," with no characters given. You Ruo is the only "Ziyou" with his own disciple page. A reader focusing on Romanized appellations, as the rundown does, could get the impression that You Ruo is the "Ziyou" who had praised Tantai Mieming two pages earlier.

The encyclopedist's reading of the statement about ritual and harmony in the cartoon was likely influenced by statements of Ziyou,<sup>107</sup> the most salient of

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<sup>105</sup> The volume does not identify this "Ziyu" or mention anywhere that Tantai Mieming was called Ziyu 子羽.

<sup>106</sup> P. 233 n. 29, for *Analects* 2.7.

<sup>107</sup> The other most relevant material in the *Analects* would be Confucius' telling Ziyou at *Analects* 2.7 that respect is important in filial piety (suggesting some deficiency in Ziyou's attitude), Confucius' rebuking Ziyou at 17.4 for using musical ceremony in governing a mere town (though Ziyou then changes the master's mind on the point), and Ziyou's statement at 19.14 that mourning should not go beyond the full expression of

which for him at the time may have been Ziyou's praise of Tantai Mieming within the cartoon two pages earlier. The English translation on that page takes liberties: it adds punctilious rule-following to the qualities for which Ziyou praises Tantai Mieming at *Analects* 6.14,<sup>108</sup> and it adds punctilious rule-following to the biographical information about Tantai Mieming excerpted from the *Shiji*.<sup>109</sup>

The hypothesis that the encyclopedist did not think of Youzi in connection with "You Ruo" would account for the rundown's omission of the honorific "Youzi" or "Master You" (so that the honorific never appears in the *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*). The omission is otherwise surprising, for the encyclopedist and others have regarded Youzi's honorific as a historically noteworthy fact.<sup>110</sup> In the encyclopedist's other publications he always refers to the man by the honorific (even in translating "有若" at *Analects* 12.9) and never mentions any other name. Now, the rundown's lists of appellations for the disciples reproduce the lists on the corresponding cartoon pages, except that for Yan Hui the encyclopedist adds the doubly problematic "Yanzi." The honorific "Youzi" is

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grief. (On this last matter Youzi takes a similar position at *Liji: Tangong I*, 164 and in rebuttal Ziyou defends ritual protocols.)

<sup>108</sup> The Chinese on the page does not mention Ziyou. It recasts Ziyou's praise at *Analects* 6.14, "有澹臺滅明者，行不由徑。非公事，未嘗至於偃之室也，" as a report of Confucius' opinion: "孔子以爲材薄，既已受業，退而修行，行不由徑。非公事，不見卿大夫。" The English in the cartoon, looking to the *Analects* rather than Tsai's Chinese, has Ziyou saying, "There is one called Tantai Mieming who is *strictly law-abiding*. He never takes shortcuts. And he only comes to my residence for official business" (Tsai 1996, p. 156; emphasis added).

<sup>109</sup> Where the *Shiji* (accurately quoted in Chinese on the page) says of Tantai Mieming, "從弟子三百人，設取予去就，" the English on the page says, "... about three hundred disciples. He established a code of conduct for them *which he himself never violated*" (Tsai 1996, p. 156; emphasis added).

<sup>110</sup> The honorific for Youzi was regarded by the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi and others after them as one of the main historical clues about the origins of the *Analects* and the early history of the movement after Confucius. The brief endnote introducing Youzi in Ames & Rosemont 1998 says that "Master You was always referred to with the honorific by Confucius' inner circle" (p. 230 n. 3).

absent from both the cartoon page and the rundown. The failure to add it makes sense if the encyclopedist did not recognize that “You Ruo” was Youzi.

One might think that while composing the overview of “You Ruo,” the encyclopedist must have been prompted to think of Youzi, if not by the name then by Youzi’s famous statement in the cartoon, from *Analects* 1.12. Also Youzi’s statement at 1.13 is presented in full in the Chinese margin.

But there are three reasons to think it would not have been characteristic of the encyclopedist to recall that these statements are attributed to Youzi in the *Analects*. First, in a 1993 publication the encyclopedist had misattributed the statement at 1.12 to Confucius.<sup>111</sup> Of the 16 publications to date where the encyclopedist has quoted the entire statement in discussion, three attribute it to Youzi, but not before 2004.<sup>112</sup>

Second, similarly, the encyclopedist attributes Youzi’s statement at *Analects* 1.13 to Confucius in books published in 2001,<sup>113</sup> 2009,<sup>114</sup> 2011,<sup>115</sup> and 2021.<sup>116</sup> He quotes the statement several times elsewhere without attribution (e.g. twice in a 1987 book).<sup>117</sup> I have not found a place where he attributes the statement to Youzi.

Third, similarly, regarding the better-known statement at *Analects* 1.2 on the root of the Way, the encyclopedist’s 1987 collaborative book on the *Analects* attributes the statement to “Confucius himself.”<sup>118</sup> In published discussions he has quoted the statement in whole or large part dozens of times (at least six before the *Encyclopedia*) and cited it more often, and attributed it to Youzi never

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<sup>111</sup> Ames 1993, p. 153.

<sup>112</sup> Ames 2004, p. 285; Ames 2017, p. 77; Ames 2018c, p. 289.

<sup>113</sup> Ames & Hall 2001, p. 84.

<sup>114</sup> Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 90.

<sup>115</sup> Ames 2011, p. 205.

<sup>116</sup> Ames 2021a, p. 422.

<sup>117</sup> Ames & Hall 1987, pp. 174, 196.

<sup>118</sup> Hall & Ames 1987, p. 120.

before 2008<sup>119</sup> and rarely thereafter. He attributed it to Confucius in a 2024 book.<sup>120</sup> As for his view on the matter during his preparation of the rundown, our best evidence is that the two versions of the essay containing the rundown each claim to distinguish Confucius' views from the disciples' views, and each version quotes from 1.2 in reporting that

Confucius says, “The exemplary person works hard at the root, for where the root has taken firm hold, the way will grow.” What then is the root? He continues: “Treating your family members properly— this is the root of becoming a person.”<sup>121</sup>

In sum, it should not be surprising that the statement in the You Ruo cartoon did not call Youzi to mind.

The English of the You Ruo cartoon includes two elements beyond Youzi's names and Youzi's famous statement. It says You Ruo was 43 years younger than Confucius, and it offers a version of his main legend: “After Confucius died, his students missed his presence. Because You Ruo resembled Confucius in appearance, they chose him as a replacement.” Apparently this story did not call Youzi to mind (nor Ziyou's place in the story).

The encyclopedist is not the only well-known Confucius scholar who has taken the You Ruo cartoon page to be about Ziyou 子游 despite Youzi's name, Youzi's legend, Youzi's famous statement in the cartoon, and Youzi's other statement in the margin. Presumably relying on the authority of the overview of You Ruo styled Ziyou in the first edition's rundown, an account that seems to have been based wholly on the English of the first edition's disciple cartoons, the 2018 expanded Princeton edition of the comic book revised the English rendering

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<sup>119</sup> Rosemont & Ames 2008, p. 16.

<sup>120</sup> Ames 2024, p. 91.

<sup>121</sup> Ames 1996, p. 16; Ames 2002a, p. 61f.

of “子游” throughout the book from the correct “Ziyou” to the incorrect “You Ruo,” thus reporting falsely that You Ruo was mayor of Wucheng, that the *Analects* shows You Ruo conversing with Confucius (twice), and that we have a record that Confucius praised You Ruo for culture.<sup>122</sup> But while the new edition takes “You Ruo” to be Ziyou 子游, in one place it seems also to identify “You Ruo” with Youzi. This edition adds a page for *Analects* 1.2 (not in the disciple section), and translates its “有子” as “You Ruo.” All this is done in the kind of volume on which prominent *Analects* scholars might rely.<sup>123</sup>

The new edition no longer includes the encyclopedist’s introduction with its rundown of the disciples. But the new edition offers roughly the same overview in one of four new cartoon pages inserted between sets of *Analects* passages, with no Chinese in the margin, pages not otherwise flagged as to whether they are part of the *Analects* or who is the author. Again the overview is presented as a contrast.

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<sup>122</sup> Tsai & Bruya 2018, pp. 57, 200, 208. (On p. 208, the Tantai Mieming disciple page, the translator’s “You Ruo” represents not “子游” from Tsai’s Chinese on the page (which does not mention the man by name or otherwise), but rather “子游” from *Analects* 6.14.)

<sup>123</sup> About two-thirds of the *Analects* is represented in the 2018 edition, and the Chinese offered is a Mandarin paraphrase that often does not seem to aim at accuracy. The cover of the Princeton edition calls the book the *Analects*, though the inner title page says the *Analects* is here “adapted.” The Princeton University Press website represents the book as an “edition of the *Analects*,” does not suggest that it may be incomplete, and says that “Confucius’s original Chinese text is ... presented in narrow sidebars on each page.” Neither the Foreword by Michael Puett nor the Introduction by Brian Bruya hints that the book may abridge or restate the *Analects*. The Foreword praises the comic book by saying of the *Analects* that “the way to read the text and gain a full understanding of it is to focus precisely on the whole of it—the situations, the moods, the expressions of the utterances” (p. ix). The Introduction says, “The reader should have full confidence that each classic illustrated by C. C. [Tsai] is the real deal” (p. xvi).

You Ruo and Zixia emphasized formal ceremony and practical application in government, whereas Zengzi chose to emphasize Confucius' humanitarian virtues.<sup>124</sup>

Over Zengzi's head, four cartoon bubbles hold four words: Thoughtful, Conscientious, Sincere, Trustworthy.

But if one thinks of Youzi, one thinks Confucius' humanitarian virtues are precisely what he chose to emphasize. The *Analects* foregrounds him theorizing about humanity, trustworthiness, filial piety, respect for older brothers or elders generally, obedience, ritual propriety, harmony, justness, and humble respectfulness; and his other *Analects* statement advocates a humane tax rate (12.9).

In sum, of the two apparent overviews of Youzi's thought in the Anglophone scholarly literature, one is an implausible rationale for not thinking about Youzi as such, and the other was designed with no thought of him.

### **C. What interest is served by inattention to Youzi**

Scholars commonly assert that the Confucius of the *Analects* sees family virtues in general, or two family virtues, or filial piety, as the root of the Way. Scholars also sometimes say that Confucius

- focuses on the family and the duties of its positions,
- regards society's family virtue as the root of its general good order,
- regards the state as the family writ large,
- holds that the claims of family trump those of the state or public, and
- holds that the family virtues are natural and early.

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<sup>124</sup> Tsai & Bruya 2018, p. 196.

Awkwardly, as I shall show in the Confucius section below, one cannot *present* the family root view or any of these associated views by quoting from the Confucius material in the *Analects*. Nor can one *support* any of these imputations to Confucius on the basis of the Confucius material. A scholar making any of these imputations cannot easily avoid noticing that point, if she tries to have or offer any particular evidence for the imputation or imputations. And if the scholar tries to have or offer *adequate* evidence, she cannot easily avoid noticing that the Confucius material opposes the imputations.

