

**Impartiality in the Ancient Root:
Two Concepts of *xiàoti* 孝弟/悌**

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This file has hyperlinks for cross references and some text passages.

References to the *Liji* are to section numbers at ctext.org.

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I. Two ancient concepts of *xiàoti*

Early Chinese texts often present *xiào* 孝 and *tì* 弟/悌 as partner virtues. In the earliest texts in which the term *tì* appears, *xiào* and *tì* as a pair are *filial piety in the family and elder-respect in the wider community*. I call this pair of virtues the “straddling” pair because it has one foot in the family and one foot out. Most scholars today seem to recognize that the terms stand for the straddling pair at *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20 and at *Mencius* 3B4, and many translate *tì* as elder-respect even at *Analects* 1.2. I shall argue that the terms take this sense always in the *Analects* and at least usually in the *Mencius*. By the late 300s BCE the term *tì* was sometimes used also to mean a man’s respectfulness to his older brother, and sometimes *xiào* and *tì* together were often used to name the pair *being a filial son and a respectful younger brother* (to an older brother).¹ I call this pair the “lineage pair,” for reasons that will soon be apparent.

¹ Erin Cline has recently made a powerful defense of the very important fact that we should not assume that the language of e.g. *Analects* 1.2 was about males only (Cline 2026, p. xxvff.). But for purposes of historical interpretive argument I think we should recognize that both readings are too simple. In the line “all men are created equal,” the authors of the American Declaration of Independence used language that definitely referred to all males and arguable all human beings, but they were *thinking* almost exclusively of white males, though they were often in the company of another gender and race.

The idea that for philosophical purposes we can simply read past the gender specificity of a text like *Analects* 1.2 is especially problematic if we take this passage to be alluding to the institution of the family or lineage. The idea that we can read past gender-specificity in such a context assumes (among other things) that the relevant forms of kinship-based social order among *males* in a patriarchal and patrilineal society

I shall argue also that if we look at the whole range of statements of the Confucius of the *Analects* and the Mencius of the *Mencius*, in whatever terms, we find that those texts are closer to holding that the root of the way is the straddling pair, than to holding that the root is the lineage pair.

While the virtue term *tì* 弟/悌 was no doubt etymologically related to *dì* 弟 for “younger brother” or “younger,” we cannot infer that the virtue term originally meant the role virtue of a younger brother. No other family position name generated an established term for the role virtue of the respective position. The virtue term *tì* could have originated as a term for the role-virtue of juniors (hence elder-respect), or else as a younger-brother metaphor for elder-respect or general respectfulness. Similarly, the Western virtue similes “fraternal” and “brotherly,” and the virtue nouns “fraternity” and “brotherhood,” normally carry no

can be roughly the same as the relevant forms of kinship social order among *people* in a society with rough gender equality.

Problems with this isomorphism assumption are relevant at *Analects* 1.2 if we think this passage sees either the family (including at least a married couple and their offspring) or the lineage (a many-generation kinship group based on descent, with a sense of itself as a division of society) as an important model for overall social order among the people who count. For neither the nuclear family *nor* the descent group can be a significant institution *both* among the men in patrilineal descent groups and among the people of a roughly gender-equal society. Among the men in patrilineal descent groups we cannot much find the spousal relation or (therefore) the nuclear family. And the kind of descent-group that can be a division of society with its own identity cannot be a significant institution in roughly gender-equal society (unless the descent groups are endogamous).

When English-speakers today think of the “family,” we think first of a household consisting of a married couple and their minor children. Our image of “family life” foregrounds home life, both genders, the spousal relation, and children. I wonder whether in Confucius’ milieu the Chinese lineage might have been envisioned mainly as a network of men spanning multiple generations and households (or a chain of progenitors, one per generation), not foregrounding intimate home life, both genders, the spousal relation, or children.

suggestion that the people involved are literal brothers²—though the terms can be pushed in that direction, as happens to them in translations of *Analects* 1.2 because people want brief language for a (younger) brother’s virtue, and, I suspect, happened to *tì* in the 300s BCE for similar reasons.

An obstacle to investigating which pair is meant in which ancient passage, and an argument for the value of the inquiry, is that at least in the Anglophone scholarly literature other than my own blog posts, so far as I have been able to discover, no scholar has ever published a reason for reading the word *tì* in one way rather than another in any ancient passage (with one arguable exception³).

In the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Xunzi*, *Huainanzi* and *Yantielun*, the straddling pair is sometimes called *rùzéxiào chūzétì* 入則孝出則弟(悌) or *rùxiào chūtì* 入孝出弟(悌), usually in offering the straddling pair as a summary or starting-point of

² As non-virtue terms, “brotherly” and “fraternal” can simply mean pertaining to brothers, as in “brotherly enmity,” “fraternal resemblance,” “brotherly duty.” In that way they are analogous to “filial.”

Of the many citations for these virtue terms in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the vast majority are applications to non-brothers. The only exceptions are two negative applications, where someone is said *not* to be fraternal or brotherly to his brother. That is precisely what we would expect if the terms simply meant the kind of relating characteristic of ordinary brothers (not specifically of excellent brothers). Such relating between non-brothers is virtuous, and its absence between brothers is vicious. In our earliest apparent record of *tì* in the sense of subfraternity, the term is used negatively, when [the *Zuozhuan* explains](#) that the record did not refer to a man as another man’s younger brother because he did not act like one: “書曰：「鄭伯克段于鄆。」段不弟，故不言弟” (Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 11).

³ Speaking directly 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.

the Confucian Way. And as I shall show, the straddling pair is called *xiàotì* at *Mencius* 6B2, where *xiàotì* is said to be the Way of Yao and Shun, and at 1A3 and 1A7 and more.

A lengthy hyperbolic passage at *Liji: Jiyi* 30-34 uses *xiàotì* in presenting a detailed picture of elder-respect as *the* partner virtue of filial piety in a golden age.

昔者，有虞氏貴德而尚齒，夏后氏貴爵而尚齒，殷人貴富而尚齒，周人貴親而尚齒。虞夏殷周，天下之盛王也，未有遺年者。年之貴乎天下，久矣；次乎事親也。

Anciently, the sovereigns of the line of Yu honoured virtue, and highly esteemed age [齒]; the sovereigns of Xia honoured rank, and highly esteemed age; under Yin they honoured riches, and highly esteemed age; under Zhou, they honoured kinship [親], and highly esteemed age. Yu, Xia, Yin, and Zhou produced the greatest kings that have appeared under Heaven, and there was not one of them who neglected age. For long has honour been paid to years everywhere; to pay it is next to the service of parents [親].

是故朝廷同爵則尚齒。七十杖於朝，君問則席。八十不俟朝，君問則就之，而弟達乎朝廷矣。

Therefore, at court among parties of the same rank, the highest place was given to the oldest. Men of seventy years carried their staffs at the court. When the ruler questioned one of them, he made him sit on a mat. One of eighty years did not wait out the audience; when the ruler would question him he went to his house. Thus *tì* 弟 was recognized at the court.

行，肩而不并，不錯則隨。見老者，則車徒辟；斑白者不以其任行乎道路，而弟達乎道路矣。

A junior walking with one older (than himself), if they were walking shoulder to shoulder, yet it was not on the same line. If he did not keep transversely (a little behind), he followed the other. When they saw an old man, people in carriages or walking got out of his way. Men, where the white were mingling with their black hairs, did not carry burdens on the roads. Thus *tì* 弟 was recognized on the public ways.

居鄉以齒，而老窮不遺，強不犯弱，眾不暴寡，而弟達乎州巷矣。

Residents in a village [鄉] took their places according to their age, and the old and poor were not neglected, nor did the strong come into collision with the weak, or members of a numerous clan do violence to those of a smaller. Thus *tì* 弟 was recognized in the country districts and hamlets.

古之道，五十不為甸徒，頒禽隆諸長者，而弟達乎蒐狩矣。

According to the ancient rule, men of fifty years were not required to serve in hunting expeditions; and in the distribution of the game, a larger share was given to the more aged. Thus *tì* 弟 was recognized in the arrangements for the hunts.

軍旅什伍，同爵則尚齒，而弟達乎軍旅矣。

In the tens and fives of the army and its detachments, where the rank was the same, places were given according to age. Thus *tì* 弟 was recognized in the army.

孝弟發諸朝廷，行乎道路，至乎州巷，放乎蒐狩，修乎軍旅，眾以義死之，而弗敢犯也。

Xiàotì 孝弟 were displayed in the court; practiced on the road; reaching to the districts and hamlets; applied in hunting; and cultivated in the army. Everyone would have died for them under the constraint of righteousness, and not dared to violate them.⁴

Roughly the same passage appears in isolation at [Kongzi jiayu 41.25](#) as a speech by Confucius to Duke Ding.⁵

We might get a partial glimpse of how the people around Confucius understood elder-respect from the passages in the *Analects* that seem to mention norms of elder-respect otherwise than with the word *tì*. To illustrate a limited

⁴ The English is from Legge as at [c;text.org](#), slightly modified. This passage is a highly structured whole, followed by more detailed presentations of some of its points. It is not accompanied by a similarly organized presentation of filial piety in the various arenas (though material earlier in the *Jiyi* touches on some of the suggested points).

⁵ Bruya & Li 2026, p. 455f., translating *xiàotì* here as “respect for elders inside and outside the family.”

and impersonal view of filial piety, Confucius at *Analects* 2.8 speaks of serving elders first (though he does not say that “serving elders first” is limited to serving parents before their offspring).⁶ At 5.26 Confucius speaks of his wish to give rest to the aged. *Analects* 7.29 says that Confucius’ disciples were concerned that a teen was too young to be given an audience, though Confucius disagreed. *Analects* 9.10 remarks that Confucius would express formal respect for a stranger’s mourning attire even if the stranger were younger than he; the idea might have been that while anyone would bow to seniority, Confucius would bow also to mourning. *Analects* 10.13 says, “When attending the village drinking ceremonies, he would leave only after the elderly people had left.”⁷ At 11.26, among close non-kin companions, the way Confucius encourages his disciples to speak their minds is by inviting them to disregard the fact that he is “one day older” than they. (Here the reference to seniority is no doubt partly a modest way of alluding to other grounds of respectful restraint, but the remark is suggestive about elder-respect nonetheless.) At 14.44, Confucius criticizes a precocious young man for taking a place among elders on a public occasion. In a late book, at 18.7, Zilu refers to proper relations between parents and offspring as an example of the proper relations between old and young (長幼之節).

The straddling pair is a conceptually simple and naturally obvious candidate for the root of general virtue, as it is easy to see respectful deference in our interactions with elders at home and abroad as the beginning and lifelong

⁶ Dasan comments on this passage, “Principally, in a gathering of the young and the old, the lower-standing and juniors usually undertake the toil when there is work to be done, and when there are wine and food, what is to be offered to superiors and elders is usually set before them earlier. This is one of the constant rituals in villages” (H. Kim 2016, p. 102f.).

⁷ Slingerland 2003, p. 105, where the note says, “Waiting to leave until one’s elders have left is a basic dictate of ritual propriety.”

core of any man's respect for his lineage and broad community and their traditions, especially in a society that does not rely heavily on written communication and broadcast. Each virtue in this pair would make a distinct and important contribution to general virtue. Ancient texts stress the impartiality of respect for seniority—its independence of family and other personal relationships—and its effectiveness in promoting peace and protecting the vulnerable. There are signs that after Youzi the halves of the straddling pair were sometimes associated respectively with affect and impartiality, inner and outer, and *rén* 仁 and *yì* 義.

Of the two familiar pairs called *xiào* and *tì*, the pair that is better known to scholars today is the lineage pair: filial and subfraternal piety (as I shall call it).⁸

A problem with the idea that the lineage pair is the key support of the Way is that this pair seems ill-suited to keep a man caring about, obeying, or learning from people outside his nuclear family or lineage, unless by luck such an outward-looking orientation happens to be in his lineage tradition.⁹

⁸ This pair is not what *Shangshu: Kang Gao* 9 is alluding to when it disparages men who are “unfilial and unbrotherly” (*búxiào bùyǒu* 不孝不友), for the text goes on to say that it has in mind the vices of the four positions of father, son, and elder and younger brother, using the term *yǒu* 友 specifically for the virtue of an older brother toward a younger.

⁹ Confucius seems to put a time limit on that kind of effect at 1.11 and 4.20.

A virtue that had earlier been called *xiào* did draw attention to the broader community, because this *xiào* included devotion to leaders of the broader community.

Elementary guided practice in human interaction such as a child needs can support involvement in the broader community, and one might imagine that a main value of filial and subfraternal piety in view at *Analects* 1.2 is such elementary guided practice for children. But anyone old enough to be *xiào* in the eyes of the *Analects* thinkers, or to be a *jūnzi* working on anything, should be past needing elementary guided practice in human interaction, and may have better ways to get it than with parents (who may be deceased) or an older brother (who might live elsewhere if he exists at all).

The idea that early Confucianism saw the root as the lineage pair is also a poor fit with the recently popular idea that early Confucianism saw family virtue in general as the root of *rén*, i.e. as the key support for the general practice that is the Way of the *jūnzi*. The family root reading of *Analects* 1.2 may derive some of its attractiveness today from the modern commonplace that the origin of character is in childhood family experience. But the statement at *Analects* 1.2 is not about childhood and not really about origins.¹⁰ It is mainly an argument recommending that men not shortchange *xiàotì* in pursuit of higher ends. Further, the lineage pair is a strikingly unrepresentative sample of men's family virtues (even if sisters don't count). Omitted are the virtue of an *older* brother, which might naturally be thought a better match for leadership; and the virtue of a *parent*, which is the obvious model for being a metaphorical father and mother to the people. The omission of the virtues of a parent and *spouse* suggests a focus far less on men's *family* life (as that term is actually understood in English) than on the lineage or clan as a network of men. The focal image associated with the English countable noun "family" is a household community comprising a couple and their minor children. The filial and sibling relations of adults are not located within that core community.

Calling a pair of virtues the root of greatness is a way to exalt or commend them. But positive mention of the lineage pair in an early text need not suggest the view that they are the root of anything. For there was an obvious reason to exalt and commend the lineage pair *specifically*, quite apart from the far less obvious idea that the lineage pair might be the root of virtue. To simplify a bit: if

¹⁰ See the Appendix for a defense of this claim. Also the modern commonplace emphasizes not so much the effect of the child's family practices, but rather the effect of the practices of other family parties toward and around the child, a topic not alluded to in *Analects* 1.2.

all sons defer to their fathers, and (within that constraint) all younger brothers defer to their older brothers, then the hierarchy of men within each clan and lineage is in good order, and smooth succession to high office is assured. Filial and subfraternal piety each make a distinct key contribution to this end. This reason for pairing just those two virtues would have been obvious.