Hence scholars who are invested in maintaining some of those imputations to the Confucius of the *Analects* (and who accept the usual reading of *Analects* 1.2<sup>125</sup>) are invested in regarding 1.2 as a reliable key to Confucius' views—indeed so reliable as to outweigh the evidence of the rest of the collection. And as we have seen, there is no presentable reason to hold this opinion of *Analects* 1.2. Hence those scholars are specifically invested in overlooking, and having their readers overlook, Youzi as a potentially distinct figure and voice.

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<sup>125</sup> For an argument against the usual reading, see Haines 2026, “Impartiality in the Ancient Root,” *passim* and especially pp. 42-97.

### **III. The absence of the family root view and related views from the Confucius material in the *Analects***

#### **A. Reasons for attention**

There is perhaps no need to argue that the absence of evidence for a common core view is worth scholars' attention.

#### **B. The absence is overlooked**

To a first approximation, the *Analects* is a trackless chaos of obscure bits. To understand the book, one might rely heavily on summary reports by other scholars. But the better approach is simply to read it many times, in the original and/or various translations, boldly and experimentally imagining what the various bits might mean, and trying to find a vision in each that fits the others. That is the kind of thinking that can hope to make contributions to the collective enterprise of understanding the *Analects*. But in one's first one or two dozen readings, while looking at one bit of the text it can be hard even to remember the others. Memory needs explanatory order, or narrative order, or human drama, or regular drill. There is drama in the *Analects*, in some of the brief exchanges; but there is little intellectual order within or between the passages, and there is hardly any argument or narrative structuring any sequence of passages. Coming to terms with the *Analects* takes a long time.

Each time through, the student or scholar may seem to be told at the outset that the key to the whole is the idea that two family virtues grow to create Way. A modern reader is likely to think of children relating to their siblings and parents, for we think of relations with parents and siblings as central mainly to childhood life, and we think of childhood family relations as fundamental to character. Hence we may find the view at 1.2 quite attractive at first; its vision of psychology may seem quite modern. Hence as we read and reread the collection, we may learn to hear every mention of filial piety or parents or brothers or *rén* or the *jūnzi* as an elaboration of the family root view. We may thereby come to link the family root view with other terms too, such as ritual. We can gradually get the impression that Confucius often mentions the family root view.

I remember where I was when I first wanted to cite a passage to show that Confucius accepted the family root view. I leafed through quickly to find one of the many passages where he mentions the point, but at first they all eluded me. So I leafed through again, more slowly, and then again. Where did all those statements go?

In what follows I shall show that there is a vast gap between what many scholars say about the Confucius of the *Analects* and what is actually in the Confucius material in the *Analects*. For example, in at least nine *Analects* passages other than 1.2, scholars have seen the family root view where it is plainly absent from the text. Scholars have similarly seen the following features that are absent from the text: that Confucius focuses on the family, that he thinks society's family virtue is the root of society's general good order, that the family is his model for the state, that he thinks the moral claims of the family trump those of the state or public, and that he thinks the family virtues are basic because they are especially natural and come very early. Let us review all these scholarly phenomena, beginning with the family root view itself.

## 1. Family virtue is the root of the Way.

*In the family first are the origins and wellsprings of love, of the constitutions of cities, and of justice.*

—Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1242a40-b1

As we have seen, countless scholars attribute the statement at *Analects* 1.2 to Confucius, and in that way attribute something like the family root view to the Confucius of the *Analects*: overlooking the absence of that passage from the Confucius material in the *Analects*.

But scholars also often claim that the family root view is presented in one or another *Analects* passage other than 1.2. I have found this claim made regarding another statement the *Analects* attributes to Youzi, six statements the *Analects* attributes to Confucius, and two statements the *Analects* attributes to Zixia.

As we shall see, each of the nine other statements quite plainly does not present the family root view or anything like it. But scholars do not *argue* for the family root reading of these statements. It is as though in each case the scholar did not notice the absence of any colorable appearance that the passage presents the family root view.

***Analects* 1.12.** To display the family root idea in a passage other than *Analects* 1.2, one scholar writes:

The family is the ultimate source and the indispensable ground of an achieved propriety (*li* 禮) in all of our roles and relations. The *Analects* makes this point explicitly:

[Here the scholar presents all of *Analects* 1.12 except for “Youzi said.”]

Morality so understood describes the cultivation of a quality of conduct that is directed at making familial bonds stronger, thicker, and more enduring.<sup>126</sup>

But the statement at 1.12 does not mention family or any family bond or position. Nor does it hint at any source or ground of ritual propriety. Rather, the thesis at 1.12 is that ritual propriety is a source and necessary condition of harmony.<sup>127</sup>

(Youzi arguably offers a root of ritual propriety in the next passage, 1.13; but the root he offers does not pertain to family.)

***Analects 2.8.*** Regarding Confucius' statement at *Analects 2.8*, it has been said,

The centrality of “filial responsibility (*xiao* 孝)” to ritual propriety and the extent to which this demand lies in the very embodiment of appropriate feelings is made abundantly clear:

Zixia asked about being filial (*xiao* 孝). The Master replied, “It all lies in showing the proper countenance. As for the young contributing their energies when there is work to be done, and deferring to the elders when there is wine and food to be had,—how can merely doing this be considered filial?”<sup>128</sup>

But *Analects 2.8* makes no allusion to the centrality of filial piety to anything. Also it makes no allusion to anything that someone might think filial piety is central to, such as ritual propriety in general. If any part of what the reader is

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<sup>126</sup> Ames 2020, p. 107; and similarly at Ames 2011, p. 170; Ames 2021a, p. 43; and Ames 2021b, p. 148.

<sup>127</sup> One scholar favors a parsing of *Analects 1.12* that makes it say that ritual and harmony are necessary for each other (Slingerland 2003, p. 5); but the translation offered here by Ames does not use that parsing.

<sup>128</sup> Ames & Hall 2001, p. 45; Ames 2002, p.151.

shown here could suggest the centrality of something to something, it would be the sentence, “It all lies in showing the proper countenance.” But this sentence translates *sè nán* 色难: attitude is the key to filial piety, or the expression of attitude is the hard part.

***Analects 2.21.*** In this passage, Confucius makes an obscure remark in response to a question. No interpreter has yet proposed an interpretation of Confucius’ answer that makes it arguably responsive and cogent, and that would thereby support attributing a philosophical view to Confucius on the strength of the passage. (I favor the more traditional reading that takes the remark at easy face value, as explained on pp. 98-106 below.)

Scholars tend to read this passage through Youzi-colored glasses, seeing what is not there. For example, one scholar claims that at 2.21 Confucius speaks of “filial piety and respect for elder brothers,”<sup>129</sup> and another claims that the remark includes the term *tì* 悌.<sup>130</sup>

One scholar, citing only *Analects 2.21* (and two Odes’ reference to a lord as father and mother to the people as presumably illuminating about Confucius’ views), writes,

If one can be a good member of a family, one can be a good member of a larger community. If one can regulate a family well, one can rule a country well. When someone asked Confucius, “Why do you not actively search for a career in governing?” the Master replied, “The *Book of Documents* says, ‘It is all in filial conduct (*xiao* 孝)! Just being filial to your parents and befriending your brothers is carrying out

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<sup>129</sup> Makeham 2003, p. 307. It is unclear to me whether the slip on the page is John Makeham’s or Liu Baonan’s. Where classic texts use the term *yōu* 友 in distinguishing the specific virtues of older and younger brothers, they associate *yōu* with the virtue of an older brother: *Shangshu: Kang Gao 9*, *Zuozhuan: Xi Gong 33* (Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 452f.) and *Zuozhuan: Wen Gong 18* (Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 452f.).

<sup>130</sup> Ames 2022, p. 48; Ames 2023, p. 309.

the work of government.’ In so doing a person is also taking part in government. How can there be any question of my actively taking part in governing?” (2.21)<sup>131</sup>

Now, *Analects* 1.2 as usually understood says that if one is filial and fraternal, one has the source of the virtue it takes to be a good community member or ruler. The scholar’s two opening statements above might seem similarly to link being filial and fraternal with being able to rule well (though the opening statements do not link those things). But the scholar does not propose a way in which that linkage or his opening ideas themselves might be thought to be used in the argument of Confucius’ remark and thereby evidenced as Confucius’ view. There is no proposal as to how any or all of those three ideas (if Confucius accepted them) *could* help Confucius reach the conclusion that his filial and fraternal piety makes it unimportant that he participate in government.<sup>132</sup> On the face of things they could not.

Another scholar asserts that the remark at *Analects* 2.21 “can be interpreted as another way of saying that all correct political comportment is an extension of dutifulness at home,” but does not say how it can be interpreted in that way.<sup>133</sup>

Another scholar writes of the passage,

This dialogue is profoundly meaningful for understanding Confucius’ thought. For him, to exercise the filial piety of the father-son relationship and the fraternity of the younger brother-elder brother relationship in the process of government affairs is precisely “to engage in government” 為政 (*weizheng*). In other words, if an official

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<sup>131</sup> Ni 2016, , p. 91.

<sup>132</sup> Granted, from the premise that any good son and brother “can rule the country well,” one could argue that there is no need for this particular man to do it: for perhaps good family men are plentiful. But the words of Confucius’ remark cannot fit that reading.

<sup>133</sup> El Amine 2015, p. 107f.

can from start to finish cultivate a sincerely loving relationship with his relatives from his empathetic heart, then he will be capable of extending that love to all people, and the governmental decrees that he proclaims to the people will be widely accepted as humane.<sup>134</sup>

That doctrine is a bold inference from the usual reading of 1.2, but it can hardly support a defense of Confucius' staying out of government.

**Analects 8.2.** One scholar writes of “Confucius’ view that one who is filial toward her parents will also have the virtues to be a good ruler (8.2).”<sup>135</sup>

In fact the statement at 8.2 does not suggest that anyone who is filial will have the other leaderly virtues. (Nor does 1.2 go that far; and Confucius denies the point at 13.20.) What Confucius says at 8.2 is that filial or family virtue in someone who is already a leader inspires other people to other goodness (*rén* in a narrow sense perhaps)—assuming that *qīn* 親 at 8.2 refers to parents or family rather than intimate advisers.

... When those who are in high stations perform well all their duties to their relations, the people are aroused to virtue. When old friends are not neglected by them, the people are preserved from meanness.<sup>136</sup>

... 君子篤於親，則民興於仁；故舊不遺，則民不偷

**Analects 2.20.** One scholar says that Confucius “argued that teaching the people filiality and parental kindness would ensure their loyalty,” and cites *Analects 2.20*.<sup>137</sup> The scholar’s picture would seem to be that the people’s filiality

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<sup>134</sup> Chen (2017), p. 30.

<sup>135</sup> Sim 2007, p. 173.

<sup>136</sup> English from Legge as at ctext.org.

<sup>137</sup> Pines 2002, p. 198. “Argued” here seems to mean “said.”

and parental kindness would generate the people's not liking to disobey a superior or foment rebellion, a view one might associate with *Analects* 1.2.

But if that point were in *Analects* 2.20 it would be a premise, not something Confucius "argued" for. And in fact the passage makes no mention of the people's filiality and parental kindness, unless on a very awkward parsing.

Ji Kangzi asked, "How can I cause the common people to be respectful, dutiful, and industrious?" The Master said, "Oversee them with dignity, and the people will be respectful; oversee them with filiality and kindness, and the people will be dutiful; oversee them by raising up the accomplished and instructing those who are unable, and the people will be industrious."<sup>138</sup>

季康子問：「使民敬、忠以勸，如之何？」子曰：「臨之以莊則敬，孝慈則忠，舉善而教不能，則勸。」

***Analects* 1.6.** Very often in scholarly publications, *Analects* 1.6 is said to express the family root view. Here is the passage:

The Master said, "My lads: whenever you are home, be filial; elsewhere be deferential to your elders. Be scrupulous and trustworthy. Care broadly for the many, and associate closely with the virtuous. If you have strength remaining, study the records of high culture."

子曰：「弟子入則孝，出則弟，謹而信，汎愛眾，而親仁。行有餘力，則以學文。」

On its face, the statement at *Analects* 1.6 is simply a list of six practices said to be more urgent than technical expertise in culture. Confucius is saying that (for the purposes for which he is training people) it is more important to be moral and associate with the good than to be a scholar. Plainly there is no mention of

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<sup>138</sup> Slingerland 2003, p. 14.

any practice arising from any other practice by growth or extension, nor any mention of time-order or causation among the six. A family virtue is listed first among the six, but it is not said to play a special role among them.

Here are some examples of claims for which scholars have cited or quoted 1.6 alone as though the reading were plain fact.

Although Confucius does not use the word *tui* itself, expansion of one's natural family love is also essential to his teaching. ... So the idea of *tui* has been important for Confucianism from the very beginning.<sup>139</sup>

The *Lunyu* provides an unambiguous description of the vital Confucian project: one's energies or *gongfu* are to be directed primarily at cultivating oneself to become an effective member of the family, and to extend those familial feelings to the community at large.<sup>140</sup>

Confucius in particular emphasizes the expansion of filial love to include other people. For him, love starts from the filial love towards one's parents, and extends to "the love of the multitude at large."<sup>141</sup>

The cultivation of moral feelings in the context of filial relationships naturally leads to their extension in wider settings. On this view, individuals who cultivate filial piety and respect in their relationships with their parents and elders are also likely to develop a strong sense of accountability to and responsibility for other members of society.<sup>142</sup>

According to Confucius, every person has a natural affection towards his kin. One should exercise, develop, and cultivate this

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<sup>139</sup> Y. Huang 2014, p. 150; Y. Huang 2015, p. 169.

<sup>140</sup> Ames 2018b, p. 28.

<sup>141</sup> Yu 2007, p. 107.

<sup>142</sup> Cline 2015, p. 16

natural sentiment within one's family, and then extend it to all human beings. One first becomes a good child in one's own home, and then one can become a good citizen in one's society.<sup>143</sup>

Kongzi argues that filial devotion must be realized before one can care for others.<sup>144</sup>

The passage begins with family relations that then emanate out more broadly to become communal relations.<sup>145</sup>

As is well known, it is a central tenet of Confucianism that ... consanguineous affection is the foundation of the ideal person.<sup>146</sup>

The virtue of *Xiao* is the basis for the virtue of *Ren*.<sup>147</sup>

*Xiao* is central to the ethical life.<sup>148</sup>

Citing *Analects* 1.2 alongside 1.6 does not make such claims about 1.6 any more plausible.

Confucius would fully agree with the position of You Ruo [at. 1.2], because he also claims, “A youth should be filial at home and....”<sup>149</sup>

“Be filial at home” here [in 1.6] serves as a starting point (cf. 1.2), and “be respectful to elders when going out” is extending the love to the multitude broadly.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> R. Wang 2003, p. 128.

<sup>144</sup> Sarkissian 2020, p. 196.

<sup>145</sup> Ames 2016, p. 31.

<sup>146</sup> Liu 2023, p. 236

<sup>147</sup> Y. Li 2012, p. 40

<sup>148</sup> A. K. L. Chan 2004, p. 156

<sup>149</sup> Liu 2008, p. 179.

<sup>150</sup> Ni 2017, p. 83.

... the Confucian model, according to which conscientious love for family grows outward from each family node so that eventually everyone is cared for by everyone, ... [endnote citing 1.2 and 1.6]

Confucius advocates cherishing family first, with the circle of concern expanding from one's own family to other families, then to one's village, nation state, neighboring states, and so on. [endnote citing 1.2 and 1.6]<sup>151</sup>

Once the root takes hold, the Way grows from it (*Analects* 1.2, 1.6). Mencius later defends the Confucian position by calling this the extension (*tui*) of the moral virtues we have learned from close relationships ...<sup>152</sup>

The general idea of these two passages [1.2 and 1.6] is that being filial at home is the root for one to be respectful outside the home, and filial love can be gradually expanded to include all others. Cultivation consists in the transferal of the family's relation of hierarchy and fraternity to the larger society.<sup>153</sup>

Of course none of that is said or discernibly intimated in *Analects* 1.6. Still, my sense is that the majority of references to 1.6 in the literature are for the purpose of supporting this sort of point.

Can we grant that there are colorable grounds for the family root reading of the statement at *Analects* 1.6, or at least for taking the statement as evidence that Confucius held the family root view? I do not see how.

**Granted**, in *Analects* 1.6 there are three features that at least superficially echo *Analects* 1.2. Like 1.2, 1.6 offers a list of practices that **(a)** begins by pairing *xiào* and *tì*, **(b)** mentions other good practices in the middle, and **(c)** ends with a reference to *rén*.

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<sup>151</sup> Flanagan 2008, pp. 477, 485, and endnotes 13 and 34.

<sup>152</sup> Littlejohn 2016, p. 128.

<sup>153</sup> Yu 2007, p. 125.

**But** on the traditional reading of *Analects* 1.2, these echoes are plainly false or trivial. Echo **(a)** is a false echo because (on the traditional reading of 1.2) the *xiàotì* at 1.6 is a different *xiàotì*. If the list at 1.6 *reflects* the idea that *xiàotì* is the first step toward *rén*, as it might, the *xiàotì* seen as that first step is explicitly not internal to the family. Echo **(b)** is trivial, because the middle pair of good practices in 1.6 is on its face unlike either the first pair in 1.6 or what one might call the middle pair of virtues in 1.2 (not liking to go against a superior, not liking to foment disorder). And echo **(c)** is false or very distant, both because at 1.6 the explicitly *rén* party is not the filial party and because the mention of *rén* in 1.6 is presumably meant to describe a way of acquiring that virtue *other* than by extension.

(One scholar imports a fourth surface echo by translating 1.6's opening term *dìzǐ* 弟子 as, "As a younger brother and son, ...."<sup>154</sup> Those are the two positions whose virtues comprise the root on the traditional reading of 1.2. But only a younger brother is a younger brother and son, and one can hardly think the advice at 1.6 was intended only for younger brothers. If the scholar's idea is that Confucius meant it is in a man's *capacity as* a younger brother and son that he is to be filial, trustworthy, associate with the *rén*, de-prioritize specialist studies, etc., then I reply that the terse wording of the opening at 1.6 is hard to reconcile with an intention to communicate that subtle and puzzling point. The term *dìzǐ* 弟子 was in common use simply to mean trainees or young men.)

**Granted**, we might hear in 1.6 a suggestion of chronological sequence among the six good practices, because caring broadly for the many suggests official authority that the other practices do not require, and perhaps because we associate filial piety with childhood.

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<sup>154</sup> Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 72; Ames 2011, p. 162; Ames 2018b, p. 28; Ames 2023, p. 142.

**But, first,** there is no mention of chronological (or causal) order in 1.6 (unless perhaps in the idea that *each day* or week one should study only after taking care of the six).

**Second,** in reading the *Analects* we should not associate filial piety with childhood.<sup>155</sup> At *Analects* 13.20, the other place where Confucius pairs filial piety at home with elder-respect abroad, he is talking about qualities of *shi* 士, who are in a position to care for the many.

**Third,** unlike the list at 1.6, his similar list of virtues at 13.20 is explicitly ordered by level of moral achievement, and the order at 13.20 does not match the order of presentation at 1.6.

**Fourth,** at 1.6 there is no suggestion of forward chronological order *within* any of the three pairs, and there are ample suggestions to the contrary. The image in the first pair, “When you go in, be filial; when you go out, respect your elders” suggests a daily pattern, not two stages of life. (Who has not been out? And whence does one “go in” if not from out?) The second and third pairs are each linked by *ér* 而, which suggests simultaneity. And in the third pair, associating with the virtuous seems like a way to come to care for the many, rather than the other way around (cf. Confucius’ remark at *Analects* 1.14). And if there is order only among the pairs, not within them, so that the list describes three stages rather than six, then the very first stage is explicitly not internal to the family.

**Fifth,** even chronological order would not get us to an extension picture. For *usually* when we think one thing is or must be done before another, we are *not* thinking that the second extends the pattern of the first or tends to grow from the first (cf. *Analects* 16.7). One must learn to talk before one can be a store clerk. One must learn arithmetic before one can learn calculus. One must prepare the materials before carving or painting or building. One must be

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<sup>155</sup> For a defense of this claim, see the Appendix in Haines 2026, “Impartiality in the Ancient Root.”

respectful and obedient to absorb a difficult art such as football from a master, even if the art is not modeled on respect and obedience.

**Granted**, among the six practices, items 1, 2 and 5 fit the pattern, “good treatment for a few people and then for more and more.” To be filial is to give care and respect to a few people. Elder-respect gives respect to more people (the elders one encounters). And caring for the many gives care to even more people.

**But, first**, items 3, 4 and 6 are markedly out of step with such a progression, showing that the set of six was not intended to suggest such a progression. The one scholar who almost offers an argument for the extension reading of 1.6 does so tacitly and indirectly, by translating and paraphrasing the statement in such a way as to dispose of these three anomalous items on the list: suggesting that items 3 and 4 were not among the statement’s prescriptions or were intended as aspects of item 5, and that item 6 falls under the rubric of 5 because *qīn* 親 is to be read as affection rather than association. There is no argument for these interpretive choices, nor acknowledgment that they are not simple facts.

Kongzi says in 1.6, “A young person should be filial when at home and when going out, respectful of his elders. Conscientious and trustworthy, he should care widely for the multitudes but have affection for those who are *Ren* (‘humane’).” Here, we should notice that Kongzi first describes filiality at home; second, respect for elders in the community; and third, care for others who are not in one’s immediate circle.”<sup>156</sup>

**Second**, a more natural reading of the series finds it expressing an opposite of the extension reading, in a sense. For it is easy to see most of the six practices on the list as devices for *receiving* lessons or proper forms from others—devices for being carved—rather than as stages in the progressively wider

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<sup>156</sup> Cline 2012, p. 136f.

application of the forms internal to an initial seed (cf. *Analects* 2.22). As devices for reception, they are analogous to the study of books; they are proper to students (*dizī* 弟子).