The norm of subfraternity made the oldest brother the head of every set of brothers, and harmonized with the traditional preference for first sons as heads also of lineages, of clans, and of states. Hence a Ru who endorsed subfraternal deference, and who agreed with Confucius and prior tradition that the virtue of the rulers is the key to social order,¹¹ would be concerned especially for the virtue of men who had no older brothers. The paragons Shun, Wen and Taibo were such men. The more important subfraternity is thought to be as a virtue and a model for wider order, the more problematic is the idea that being a good younger brother is part of the root of virtue for leadership.

Among the Ru in that milieu, what would it be like to *introduce* the idea that being some man's good younger brother is essential to the comprehensive virtue a leader needs? It would appear that that is what happened if *xiàotì* at *Analects* 1.2 is the lineage pair. For a Ru traditionalist to introduce that idea would have been a little like a conservative announcing in 1950s New York, "Being a good leader depends on being a good wife." Such a saying could have been an attention-getting catchphrase, to be explained by pointing to the things a man can do that are similar to what a good wife does; but discussion of the saying would have emphasized this asterisk. Few at first would imagine taking the words straight. The ancient Ru's new claim, taken seriously, would have been a strange innovation, unmistakably iconoclastic, dangerous to the peace,

¹¹ For a defense of this reading of Confucius against a common reading of *Analects* 2.21, see Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," pp. 98-106.

disparaging of many of the leaders or heirs apparent a Ruist would hope to work for, discouraging to some potential trainees, and a stumbling-block even for the project of respecting one's oldest brother. Even to *seem* to say such a thing would be unwise—until the claim was already part of the consensus doctrine, for we tend to be very uncritical of consensus doctrines and hallowed words, resisting doubts on principle. How many scholars over the years have mentioned this problem about the statement at 1.2. understood in the traditional way?

I suspect that the idea that the root is the lineage pair was never first proposed; rather it oozed into the tradition and into the statement after the word *tì* began to be used also for subfraternity. Reinterpretation of Youzi's claim could have been aided by inattention to the distinction between commending the lineage pair and calling it the root, and by disagreements and discontinuities in the Ruist tradition (recall the recurring tension reported between Zengzi and Youzi) and the destruction of most Ruist intellectual and textual capital with the reunification of China.

A very few ancient texts seem to try and fail to explain how subfraternity is an apt partner for filial piety in the root. Others simply drop *tì* from the root they announce. Today's Anglophone scholars almost never try to say how subfraternity could be or seem to be the apt partner for filial piety. Indeed, as we shall see, today's Anglophone scholars seem very uncomfortable with the idea that being a good younger brother (or younger sibling) is mentioned at all in *Analects* 1.2. The vast majority of scholars seem to prefer to misreport Youzi's proposed root as filial piety, and/or to misreport the second half of Youzi's root as a different virtue, one with strong connotations of equality rather than rank order, without defending or even acknowledging either alteration.¹²

¹² For details see Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," pp. 6-16.

One might easily overestimate how many positive ancient mentions of the lineage pair reflect a view that the lineage pair is the root rather than a view that the lineage pair is important for the good order of society. Additionally, one might easily overestimate the relative frequency with which early texts mention the lineage pair at all. Early texts sometimes mention *xiào* and *tì* without explanation, or explain the pair in vague or ambiguous terms. Where the only contextual cues are obvious strong signals that the lineage pair is not meant (as is always the case in the *Analects*), scholars often read the lineage pair anyway, as we shall see, without any apparent recognition that there might be an interpretive question.

Part II below argues that the **Confucius** of the *Analects* always uses the word *tì* to refer to respect for elders outside the family, twice presenting *tì* in that sense as a partner virtue of *xiào*. Then, turning from word usage to substance, Part II goes on to argue, on the basis of the whole mass of Confucius materials in the *Analects*, that Confucius as presented in the *Analects* is closer to regarding the straddling pair as the root rather than the lineage pair.

Part III looks at the statement attributed to **Youzi** at *Analects* 1.2, and argues on a variety of grounds that *xiàotì* as originally understood there was the straddling pair.

Part IV argues that when the **Mencius** pairs *xiào* and *tì*, what is meant is at least usually the straddling pair; and then argues that on the whole the *Mencius* prefers the idea that the root is the straddling pair, not the lineage pair.

II. The Confucius of the *Analects*

A. How Confucius means *tì* and means the pair

Outside the statement attributed to Youzi at *Analects* 1.2, the term *tì* appears in three passages in the *Analects*, always in statements attributed to Confucius. Two of the three passages present *tì* as the partner virtue of *xiào*.

***Analects* 1.6**

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。」

The Master said, “My young fellows: when at home, be filial, and when going out, be respectful to elders. Be earnest and trustworthy, love the multitude broadly, and seek close association with those who are human-hearted. If you still have energy left after behaving in such a way, use it to study culture (wen 文).”¹³

Many or most scholars understand *tì* at *Analects* 1.6 as respect for elders,¹⁴ though many do not.¹⁵ The interpretive question is not discussed.

¹³ Ni 2017, p. 83.

¹⁴ In translations of the *Analects*: Chin 2014, p. 4; Cline 2026, p. 17; Eno 2015, p. 2; Legge 1971, p. 5; Leys 1997, p. 4; Ni 2017, p. 83; Slingerland 2003, p. 3; Soothill 1910, p. 127; Tsai & Bruya 2018, p. 60; Waley 1938, p. 84. In other scholarly works: Ames 2011, p. 162; Ames 2023, p. 142; Fan 2010, p. 96; Foust 2008, p. 154; Y. Huang 2025, p. 169; C. Li 2023, p. 98; Rosemont 2014, p. 20;

¹⁵ Irene Bloom has simply “respectful” at De Bary & Bloom eds. 1999, p. 45. “Deferential” is given at Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 72, Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 24; and “courteous” at Goldin 2005a, p. 46. →

Analects 13.20

子貢問曰：「何如斯可謂之士矣？」

子曰：「行己有恥，使於四方，不辱君命，可謂士矣。」

曰：「敢問其次。」

曰：「宗族稱孝焉，鄉黨稱弟焉。」 ...

Zigong asked, “What does a person have to be like before he could be called a true scholar-official?”

The Master said, “Conducting himself with a sense of shame, and not dishonoring his ruler’s mandate when sent abroad as a diplomat—such a person could be called a scholar-official.”

“May I ask what the next best type of person is like?”

“His lineage and clan consider him filial, and his fellow villagers consider him respectful to his elders.” ...¹⁶

Roberts 2020 has “treat each man as an older brother” (p. 26).

Bruya & Li 2026 has “be ... the good younger brother” (p. 105). The translation is “fraternal” at Chai & Chai eds. 1965, p. 44 and Chen 2019, p. 162, and “brotherly” at Watson 2007, p. 16. James Ware has “fraternal duty” and omits to translate *rù* 入 and *chū* 出 (Ware 1955, p. 22). Chichung Huang has “obedient to their elder brothers abroad,” with a note: “‘Abroad’ here implies ‘at school’” (C. Huang 1997, p.48). E. Bruce and Taeko Brooks translate *tì* in this passage as “fraternal” and note an oddity: “Here *both* members of the *rù/chù* 入/出 home/away dichotomy are limited to the family virtues of 1:2, respect for parents and deference to older brothers.” They do not suggest that there might be a doubt about whether the term here means subfraternity (Brooks & Brooks 1998, p. 146). In defense of the subfraternity reading at 1.6 one might cite a couplet from *Maoshi* 164.4, though the argument has not been made:

兄弟闖于牆、 Brothers may quarrel inside the walls,

外禦其務。 But they will oppose insult from without. (Legge at ctext.org.)

¹⁶ Slingerland 2003, p. 148.

Many translators render *tì* at 13.20 as respect for elders,¹⁷ and many do not.¹⁸ The interpretive question is not discussed.

Can we confirm that elder-respect is what is meant by *tì* at *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20?

At *Analects* 1.6, Confucius uses ***rù/chū*** to pair *xiào* and *tì*. So we should look for other early passages that use *rù/chū* to pair *xiào* and *tì*, to see what they mean. There are a number of such passages (see p. 51f. below). Coming after Youzi, each presents the straddling pair as a starting-point or summary of the Way, as we shall see. But what we do not find in any of these passages is a salient clue, beyond *rù/chū* itself, about the nature of the non-kin virtue they are calling *tì*. That absence suggests that people were expected to know what non-kin virtue called *tì* was standardly paired with *xiào*, but it does not confirm that the non-kin virtue was elder-respect.

At *Analects* 13.20, Confucius associates *tì* especially with **village life** as opposed to lineage life. So we should look at other early texts to see whether village life as distinct from home life is generally associated with elder-respect. And indeed it is.

- In two passages in *Guoyu: Qiyū 2f.*, balanced phrases present respect for seniority (長悌) in villages and districts (*xiānglǐ* 鄉里) as the partner

¹⁷ Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 168; Chai & Chai eds. 1965, p. 34; Cline 2026, pp. 32, 132; Couvreur 1895, p. 217; Eno 2015, p. 70; Leys 1997, p. 64; Ni 2016, p. 109; Ni 2017, p. 313; Radice 2017, p. 191; Slingerland 2003, p. 148; Waley 1938, p. 176.

¹⁸ Hongkyung Kim renders the term here simply as “respectful”: H. Kim 2021, p. 209. Other scholars render it as “respectful young man” (Lau 1979, p. 121) or “fine young men” (Chin 2014, p. 210). The Lau/Chin reading implies, problematically, that *shì* were in general young. The elder-respect reading does not.

Others appear read it as subfraternity: Brooks & Brooks 1998, p. 103 (“his county council esteems him as fraternal to them”); Hinton 1998a, p. 145; C. Huang 1997, p. 137; Legge 1971, p. 271; Pines 2017, p. 170; Roberts 2020, p. 109; Soothill 1910, p. 635; Ware 1955, p. 86; Watson 2007, p. 92.

virtue of filial piety toward parents. The *Guanzi* has roughly the same pair of passages, but with “長弟” rather than “長悌”.¹⁹

- *Mencius 2B2* picks out villages (*xiāngdǎng* 鄉黨) as the arena where the greatest respect goes to age (*chǐ* 齒).²⁰
- *Xunzi 6* picks out scrupulous respect for age difference (*xiū zhǎngyòu zhi yì* 脩長幼之義) as the salient virtue for encountering fellow villagers (*yùxiāng* 遇鄉).²¹
- Both *Xunzi 20*²² and *Liji:Yueji 48* pick out *xiānglǐ* 鄉里 and *zúzhǎng* 族長 as the contexts for harmony between old and young (*zhǎngshào ... héshùn* 長少...和順), citing the home (*guānménzhīnèi* 閨門之內) as the arena for harmony between father and son and between older and younger brothers.
- *Liji: Jingjie 6* lists four arenas of interaction and their distinctive virtues, saying that the household is the arena for good relations between father and son and between brothers, while villages and districts (*xiānglǐ* 鄉里)

¹⁹ *Guanzi: Xiao kuang* 5f.; Rickett 2001, pp. 331, 333 (but translating “長弟” as “provide leadership for the young”).

²⁰ 天下有達尊三：爵一，齒一，德一。朝廷莫如爵，鄉黨莫如齒...。
In the kingdom there are three things universally acknowledged to be honourable. Nobility is one of them; age is one of them; virtue is one of them. In courts, nobility holds the first place of the three; in villages, age holds the first place. (Legge at ctext.org.)

²¹ Knoblock 1988, p. 227.

²² 閨門之內，父子兄弟同聽之，則莫不和親；鄉里族長之中，長少同聽之，則莫不和順
When it [music] is performed within the home and father and sons, elder and younger brothers listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously affectionate. And when it is performed in the village, and old and young people listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously cooperative. (Hutton 2014, p. 218)

are the arena for good order between older and younger (*zhǎngyòu yǒu xù* 長幼有序).

- *Liji: Jingjie 7 and 8* and *Liji:Sheyi 1* make that point with specific reference to village drinking ceremonies, in which people drank in age order.
- *Liji: Guanyi 2* says that a newly capped man will pay his respects to his mother and brothers, his ruler and high officers, and the elders of his village (*xiāng xiānshēng* 鄉先生).

Further, there are passages in the *Mozi* and the *Liji* echoing **both** the *rù/chū* of *Analects* 1.6 and the villages of *Analects* 13.20 to pair family virtues at home with elder-respect in the villages. *Mozi 9 (Honoring the Worthy 中)* uses *rù/chū* to partner appropriate parent-offspring relations at home with appropriate elder-younger relations (長弟 or 弟長) in the villages and districts.²³

... 入則不慈孝父母，出則不長弟鄉里 ...

...at home not kind or filial to their parents, abroad not respecting age-order in the village or district....

Mozi 35 (Against Fatalism 上) does the same.

...入則孝慈於親戚，出則弟長於鄉里 ...

...at home filial and kind to their close kin, and abroad respecting age-order in the village or district....

...入則不慈孝於親戚，出則不弟長於鄉里 ...

... at home not filial or caring to their close kin, and abroad not respecting age-order in the village or district. ...

Similarly, a passage in *Liji: Xiangyinjiuyi* 8 uses *rù/chū* to say that honoring elders and nourishing the old at the village ceremony teaches people to be filial and subfraternal (*xiàotì*) at home—and that this matched set of home and village virtues constitutes complete education and thus puts the empire at peace.

鄉飲酒之禮：六十者坐，五十者立侍，以聽政役，所以明尊長也。六十者三豆，七十者四豆，八十者五豆，九十者六豆，所以明養老也。民知尊長養老，而後乃能入孝弟。民入孝弟，出尊長養老，而後成教，成教而後國可安也。

At the ceremony of drinking in the country districts [鄉], those who were sixty years old sat, and those who were (only fifty) stood, and were in waiting to receive any orders and perform any services - thus illustrating the honour which should be paid to elders. Before those who were sixty, three dishes were placed; before those of seventy, four; before those of eighty, five; before those of ninety, six - thus illustrating how the aged should be cherished and nourished. When the people knew to honour their elders and nourish their aged, then at home they could practise filial piety and *tì*. When the people at home were filial and fraternal, and abroad honored elders and nourished the elderly, then their education was complete, and this led to the peace and tranquillity of the state.²⁴

(James Legge translates *tì* here as “fraternal duty.”)