The six practices prior to study in 1.6 may be ordered roughly from home life to public life to official life. When one is presenting a list that is to be remembered, it is good composition to give the list some kind of notional order. We might compare other statements by Confucius that order practices chronologically or from home to public life, without prompting readers to think of extension, starting with a nearby passage strikingly parallel to 1.6:

#### 1.14

The Master said, ' The gentleman seeks neither a full belly nor a comfortable home. He is quick in action but cautious in speech. He goes to men possessed of the Way to be put right. Such a man can be described as eager to learn.'<sup>157</sup>

子曰：「君子食無求飽，居無求安，敏於事而慎於言，就有道而正焉，可謂好學也已。」

#### 2.4

The Master said: When I was fifteen I set my heart on learning. At thirty I took my stand. At forty I was without confusion. At fifty I knew the command of Tian. At sixty I heard it with a compliant ear. At seventy I follow the desires of my heart and do not overstep the bounds.<sup>158</sup>

子曰：「吾十有五而志于學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不踰矩。」

#### 8.8

The Master said, "Find inspiration in the *Odes*, take your place through ritual, and achieve perfection with music."<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Lau 1979, p. 61.

<sup>158</sup> Eno 2015, p. 5.

<sup>159</sup> Slingerland 2003, p. 80.

子曰：「興於詩，立於禮。成於樂。」

9.30

The Master said, “You can study with some, and yet not necessarily walk the same path (dao ); you can walk the same path as some, and yet not necessarily take your stand with them; you can take your stand with them, and yet not necessarily weigh things up in the same way.”<sup>160</sup>

子曰：「可與共學，未可與適道；可與適道，未可與立；可與立，未可與權。」

**Analects 1.11.** Confucius says at *Analects* 1.11 that he counts a man filial who keeps to his father’s way for three years after the father’s passing. One scholar cites this passage (along with *Analects* 1.6) to support the claim that Confucius saw a person’s filial piety as the foundation of their understanding of how to treat others in general, because one’s understanding of how to treat family “carries over” into an understanding of how to treat people generally.

Filiality or filial piety (*xiao*) may be considered the foundational value of Confucius’s political understanding, as well as his social and ethical thought. In the family one learns how to treat others, and this carries over to life in the community and even the state (1.6, 11).<sup>161</sup>

But on its face, 1.11 would imply at most that someone with filial piety treats others in general as his father aimed to treat others, for a limited period. I do not know how to find in this passage the idea of *extension* or carrying over, nor a suggestion that filial piety supports other virtue.<sup>162</sup> In suggesting that even a filial son need not follow his father’s way after the mourning is over, the passage

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<sup>160</sup> Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 133.

<sup>161</sup> Littlejohn 2011, p. 25.

<sup>162</sup> Also, one’s treatment of others is perhaps minimal while one is mourning.

acknowledges that one's father's way may not be acceptable (except for a time by one or a few because it is an expression of filial piety).

**Analects 1.7.** Like Confucius' statement at 1.6, Zixia's statement at *Analects* 1.7 presents a list of practices including filial piety, with no suggestion of chronological or causal sequence. And yet the passage has been cited to support something like the family root view.

The Confucian *Analects* recognizes the centrality of personal relationships to personhood. Many of its conversations dwell on how relationships with significant others must first be nurtured and developed before a person can interact with others in society and handle matters successfully (*Analects* 1.6; 1.7).<sup>163</sup>

The scholar's claim that "many" conversations "dwell on" that point is belied by the choice to cite two that do not mention the point.

**Analects 12.5.** This passage reports an exchange between the disciple Zixia and one Sima Niu. It is widely thought that this Sima Niu was a certain man whose brothers were so problematic that he could not consider them brothers.<sup>164</sup> But it is also possible that the Sima Niu in 12.5 was another Sima Niu, one who simply had no brothers. Either way, his remark shows him thoughtless about others.

Sima Niu lamented, "Everyone has brothers except for me."

Zixia said to him, "I have heard it said:

Life and death are a matter of one's lot;

Wealth and honor lie with *tian* 天.

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<sup>163</sup> Lai 2016, p. 111.

<sup>164</sup> Ames & Rosemont 1998, p.250; Chin 2014, p. 183f.; Slingerland 2003, pp. 126ff.

Since exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) are respectful and impeccable in their conduct, are deferential to others and observe ritual propriety (*li* 禮), everyone in the world is their brother. Why would exemplary persons worry over having no brothers?”<sup>165</sup>

司馬牛憂曰：「人皆有兄弟，我獨亡。」子夏曰：「商聞之矣：死生有命，富貴在天。君子敬而無失，與人恭而有禮。四海之內，皆兄弟也。君子何患乎無兄弟也？」

I submit that the natural and obvious reading of Zixia’s reply is that if I treat everyone very well, I will find everyone very well disposed toward me. The point is not about the prior psychological grounding of my good treatment of others. But one scholar adds a detail:

Answering someone’s worry about having no brother, a good pupil of Confucius pointed out that to be an exemplary person means to have everyone in the world as his brother (12.5), presumably by expanding the filial and brotherly love to people in the whole world.<sup>166</sup>

But this reading may take Sima Niu’s lament to be, strangely, that he has nobody to love. More importantly, someone who has no brother (that he is willing to acknowledge) can hardly be expected to “expand” his brotherly love.<sup>167</sup>

We have seen that scholars claim to find the family root idea in nine *Analects* passages other than *Analects* 1.2, six of them attributed by the *Analects* to Confucius. But each of these passages plainly says no such thing; nor does any of them plainly suggest any such thing.

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<sup>165</sup> Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 154.

<sup>166</sup> Bai 2020, p. 127.

<sup>167</sup> On *Analects* 12.4, see Haines 2026, “Impartiality in the Ancient Root,” p. 29 n. 43.

And in each case the reader is offered no reason to accept the family root reading of the passage. I ask the reader to speculate: why is no reason offered? Is it because the scholars think none is needed or owed?

## **2. Focus on the family.**

In a guide to the *Analects*, one scholar has claimed, without citing any passages,

For Confucius, the roots of ethical conduct are grounded in the family, and he focuses on the responsibilities of family members as determined by their role(s) in family life: Father, mother, son, daughter; grandmothers and grandfathers; brothers and sisters; aunts and uncles.<sup>168</sup>

In fact, Confucius never suggests in the *Analects* that ethical conduct is grounded in the family.

Nor are the duties of those family positions his focus. He *mentions* five of the ten positions listed (six if *fùxiōng* 父兄 includes paternal uncles). While he often describes the responsibilities of a son, he says nothing or approximately nothing about the responsibilities or even the typical actions of the other nine positions. He implies that fathers *have* duties or characteristic ways of relating toward sons (12.11), but mentions specifics only for the special case that the son is an infant,<sup>169</sup> a criminal,<sup>170</sup> or deceased.<sup>171</sup> He may speak indirectly and at cross purposes about whether friendship is a good model for a man's relation to his brother (2.21, 13.28). As for the specific virtue of a younger brother toward

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<sup>168</sup> Rosemont 2014, p. 40.

<sup>169</sup> *Analects* 13.4, 17.21.

<sup>170</sup> *Analects* 13.18.

<sup>171</sup> *Analects* 11.8, 11.11.

an older brother, he arguably never alludes to it,<sup>172</sup> and he praises as straight (*zhèng* 正) a man who took his older brother's high office by having him killed.<sup>173</sup> Confucius discusses the brothers Boyi and Shuqi three or four times in the *Analects*.<sup>174</sup> Their legend raises interesting questions about family duties. But from the *Analects* one cannot learn that the two men were kin. Hence while Confucius shows significant interest in the duties of one position in one relation we would categorize as a "family" relation, that fact does not suggest an interest in, much less a focus on, family position duties as a category or topic, any more than an interest in gold would suggest an interest in metals or chemical elements as such.

(Book 10 describes Confucius' exemplary personal practices and comments on his relations with superiors, friends and strangers, and even on how he liked his food and what he wore to bed. But in this book we read nothing of his parents, sibling(s), wife or children, or his thoughts or actions on such topics. The passages elsewhere about his choosing husbands for his daughter and niece seem to be interested in those choices mainly as indications of his views on men's qualities.<sup>175</sup>)

Let us turn from family positions to the family as a unit. Another scholar has written, in a chapter called "Kongzi's Version of the Way" that cites no source for Confucius outside the *Analects*,

At the heart of Kongzi's conception of the proper life for human beings—the "Way" (*dao* 道) – is a model of a harmonious and happy family, one whose different members each contribute to the welfare and flourishing of the whole, according to their role-specific obligations. These obligations—serving as a mother, a father, an elder brother, etc.—and the practices and norms associated with

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<sup>172</sup> See Haines 2026, "Impartiality in the Ancient Root," pp. 26-28.

<sup>173</sup> *Analects* 14.15f.

<sup>174</sup> *Analects* 5.23, 7.15, 16.12, 18.8.

<sup>175</sup> *Analects* 5.1, 5.2, 11.6.

them were the primary guides to the moral life. In this sense, the family served as the basic paradigm for the well-lived life.<sup>176</sup>

No passage is cited for these claims. (All the family relational positions listed here are downward-facing; but Confucius says nothing about the specific obligations of any downward family relational position unless at 13.18.)

In fact, in the *Analects* Confucius never says that any family norms are a guide (primary or otherwise) to the moral life or to anything like that.

Also he never presents a “model” of the household or a kinship group as a community. He never sketches or comments on any such community as a whole, nor speaks of its life or flourishing or welfare,<sup>177</sup> nor of the contributions of members in general. We can attribute to everyone who has the concept of “a family” the view that families involve contributions from all, because the point is obvious. But the closest Confucius comes to actually speaking of mutuality or contributions from all in the family is to say that the father-son relationship involves

- perhaps a mutual *disposition* to contribute in the hypothetical case that the other party commits a crime (13.18);
- one exchange of contributions that involves no adult interaction: A treats B well in B’s infancy so B treats A well after A’s death (17.21); and
- one other exchange referenced in a simile: one man is said to have treated another like a father during their lifetimes, and the latter therefore wants to treat the former like a son by one action after the former’s death (11.11).

We see no mention of contributions exchanged between living members of a family. Granted, in each of the three cases listed above the mutuality described may be taken to stand for more. But the more is entirely offstage; it cannot be

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<sup>176</sup> Ivanhoe 2002, p. 1.

<sup>177</sup> In a passage of particularly doubtful authenticity, he speaks of the flourishing of a clan, but he means the flourishing of the state under its control (*Analects* 16.1).

called an apparent focus. And the three cases together touch one dyad only, rather than being discernibly about family.

Indeed, it is not clear that we can find in the *Analects* evidence of a concept similar to what in English is called “a family.” The core image evoked for Anglophone readers by the countable noun (the image we expect to evoke when we use this term in default of special signals such as “extended” or “Arawak”) is a household comprising a married couple and their minor children,<sup>178</sup> and then that core image plus a penumbra consisting mainly of both parents’ parents and those grandparents’ other offspring and *their* spouses and children, or some approximation. When a couple has a child we say they are “starting a family.”

The concept of family is not obviously prominent or even at home in Confucius’ milieu. Note some differences between the family (in the usual sense of that word) and the Chinese lineage.

- When we envision a “family” in its default sense, we are likely to envision especially home life centering on spouses and children. By contrast, the lineage was primarily a network of men over multiple households. The spousal relation is central to “family,” but in the lineage the spousal relation was a hydrogen bond to a carbon chain. The virtues most essential to lineage order were men’s deference to their fathers and to any older brothers; but within the community that is the focal image of a family, no man has filial or sibling relations.
- Half of a man’s grandfathers and grandsons were outside his lineage, as were all of his brothers-in-law and sons-in-law, and probably half of his siblings and adult children. A girl would move or be removed from her lineage at a vulnerable age. For the typical or successful woman, her parents, siblings, and married daughters were outside her lineage. The Chinese patrilineage is in these senses at odds with the family.

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<sup>178</sup> Note that adults have no filial or sibling relations within this unit.

- The lineage is not about consanguinity, nor about consanguinity between members of the primary gender. It is about chains of direct descent between members of the primary gender. Descent from or through members of the secondary gender does not count, and in China women’s lineage membership was artificial and changeable. To be felt as natural, the institution of the lineage depends entirely on the general assumption of profound gender inequality. That is how an individual or lineage could seem to have a single “ancestor” several generations back, and how exogamous descent groups could avoid thorough overlap. By contrast, the *family* is made *less* valuable by profound gender inequality, and hence less valued by the wise; because inequality lessens the moral significance of the spousal relation for the primary gender, worsens the moral quality of that relation for both parties, and arguably worsens the ability of family and parents to model morality.

The uncountable noun “family” (as in “Chris is family”) means “close relative(s),” such as a spouse or in-law. “Family” in this secondary sense is not a kind of community that can have a sense of itself; rather it is an *individual’s* posse or matrix. (A person is a member of their countable family, but is perhaps not one of their own close relatives.) In the *Analects* the word *qīn* 親 might be the nearest equivalent. Depending on the context, this Chinese word could be used in various senses; it is not always clear which.

### **Attributed to Confucius**

1.6 – associate closely with (verb)

8.2 – parents / close kin / close ones, e.g. perhaps advisers

12.21 – parents / close kin

14.7 – oneself (adverb)

19.17 – parents

### **Not attributed to Confucius**

1.13 – parents / close kin / close ones, e.g. perhaps advisers

10.17 – oneself (adverb)

18.10 – parents / close kin / close ones, e.g. perhaps advisers

20.1 – kin

Hence it is possible but uncertain that in as many as two passages Confucius speaks of “close kin” as a category, though not in the sense of a community or group including the person whose *qīn* they are, and perhaps not including spouses (cf. Youzi’s use of the term at *Analects* 1.13).

Translating *jiā* 家 in the *Analects* as “family,” as is often done, or translating *xiào* 孝 as “family reverence” or “family feeling,” creates many clear mentions of “family” in translation, obscuring the absence of any such mention in the original passage. One translation of the *Analects* has Confucius mention “family” at *Analects* 6.5;<sup>179</sup> but the Chinese term is *línli* 鄰里, better translated as “neighborhood.”

### **3. Family as the Collective Root.**

Perhaps it stands to reason that if family virtues are the root of the Way for individuals, they are also the root of the Way for a whole society. *General social order is rooted in the society’s family virtues.*

Depending on how we read these words, they could be saying something radical or something uncontroversial. What do we mean by general social order? What claim is being made about how necessary, or how sufficient, society’s family virtue is to general order? Is the idea that there are no other significant

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<sup>179</sup> Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 104.

influences (as there are for individuals)? How sensitive is general order supposed to be to increments of family virtue? If the great family virtue of one group or one man brings a golden age, is that an example? Does the answer depend on whether the man was born to the rulership or was chosen for his virtue? Does it depend on whether his influence on general order was by way of a *direct* influence of his family virtue on other people's family order, rather than by way of e.g. his digging canals or lowering taxes?

There are well-known reasons to think the Confucius of the *Analects* does not accept a version of the collective family root view that is strong enough to be interesting—reasons beyond his never expressing the view. One is that he very often displays the contrary view that the many are putty in the hands of good rulers, without any qualification as to whether the many are culturally ready.<sup>180</sup> He seems to think good general order can come and go quickly.<sup>181</sup> When Zigong asks him about government, he lists sufficient food, sufficient arms, and trust in the rulers, but says nothing about the popular culture of the family.<sup>182</sup> When he discusses the importance of ritual propriety, his eyes are on the ritual propriety of the powerful, not of the many.<sup>183</sup>

One scholar finds a detailed version of the societal family root claim in a statement by Confucius to the Duke of She. The scholar says Confucius here

suggests the pressing need to continue to cultivate virtuosity in family relations close to home as the ultimate ground of all familial, communal, and political morality. The position that Confucius is advocating here is that a true and trusting relationship among members of a family is the fabric from which the norms of

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<sup>180</sup> *Analects* 2.1, 2.3; 2.20, 6.24, 8.2, 8.9, 12.1, 12.17, 12.18, 12.19, 13.4, 13.6, 13.11, 13.12, 13.15, 14.17, 14.41.

<sup>181</sup> *Analects* 5.21, 15.7.

<sup>182</sup> *Analects* 12.7.

<sup>183</sup> *Analects* 1.15, 3 *passim*, 4.13, etc.

community and society and ultimately polity draw their tensile strength.<sup>184</sup>

Here is the passage, at *Analects* 13.16:

The Governor of She asked about governing effectively, and the Master replied, “Those near at hand are pleased, and those at a distance are drawn to you.”<sup>185</sup>

葉公問政。子曰：「近者說，遠者來。」

In fact we can read this concretely to mean “good government brings more subjects and hence more power” (as at 13.4), or more abstractly to mean “if you treat well the people nearby, you will gain support far and wide.” In neither case does it suggest that anyone’s virtue grows; nor does it suggest a primary role for the people as distinct from the government. And the grounds for thinking that the passage has family in mind at all are quite weak.

To show that the Confucius of the *Analects* holds the societal family root view, scholars cite mainly his remark at *Analects* 2.21, which is the only statement by Confucius in the *Analects* that can seem to say near the surface that family is fundamental in some sense. For example, one scholar writes, “Passage 2.21 suggests that Confucius also takes being filial as the root of a good government.”<sup>186</sup> But no translation of the passage represents Confucius’ remark as *articulating* any such doctrine. See the footnote for some scholars’ articulations of this doctrine as they attribute it to Confucius on the strength of *Analects* 2.21, and for the arguments given in each case for the interpretation.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ames 2023, p. 173; and similarly at Ames 2024, p. 90f.

<sup>185</sup> Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 166.

<sup>186</sup> Ni 2017, p. 81.

<sup>187</sup> Here are some examples of how scholars have articulated the societal family root doctrine as they attribute it to Confucius on the strength of *Analects* 2.21.

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The idea that filial piety constitutes the roots of political order prevails in the *Analects*. One of the clearest formulations of this idea is found in 2.21 [quoted].... It is difficult to imagine a clearer indication of the connection Kongzi sees between the cultivation of filial piety and political order. He thinks that the government alone cannot bring about a stable and harmonious society; rather, such stability must be initially cultivated in the context of the family. Members of society must develop certain dispositions, learning to think and feel for others in certain ways, if there is to be political order. (Cline 2012, p. 126.)

[As for] filial piety and fraternal respect in the family ... if families were to ‘teach’ these virtues routinely, society would become stable and harmonious, and order would prevail, without any physical coercion. (Gardner 2003, p. 73)

In Kongzi’s own political thought, the family is foundational to social order, and the child’s relation to elders, and parents in particular, are held to have significant implications for the harmony and order of wider society. (Olberding 2011, p. 161)

Implicit in this passage is the idea that government is an extension of family, and that there is a continuum between families and government (cf. 1.2). (Ni 2017, p. 110)

Withdrawal from formal participation in the administration of bad government does not mean the abandonment of responsibility for the sociopolitical order. On the contrary, it is precisely to serve sociopolitical order at its more fundamental level of family that the *chün tzu* withdraws from office (2/21)... Sociopolitical order is ultimately derived from and hence must be restored at the most immediate level, moving from the more distant political order toward its ground in familial and personal order. (Hall & Ames 1987, p. 185.)

Since family feeling is the ground of Confucian role ethics, and since polity in this tradition is a direct extension of the family as quite literally “country-family” (*guojia* 國家), Confucius can further claim that being a responsible and productive member of one’s family is tantamount to governing the country. ... This passage can be easily misunderstood as minimalist—that is, each one of us in our families makes our own small

This reading, I shall argue, fails to take Confucius' remark at face value. The remark is easy to understand; and Zhu Xi, James Legge and William Soothill had it right, as I shall argue.

Before I present the face-value reading I favor, let us look carefully at *Analects* 2.21 to see how, if at all, it can seem to support the imputation of the societal family root view to Confucius. I leave one obscure string untranslated.

2.21. Someone asked Confucius, “Why are you not engaged in government (office)?” The Master replied, “The *Book of Documents* says, ‘Filial piety! Just filial piety, being friendly toward one’s brothers, *shī yú yǒu zhèng* 施於有政.’ This too is being engaged in government. In doing this I am employed in governing. Why do *that* kind of governing?”<sup>188</sup>

或謂孔子曰：「子奚不為政？」子曰：「《書》云：『孝乎惟孝、友于兄弟，施於有政。』是亦為政，奚其為為政？」

Scholars interpret the string *shī yú yǒu zhèng* 施於有政 in a variety of ways. For convenience I shall call this string “the obscure string.”

- Soothill takes it to mean that filiality and fraternity “are to be exhibited in the holder (or affairs) of office.”<sup>189</sup> Legge translates it similarly as “These qualities are displayed in government” Similarly but perhaps

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contribution to the greater political order. I believe, however, that Confucius’s point is quite the opposite. Most of the real significance of our political lives (and our religious lives too) transpires close to home. If we ask after the relative importance of the state and the family in effecting cosmic harmony, we must allow that family is the ultimate source and ground of political order, and in the absence of the flourishing family and the thriving community it enables, political order is a sham or worse. It is for this reason that any formal pretence to be a strong state independent of the thriving community is an empty abstraction: what Whitehead would call “misplaced concreteness.” (Ames 2011, p. 167f.)

<sup>188</sup> The English is taken from Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 80f.

<sup>189</sup> Soothill 1910, p. 175.

coloring the passage by a Mencian reading of *Analects* 1.2, Jeffrey Riegel and Hongkyung Kim translate it as “extend this to governing”<sup>190</sup> and “extend this to the administration of your office,”<sup>191</sup> respectively. (The author of the Old Text *Documents* seems to have read Confucius’ string in that way, as it is used in appointing someone to high office.)