In further support of the idea that elder-respect was familiarly taken as a comparable associate of filial piety, it might be fair to adduce ancient passages

²⁴ Translation based on Legge at ctext.org.

that seem to present filial piety and general elder-respect as the first two on a short list of virtues to be displayed in ritual by the sovereign (who was likely to be incapable of subfraternity). While *tì* in this context clearly means elder-respect, scholars misread it as subfraternity. One such passage is in *Liji: Ji yi* 35f., from just after the long account of *tì* as elder-respect quoted on p. 4f. above, here with English from Legge's translation at ctext.org.

祀乎明堂，所以教諸侯之孝也；食三老五更於大學，所以教諸侯之弟也。...

食三老五更於大學，天子袒而割牲，執醬而饋，執爵而醕，冕而總干，所以教諸侯之弟也。是故，鄉里有齒，而老窮不遺，強不犯弱，眾不暴寡，此由大學來者也。

The sacrifice in the Hall of Distinction served to inculcate filial duty on the feudal lords; the feasting of the three classes of the old and five classes of the experienced in the Great college served to inculcate *tì* on those princes; ...

When feasting the three classes of the old and five classes of the experienced, the son of Heaven bared his arm, cut up the bodies of the victims, and handed round the condiments; he also presented the cup with which they rinsed their mouths, wearing the square-topped cap, and carrying a shield. It was thus he inculcated *tì* on the princes. It was thus that in the country and villages [鄉里] regard was paid to age, that the old and poor were not neglected, that the strong did not attack the weak, and that the members of a numerous clan did not oppress those of a smaller - these things came from the Great college.

(Legge translates *tì* here as “brotherly submission.”) The conclusion of *Liji: Yuè jì* 44 is closely similar. An apparently related passage appears at *Da Dai Liji: Baofu*:

帝入東學，上親而貴仁，則親疏有序，如恩相及矣。帝入南學，上齒而貴信，則長幼有差，如民不誣矣...

When the [young] sovereign enters the eastern academy and [learns to] honor his parents and value humanity, there will be order between close and distant relations and they will treat each other with kindness; when the sovereign enters the southern academy and [learns to] honor elders and value trust, there will be differentiation between young and old and the people will not be dishonest . . .²⁵

(The western and southern academies are said to be for honoring virtue and noble birth, respectively.)

Scott Cook points to the passages quoted above as potentially illuminating about the following passage in the Guodian bamboo manuscript *Táng Yú zhī dào* (“The Way of Yao and Shun”).

夫聖人上事天，效（教）民又（有）尊也；下事隍（地），效（教）民又（有）新（親）也。皆（時）事山川，效（教）民（4）又（有）敬也；²²新（親）事且（祖）禩（廟），效（教）民孝也。大（太）教（學）²³之中，天子翠（親）齒，效（教）民弟（悌）也。²⁴先聖（5）牙（與）²⁵後耶（聖）²⁶，考²⁷後而遘（歸）²⁸先²⁹，效（教）民大川（順）³⁰之道也。

For the sages, above, served Heaven, so as to teach the people to hold reverence, and below, they served Earth, so as to teach the people to hold affinity. They seasonally served the mountains and rivers, so as to teach the people to hold respect, and they personally served the ancestral temple, so as to teach the people to be filial. In the academies of higher learning, the Son of Heaven [honored] close relations and elders, so as to teach the people to be *tì*; and toward the former and latter sages, he examined [the practices of] the latter

²⁵ Cook 2012, p. 548f. n. 24.

but paid allegiance to the former, so as to teach the people the way of great accord.²⁶

Though one of the two title sage emperors had no older brother, Cook translates *tì* here as “brotherly,”²⁷ perhaps influenced by the clause “天子親齒” read as “the Son of Heaven [honored] close relations and elders.” For one’s older brothers (if any) are among one’s close relations and elders, albeit perhaps the youngest of one’s close kin elders. But I propose amending “天子親齒” differently, reading “the Son of Heaven personally [served] elders.”²⁸ This reading brings the description of the fifth activity into closer parallel with the previous four descriptions, especially the immediately preceding one. And it fits the hands-on service of elders in the Great College described in the passage quoted above from *Liji: Biāoji* 35f.

On this amended reading of “天子親齒,” it becomes even more natural to read *tì* in the passage as elder-respect, a virtue both title sages could practice.

²⁶ Cook 2012, pp. 548 ff. Footnote numbers in the Chinese text refer to Cook’s footnotes, not mine.

²⁷ As my reader is aware, the word *tì* is usually translated into English in a way that is uncontroversially false to the term in that the chosen English does not distinguish younger from older brothers. For discussion see Haines 2026, “Blind Spots,” p. 12f.

²⁸ (Or, without amendment, “The Son of Heaven familial age.”)

An argument for Cook’s reading is that the first four activities on the list of six are services by the “sages,” i.e. the sage emperors, described in tightly parallel syntax. The fifth and sixth are activities by the “Son of Heaven.” By inserting “honored” in the fifth, Cook makes the fifth possibly mention looking up to two kinds of person, as the sixth does.

Schimmelpfennig 2019 takes a different approach to *tiānzǐ qīn chǐ* 天子親齒, translating it as “they treat the son of heaven’s immediate family members according to their age” (p. 98). This reading departs from the otherwise regular verb+object syntax of the phrases in analogous positions elsewhere in the passage.

On this reading the sovereign teaches elder-respect by displaying elder-respect in the Great College, just as at *Liji: Jiji* 35f. and *Liji: Yuèjì* 44.

While it is clear elsewhere in the *Táng Yú zhī dào* that that work regards the main partner of *xiào* as honoring the worthy, not as respecting one's elders, still the work also seems to regard respecting one's elders as an analog and associate of filial piety, as in the following passage.

古者堯之與（舉）⁶²舜也：昏（聞）舜孝，智（知）其能菑（養）天下（22）之老也；昏（聞）舜弟（悌），智（知）其能幻（事）⁶³天下之長也；昏（聞）舜茲（慈）⁶⁴虐（乎）弟，【智（知）其能王天下而】⁶⁵（23）為民室（主）也。

In ancient times, Yao's promotion of Shun was thus: he heard of Shun's filial piety, and knew he would be able to nurture the elderly of the world; he heard of Shun's *tì*, and knew he would be able to serve the elders of the world; he heard of Shun's affection for his younger brother, [and knew he would be able to rule the world (?) and] serve as sovereign to the people.²⁹

We must read *tì* here as “elder-respect,” rather than with Cook as “brotherliness,” for Shun was not a younger brother.

In sum, it seems clear enough that at *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20, Confucius is using the terms *xiào* and *tì* to refer to filial piety at home and elder-respect abroad. Let us turn now to the third and last passage where Confucius uses *tì*.

Analects 14.43

原壤夷俟。子曰：「幼而不孫弟，長而無述焉，老而不死，是為賊！」以杖叩其脛。

²⁹ Cook 2012, p. 555f.

Yuan Rang sat casually, with his legs sprawled out, waiting for Confucius. On seeing him, the Master remarked, “A young man devoid of humility and respect for his elders will grow into an adult who contributes nothing to his community. Growing older and older without the dignity to pass away, he becomes a burden on society.” He then rapped him on the shin with his staff.³⁰

Many scholars seem to read *tì* in this passage as a rough synonym for *xùn*.³¹ Others read it as respect for elders.³² For a young man, the distinction between being humbly respectful in general and being humbly respectful to elders would have been subtle. (Two scholars read *tì* here as subfraternity,³³ and one reads it as superfraternity.)

Scholars disagree about whether Yuan Rang is young or old here.³⁴ But surely he must be youngish, no matter which way we take the compound *xùntì*. Rapping an old man on the shin, trashing his life and rebuking him for not being

³⁰ Slingerland 2003, p. 172.

³¹ Chai & Chai eds. 1965, p. 63; Chin 2014, p. 246; C. Huang 1997, p. 150; H. Kim 2023, p. 118; Lau 1979, p. 131; Legge 1971, p. 293; Soothill 1910, p. 713; Ware 1955, p. 97; Watson 2007, p. 103.

³² Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 182; Cline 2026, p. 19; Couvreur 1895, p. 112; Eno 2015, p. 81; Ni 2017, p. 349; Slingerland 2003, p. 172; Waley 1938, p. 192.

³³ Brooks & Brooks, p. 169. E. Bruce and Taeko Brooks read *xùn* at 14.43 and 15.18 (but not elsewhere in the *Analects*) as “lineal,” by which they appear to mean the role virtue of a descendant as such, making *xùntì* an approximation of *xiàotì*. But they offer no reason, other scholars do not share the view, and I have not found another passage where that might be a plausible reading of *xùn*.

I have not found the compound *xùntì* in any other text, in any of the four possible combinations of graphs. Elsewhere in the *Analects*, *xùn* appears in a remark attributed to Zigong at 17.24, and in remarks attributed to Confucius at 7.36, 14.3, 15.18, and 17.25. Throughout, the reference is pretty clearly not to family relations.

³⁴ He is taken to be old by Huang Kan and Zhu Xi (Slingerland 2003, p. 172), and at Legge 1971, p. 156; Soothill 1910, pp. 710ff.; Watson 2007, p. 103; Chin 2014, p. 245; and Ni 2017, p. 349.

dead would be ugly and unproductive. Hence we should read Confucius' list of ills at three ages, with Slingerland, as an admonitory warning, a conditional suggesting a causal connection. (Compare the current NPR solicitation slogan, "Fund around and find out.") A further consideration in favor of Yuan Rang's youth here is that his posture in waiting is the only context offered for Confucius' words. As a plain instance of disrespect, that posture would call for remark, especially if Yuan Rang is young (and younger than Confucius). But if Yuan Rang is old here, then the story is that Confucius has long known the man and thought ill of him but was planning to meet with him anyway, and now calls him a pest (rather than merely cautioning him on how to avoid that eventuality) not on the grounds of his posture so much as his whole life up to that point, which the narrator has not reported; and we have less reason to think that Confucius was suggesting a causal connection between disrespect in youth and being a pest in old age.

A slight indication that the compilers regarded Yuan Rang as young at 14.43 is that this passage is adjacent to another in which Confucius comments about a young man's disrespect for elders, in village life.

Analects 14.44

闕黨童子將命。或問之曰：「益者與？」子曰：「吾見其居於位也，見其與先生並行也。非求益者也，欲速成者也。」

A youth from the Que village would carry messages for the Master. Someone asked Confucius, "Is he making any progress?" The Master replied, "I have seen him sitting in places reserved for his seniors, and have seen him walking side by side with his elders. This is someone intent on growing up quickly rather than on making progress."³⁵

³⁵ Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 183.

In sum, we have found that in the Confucius materials in the *Analects*, the word *tì* never means subfraternity. It means respect for elders, at least where *tì* is paired with *xiào*. In the one place where it is not paired with *xiào*, either it means elder-respect or it is a rough synonym for *xùn*. In all three passages with the term, it is used in referring specifically to respect for non-kin elders.

B. The Confucius of the *Analects* would prefer the straddling pair as an account of the root of the Way.

The discussion above canvasses Confucius' uses of the word *tì*, but does not broadly investigate his views about the root of the Way.

Looking to the larger mass of Confucius materials in the *Analects*, what can we say about whether he would have preferred the lineage pair or the straddling pair as a candidate for the root of the Way? Which theory about the root is more in line with the views of the Confucius of the *Analects*?

In fact the Confucius materials show no sign of the idea that comprehensive virtue or some cardinal virtue arises from some humbler face-to-face practice(s) by growth or extension, with the humbler virtues setting the pattern for the great virtues (causing analogous great virtues by way of the analogy).³⁶ Instead Confucius tends to picture moral progress as learning and internalizing patterns we find outside us and before us, learning the good ritual order or accommodating ourselves to the ritual order, rather as good material is easily carved or a good vine takes the shape of its trellis (see e.g. *Analects* 2.4). Moral growth is like learning a language or a sport or a job or a culture. If,

³⁶ See Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," pp. 73-89 for a partial defense of this claim.

accordingly, we say that the closest thing Confucius has to an idea of “root” virtues is virtues of humble receptivity that help us learn and internalize practices modeled or prescribed by others, then it would seem he must think the straddling pair makes a better and more obvious support for wider virtue than the lineage pair does, because elder-respect abroad listens to the wider community, not just very close kin. One’s elders in general would have much more to offer to complement filial piety than a brother who should be following one’s own father. Confucius elsewhere puts great stress on learning from the wider community’s past and absorbing its traditions, and puts great stress on humble respectfulness in general (not just toward close family).

But let us investigate what Confucius says specifically about elder-respect and about subfraternity, to see what light such statements shed on which practice he likely regards as more importantly supportive of other virtue.

1. Confucius on elder-respect as a support for other virtue

In as many as four passages in the *Analects*, Confucius arguably suggests that elder-respect outside the family is a significant support for further virtue. At **1.6** he might mean that filial piety and elder-respect are *among* the main practices of self-cultivation for a man aspiring to contribute to public life, and part of his reason might be that he thinks they support further virtue in oneself; though all he actually says in that passage is that these and other practices are more important than book learning. At **13.20** he says that the straddling pair characterizes second-best scholar-officials (*shì* 士), thus perhaps suggesting that the straddling pair supports some part of more directly governance-related excellence, though also suggesting that this pair does not guarantee general excellence. At **14.43** he seems to say that a young man’s elder-respect is an

essential factor helping him amount to something later in life. At **14.44** he says that a young man's lack of elder-respect is a sign that the man does not aim to make progress in virtue. This point suggests that elder-respect is a key factor supporting progress in general virtue. More certainly than the first two passages, these latter two suggest the view that respect for elders supports further virtue, and is in fact a key support.

Taken together, these four passages are some evidence that the Confucius character in the book thinks elder-respect is an important support for further virtue.