- Several scholars seem to take the string instead to mean that the filial and fraternal person’s qualities exert an influence on governing officials.<sup>192</sup> This reading is consistent with the societal family root view but in an odd way, as it suggests that the people’s family virtue supports society’s general order mainly by way of its effect on the actions of officials, not by directly supporting the people’s general virtue.
- Many others seem to understand the string to mean that filial and fraternal piety have a significant governing effect on society (without specifying whether what is claimed to have this governing effect is these virtues of one person or of the society at large).
- We might also consider the possibility that in the original *Document* the reference was to someone’s exercising *xiào* and camaraderie toward the ruler(s) and fellow officials, not toward family. Depending on the interlocutor, Confucius might have expected the passage to be recognized and thus understood from the context.

For convenience I shall call the string “the obscure string.”

Plainly there is no general doctrine that Confucius’ remark can seem to us to succeed in articulating. We can find that the remark expresses or suggests a general doctrine if we find that the doctrine **(1)** is needed to make sense of his argument, and **(2)** could arguably have been suggested to an outsider by Confucius’ wording (e.g. if the outsider knew the original context in the

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<sup>190</sup> Riegel 2017.

<sup>191</sup> H. Kim 2016, p. 128

<sup>192</sup> Slingerland 2003, p. 15; Chin 2014, p. 22; Ni 2017, p. 110.

*Documents*, which we do not). We can find that the remark expresses a doctrine only if we can find that it was possible for Confucius to have thought his remark might communicate the doctrine.

Indeed, to see Confucius' remark as potentially making an argument that addresses the question at all, we must take it as making *at least* the following skeletal argument, which is the closest thing to a surface meaning of the remark if it is seen as addressing the question.

- (A) In general, if a person practices filial and fraternal piety, those virtues make it unimportant that the person hold office (even if he would be very good at a government job).
- (B) I am active in filial piety and friendship with a brother.
- (C) Hence, in general, it is unimportant that I hold office.

Points (A) and (C) are made by way of the rhetorical question at the end of the remark, interpreted in light of the assumption that Confucius intended to make an argument responsive to the question. Point (B) is tacit in the remark, but the listener naturally infers it because it is needed to link (A) and (C).

The obvious place where this skeletal argument needs support is the *prima facie* false premise (A). So we must find a doctrine that that could at least seem to support premise (A), ideally one that could be suggested at least indirectly by the quotation from the *Documents*. We can then reasonably attribute the doctrine to Confucius on those grounds—at least if there are no major obstacles to thinking that he accepts the skeletal points *other* than the *prima facie* falsehood of premise (A).

But there are three such major obstacles: Confucius' political philosophy, his family circumstances, and his life projects.

- **General point (A)** seems to go against core tenets of Confucius' political philosophy. Confucius thought a key to governance was to put virtue

in office, by promoting the worthy and by counselors' moving the rulers to good practices. In particular, at *Analects* 2.20 and 8.20 he mentions the importance of having filial people in power.

- **Premise (B)** is in tension with the report in the *Kongzi jiayu* that Confucius' father died when Confucius was two, and that his mother died when Confucius was no older than 23.<sup>193</sup> (His brother may have died before Confucius found a husband for the man's daughter.) As compared to many other people, Confucius would have had relatively little occasion to express filial piety. And in the *Analects* we hear nothing of Confucius' own filial piety unless that he finds proper mourning easy.<sup>194</sup>
- **Conclusion (C)** dismisses both of Confucius' main life projects: to become a counselor to a ruler, and to train others to be good officials.

If we cannot defeat all three obstacles, we cannot attribute even the skeletal argument to Confucius in this remark, so the fact that a doctrine would support premise (A) would give us no grounds to attribute the doctrine to Confucius.

But let us set those obstacles aside for the sake of argument. From here forward let us suppose that we have found a reasonable way past the three obstacles, so that the skeletal argument can be attributed to Confucius on the strength of his remark.

Let us then seek a doctrine that **(a)** could conceivably be suggested by quotation from the *Documents* and that **(b)** could conceivably be thought to

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<sup>193</sup> The report is in the *Benxing Jie* (本姓解) chapter. It is accepted as fact in Brooks & Brooks 1997, pp. 10, 270; and Brooks 1996, p. 27—see n. 42 on the early death of Confucius' mother. Eno 2015 does the same (p. ii); and some historical doubts are answered in Eno 2003, *passim*.

<sup>194</sup> *Analects* 9.16.

support premise (A). If a doctrine meets these two requirements, the passage is evidence that Confucius holds the doctrine.

Consider the doctrine that a society's family virtue is the root of that society's good order. Does that doctrine meet requirements (a) and (b)?

The idea that society's family virtue is a significant contributor to its general good order could perhaps be suggested by the obscure string in context.

But the doctrine that society's family virtue is the root of its good order offers no *prima facie* support to general premise (A), for three reasons.

- While a person's family virtue is an increment of society's family virtue, the person might expect to provide that same increment while in office.
- Taking office would seem to be an act of family virtue. At least Confucius would likely have expected the questioner to make that assumption. For although the duties of office may occasionally come to conflict with family virtue, the general presumption must have been that office brings honor to parents ("My son the official!") and brings income and influence by which one can better serve one's family (though it also brings constraining expenses, as mentioned at *Analects* 11.8).
- Someone who is very well qualified for government work might hope to make from office an *additional* and much greater contribution to society's good order beyond his part of the sum of society's family virtue.<sup>195</sup> The most obvious example in this context is that someone like Confucius might hope to promote *society's family virtue* more effectively from high office than from private life, in any number of ways: by modeling it more visibly and from a stronger and more honored position, by promoting others who model it, by counseling superiors and

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<sup>195</sup> The idea that a society's family virtue is the root of its good order does not imply that there is no way to contribute to good order more directly than through family. For example, my family virtue may have made me a devoted manager of the digging of canals.

colleagues to model it, by having it taught widely, by lessening obstacles such as poverty and social conflict, and/or perhaps by rewarding it or protecting it (e.g. not inviting such testimony as the Duke of She mentions at *Analects* 13.18, should one happen to hold an office responsible for crime control). Surely Confucius was alive to such points if he was concerned about society's general level of family virtue.

(To each of those bullet points one might reply as follows: "That would normally be true; but under the Ji clan service in government was like serving a crime boss or selling one's soul to the devil, as these are played out in our morality tales. Government office might seem to promise power and glory; but under the Ji clan it would bring only humiliation, hardship and danger to oneself and one's family." But insofar as our interpretation relies on this view about Lu under the Ji clan, we are denying that Confucius is making a general point.)

To fix those problems we might try expanding the doctrine we hope to impute to Confucius, so that in addition to holding that society's family virtue is the root of its more general good order, it holds also that a single person's family virtue in private life can make a powerful contribution to society's overall level of family virtue. If society is falling short in its family virtue, a very small cadre might be able to turn that around.

In particular, Confucius is sometimes thought to hold that virtue is highly contagious.<sup>196</sup> It might seem to follow that one man's great family virtue would spread family virtue far and wide, thus having a kind of governing influence at least on society's family virtue (and, if such virtue is society's root, on society's other good order). And conceivably Confucius could have expected the string that is obscure to us to have suggested the idea of a governing contagion.

If we combine the societal family root doctrine with the private virtue contagion doctrine, we have a complex doctrine that might be thought to support

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<sup>196</sup> Flanagan 2008, p. 479f.; Slingerland 2011, p. 411; Haines 2011, p. 230.

premise (A) and be suggested by the obscure string, so that Confucius' remark could be evidence that he holds the complex doctrine, including the societal family root view.

It is hard to think Confucius could have thought he might communicate the complex doctrine by the remark, but that does not mean the reading is impossible. It is impossible for other reasons.

- If any one burning plant can start a wildfire, it follows that no one plant can make a non-negligible contribution for long.
- Suggesting that his own family virtue was causing family virtue all around him would likely have exposed Confucius to just ridicule unless it seemed to be true. But we have no report of such a miracle.
- Confucius seems to think his own close associates still need very elementary instruction in filial piety.<sup>197</sup>
- Although Confucius thinks there have been exemplars of great virtue,<sup>198</sup> he recognizes that even filial piety is not universal in his day.
- Confucius thinks great worth can be overlooked.<sup>199</sup> So if he thinks a civilian's filial and fraternal piety are contagious, he presumably thinks an official's filial and fraternal piety are *more* contagious, if only because office makes one's ways more visible.

Someone who wants to see Confucius' remark as presenting or evidencing the societal family root view might take a different approach, saying, "Confucius didn't really mean that out of office he could make a big contribution; he just meant he could make *some* contribution." But that is to say that either that his argument was not meant to address the interlocutor's question, or that it addressed the question very badly. We thereby lose our *leverage* for finding in

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<sup>197</sup> *Analects* 2.7f.

<sup>198</sup> *Analects* 7.15, 14.16; cf. 1.3, 1.6, 4.1.

<sup>199</sup> E.g. *Analects* 1.1.

the remark some interesting tacit doctrine (such as the societal family root view) on the grounds that the view plugs a plain gap in the argument. If he is only saying that out of office he can make *some* contribution to society, without proposing that this point answers the interlocutor, then no special doctrine is needed to fill a gap because no argument is needed. The point is wholly uncontroversial. And of course it does not suggest the societal family root doctrine.

For my part I think the exchange as reported is easy to understand, on the assumption that Confucius was a competent communicator who wanted to be understood. We should take Confucius' remark at face value.

On its face the remark articulates no serious argument. The remark was meant as an impressive but transparent evasion.

Suppose the string we find so obscure was not obscure at the time, and clearly implied the societal family root doctrine. If so, then (as we have seen) on its face the remark articulated no apparently cogent answer to the question posed. Or if the string clearly meant one of the other things scholars have proposed, or was obscure even back in the day, then again on its face the remark did not articulate any apparently cogent answer to the question. Either way, the remark plainly did not articulate any true or plausible answer to the question. Confucius would have known that, so he likely intended the questioner not to hear any apparently cogent argument. We might compare *Analects* 17.20, where Confucius sent away a would-be visitor on grounds of illness, and then played music so that the man could hear.

William Soothill reports that Zhu Xi explains, "It was difficult (not polite) for Confucius to announce his real reason for refusing office" (孔子之不仕有難以語).<sup>200</sup> Legge says, "Confucius had his reason for not being in office at the time,

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<sup>200</sup> Soothill 1910, p. 172.

but it was not expedient not to tell. ... A western may think that the philosopher might have made a happier evasion.”<sup>201</sup>

In the United States at least, when someone resigns from a high position, or chooses not to run for re-election, they are asked why; and the standard reply is, “I want to spend more time with my family.” This reply avoids saying something humiliating (“I’m not wanted”) or provocative (“Those with the power are in the wrong”) that could be repeated or rebroadcast. These are concerns Confucius likely shared.<sup>202</sup> The modern standard reply gives a false reason, but it is not a deception. It is a transparent evasion. Confucius’ remark too says that he prefers to focus on his family. His transparent evasion differs from the modern standard transparent evasion only in that his makes a show of offering an impressively apt quotation from a classic text. Calling the passage to mind on the spot was genuinely impressive. Displaying skill at finding apt quotations was a way for a counselor to display his merits, and would have helped preserve Confucius’ dignity in the moment.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Legge 1971, p 16.

<sup>202</sup> *Analects* 1.10, 7.11, 7.15, 7.31, 8.13 8.14, 14.3, 15.1, 15.7, and 16.10.

<sup>203</sup> Perhaps the next-most-plausible reading is that the remark was intended to suggest, “What need is there for officials? All the lords need do is be filial and fraternal, and the people will be governed thereby.” While this view is not clearly articulated by Confucius’ wording, that does not imply that it was not clearly enough hinted. Stating it plainly might have been dangerous. Against this reading is the point that if Confucius held this view one would expect him to express the view elsewhere, which he does not. The closest approximations are at 2.20 and 8.2, though even there filiality and fraternity do not exhaust his recommendations to leaders. And the view would imply that the study of state ritual is unimportant, a view Confucius did not hold.

#### 4. The state is or should be the family writ large.

*One finds similars of these [the just constitutions], like artists' models (paradeigmata) for them, in families.*

—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1160b24f.

Scholars sometimes say that for Confucius, “the family serves as a model for the ideal state.”<sup>204</sup> His “moving and inspirational ideal community is ... roughly the family writ large.”<sup>205</sup> On Confucius’ view, “all relationships are modeled more or less directly on family relationships and all legitimate forms of rule will embody the pattern of the father-son relation.”<sup>206</sup> for “a state is just a family writ large.”<sup>207</sup>

Usually the view is offered without supporting evidence. One should offer evidence, especially after Joseph Chan argued at length in 2004 that classical Confucianism does not see the family as the model for the state.<sup>208</sup>

To say that the state is “the family writ large” is to say that the state is analogous to the family; and it is to suggest further that the analogy captures all the main features of the state, i.e. that the state lacks other main features. But in the *Analects*, Confucius never says that political order is or should be analogous to the family (or to any other kin-group or dyadic kinship relation), much less that it lacks or should lack other main features. Also he does not say that he uses the family or any of its relations as his model for conceiving the real or ideal state.

If he occasionally used a family metaphor for a political relation such as that between ruler and people, that would not necessarily show that he holds a

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<sup>204</sup> Cline 2015, p. 14, citing 2.21.

<sup>205</sup> Ivanhoe 2013, p. 66.

<sup>206</sup> Sim 2007, p. 20; cf. p. 41.

<sup>207</sup> Sim 2019, p. 273.

<sup>208</sup> J. Chan 2004, *passim*.

big or distinctive doctrine. We all use family metaphors often enough. But in fact neither Confucius nor any other speaker in the *Analects* ever uses any family position or relation as a metaphor for any of the human relations constitutive of the state: ruler and people, ruler and ministers, officials and people, superior and inferior officials, or peer officials. And no speaker ever uses the family or any other kinship *group* as a metaphor for the state or society.

Merely asserting a similarity between A and B would not begin to suggest that one takes A as one's model for B, or B for A. Confucius does *not* assert any similarity or analogy between family and state or any of their component human relations, ideal or otherwise.

Of course some similarities between family and state are almost universally acknowledged, without tempting us to say that family is everyone's model for the state. **First**, family and state involve relations of rank: leadership and followership, authority and service. **Second**, adults of lower rank should be permitted or encouraged to express disagreement to their superiors. **Third**, morality (care and respect) is thought to apply in both the family and the state; after all, it applies everywhere, and more stringently in close relationships. **Fourth**, family and state are both *communities* where the members have different parts to play (though one might not think so if (a) one does not have a word for "community" that applies to the family and to the state; or if (b) one is thinking of "family" as a web of indefinite extent, or as any of the circles of relatives centering on each individual, rather than as a kind of group that has members and does not center on any of them; or if (c) the state in one's experience is not a community of members (citizens) but rather a territory under a ruler, with the understandings in the foreground that the territory is changeable with the fortunes of war while the population of subjects (residents) is changeable also with mass migration.) I am not sure I have seen that a scholar who attributes the family-state isomorphism view to the Confucius of the *Analects* points to any

similarity beyond these four thin similarities that most people everywhere recognize.

In a few places Confucius mentions kinship relations *alongside* political relations, no doubt because kin-groups and the state were in his day the main forms of organization. To list the main forms or arenas of organized life was to juxtapose kinship organization with state organization. Being organized life, they each involve rank and morality, as anyone would agree. That is, they each involve authority, respect and care. Some of Confucius' juxtapositions bring out this point. But in connection with such juxtapositions Confucius never says anything further to suggest that some lesson is to be drawn from the fact of that thin similarity.

For us today kinship organization is not the only prominent kind of organized life in society other than the state. We are exposed from childhood to a rich menu of other kinds, such as corporations (work and stores), school, games, traffic, and social media; and we choose ideas from these to help us think about political order (contract, rules of the road). So if a text juxtaposes the lineage or clan with the state as a pair, we can get the false impression that family or clan has been *selected* for juxtaposition with the state, when in fact no selection has been made, and all that is happening is that the main kinds of social organization are being listed.

Another fact that might conceivably encourage a modern reader to read into mere juxtapositions the idea that Confucius envisioned the family as the model for the state, or saw fatherhood as the model for non-family authority generally, is that although such a vision of political order is not explicit or apparent in the *Analects*, it is often prominently explicit elsewhere, both in the Chinese tradition<sup>209</sup> and throughout Western thought and culture, especially in Classical Greece and the Protestant Reformation and at least through the end of

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<sup>209</sup> I find, however, that machine searches of textbook surveys of Confucian philosophy tend to show few mentions of family after the earliest period.

robust European monarchy a little over a century ago. But we should let the Confucius of the *Analects* be the Confucius of the *Analects*.

Yet another fact that may lead us to overestimate the significance of such juxtapositions is that the state as Confucius knew it lacks certain features that family also lacks, and that for us today are practically the *main* features of the state: elections, a legislative assembly, judicial review, multiple vast bureaucracies of technical specialists, etc.<sup>210</sup> As the Warring States lacked those things, *we* may imagine that in broad outline each state was just a man in charge of everybody else, subject to morality (care and respect), as was the patriarchal family. We might casually see monarchy and the patriarchal family only in that very broad outline, because (unlike Confucius) we have little practical experience with either. They each involve authority relations, as Confucius' juxtapositions suggest, and the relationships internal to each require care and respect (i.e. morality), as does life in general, and there are none of the institutional checks we most value in the state. So, *we* might think, the good family and state as Confucius thought of them have *all their main features* in common.

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<sup>210</sup> If we take the family as our main example of an *institution*, it may suggest to us that institutions are made of *relations and their roles*, so that the thoughtful design of roles and relations suffices for the thoughtful design of institutions. But that is too simple an image of institutions. Following Rawls' definition of "practices" when he is saying that practices are the main topic of his moral and political philosophy, we might say that in addition to roles and relations, institutions also include "moves, penalties, defenses, and so on" (Rawls 1955, p. 3 n. 1). Well-defined moves allow for the kinds of practice or institution Rawls gives as his illustrative examples: "games and rituals, trials and parliaments, markets and systems of property" (Rawls 1971, p. 55). For us, familiar well-defined moves in connection with family (if they are well-defined for the institution rather than being idiosyncratic to this or that family) pertain mainly to people's entry or exit from family membership (marriage, divorce, adoption, disowning) rather than to the internal life of families. Hence we can find it novel and interesting to propose family today as a model for the state, rather as we might find it novel and interesting were someone to propose a log cabin as a model for conceiving machines in general.

But Confucius was not struck by the absence of legislatures and judicial review. If we look for further similarities between good families and good states as he likely saw them, I think we find mostly differences, and quite profound ones. Consider three main kinds of difference.

**(1) Authority and subjecthood.** For Confucius, authority relationships in family and state would seem to be different kinds of relationships, differently grounded. Among men in a **family**, authority is lifelong and independent of virtue.<sup>211</sup> Confucius holds that a man who disagrees with his father should try gently to change his mind, but go along in any case, or almost any case.<sup>212</sup> By contrast, a main feature of Confucius' view of the **state** is that the authority of office should go to virtue. The ruler should promote the worthy, changing who has authority over whom. Further, officials should not continue to serve a ruler who persists in acting wrongly.<sup>213</sup> Even subjects can choose their rulers by virtue, in the sense that dissatisfied residents can move to another territory. A ruler should try to rule well enough to induce the subjects of other rulers to forsake them.<sup>214</sup> Men and families could not similarly migrate between kinship groups.

**(2) Bonds between approximate peers.** Though Confucius hardly touches on the matter, we may suppose that he holds that bonds between brothers should be maintained. These would be bonds determined by birth. By contrast, peer bonds outside the family, especially among those with a political calling, should be assigned largely by achieved virtue. They would seem to be different from the brotherly bond, with different roles to play. Confucius thinks it is important that his trainees for public life be very selective about their friends

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<sup>211</sup> Aristotle saw a father' authority over his children as parallel to a kingship based on virtue, but Aristotle was thinking of actual children. For Confucius, filial piety was a practice of adults.

<sup>212</sup> *Analects* 4.18.

<sup>213</sup> *Analects* 5.19, 11.24, 15.7; cf. 8.13, 14.37, 15.1, 15.8; but see 14.16, 14.17, 14.19.

<sup>214</sup> *Analects* 13.4, 13.16.

and associates.<sup>215</sup> One should have no friend inferior to oneself,<sup>216</sup> and (yet) one should seek to associate with one's betters<sup>217</sup> and live among good people.<sup>218</sup> If a friend will not listen to one's remonstrance, one should leave that friend.<sup>219</sup> Hence while Confucius' quotation from the *Documents* at *Analects* 2.21 may suggest taking friendship as one's model for relations with brothers, his own remark at 13.28 seems more in line with his views when it says the two kinds of relationship should be dissimilar in quality.

**(3) Normative focus.** In matters pertaining to the **state**, Confucius' main normative focus is on the governing positions: how to govern, the character of the ruler, and the character of Confucius' trainees in view of their anticipated work in governance. His thought seems to be that the virtue of *leaders* is the key to political order<sup>220</sup> and to the good society. The people can be counted on to absorb the virtue of their good leaders almost automatically, by emulation<sup>221</sup> and reciprocation.<sup>222</sup> But for the **family**, so far as can be seen from the text, Confucius' normative focus is almost exclusively on upward relating by sons. Emulation is a temporary norm, not a natural fact.<sup>223</sup> He never suggests that a father's virtue is wind to the son's grass (cf. *Analects* 11.22), and he never mentions reciprocation between living family members. Indeed, although presumably (a) one of the most important tasks of a ruler was to make sure to have a good successor, presumably a son, and (b) an important current or

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<sup>215</sup> *Analects* 1.6, 1.14, 4.1, 9.30, 15.10.

<sup>216</sup> *Analects* 1.8, 9.25.

<sup>217</sup> *Analects* 1.6, 1.14, 15.10.

<sup>218</sup> *Analects* 4.1.

<sup>219</sup> *Analects* 12.23.