2. Confucius on subfraternal piety as a support for other virtue

As we shall see, the Confucius material in the *Analects* has almost nothing to say about subfraternity. Hence, after looking into what Confucius says specifically about subfraternity, we shall look into what he says about relations between brothers in general as a support for further virtue, and then what he says about the power of family virtue in general to support further virtue, and then what he says about the power of filial piety to support further virtue (which might suggest a view about the power of family virtue in general). We will find that he says less on all these topics put together than he says about the formative importance of elder-respect.

a. Confucius on subfraternal piety as a support

The Confucius of the *Analects* arguably never mentions subfraternity. There are just two remarks by Confucius that might be taken to show him

supposing that subfraternity matters somehow, at least in unusual cases: 9.16 and 11.22. But in each case he is likely not talking about subfraternity at all.

At *Analects* 9.16, Confucius can seem to suppose that subfraternity is worth doing, though he does not say why.

***Analects* 9.16**

子曰：「出則事公卿，入則事父兄，喪事不敢不勉，不為酒困，何有於我哉？」

The Master said, “To serve the Duke and his ministers at court, and to serve my elders [父兄] at home, in funerary matters not to presume to give less than my best efforts, and not to be overcome by drink—how could such things give me any trouble at all?”³⁷

If Confucius mentions subfraternity here, he calls it serving one’s older brother, given a certain reading of the term *fùxiōng* 父兄. This term sometimes means father and older brother(s). But sometimes instead it means males of one’s father’s generation in one’s patrilineage. In the *Liji* the term usually has this latter sense, as it must at e.g. *Mencius* 3A1; and there is no obstacle to this reading in either of the compound’s two occurrences in the *Analects*.

The one other place where Confucius may speak of action in connection with one’s older brother(s) is at *Analects* 11.22, where he says that a certain exceptional man should hesitate to act on new teachings while his *fùxiōng* are around. It is not certain that Confucius is recommending that the exceptional man *consult* with these relatives, but some kind of deference seems to be intended. But we are not being told of a norm ordinarily attaching to the

³⁷ Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 130.

position(s) correlative to *fùxiōng*. On the contrary: Confucius gives a more ordinary man the opposite advice.

For 9.16 and 11.22, several considerations oppose reading *fùxiōng* as father and older brother(s). First, the fact that Confucius' father died in Confucius' infancy argues against that reading for 9.16, especially in light of the separate mention of mourning in the same sentence. Second, the repeated mention at 11.22 that someone's *fùxiōng* are "around" (*zài* 在) is likely to mean that they are alive, suggesting a focus on the older generation. Recall that Confucius is doubly on record as saying that the filial duty to stick to one's father's way loses its force after the special mourning period.³⁸ We might nevertheless favor the "father and older brothers" reading of *fùxiōng* in these two passages if Confucius in the *Analects* elsewhere pairs father and older brother (or son and younger brother) in other terms, or pairs filial piety and subfraternity in any terms. But he never does.

Another two passages report that Confucius chose a husband for the daughter of his own older brother (perhaps deceased), and one of the passages implies that the groom was a safe choice³⁹ (unlike, apparently, Confucius' choice for his own daughter⁴⁰). No other passage in the *Analects* reports any activity of Confucius with or for his older brother, or reports his older brother's projects or ideals or fate or name.

That we find just these few passages among the hundreds of Confucius statements in the *Analects* does not suggest that Confucius would pick out subfraternity as one of the most important virtues for supporting broader virtue, or one of the more important virtues at all. It strongly suggests the opposite.

³⁸ *Analects* 1.11, 4.20.

³⁹ *Analects* 5.2, 11.6.

⁴⁰ *Analects* 5.1.

Confucius thinks very highly of Shun⁴¹ and Taibo,⁴² who were eldest sons.

Other statements by Confucius suggests that *if* he thinks subfraternity is important for one's other virtue, he thinks it is not so important that it cannot be wholly sacrificed for public purposes.⁴³ As Confucius understands history, Duke Huan had helped bring peaceful order to much of China using the ducal position he took from his older brother by having the man killed. Confucius' comment on Duke Huan's character is that he was straight (*zhèng* 正).⁴⁴ Confucius also says Duke Huan's great minister was right to serve him (greatly augmenting Duke Huan's power and prominence), against the objection brought separately by two disciples that the duke was a fratricide.⁴⁵ Granted, in all these

⁴¹ *Analects* 6.30, 8.18, 14.42, 15.5.

⁴² *Analects* 8.1.

⁴³ Yet another statement, at *Analects* 12.4, might reflect Confucius' views on subfraternity, but we cannot know that it does, and charity prefers not to read it that way. With Slingerland's translation:

司馬牛問君子。子曰：「君子不憂不懼。」曰：「不憂不懼，斯謂之君子已乎？」子曰：「內省不疚，夫何憂何懼？」

Sima Niu asked about the gentleman.

The Master replied, "The gentleman is free of anxiety and fear."

"Free of anxiety and fear"—is that all there is to being a gentleman?"

"If you can look inside yourself and find no faults, what cause is there for anxiety or fear?"

Slingerland 2003 (p. 126f.) points out that this Sima Niu may have been the Sima Niu whose older brother was a rebel causing trouble for Confucius and endangering the man's other older brothers. If this matter of the brothers was informing Confucius' remark, as *Analects* 12.5 may suggest, then the remark would seem to reflect a view on subfraternity, for the remark would be urging the man to be concerned about his own virtue rather than about his older brothers—as though the image of virtue that Confucius shared with his interlocutor did not integrally involve a concern for the good or goodness of any older brothers one has, such as could prompt anxiety or fear, even in a context in which concern about one's older brothers was a salient issue.

⁴⁴ *Analects* 14.15. For this term see 12.17, 13.6, and 13.13.

⁴⁵ *Analects* 14.16, 14.17; cf. 11.24. It is quite possible to think that treating one's brother well (or poorly) is a major *sign* of general character, or an asset (or handicap) for

passages Confucius never directly denies that subfraternity is a key support for general virtue. But neither does he try to explain how one could hold that view (and his view that the people tend to follow the example of the ruler's personal virtues or vices) while holding his positive view of the duke and his minister. For example, he does not impugn the character of the duke's older brother. The appearance is that it was not understood among the conversants that subfraternity stands out among other virtues as a key support for general character.

In sum, the Confucius material in the *Analects* presents Confucius as someone who would not put subfraternity high on a list of the important virtues because it is a key support for general virtue.

b. Confucius on fraternal piety as a support

There are at most two passages where Confucius might display a thought about relations between brothers in general: *Analects* 2.21 and 13.28. (There is nothing specifically about how older brothers do or should relate to younger brothers.)

At *Analects* 2.21, responding to a question, Confucius quotes with approval a brief passage from a revered text, and one of the ideas in the quotation is being a friend, or friendly, to one's brothers (*yǒu yú xiōngdì* 友于兄弟).⁴⁶ The suggestion could be the largely uncontroversial one that friendship is a good model for relations between brothers, or at least that brothers should be friendly.

leading the people on the Way, without thinking that it is a major *cause* of other aspects of character for leadership.

⁴⁶ Slingerland 2003 reads “兄弟” here as “elders and juniors” rather than brothers (p. 15), possibly a reference to colleagues in officialdom or comrades in public life.

And there at least an initial appearance that the remark's further suggestion is that this friendship or friendliness has great further importance of some kind (not alluded to elsewhere in the Confucius materials).

But we are not on solid ground in drawing from the remark any inferences about Confucius' view on brothers. For, first, brothers are mentioned here only as a possibly secondary element in a quotation.⁴⁷ More importantly, I submit, no remotely credible interpretation of Confucius' remark as presenting a genuine answer to his interlocutor (an explanation why Confucius is not in government) has ever been proposed. I argue elsewhere that we must take the remark at face value, as an intentionally transparent evasion of the question, not articulating any philosophical position, rather like today's conventional transparent evasion of the same question: "I want to spend more time with my family."⁴⁸ In any case, regarding brothers, at most the remark suggests that Confucius thought a man should be a friend to his brothers (and that this friendship would help make it unimportant that the man serve in office). That one should be a friend to one's siblings is perhaps the usual view about siblings everywhere, so it is fair to attribute that minimal view about brothers to Confucius on slight evidence or none at all, if there is no evidence to the contrary.

But much in the Confucius material in the *Analects* is out of harmony with that minimal view about brothers. The only other passage where Confucius might display a view about how brothers in general should relate to each other is **Analects 13.28**, where Confucius says that a *shì* ± "must be earnest and critical, but also affable—earnest and critical with his friends (*yōu* 友), and affable

⁴⁷ This may be the view at Brindley 2009, p. 52; Cline 2012, p. 126; Cline 2015, p. 14; Foust 2008, pp. 151, 155; Littlejohn 2011, p. 25; Ni 2017, p. 81; Radice 2017, p. 202, Shun 2002, p. 795; Sim 2009 p. 273, Suddath 2006, p. 230.

⁴⁸ For a defense of my reading of Confucius' remark as an intentionally transparent evasion, see Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," pp. 98-106.

with his brothers.”⁴⁹ The thought seems to be that unlike friends, brothers should usually paper over potential disagreements. That is to say, while public servants should be deeply *committed* to their brothers, they should not in general be as deeply *engaged* with their brothers as with a good friend. Why might Confucius or anyone think this? One reason could have been that it is important not to risk a falling-out. A related reason could have been that a brother might not happen to be a good partner in the pursuit of excellence, especially for a man going far in that pursuit. Every bit of progress raises the standard for an adequate partner,⁵⁰ and one should not have a friend (*yōu* 友) who is not up to one’s own level.⁵¹ A man cannot choose his brother, but can choose how to associate with him.

Of course these considerations do not suggest that Confucius thought there could not be virtuous brother friends. He repeatedly praises the legendary brothers Boyi and Shuqi.⁵² We learn from later sources that when their father chose the younger of them to succeed him (as was the father’s right, though normally the eldest son would succeed), the brothers’ mutual devotion was such that the younger brother rejected his father’s choice, and then the older brother rejected his younger brother’s subfraternal cession—so both brothers simply left, together. Long afterward they starved to death, refusing to eat because they disapproved of the ruler. Their story suggests many questions about family values and norms. But Confucius’ comments on the brothers do not appear to reflect any particular interest in questions about family. From the four passages about Boyi and Shuqi in the *Analects* one cannot learn that they were kin.

⁴⁹ Slingerland 2003, p. 151.

⁵⁰ *Analects* 9.30.

⁵¹ *Analects* 1.8, 9.25; 15.10, 16.4.

⁵² *Analects* 5.23, 7.15, 18.8.

In sum, Confucius as represented in the *Analects* probably held the wholly uncontroversial view that a man should be friendly with his brothers, as well as the more distinctive view that being true friends with one's brother cannot be recommended in general for men aspiring to the way of the *jūnzǐ*. True friendship with one's brother could interfere with moral progress for public life.

c. Confucius on family virtue as a support

An obvious argument that the Confucius of the *Analects* would have preferred subfraternity over elder-respect as filial piety's partner in the root is his general interest in family. It is not much disputed that **(a)** Confucius focuses on the family (or the patrilineage) as a community and on the duties of its various positions; **(b)** he sees this kinship-based community as the model for social order generally and for the state in particular; **(c)** he thinks the good order of society comes mainly from the good order of its families; and **(d)** he sees childhood family feeling as *the* natural starting-point of virtue. These points suggest that Confucius saw the family as the root—the formative and supportive model—of general virtue for political life, so that he would have preferred a root with subfraternity over a root with elder-respect abroad.

Looking especially at how scholars have promoted (one can hardly say defended) the interpretive claims (a)(b)(c)(d) about the Confucius of the *Analects*, I have argued elsewhere that there is no evidence in the text in favor of any of those claims, and there is evidence against them.⁵³

Indeed, of Confucius' 55 reports of qualities integral or incidental to the *jūnzǐ* or to *rén*, only two mention any kind of family relating, and these two are

⁵³ Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," pp. 89-120.

inapposite. One of those two uses *jūnzi* to mean ruler, saying the people will behave well *if* the ruler is good to his family.⁵⁴ The other, in a late book, casts filial piety as a natural consequence of *rén* in the narrow sense, given ordinary good behavior on the parents' part.⁵⁵

Further, as we noted in the preface, the idea that the root is family virtue in general is a poor fit with the idea that the root is the lineage pair.

d. Confucius on filial piety as a support

It might be held that while Confucius may not have focused on *family*, at least (1) Confucius saw *filial piety* as a root of general virtue, and (2) subfraternity is more like filial piety than is elder-respect. So he would probably have preferred to see subfraternity rather than a non-family virtue like elder-respect as filial piety's partner in the root.

One might challenge premise (2), that subfraternity is more like filial piety than is elder-respect. Unlike subfraternity, filial piety and elder-respect are each respect for the main elders in a main arena of life, as Confucius suggests at *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20. Unlike subfraternity, filial piety and elder-respect are virtues of positions everyone occupies. And unlike subfraternity, filial piety and elder-respect are the virtues of lower positions everyone occupies on their way to occupying the upper positions in the same relations, failing mishap.

But I shall focus here on premise (1). There is no evidence in the Confucius materials in the *Analects* that Confucius saw a man's filial piety as a main support for his general or public virtue. There is some slight evidence that he

⁵⁴ *Analects* 8.2.

⁵⁵ *Analects* 17.21.

saw a man's filial piety as somewhat supportive of other virtue, but only in connection with its partnership with elder-respect.

Confucius' remark at *Analects* 2.21 has seemed to some to say that an individual's filial and fraternal piety is fundamental to their general virtue, or that a society's filial and fraternal piety or to general social order; but again, I argue elsewhere that the remark cannot reasonably be read in that way.⁵⁶

One might suppose that the Confucius of the *Analects* shows plainly enough that he thinks filial piety is a key root of general virtue. For he describes filial piety a number of times. He is asked about it a number of times, and that fact likely reflects his own interest.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," pp. 98-106.

⁵⁷ We should not overstate how often he discusses filial piety. To explain why the term for filial piety (*xiao* 孝) "appears relatively infrequently in the *Analects* in comparison to the other terms of ethical import for Confucius," Ames and Rosemont offer the following consideration:

The textual evidence suggests that the early Confucians didn't think too long or hard about the institution of the family *qua* family either, but for very different reasons than their Western counterparts: the family is seen as so basic for human flourishing as to be self-evident, and hence not in need of detailed analysis or justification. For the Confucians, the question is not *whether* the family is necessary for human beings to develop and flourish, for it is obvious that it is, and without it, it is assumed that one does not have the means to become human. The question is rather *which* behavior models are most appropriate in a family in order for its members to develop and flourish. (Ames & Rosemont 2014, p. 36, p. 44 n. 35)

It is unclear to me how Confucius' emphasis on *which* rather than *whether* might be thought to help account for the relative scarcity of the term *xiào* 孝 in the *Analects*. It would come closer to accounting for his describing *xiào* rather than saying it is a key support for further virtue. As for the claim that the Confucius of the *Analects* found the psychologically foundational character of family obvious to his addressees, that is not something we know *a priori*. We should have and offer evidence. And we might wonder how it would have been possible for Confucius to think his disciples did not need to be

From his often describing filial piety or mentioning it and regarding it as a virtue, *how* could we infer that he regards it as a key support for general virtue, the virtue a leader needs? One bridging premise for us might be that the cultural tradition before him regarded filial piety as a key support for general virtue. But I am not sure I have encountered a scholar who relies on that premise. A scholar relying on that premise would focus on finding and presenting evidence from the tradition before Confucius, and especially on finding and presenting earlier texts where the formative value of filial piety is attributed not to the special excellence of the progenitors or their responsible conduct of high office nor to care of office as a trust, but rather in the kind of personal devotion and deference to parents that Confucius emphasizes. The scholar would show that this idea is so predominant in the tradition that we can infer Confucius' acceptance of it from his mentions of filial piety. I am not sure this point would be easy to demonstrate from earlier texts. I do not know where scholars have tried.

Another possible bridging premise to allow us to infer "Confucius saw filial piety as a key root of greatness" from "Confucius often described filial piety" is that there is no *other* reason for regarding filial piety as important.⁵⁸

But there are at least five reasons one might have for thinking Confucius would have rejected that bridging premise.

1. My reader might think (as I do not⁵⁹) that the Confucius of the *Analects* models his view of good social order on his view of good family order, i.e. the order that would be good in a family even if the family lived in isolation. If that is Confucius' view, then a main part of this model in Confucius' view is filial piety,

told that family relating is fundamental in an ongoing way, while they needed to be told to be respectful toward their parents.

⁵⁸ One scholar writes that "the Confucian reason for emphasizing familial love is that it is naturally the first step in our path toward moral expansion" (Bai 2020, p. 127).

⁵⁹ I argue against this theory at Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," pp. 89-94 and 107-115.

because that is the part he mentions. Hence Confucius must think filial piety would be very important even if families lived in isolation. Hence he cannot think its only importance is that it supports other virtue for public service or leadership.

2. The authority structure of the family, lineage and clan depended on the filial piety of the members; and filial piety in the ruling lineage helped to ensure smooth succession to state headship.

3. *Analects* 17.21 suggests that the Confucius of the *Analects* thinks an important reason for filial piety is simple gratitude. There Confucius is said to take a disciple's ungrateful impiety as an indication of lack of *rén*. Surely the natural reading is not the roundabout thought, "He lacks filial gratitude, so he lacks the psychological grounding for *rén* in the comprehensive sense, so he must not be *rén* in that sense." The natural reading is, "A decent person would have felt more gratitude than that (as a direct *effect* of decency)." And the same thought would seem to apply *a fortiori* to being good to one's living parents.

4. Confucius thinks an important good consequence of the filial piety of those involved in governing (the project for which his remarks are training his disciples to participate or advise) is that it leads the governed to behave better. At *Analects* 2.20 he says that a ruler's filial piety will increase his subjects' fidelity to him, and at 8.2 he probably says that the filial piety of a person in high position will inspire the people toward *rén*.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ A ruler's filial piety might have this effect simply because people take it as a sign of goodness. Of course we might speculate that the thought was that a ruler's filial piety will be mimicked by the people, where it will then grow into their willing obedience and *rén*. But there are four reasons to doubt that interpretation.

- It is odd to suppose that Confucius made repeated use of a roundabout argument involving a bold premise that he did not articulate.
- If Confucius held the family root view, still it is a bit much to think that Ji Kang, the addressee at 2.20, knew enough of Confucius' philosophy to hear that complex argument in Confucius' brief line. Even someone who has long studied

5. There is some inherent tension between Confucius' project with his disciples and those disciples' relations with their parents. Confucius competes with his disciples' parents for the disciples' attentions and deference,⁶¹ calling one of them his son in a thicker metaphorical way than in the address *èr sān zǐ* 二三子.⁶² Also he is willing to put at 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 them to potential death from starvation. If we think of the *Analects*

the Confucius material (and only that material) in the *Analects* has not been prompted there to suspect that Confucius held the family root view. So the passage suggests that Confucius' thought was that a ruler's filial piety wins the people in some way other than by being mimicked and then rooting general obedience, some plain way that Ji Kang would understand. Confucius might then be expressing a similar thought at 8.2 as well—especially if we do not read the subjects' *rén* at 8.2 in the most comprehensive sense.

- At *Analects* 12.19, Confucius tells Ji Kang that the people's virtue is as grass to the ruler's wind. The idea is that the people will act according to the ruler's values (as perceived by the people). By the same account the people will remain prone to turn on a dime should the ruler's values change, or should a new ruler come to power. This view of the people's character does not harmonize well with the Youzian emphasis on the internal psychological mechanics of virtue. It does not harmonize with the idea that the kind of filial piety the people would have in bending to a filial ruler is the kind that could be a strong root.
- The idea that a ruler's being good to his family would lead the people to become good to their families and therefore (by that root) *rén* seems to suppose that on the whole the people are not already good to their families, and that being good to one's family is a sufficient condition for *rén*. Whatever Confucius may have said about the shallowness of the people's filial piety, or of their idea of the meaning of the word *xiào*, it seems uncharitable to attribute to Confucius the idea that the people would perceive fine points of the ruler's filial piety (such as a reverential attitude adopted on Confucius' advice as a way to influence the people) and thus be transformed.

⁶¹ *Analects* 1.11, 4.20, 11.22

⁶² *Analects* 11.8; 11.11. Note that in the United States, especially in the south, one can use "son" as a casual term of address for a younger man, even a stranger, as the border official does in addressing Confucius' disciples at *Analects* 3.24. (I am not aware that "daughter" can be used similarly.)

as a historical record compiled by the disciples rather than a collection of abstract philosophical bits, we may speculate that Confucius' disciples may have asked him about filial piety because they felt the tension between their devotion to the charismatic father figure and their attractive or burdensome obligations to their parents. They would have remembered his answers especially well because, unlike his comments on governance, the words were immediately applicable. He may have wanted his disciples to minimize the tension because it could interfere with (or end) their training with him. He might thus have wanted to remind a disciple occasionally to *show* respect or to remember parents' ages—lessons that an ordinary young man in ordinary circumstances might not have needed—and to downplay the importance of material support. (And he may have been more concerned about that tension in connection with his more eager disciples, as suggested at 11.22.) In these ways his disciples' filial piety could have been worth his and their attention as being indirectly important to their training for public affairs, even if it did not happen to be otherwise a root of the Way.

In sum, we cannot infer from Confucius' often describing filial piety that he holds that it is a key formative support for one's other virtue.

On the basis of *Analects* 1.11 and 4.20 about following a father's way until the mourning is done, the reader might think the Confucius of the *Analects* thinks the filial piety of adults is formative in that their filial piety helps them to learn and retain important lessons from their parents, such as farming and frugality and other virtues. (This reason to think that early filial piety is formative would not be a reason to think that filial piety *remains* an essential support for great excellence.) Confucius presumably thinks filial piety gets one to learn a parent's way and try it out for a while, and he presumably thinks that most

parents' ways are good enough that trying them out is an importantly valuable learning exercise, at least for a while.⁶³ The emphasis of the remarks in question seems to be on the point that sticking to one's father's way through the mourning period is quite enough.

And as we noted earlier, adults' filial piety viewed as a channel of learning and internalization has a *salient* limitation other than time. For it offers lessons only from one's own parents and lineage, not from the whole community unless by luck. One's parents might not be paragons; they might walk only some parts of the Way. To supplement that narrowness, elder-respect abroad would be an obvious partner channel. Subfraternity would not.

Aside from the passages that speak of following one's father's way until the mourning is done (1.11 and 4.20), the *only* passages where the Confucius of the *Analects* arguably comes close to suggesting that a man's filial piety normally tends to support his further virtue are two of the four passages we canvassed above in which he might suggest that elder-respect supports further virtue: 1.6 and 13.20. Indeed they are the two passages where that suggestion about elder-respect is faintest, if it is present at all. In these two passages, *if* Confucius is suggesting that filial piety supports further virtue, he is making the same suggestion in the same breath about elder-respect. Granted, at 11.22 Confucius suggests that for an extraordinary person, deference to parents and other family elders can helpfully slow the drive to general progress so as to make that drive more effective somehow. But in the same passage he suggests that for a more ordinary person, deference to parents and family elders would not be helpful in that way.

⁶³ Further, I submit, the remark at 1.11 and 4.20 makes more sense as an assurance that one need not stick to one's father's way forever, than as an admonition to stick to it for now.

In sum, the Confucius of the *Analects* was much closer to thinking that the root of virtue is filial piety at home and elder-respect abroad than to thinking the root is filial and subfraternal piety. He is more explicit about the effect of elder-respect in supporting further virtue than about any supporting effect of subfraternity or even filial piety.

III. The Youzi of the *Analects*

A. Preface

Analects 1.2

有子曰：「其為人也孝弟，而好犯上者，鮮矣；不好犯上，而好作亂者，未之有也。君子務本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其為仁之本與！」

Youzi said, “One who in his personal life is filial and respectful of elders but likes to go against his superior is rare. One who does not like to go against his superior but likes to stir up trouble has never existed. The *jūnzī* works on the trunk. The trunk stands and the way grows. Being filial and respectful of elders is the trunk of one’s practice of *rén*, yes?”

Despite the statement’s surface emphasis on followership, I shall assume that this passage is not just about how to be a good follower. Rather, the intent is to speak of the root of the kind of comprehensive virtue that Confucius taught his followers to regard as the key to governance.⁶⁴

Many scholars translate *tì* at 1.2 as elder-respect rather than subfraternity.⁶⁵ In that sense the reading I am defending is a mainstream view;

⁶⁴ See p. 94 below.

⁶⁵ Ames 2011, p. 76; 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. D. C. Lau translates it somewhat similarly, as “obedient as a young man” (Lau 1979, p. 59; but see p. 18).

though at least some of those scholars may assume that what is meant is respect for elders inside one's family.

Most scholars take *tì* in the statement at *Analects* 1.2 to refer to subfraternity. This reading has been influential in Confucius scholarship. It puts the root within men's nuclear family relations. The passage so read has been associated with the priority of family as such, and with a vision of the root as family virtue in general, though as we have seen, the passage so read is a poor fit with that idea.

But often the string *xiàotì* is used in a context that does not clearly signal whether what is meant is the lineage pair or the straddling pair.

The great familiarity of *Analects* 1.2, read in the traditional way, has trained us all to make two hasty assumptions. The first is that the lineage pair is the default or only possible reading of *xiào* and *tì* when these are presented as a pair. Hence, as we have seen, scholars often assume that *xiào* and *tì* name the lineage pair even where the immediate context makes that reading obviously implausible (as we have seen above for many passages and we will see below for others). Such an assumption would suppress evidence that the straddling pair may have been a very familiar term in early Ruist texts. Indeed, the string *xiàotì* often appears in early texts in contexts that do not themselves clearly signal whether what is meant is the lineage pair or the straddling pair.

The second hasty assumption is that any passage that mentions the lineage pair is thinking of it as the root of virtue, rather than thinking of it as important for some other reason, e.g. because it supports lineage and clan hierarchy and smooth succession to leadership. This assumption might artificially inflate the number of passages that seem to allude to the lineage pair as the root.

Outside of *Analects* 1.2, I can find no record of the word *tì* being used to mean subfraternity before the mid- or late 300s BCE, and subfraternity seems not to be the *usual* meaning of the term until later still. But the argument of the present paper does not depend on denying that *tì* had both senses in in Youzi's day, since there are other strong and obvious reasons to prefer the elder-respect reading at *Analects* 1.2. And the elder-respect reading at 1.2 removes the only candidate instance of *tì* being used for subfraternity in any text before the 300s BCE,⁶⁶ and thus supports the case that the word did not mean subfraternity at first.

I shall offer three main arguments for the straddle reading at 1.2. **First**, many early texts after Youzi offer the straddling pair as a starting-point, root or summary of the Confucian way. **Second**, the straddle reading does a much better job of aligning 1.2 with the philosophy and terminology of the rest of the *Analects*, and in particular with the Confucius materials in the *Analects*. We have already seen the meat of this argument. **Third**, in a root of general virtue, elder-respect abroad makes a much better partner for filial piety than subfraternity does. Elder-respect draws one's attention to the broader community, and its arithmetical objectivity introduces an element of impartiality, helping to prevent conflict and protect the weakest. Ancient texts show signs of recognizing this, as we have seen. By contrast, it is hard to explain how subfraternity would be a key partner for filial piety in the root, for men who have older brothers. Some ancient texts seem to try to explain this and fail. And the earliest Confucians could not have missed the point that most of the men whose virtue was most important were congenitally incapable of subfraternity.

⁶⁶ To my knowledge the only candidate appearances of *tì* before Confucius' time are in the *Odes*, though it may not appear there at all. It is certainly not used there in the sense of subfraternity.

But before I present those three arguments, I shall take some time to address a general objection.

B. Objection and Replies

The objection is that as compared to the straddling pair, the lineage pair makes a more basic and compact root. If the straddling pair can root the Way, then along similar lines the lineage pair can root the straddling pair. The apparent psychological idea behind *Analects* 1.2 is that a way of relating to *some* people supports relating in the same way to *more* people, by growth or extension; so that the most basic explanation, the real root, involves the fewest people. Hence the lineage pair is the more elegant (simple and powerful) explanation of the Way. Therefore interpretive charity favors the subfraternity reading of *tì* at 1.2, says the objector.

Or to make the same point by an illustrative example: today's ten-year-old tree is explained by the seed it grew from, and by the one-year-old sapling it grew from, and by the nine-year-old tree it grew from. The explanatory arguments are similar. But the seed is the most simple and powerful of these explanations, as it is smaller and explains the other explanations. The nine-year-old tree is a wimpy explanation. It is not very different from the thing to be explained.

The image of a "root" suggests a starting-point, not something intermediate like the nine-year-old tree or deference to many people. For a young man, general elder-respect is a relation to countless strangers, indeed to the vast majority of adults. From such a starting point, little extending is needed to arrive at the destination: relating to the whole world in that same way.