<sup>220</sup> The main passage where Confucius has seemed to some to depart from this view is also the one passage where he can seem to assign family a fundamental role of some sort: *Analects* 2.21. On this passage see pages 98-106 above.

<sup>221</sup> *Analects* 2.1, 8.2, 12.17, 12.18, 12.19, 13.1, 13.6.

<sup>222</sup> *Analects* 2.3, 2.20, 13.4.

<sup>223</sup> *Analects* 1.11.

imminent activity for Confucius' young men was to generate younger good men, nevertheless Confucius nowhere discusses how to parent a living boy or man beyond saying in passing that a good father may cover up his son's crimes, and that parents do in fact hold their infants and bring them when emigrating. These points are not the presentation of a model for governance.

Governance is perhaps the primary concern throughout the Confucius material. He seems to be trying to train people to participate in it and give counsel about it. Hence, insofar as his thought was led by some model for governance, such as historical successes or the family, we must see *some* attention to that model as such. If his model was the family, we do not.<sup>224</sup>

One passage that has been offered in support of the claim that Confucius saw the state as the family writ large is *Analects* 2.21. For example, one scholar writes,

To begin, it is important to note that Confucius conflates the family and the state such that the good of the one is bound up with the other; a state is just a family writ large. For instance, when asked why he was not employed in government, Confucius responded by saying, "It is all in filial conduct ( xiao 孝)! Just being filial to your parents and befriending your brothers is carrying out the work of government" (2.21).<sup>225</sup>

("For instance" proffers that other passages too evidence the view, but none is named.) Another scholar comments, with regard to the same passage, that

Confucius is making an astute observation when he asserts that within this cultural tradition, the proper functioning of the

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<sup>224</sup> We might see some attention to the model, with no suggestion that it is a model, if his model for good ruling of the people is filial piety toward one's parents.

<sup>225</sup> Sim 2019, p. 273.

institution of family is isomorphic with the socio-political order of the state.<sup>226</sup>

But no argument is offered for finding any such idea in the passage, nor even an account of how the passage could seem to suggest the idea.

Another scholar finds the view in *Analects* 1.2, 12.5 and 12.11, saying,

It has become rather clear through these passages that communal and political relations are analogous to and should be modeled after familial relations, and the state, even the whole world, is an enlarged family. The devotion to the enlarged family is developed from the devotion to the natural family.<sup>227</sup>

Of the three passages, only **12.11** includes a remark attributed to Confucius. There he juxtaposes the ruler-minister relation to the father-son relation, in speaking to a duke who had trouble with his ministers and sons. Since the remark says nothing about *what* analogy might be thought to obtain between the two relations, and since some analogies between them are universally recognized, I cannot see that the passage suggests any analogy beyond what is universally recognized. And it seems quite possible that the main reference is to relations among the people in government, or the ruler's relations with different kinds of close underling, not to the relation between ruler and subjects (individually or collectively) or the relations between fathers and sons throughout the population.

Whether the statement attributed to Youzi at *Analects* **1.2** implies an interesting analogy between family (or lineage) and state depends on

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<sup>226</sup> Ames 2023, p. 322

<sup>227</sup> Bai 2020, p. 127.

controversial points of interpretation within the traditional understanding, points the scholar does not touch on.<sup>228</sup>

The statement attributed to Zixia at *Analects* **12.5** does not allude to the state, but at least it uses a brother metaphor. However, this metaphor is not an account of the moral position of all people relative to each other, like the familiar idea of the “brotherhood of man” so common in the West and elsewhere. Also Zixia’s image is just one relation we associate with family; it is not an image of a *family* (like the familiar idea of the “family of man”). This is an important distinction. There is no place for the parental or spousal relations in Zixia’s image, nor even a suggestion of a community rather than an aggregate of dyadic relations with one person. When Zixia says that all men are the *jūnzi*’s brothers, he is not suggesting that all men are in the same sense brothers to each other. Such a statement would tell Sima Niu he does not have to be a *jūnzi* himself to get all those brothers.

If *Analects* 1.2, 12.5, and 12.11 are the *Analects* passages that best evidence the idea that the state or the world is the family writ large, then that idea is not in evidence in the *Analects*.

## **5. The family trumps the state and public.**

Each of the four Youzi statements in the *Analects* makes an argument of the form, “X is a key support for Y. So to achieve Y, don’t skimp on X: it won’t work.” According to *Analects* 1.2, someone who shortchanges the root in the interest of other moral projects is unlikely to be following the Way of the *jūnzi*. If we take the root to be family virtue, then the statement might be taken to imply that the moral claims of the state or public never supersede those of the family in case of conflict.

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<sup>228</sup> See Haines 2026, “Impartiality in the Ancient Root,” p. 8 and pp. 90-97.

One scholar has written that the Confucius of the *Analects* held that alongside obligations to parents and family, there were “parallel obligations to king and state which, though never superseding, were fashioned on the model of those to parents and family.” No passage is cited in support.<sup>229</sup>

Arguably no genuine obligation supersedes another, so presumably the imputation is that no *claim* of the state overrides one of the family.

The one Confucius statement that might be associated with that radical view is in the passage on Upright Gong at *Analects* 13.18, where Confucius opposes the view that when a man’s father commits a minor crime, the man should rat his father out to the state to be punished. It has been said that in this passage we see that for Confucius, “the societal (public) role could never take precedence over the familial (private),”<sup>230</sup> and that “family reverence takes priority over loyalty to the state (those who govern, and the regulations they enforce).”<sup>231</sup>

At 13.18, Confucius is opposing an ugly state-first radicalism. But his view is not an opposite family-first radicalism, or at least the passage gives no evidence of that. He does not say family trumps state in general, nor does he even quite say that it is wrong for a father to rat out his son for theft or vice versa. He says only that in his village there is uprightness in a son’s covering up for a father or vice versa; covering up can be a reflection of uprightness. I submit that this unremarkable view is the usual view in the United States today.

I find no passage where Confucius appears to say that the moral claims of the family always trump those of the state. I think charity requires us to deny the imputation of that view to him. It is almost impossible for anyone not to notice that both family and state make claims that are compelling and claims that are trivial (or worse).

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<sup>229</sup> Ivanhoe 2002, p. 1.

<sup>230</sup> Rosemont 2015, p. 120.

<sup>231</sup> Rosemont & Ames 2008, p. 9f.

There are many passages in which Confucius seems to hold at least that the public good can trump some moral claims of family:

- Confucius says the *jūnzī* does not take sides (2.14, 4.10, 15.22);
- he denies his own son a thick burial so that he can better participate in state ceremony (11.8);
- he sees nothing wrong with Great Yu's choice to live in hardship conditions for the sake of public works (8.21), a choice that would presumably have put Yu's family in hardship or deprived Yu and his family of each other's company;
- he is willing to risk his own and his students' ability to carry out their basic duties to their families, as he takes some students far from home and exposes some to potential death from starvation; and he praises one student for not minding;
- he suggests that filial adherence to one's father's way may yield to other considerations after the formal mourning period (1.11, 4.20), and that the extent to which his students should defer to their elder kin depends on considerations internal to training for a public career (11.22, cf. 2.5<sup>232</sup>); and
- he says it was wrong of a governor to use a veiled threat in asking that a successor to him be appointed from his own kin (14.14).

A possible indication that Confucius saw the order of the state as a more serious matter than the order of the family is that while he opposed taking the names and forms of state positions in vain,<sup>233</sup> he seemed not to have analogous scruples about the positions of father and son.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> I take Confucius at 2.5 to be telling different people different things.

<sup>233</sup> *Analects* 3.1, 3.2, 9.12.

<sup>234</sup> *Analects* 11.8.

## 6. The Family Virtues are Natural and Early

*Man is naturally spousal, more than political, as the family is prior and more necessary than the city.*

—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1162a16-19

*A parent would seem to have a natural friendship for a child, and a child for a parent, not only among human beings but also among birds and most kinds of animals.*<sup>235</sup>

—*ibid.*, 1155a16-20

*As a colony or offshoot from a household, a village seems to be particularly natural, consisting of what some have called "sharers of the same milk," sons and the sons of sons. That is why city-states were originally ruled by kings, as nations still are.*<sup>236</sup>

—Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b16-18

The *Mencius* proposes that humanity, rightness, ritual and wisdom have simple natural starting-points. This doctrine might be useful in convincing a ruler or other person that they have the capacity for goodness, and in convincing a ruler that the people have enough goodness that they will likely respond well to good treatment. The more the starting-points can be claimed to be natural and universal, the better the doctrine serves these practical purposes.

By contrast, *Analects* 1.2 represents Youzi as *arguing for* scrupulous attention to *xiàotì*, saying that even the *jūnzi* works on that root. The more natural and universal something is, the less practical value there is in arguing for it.

Nevertheless, the Mencian idea that the roots of virtue are natural is sometimes attributed to Confucius in connection with Confucius' supposed view

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<sup>235</sup> Irwin 1999, p. 119.

<sup>236</sup> Reeve 1998, p. 3.

that family is the root of the Way. We have already seen that some scholars cite *Analects* 1.6 in support of attributing to Confucius the view that the root is “natural” family affection or love.

One scholar is quite emphatic in attributing this view about human nature to Confucius:

One of the most distinctive claims Kongzi makes about human nature is that our moral sensibilities find their source and paradigm in natural feelings among family members. These are the earliest and most characteristic features of human nature and the beginning of a moral life. This last point is an extremely important feature of Kongzi’s philosophy, for it establishes certain fundamental emotional responses as the source of ethics and the family as the paradigm for ethical relationships and political order. ...

Kongzi places great importance on what he regards as the natural virtues of filial piety and brotherly respect and sees these affectionate and deferential dispositions as the sources and paradigms for more general virtues such as humanity and conscientiousness.<sup>237</sup>

The scholar offers no evidence or argument to support attributing these claims about nature and childhood to Confucius.

In fact of course the Confucius of the *Analects* says approximately nothing about human nature or childhood, and that only in late books. In particular he does not comment on the naturalness or earliness of filial piety or brotherly respect.

Further, when Confucius names actions characteristic of filial piety, such as support for parents, the actions he names are almost always unavailable to

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<sup>237</sup> Ivanhoe 2014, pp. 50, 51.

young children. And he nowhere expresses or displays any interest in early childhood conduct.<sup>238</sup>

Further, he suggests that *in general* the people of his time lack the feelings or attitudes proper to filial piety; and he seems to suppose that two of his own disciples need that elementary instruction.<sup>239</sup> And he seems to hold that peoples lacking China's civilizing ritual tradition are in a backward state generally.<sup>240</sup>

### **C. What interest is served**

The primary interest served by the family root reading of Confucius may be that one has long been invested in that reading, or that many other scholars have advanced that reading.

Also a modern or Western thinker can be expected to find a family-centered Confucius especially attractive. Hence in trying to promote her field in the West, a Confucius scholar might be tempted to emphasize Confucius' focus on the family.

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<sup>238</sup> See Haines 2026, "Impartiality in the Ancient Root," pp. 126-129.

<sup>239</sup> *Analects* 2.7f.

<sup>240</sup> *Analects* 3.5 and perhaps 13.19.

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