Indeed, the subfraternity reading of *tì* at 1.2 makes the root not only smaller in terms of the number of people and quantity of activity involved, but also *conceptually* more compact, as subfraternity is *more similar* to filial piety than elder-respect is.

Replies

(1) The purpose of Youzi’s statement. For the project of interpreting *Analects* 1.2, the question which root makes for a more elegant or powerful theoretical explanation is less relevant than the question which reading better suits the apparent practical purpose of the passage.

When the *Mencius* is talking about extension, often the immediate practical purpose of the presentation is better served by a small root than a big one. For often the purpose is to encourage a morally unambitious person to aim at virtue by showing that virtue is accessible to them, or to encourage a king to have faith that the people will respond well to good treatment. Such purposes want to find beginnings that are small and easy, roots that we can assume people *already have* (or will have if we respect their basic material needs). In these discussions the prescription is about the branch: “You *have* the root; just *extend* it.”

But the practical purpose of the Youzi statements in Book 1 is the opposite. These three complex statements present four root-branch pairs⁶⁷ and say in effect, “Beware of skimping on the root to serve the branch; it won’t work.” In these discussions the prescription is about the root: “Do the root; the branch will

⁶⁷ 1.2 says *xiàotì* supports *rén*. 1.12 says a community’s ritual practice supports its harmony. 1.13 says trustworthiness supports *yì* and respectfulness supports ritual propriety.

grow.” Youzi says to morally ambitious people, “This is the root of what you want, so stay scrupulous about it. Don’t think you can take a shortcut.” The smaller and more natural a proposed root is, the more we can presume people have it, so the less that root is worth arguing for.

(2) Elder-respect. Elder-respect abroad is not just one small step short of the Way. Elder-respect does not include a highly developed abstract relationship with a world of strangers, like the comprehensive virtue *rén* 仁. Rather, elder-respect is primarily a repertoire of simple concrete kinds of interaction with whatever elders one actually encounters, especially in one’s village. The practice is not intellectually difficult (though it is nutritious for the heartmind). If the Way is exemplified in running a state well, then the Way is importantly different from mere elder-respect.

(3) Starting point. At *Analects* 1.2, the operative premise of the argument for attending to the root is not that *xiàotì* (perhaps in childhood) was the origin of the *jūnzi*’s virtue. Rather, the operative premise is forward-looking, that *xiàotì* is a key ongoing support for the *jūnzi*’s virtue. The evidence offered in 1.2 is that *xiàotì* is synchronically correlated with the absence of vices opposite to great virtue: liking to disobey and to foment disorder. The word *běn* 本 can perhaps better be translated as “stem” or “trunk,” as suggested in general by the standard contrast between *běn* and branches, and suggested in *Analects* 1.2 by the phrase *běn lì* 本立 (the trunk stands).

(4) Not “same treatment, more people.” Granted, on either of our two candidate readings of Youzi’s root, his first example, *disliking to disobey* (*bú hào fàn shàng* 不好犯上) suggests a simple vision of the root-branch relation. It suggests that the early branch is “liking to obey,” which seems to differ from the root by relating in the *same way to other people* than the root. And granted, on the “same treatment, more people” picture of how the root works, choosing one

or a few intimate people to regard as the fundamental recipients of the right treatment is a very natural idea to try out (even if the *Mencius* is sometimes willing to point not to intimate people but to a total stranger, be they babe or ox).

But “same treatment, more people” is a problematic reading of 1.2’s vision of the analogy between the Way and the root. This reading suggests that the Way is to defer to everybody, hence not to lead. Instead, the real vision at 1.2 and the other Youzi statements in Book 1 seems to be that what the root is *concretely*, the branch is more *abstractly*. The opposite of liking to disobey at 1.2 is liking to obey, but the opposite of fomenting chaos (*zuò luàn* 作亂) is making good order. A leader expresses respect and care for all by ruling them well, e.g. implementing and managing the excavation of canals, or (when such work is done) sitting facing south. That is putting others first, but more abstractly than simply obeying them or giving them one’s food.

The other Youzi statements in Book 1 follow the same pattern.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ As I argue in Haines 2008, ***Analects* 1.12** says that the community’s ritual supports the community’s harmony. Here the idea is not that something involving a few people supports the same thing with more people. Rather, the idea would seem to be that ritual is a concrete symbolic enactment of social harmony, of “small and great” doing something together. The parties to ritual are the same as the parties to the harmony it supports, and the operative similarity is *portrayal*. What is mimed by concrete symbols at the festival or in the gestures of a courteous greeting is thereby reinforced in reality, among the same people, every day of the week. **1.13** says that trustworthiness supports moral rightness, because then one’s words can be repeated. Granted, one might suppose that keeping one’s word does not involve many people; one need only keep one’s word to the people to whom one gives it. But if the statement at 1.13 was meant for men in or aspiring to public life, then keeping their word would be a way of relating to very many people. Further, the idea in the passage cannot be that rightness is being honest with even more people. It might instead have been something like the following. When we consider making a promise or announce an intention or aspiration, we should choose words that we can really mean on behalf of our present and later selves, whatever their circumstances might be. That is trustworthiness. Analogously, when we choose a watchword or maxim to champion, we should choose words that we can really mean on

(5) Explanatory adequacy. Granted, other things equal, a smaller explanans is a better explanans. But other things may not be equal. An explanans can be so small as to fail to encompass a key explanatory factor. For example, unlike a seed, a sapling helps hold the soil in place. And unlike the lineage pair, the straddling pair inherently directs one's attention to the wider community, and has other important advantages.

Further, while a seed or sapling can explain a tree, the lineage pair cannot explain the elder-respect of Shun, Wen, Taibo, nor most heads of states, of clans, of lineages, or of brothers. None of these parties could practice the lineage pair, though all could practice the straddling pair. (The remaining seven replies are wholly independent of this point.)

(6) Similarity between the parts. On its own terms an interpretive argument from maximal explanatory elegance or smallness should be unhappy with a root that is filial and subfraternal piety. For if that root would explain elder-respect, then by the same token filial piety would explain subfraternal piety; so the smallness argument thinks that on the traditional reading, the statement at 1.2 has a big and obvious increment of pointless explanatory inelegance. Youzi made a mistake when he included subfraternity in the root.

Interpretive charity should assume that there is a reason why the statement at *Analects* 1.2 proposes a root with two parts. Charity therefore

behalf of ourselves and others. That is moral rightness. The requisite skills and habits of mind are very similar, so that trustworthiness is good training for moral rightness. **1.13 also** says humble respectfulness (*gong* 恭) supports ritual propriety. Here the focus is not on a difference between the people toward whom one bears oneself respectfully and the people toward (or in company with) whom one follows ritual propriety; rather the comparison is between concretely vivid respectfulness (humble bearing and the like) and a more developed practice that enacts and supports respect more fully but in ways that are less naturally obvious.

expects to find that the parts are relevantly different, neither sufficient, and perhaps comparably important.

(7) Conceptual simplicity. Recall that scholars often sum up Youzi's "filial and subfraternal piety" as "filial piety," perhaps supposing that *xiào* can in a broad sense mean respect for family elders and thus encompass the subfraternity of men who have older brothers. Insofar as that supposition is legitimate, I argue, the root with elder-respect is simpler in concept.

Let us run through the comparison. If the root is filial and subfraternal piety (where we read "filial piety" narrowly enough that it made sense to mention subfraternity too), the concept that picks out the root pair is perhaps *deference to close family elders* (allowing some leeway for half-forgetting about women). But if the root is filial piety at home and elder-respect abroad (and if we can read "filial piety" in the broader sense as respect for family elders), then the concept that picks out the root virtues is *deference to elders* (i.e. inside and outside the family). That is arguably the simpler concept. The lineage pair is not conceptually simpler, on its face, than the straddling pair.

Let us turn now to the main positive arguments for the elder-respect reading at *Analects* 1.2.

C. Many early texts suggest the straddle reading at *Analects* 1.2.

Earlier we noted that a number of early passages use *rù/chū* to pair *xiào* and *tì*, beginning with Confucius' remark at *Analects* 1.6. Confucius does not there suggest that the pair is in any sense a root or summary of the Way.⁶⁹ But each of the later passages, coming after Youzi's time, do make that suggestion. Confucius' string appears again in *Mencius* 3B4, as a kind of summary of the merit that entitles a class of leaders to be supported by the laboring classes:

於此有人焉，入則孝，出則悌，守先王之道，以待後之學者，而不得食於子。
子何尊梓匠輪輿而輕為仁義者哉？

Here now is a man, who, at home, is filial, and abroad, respectful to his elders; who watches over the principles of the ancient kings, awaiting the rise of future learners—and yet you will refuse to support him. How is it that you give honour to the carpenter and carriage-wright, and slight him who practises benevolence and righteousness?⁷⁰

The briefer 入孝出弟 appears in *Xunzi* 29, in a context that suggests that the straddling pair is the first step on the Way.

入孝出弟，人之小行也。

Inside the home to be filial toward one's parents and outside the home to be *tì* constitute the minimal standard of human conduct.⁷¹

⁶⁹ For extended argument on this point see Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," pp. 78-86.

⁷⁰ Translation by Legge as at ctext.org.

⁷¹ The English is from Knoblock 1994, p. 251, which renders *tì* here as respect for elders. Hutton 2014 reads *tì* here as subfraternity (p. 325).

The same brief string appears in the *Huainanzi*, offered to describe the emblematic virtue of Confucius' followers.

孔子弟子七十，養徒三千人，皆入孝出悌。

Confucius's disciples numbered seventy, and they supported three thousand followers. All were filial when inside their households and *tì* when outside their households.⁷²

The same brief string appears in the *Yantielun*, where the straddling pair is taken as emblematic of goodness generally.

教之以德，齊之以禮，則民徙義而從善，莫不入孝出悌。

Teach them with kindness [德], order them with ritual, and the people will be just and good; each of them filial at home and *tì* abroad.

The still briefer two-character string *xiàotì* is elaborated as the straddling pair in [another passage](#) in the *Yantielun*, using *guīménzhīnèi* 閨門之內 / *guīménzhīwài* 閨門之外 to name the respective arenas for its two parts, though this passage does not offer *xiàotì* as standing for the whole Way or its starting point:

故富貴而無禮，不如貧賤之孝悌。閨門之內盡孝焉，閨門之外盡悌焉，朋友之道盡信焉。

Therefore, wealth and nobility without rites are not as valuable as *xiàotì* among the poor and humble. Within the household, one should fully practice *xiào*; outside the household, one must

⁷² The English here is from Major, Queen, Meyer & Roth 2010, p. 818, where *tì* is translated as “brotherly.”

completely observe *tì*; and in dealing with friends, one must uphold complete trustworthiness.⁷³

In some other early texts when the two-character string *xiàotì* is used to sum up the Way or its core, the context makes it quite clear that what is meant is the straddling pair. One example of such clarity is in *Liji: Jiyi 30-34*, where *xiàotì* is given as the expression of the two leading values of the Zhou, as we saw on p. 4f. above. Another place where it is quite clear that *xiàotì* is meant in the straddling sense is *Mencius 6B2*, where *xiàotì* is called the Way of Yao and Shun.⁷⁴

Sometimes the straddling pair described in other language is offered as a summary of the Way or of its root. An approximation of the straddling pair is said to be enough to put the world at peace at *Liji: Xiangyinjiuyi 8* (as noted on p. 17 above), and the straddling pair itself is said to be enough at *Mencius 4A11*.

孟子曰：「道在爾而求諸遠，事在易而求之難。人人親其親、長其長而天下平。」

Mencius said, “The path of duty lies in what is near, and men seek for it in what is remote. The work of duty lies in what is easy, and men seek for it in what is difficult. If each man would love his parents and show the due respect to his elders, the whole land would enjoy tranquillity.”⁷⁵

And as I shall show in the *Mencius* section, the halves of the straddling pair are in effect called the roots of *rén* and *yì* respectively at *Mencius 4A27* (as

⁷³ The English here is from ctext.org.

⁷⁴ See pp. 99-102 below.

⁷⁵ Legge 1970, p. 302.

understood by Robert Eno, David Hinton, Hongkyung Kim, David Nivison, Maija Bell Samei, and Edward Slingerland) and at 7A15 (especially as understood by Roger T. Ames, Robert Eno, David Hinton and James Ware). These are minority readings of 4A27 and 7A15, but the majority readings cannot make sense of those passages.

D. The straddle reading brings *Analects* 1.2 closer in language and philosophy to the Confucius of the *Analects*.

Toward answering a hard interpretive question about any statement attributed to an author, if we find that the wording of the statement does not easily settle the matter, we should seek aid from the other materials attributed to the same author. But of the many other statements attributed to Youzi in pre-Qin texts, none uses the word *tì* or addresses subfraternity or elder-respect, though Youzi does mention general demure respectfulness (*gōng* 恭) at *Analects* 1.13, holding in effect that it is the resembling root of ritual propriety (*lǐ* 禮). This root is not limited to the family.

Apart from early materials directly attributed to Youzi, the rest of the *Analects*, and especially the Confucius material, is presumably our most direct evidence of the views and linguistic usage prevalent in whatever milieu generated and initially preserved the statement at *Analects* 1.2.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Statements attributed to other parties in the *Analects* have a lesser likelihood of reflecting the background of the statement, though including them would make no difference to the argument here.

We have already seen that compared to the subfraternity reading, the elder-respect reading aligns the statement at 1.2 far better with the Confucius material in the *Analects*, both in language and in philosophy. Let us recap and discuss the relevance of this point to the interpretation of the Youzi and the Confucius of the *Analects*.

1. Alignment with Confucius in language.

The *Analects* is chaotic and at first quite cryptic. The only way to read the collection well is to deploy an active imagination experimentally. Now, the statement about the root of the Way sits at the beginning of the collection and suggests a key to the whole Way. It stands out for its articulate theoretical structure. So for anyone reading the *Analects* the first few times, or the first few dozen times, the obvious working assumption is that 1.2 is an illuminating introduction to the outlook of the whole collection. So whenever Confucius uses one or two of that statement's key terms, the reader may tend to imagine that he is elaborating on the thesis of 1.2, understood as focusing on filial and subfraternal piety, or perhaps the family virtues of the young. Hence, for example, scholars often read *xiào* and *tì* in 1.6 and 13.20 as the lineage pair despite clear strong signals to the contrary in the text. And they read 2.21 as being certainly informed by the view in 1.2 (on the standard reading of 1.2), even if they have no idea how to understand Confucius' argument at 2.21.

But if we had studied the Confucius materials *before* turning to the Youzi materials, I submit that it would not occur to us to doubt that *Analects* 1.2 is speaking of filial piety at home and elder-respect abroad. The context of *tì* in 1.2 is strikingly similar to the context of *tì* in its appearances in the Confucius material. The context shared with 1.6 and 13.20 is the recurring presentation of

xiào and *tì* as partner virtues. And each of Confucius' statements with *tì* has a further element of context in common with the statement at 1.2. At 13.20, the pair constitutes a certain modest level of moral accomplishment. At 1.6 the pair is listed first among the highest priorities for a student, i.e. someone aspiring to a public career. And at 14.43 a young man's *tì* (perhaps elder-respect) is offered by itself as a necessary condition of *other* excellence in the remainder of his life.⁷⁷

The naïve view, trusting the attributions in the text, is that the Youzi statements in Book 1 were composed somewhat later than the Confucius materials in the *Analects*, because Youzi was some forty years younger than Confucius and because the honorific used there for Youzi suggests that these statements came from a time when he was a master. On this trusting view (which I shall defend in a moment), Youzi and his audience would have been familiar first with the Confucius material. Since the Confucius material suggests that filial piety at home and elder-respect abroad was a familiar pair under the names *xiào* and *tì* in the milieu of the *Analects*, the Confucius material suggests that the statement at 1.2 amply signaled that it meant the straddling pair.

⁷⁷ Of course a speaker or author can explain things to their audience, and the author of the statement at 1.2 could have explained that he meant subfraternity. Or other context now lost might have made that clear at the time. But the Youzi statements in Book 1 do not read like excerpts from conversations. They read like writings, or statements meant for repeated use. They are intricately constructed little theoretical discourses. And if other statements attributed to him are any guide, Youzi was sensitive to the problem of misinterpretation out of context. For, first, [Liji: Tan Gong 75](#) reports that when Youzi was asking to be told of statements Confucius had made, Youzi rejected one report at first; and when Zengzi insisted that Confucius had said it, Youzi replied that there must have been a special context. And, second, his statement at *Analects* 1.13 associates trustworthiness and rightness with using words that can be *repeated*, a point that argues against the kind of practice reported at 11.22 and 2.5. Sticking to one's principles or sayings (unless one decides to change them) is a very important check on their content.

Granted, the *Analects* leaves open (without suggesting) the possibility that the lineage pair was also familiar under the same names at that time (though it is not singled out as a pair (in any terms) outside the *Analects* until much later). But if it too was a familiar pair under those names at the time, then Youzi's statement was simply ambiguous and therefore poorly designed.

2. Alignment with Confucius in philosophy.

The evidence that the elder-respect version of 1.2 aligns better in philosophy or viewpoint with the Confucius material is that (as we have seen) the Confucius material

- shows much more interest in elder-respect than subfraternity;
- says that elder-respect supports further virtue;
- does not suggest that subfraternity is important or supports further virtue;
- suggests the opposite; and
- suggests that non-cardinal virtues are formative mainly by being channels of receptivity to others' wisdom and lore and needs, implying that a good root would be one that channels lessons from outside as well as inside our families or lineages.

3. How much does alignment with Confucius matter?

Scholars often place great weight on the hypothesis that *Analects* 1.2 agrees with the Confucius of the *Analects*. For example, a scholar might interpret the mass of statements associated with Youzi and Confucius in the *Analects* based on the optimistic strong hypothesis that these materials constitute the main authentic *oeuvre* of a master and disciple in complete agreement. Or she

might interpret the same materials based on the conceit (born from pessimism about authenticity) that they are the work of one imaginary author. Given such a strong hypothesis (or conceit), if two rival interpretations of a statement fit the statement's words equally well, but one of the two interpretations makes the statement align better with the great mass of other statements attributed to the twins (or the one imaginary author), then we must prefer the better-aligned interpretation. And since the straddle reading at 1.2 aligns much better with the broad mass of the Youzi+Confucius materials in language and in philosophy, anyone who accepts the strong hypothesis (or conceit) should see that alignment as strong evidence for the elder-respect reading at 1.2.

Hence, while one might assume the subfraternity reading of 1.2 (as most scholars do), or one might write about the Youzi and Confucius materials without distinguishing authors (as most scholars do), one cannot reasonably do both at once.

Rather than hypothesizing that Confucius and Youzi agreed in everything, we might work from the weaker hypothesis that Youzi was trained by Confucius. This weaker hypothesis suggests that Confucius would probably have agreed with many things Youzi later said about moral development (though we see other disciples disagreeing with each other on that topic in *Analects* 19). Thus it argues that we should give special weight to the Confucius material in interpreting the Youzi material. Of course this weaker hypothesis does not imply that whatever Youzi said is something Confucius had thought of. If a trainee was interesting or thoughtful, he might have come up with some new ideas after Confucius passed, such as a vision of how the virtues Confucius valued are causally related to each other.

I do not myself accept the hypothesis that Youzi was trained by Confucius;⁷⁸ but I think there is something to be said in defense of the naïve view that the Youzi materials are authentic and somewhat later than the Confucius materials. And there is ample evidence that Youzi was closely involved with the disciples after Confucius passed (and perhaps with Ziyou before then), and some evidence that he asked them what Confucius had said.⁷⁹ And they all inhabited roughly the same time and place and had similar life projects. So I think that the *Analects* as a whole, and especially the Confucius material, is significant evidence of the linguistic and philosophical background of the statement at *Analects* 1.2.

Authenticity of the Youzi materials. First, on their face many of the reasons for skepticism about whether the *Analects* statements attributed to Confucius give Confucius' views do not apply with the same force to the Youzi statements.⁸⁰ And, second, a positive reason to think the four Youzi statements in the *Analects* are largely authentic is that both in style and in conceptual structure they are very similar to each other (and to the statement attributed to Youzi at *Mencius* 2A2), and very different from the rest of the *Analects*.⁸¹ At least the Youzi statements show strong signs of a single voice.

Authenticity of the Confucius materials. And if we can reasonably conclude that the Youzi materials are authentic, then (as I shall explain) this point gives us reason to think the Confucius materials are *earlier* than those authentic Youzi materials, which would make the Confucius materials largely

⁷⁸ See Haines 2008, *passim*. It has been announced in public debate that my arguments are only those of Jiang Boquan, whom I credit there for two of the arguments that had occurred to me independently. But I offer several more arguments in the paper.

⁷⁹ *Liji: Tangong I* 75.

⁸⁰ For a list, see Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," p. 29f.

⁸¹ See Haines 2026, "Blind Spots," p. 27f n. 45.

authentic. This reason is analogous to an important argument Paul R. Goldin has laid out on the side of the general authenticity of the material in the *Analects*.

Goldin points out that although other philosophical collections such as the “Mohist Analects” and the *Mencius* address the ideas and terms of their contemporaries and predecessors, there are many main philosophical ideas and terms from the 300s BCE that we do not find in the *Analects*, or not in its first 15 books. Hence “the weight of the evidence suggests that whoever was responsible for compiling this textbook included an overwhelming proportion of genuine material within it.”⁸² (A potential weakness of the argument is that there was time to generate inauthentic material between the disciples’ lifetimes and 400 or 350 BCE.)

Similarly, while Youzi’s contributions to Book 1 of the *Analects* could be described as focusing on the project of putting Confucius’ keywords into a theoretical framework that relates them to each other, that framework itself is a general vision of moral psychology that is not in evidence in the Confucius materials. Youzi discusses virtue always in terms of the general idea that some recognized (named) excellences of individuals or communities are key organic supports for other but analogous recognized (named) excellences of the same parties (1.2, 1.12, 1.13), presumably because of the analogies. This general root-branch idea speaks directly to a core concern of the Confucius of the *Analects*: how to have great virtue. If the Confucius of the *Analects* had held this view, he would have emphasized it; if he had heard of it he might at least have mentioned it. But the Confucius material does not display or address such a root-branch idea. This absence argues in favor of the chronological priority of the statements attributed to Confucius in the *Analects* over the statements attributed to Youzi,

⁸² Goldin 2018, p. 109.

so that the authenticity of the Youzi materials would argue for the authenticity of the Confucius materials.

These observations, like provisionally or naïvely trusting the text's own attributions of authorship, should discourage us from simply assuming that the ideas in the Youzi materials (whatever they might be) are central to the philosophical background taken for granted by the Confucius materials.

Conversely, the same observations or trust should encourage us to look at the Confucius materials in the *Analects* without reliance on the Youzi materials, to get a picture of the likely philosophical and terminological background of the Youzi materials.

But independent of debatable fine points about likely authenticity and priority is the following blunt point. When we are inquiring into whether *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 means subfraternity or elder-respect, and we do not find our answer within the passage or in other statements attributed to Youzi, then our next best source of evidence is the rest of the *Analects*, as the mass of material most likely to reflect the same milieu that generated the statement at 1.2. We should favor the reading that makes 1.2 line up better in language and in philosophy with that mass, other things equal.

E. The straddle reading makes a better statement.

Let us consider the merits of elder-respect as a complement to filial piety in a proposed root, and then the merits of subfraternity for that role.

1. Merits of elder-respect as a complement to filial piety in the root

For two reasons, we today might be unhappy about elder-respect as a rival to subfraternity for the role of filial piety's partner in the root. Elder-respect is a very small part of modern life outside the family, so we might suppose that in Youzi's day a man's elder-respect in the community engaged his heartmind less than did his respect for older brothers. And the modern liberal sensibility might not be excited about yet another line of ascriptive authority alongside lineage, clan and state.

But there is reason to think that for men pursuing the Way of the *jūnzi*, elder-respect might have engaged the heartmind more than subfraternity did. More interestingly, elder-respect was valued as adding an element of universality and impartiality to the root, and thereby protecting the weak. There is reason to think elder-respect was a force against oppression and for status mobility, and for broad social empathy and self-understanding. And we might note also that in a society without electronic media or popular use of writing, the generational transmission of culture might depend more heavily than we readily imagine on respect for elders in personal encounters.

a. How big a contribution could elder-respect make?

We might distinguish two kinds of depth of engagement in a practice pursued well. One kind of depth is when the relevant actions are woven through daily life. Another kind of depth is when the commitment involved is great but perhaps hypothetical or far from daily practice. "I would die for you."⁸³ The

⁸³ Or even: I would be good to my older brother if I had one.

former kind of depth may do more to make a relationship nourishing for character.

For a young man in or aspiring to a life in public affairs rather than mainly farming, elder-respect abroad might have been a much more regularly engaging practice than subfraternity. It would directly inform how he acted toward anyone older (and he would encounter it in how anyone younger acted toward him). Occasions for elder-respect might fill his day, even toward strangers on the street; for while elder-respect can be a component of relationships, it is also directly about how to interact with strangers where seniority is perceptible. The local ceremonies he attended may have been occasions especially for enacting elder-respect. Court life may have included formal expressions of elder-respect. And he might have had significant collegial or personal relationships with many non-family elders, especially if he agreed with Confucius that one should choose one's associates by their virtue.

By contrast, a man in public affairs might live apart from his brother or brothers, if he had any.

b. What kind of contribution could elder-respect make?

Let us ask first what elder-respect would have to offer as a complement to filial piety in a proposed rootstem of the whole of virtue. We might take our cue from Confucius' explicit balancing of home and community life when he pairs *xiào* and *tì*—a pattern we have found in many later texts as well. For if it is proposed that the root of a man's general virtue is only his devotion to his parents, or to his parents and older brothers, we might wonder how well that root would continually support his virtue for public life. After all, our family concerns and obligations do pull somewhat against other concerns and obligations. Too narrow

a focus on kinship ties might pull us all too far into separate warm hives (or “bubbles”) whose members reward and reinforce each others’ mutual commitment, undermining peaceful engagement and cooperation with other hives, and thus failing to nourish the broad and in some sense impartial social concern of the *jūnzǐ*.

But if it is proposed that the root of virtue toward all is devotion to parents and respect for elders in the community, then there is no puzzle about how that dual root would continually nourish broad social concern. A man’s general elder-respect prompts him often to pay respectful attention to people outside his family, people spanning the whole range of partisan commitments and concerns in the social arena at issue, and thus could cue him to apply outside the family even the good ways of relating he may have developed within the family. Elder-respect helps one learn the ways of one’s community, and draws one’s attention to a variety of different ways and standpoints. But there is much more to be said about the moral benefits of a community’s practice of elder-respect.

We have seen that elder-respect was especially associated with villages or neighborhoods. These would be the main contexts of most men’s personal or face-to-face engagement with people outside one’s family (or profession).

The recurring rhetorical emphasis on elder-respect toward white-haired people encountered on the roads suggests a kind of universality. No special relation or relationship need be involved—whether of kinship, friendship, or professional life. Elder-respect was not respect for age *weighted* by closeness of kinship or friendship.

Ceremonial elder-respect stressed universality more explicitly, at least within the village. A passage about the village drinking ceremony that appears in relevantly similar form in *Xunzi* 20, in *Liji: Xiangyinjiuyi* 13-15, and in *Kongzi*

jiayu 28.2,⁸⁴ suggests that the respect for age-ordering (弟長) solemnized in the ceremony was valued partly for including *every* person (in the village or non-family group), because age-ordering has a definite place for every person. Here from the *Xunzi*:

賓酬主人，主人酬介，介酬眾賓，少長以齒，終於沃洗者，焉知其能弟長而無遺也。...

貴賤明，隆殺辨，和樂而不流，弟長而無遺，安燕而不亂，此五行者，足以正身安國矣。

The guest of honor offers a toast to the host, the host offers a toast to the guests of second rank, the guests of second rank offer toasts to the rest of the guests, and the young and the seniors each drink in (205) turn according to their rank in age, ending with the servants carrying the wash water. From this I know that it is possible to treat appropriately those junior and senior without leaving anyone out [無遺]. ...

These five kinds of conduct—differentiating noble and lowly, distinguishing exalted and lesser, gathering in harmony and joy without becoming dissolute, treating appropriately junior and senior without leaving anyone out [無遺], and enjoying comfort and relaxation without becoming disorderly—these are sufficient to rectify one’s person and to settle the state.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Bruya 2026, p. 354.

⁸⁵ Hutton 2015, p. 223. The Knoblock translation has, “At the conclusion the tankard is rinsed and washed,” rather than Hutton’s “ending with the servants carrying the wash water.” But even on Hutton’s reading, the inclusion of servants is a gesture toward the idea of completeness, even if the servants were not all younger than the proper participants.

Like a checklist of people, such a ritual would encourage a comprehensive view of the community. It would also facilitate elder-respect outside of the ceremony, by regularly ensuring that all the attendees know precisely who is senior to whom.

Universality, and the unyielding objectivity of seniority order, protect the least advantaged, and not just in respect of the disadvantaging physical infirmities of age. The passages quoted earlier from the *Liji: Jiyi* each say that elder-respect supports harmony by protecting the less advantaged, even against the power of kinship.

居鄉以齒，而老窮不遺，強不犯弱，眾不暴寡，而弟達乎州巷矣。

Residents in the country [鄉] took their places according to their age, and the old and poor were not neglected [不遺], nor did the strong come into collision with the weak, or members of a numerous clan do violence to those of a smaller.⁸⁶

In this way elder-respect supports caring for people in general. If a man respects his elders as such, then he respects his elders from other families and clans, and he will learn to hesitate to act against the interest of other people who are dear to or represented by those elders, even if their kinship groups are weaker or less fortunate than his own. The drinking ceremony symbolizes fraternity independent of kinship; it is the community's declaration of intent.

It may be interesting to note in this connection that where the *Mencius* catalogues the worst-off and most vulnerable in society, saying that King Wen made them his first priority, the text classifies these parties by age and absence of close family, listing three categories of the old and one category of the young.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Quoted in context on p. 4f. above, with another passage on p. 18.

⁸⁷ [Mencius 1A5](#).

And where the *Mencius* reports the five articles agreed under Duke Huan at Kui Qiu, the third article is, “Revere the aged. Be kind to the young. Do not neglect guests and travelers.”⁸⁸

Elder-respect is well suited to be a model of orderliness, in that none of us can race ahead in that ranking, fall behind, or push others down. We rise steadily and inexorably through all the age-ranks in the community (unless we die young). We all share this path and its promise. A young person would notice this commonality at least when they *receive* their first elder-respect.

Public displays of age-ordering would thus paint a picture for everyone of the long path of our lives. In thus helping us be mindful of our long shared path, they would help us to understand others and ourselves better by helping us to envision our own past and possible futures in the people around us. Such displays may thus help us take our own futures more effectively in hand.

Hence the bigger a role is given to elder-respect in the ordering of society, the more every person has an important kind of upward mobility, and indeed upward motion. (Aristotle appeals to similar concerns in arguing that in the ideal state, the older citizens should govern and the *much* older citizens should be the priests.⁸⁹)

Analogously, filial piety is the virtue of a position on a ladder of positions through which we naturally rise. One starts as child and grandchild, then rises to become parent and then grandparent.

The age-ordering of brothers is not analogous. Most men do not rise from having mainly older brothers to having mainly younger brothers. And at any given time the age range of the typical set of brothers displays only a few examples on a short path.

⁸⁸ *Mencius* 6B7; translation from Van Norden 2008, p. 166.

⁸⁹ *Politics* 1328b23-1329a33.

Public visual displays of objective age-ordering would make community among multiple kin groups more thinkable, by giving people a dynamic visual image of a natural ascriptive order, a vision of a kind of coordination that transcends the bonds of blood kinship and optional friendship or alliance. In this way too a shared discipline of respect for objective seniority would work against oppression and violence, helping society be more civilized and fair.

Perhaps some such sensibility about elder-respect informed the discussions of internal and external in *Mencius* 6A, where elder-respect abroad, taken as emblematic of *yì*, is contrasted with the virtues of the brother relation, representing *rén* (in a narrower sense than this term has at *Analects* 1.2). Here from 6A4 and 6A5:

孟子曰：「何以謂仁內義外也？」...

告子曰：... 「吾弟則愛之，秦人之弟則不愛也，是以我為悅者也，故謂之內。長楚人之長，亦長吾之長，是以長為悅者也，故謂之外也。」

Mencius asked him, “What is the ground of your saying that benevolence is internal and righteousness external?” ...

Gaozi said ... “There is my younger brother; I love him. But the younger brother of a man of Qin I do not love: that is, the feeling is determined by myself, and therefore I say that benevolence is internal. On the other hand, I give honour to an old man of Chu, and I also give honour to an old man of my own people: that is, the feeling is determined by the age, and therefore I say that righteousness is external.”

「鄉人長於伯兄一歲，則誰敬？」

曰：「敬兄。」

「酌則誰先？」

曰：「先酌鄉人。」

“Suppose the case of a villager older than your elder brother by one year, to which of them would you show the greater respect?”

“To my brother,” was the reply.

“But for which of them would you first pour out wine at a feast?”

“For the villager.”⁹⁰

The Gaozian view seems to reflect a sense of the value of formal elder-respect as a principled or objective counterweight to the warm attraction of the hive. Mencius just wants to avoid the idea that elder-respect is inauthentic.

The images “internal” and “external” are so simple as to be muddled in these applications.⁹¹ But these terms likely had some resonance with the image of going in (*rù* 入) to family and going out (*chū* 出) to others, as the *rù/chū* pairing of filial piety with elder-respect in the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Mozi*, *Liji*, *Xunzi*, *Huainanzī* and *Yantielun* presumably resonated with the pairing of *rén* in family life with *yì* in public life (again, taking *rén* in the narrow sense in which it represents only part of virtue). Discussing the cluster of contrasts between inner and outer, feely and rigid, and *rén* 仁 and *yì* 義 as it appears especially in the Guodian texts, Scott Cook points out that the following line appears both in [Liji: Sangfu sizhi 5](#) and [Da Dai Liji: Ben ming 5](#):

⁹⁰ Translation by Legge as at [cctext.org](#).

⁹¹ Gaozi may be moved in some part by the fact that being *my younger brother* is person-relative in a way that *being old* is not. But insofar as elder respect is respect for those who are *older than me*, it too is person-relative.

門內之治恩揜義，門外之治義斷恩

In the order within the [family] gates, goodwill holds check over propriety; in the order beyond the [family] gates, propriety cuts short goodwill.⁹²

In practicing elder-respect, a man would be investing in an important scheme of impartiality that served as a counterweight to society's filial piety. Elder-respect helps direct one's attention to the broader community, without omitting the most vulnerable. It gives everyone an attractive and reliable kind of status mobility. A man's wholehearted participation in this scheme would help him find community more thinkable and more reliable, and give him a clearer view of himself and others.

2. Merits of subfraternity as a complement to filial piety in the root

I shall first address the quantitative question whether subfraternity would have been sufficiently engaging to the heartmind to be a significant part of the root of the Way.

Then I shall address the question how a man's subfraternity might have been seen as providing a distinct and important *kind* of support for his virtue, so that it would make sense to propose subfraternity as filial piety's partner in the root.

⁹² Cook 2012, pp. 99ff.; the quoted line is on p. 102.

a. How big a contribution could subfraternity make?

We may perhaps assume that in Youzi's milieu, for a man who had at least one older brother, his felt or active tie to any older brother was likely deeper in some sense than his tie to any one of his non-kin elders. And yet we found reason to wonder whether Confucius approved of that state of affairs for aspirants to public service.⁹³ In some scholars' words, in the view of the early Confucians, friendships "often achieve a degree of feeling and commitment that goes beyond our more formal family bonds."⁹⁴

We cannot take the sheer depth of the tie to one's older brother to be the main reason why subfraternity was chosen to be half the root, unless we think men plainly had much deeper ties to their older brothers than to their younger brothers,⁹⁵ children, close friends and partners in aspiration, and sisters and wives. The great paean to the brotherly bond is *Máoshī* 164, and it does not speak of any asymmetry in relations between brothers.

A man might have had only one or two older brothers. And many of the men whose virtue would concern an early Ru might have lived apart from their brother(s), because official positions and training for them may commonly have had the effect that brothers lived in different places. Confucius and his disciples traveled.

But the most salient problem about the degree to which subfraternity might engage a man's heartmind, especially as compared to elder-respect, is that

⁹³ See p. 31f. above.

⁹⁴ Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 39.

⁹⁵ Unlike an infant boy, a random man is just as likely to have younger brothers as older brothers. (Granted, in Argument 2 we are talking only about men with older brothers, and they are less than 100% likely to have younger brothers. But the idea is to abstract away from that *kind* of consideration for Argument 2.)

many men had no older brothers at all, and hence were congenitally incapable of subfraternity.

i. Men who cannot practice subfraternity

We may be prone to underestimate the magnitude of the obstacle to the subfraternity reading at 1.2 presented by the fact of men without older brothers, because (a) reverence for tradition or scholarly consensus disinclines us to think that any problems with a longstanding consensus view can be serious and obvious, or because (b) our focus is on texts or metaethics or metaphysical styles rather than practical life, or because (c) we are wary of trying to imagine an alien milieu of which we know little, or because (d) we underestimate the numbers of men without occasion for subfraternity by reading past gender discrimination or by working with the common but uncontroversially false translation of *tì* as being a good brother. For in all families with more than one child, 0% of the sons are not brothers. And in the aggregate of all complete sets of 6 siblings, only 3% of the males lack brothers—by simple math, absent special conditions or practices.⁹⁶ But everyone with a son has a son with no occasion for subfraternity.

What proportion of men in Warring States China were no man's younger brother? On the one hand, agrarian societies favor large families,⁹⁷ at least when land is plentiful; and a well-off man might have sons by several women. (I am not sure how sons of concubines would figure into the age order that subfraternity is concerned with, or what kind of family life there would have been in such circumstances.) On the other hand, successful childbirth was difficult;

⁹⁶ In the 64 possible gender-combinations of 6 offspring, there are $64 \times 3 = 192$ sons, among whom 6 have no brother.

⁹⁷ Thanks to Ben Hammer for this point.

and especially in a warring state a father might early suffer conscription or death, as Confucius' father did. Even Confucius and his disciples knew poverty, which would affect infant mortality. Tradition says that Confucius had just one brother and just one son, and that Mencius had no brother. I do not know if we have reports about other early Ru.

If we suppose that the population of China was 15 million at 700 BCE and 45 million three centuries later in a comparable territory, and if we suppose three generations per century and suppose that every adult male reproduced, it seems to follow that the average man had 1.3 adult sons. If only 50% of all men reproduced, then the average reproducing man would have had 2.6 adult sons.

By simple math, supposing that every child born lives a complete life, among all complete sets of 6 offspring 32.8% of the men are no man's younger brother.⁹⁸ A more comprehensive report is given in the table.

A disproportionate number of males would be from the larger sets of siblings. For example, if half of all men who reproduce generate 2 adult siblings each, and the other half generate 8, then in the first group 75% of the men lack older brothers and in the second group 25% of the men lack older brothers, but overall only 35% of all men lack older brothers.

# of offspring	% of men who are no man's younger brother
1	100%
2	75%
3	58%
4	47%
5	39%
6	33%
7	28%
8	25%
9	22%
10	20%

⁹⁸ In the 64 possible gender-combinations of 6 offspring, there are 64x3=192 sons (reflecting an average of 3 sons per combination), among whom 63 sons (one from each combination that has a son) have no older brother.

But significant child mortality would have depressed the size of the largest cohorts of adult brothers, because it would have increased the number of childbirths required to generate a given number of men. In the land-rich United States, 46% of children born in the year 1800 did not live past age 4.⁹⁹ On simplifying assumptions: if half of all males died before adulthood, among new-capped men from families with 10 childbirths 39% lacked living older brothers. A man's deference to a decedent toddler born before him may not have engaged his soul very deeply (nor tended naturally to grow into wider elder-respect).

In sum, it would seem that men who were not younger brothers were far too many to be dismissed as outlier cases that a rough-and-ready generalization can ignore.

Furthermore, even those high percentages greatly understate the problem posed for the subfraternity reading at *Analects* 1.2. Far from being outlier cases, men without older brothers would have been focal cases for early Ru interest in great virtue. Perhaps most of the men whose virtue was of most interest to a Ru in Confucius' wake were first or only sons. Here's why.

- Probably most states, clans and lineages were headed by men without older brothers.¹⁰⁰ Confucius and presumably the early Ru around him saw the virtue of rulers as the key to the good society.

⁹⁹ For children born in 1880 the figure was 34%; and for 1920 it was 18%. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1041693/united-states-all-time-child-mortality-rate/> In the United States, "the census of 1850 reported average ages of 21.4 for Negroes and 25.3 for whites at the time of death" (Stampp 1956, p. 318).

¹⁰⁰ A rich or powerful man might have had several wives and thus many sons. What would their family life have been like? Is that the circumstance envisioned at *Analects* 1.2?

- Where subfraternity is honored, every man either (a) has no older brother; or (b) strives to respect, obey, aid and perhaps emulate someone without an older brother, and may be concerned about the man's character.¹⁰¹
- The first (or only) son of each Ru was likely to be of special concern to him. And for a time, a man's first son is the only son of concern to him.
- If first or only sons were more likely to reproduce than younger sons, or more likely to be prolific, then a high proportion of men's fathers were first or only sons.
- The paragons Shun, Wen and Taibo¹⁰² were first sons.

Hence it would have been anti-tradition and anti-order to proclaim that in order to have a leader's excellence a man must be some man's good younger brother. Successfully propagating a statement that seemed to say so might be expected to encourage rebels, and to foment disorder even on a family level. For, paradoxically, such a proclamation would tell younger brothers to follow and respect their oldest brothers and in the same breath impugn those oldest brothers' potential to lead well and to merit admiration or emulation (unless it was well recognized that what it takes to lead well and merit emulation in the family was quite unlike the Way of the *jūnzi*).

Even to *seem* to say that being a man's good younger brother is a main part of the foundation of virtue would have been problematic for the employment

¹⁰¹ Or where the first son died in childhood, the head among the adult sons was one who could do little to practice subfraternity, and who may never have met his deceased brother.

¹⁰² See *Analects* 8.1.

prospects of early Ru. David Schaberg reports that in Warring States historical texts about the Spring and Autumn period,

speeches and their political principles cluster around a few problems that were likely sites of real political tension in the states of the Spring and Autumn period and that also made for especially strong literary tests and demonstrations of received values. One such problem is the choice of a successor, whether as head of the ruling line (and hence of the state) or as head of another leading family. The guiding principle, departures from which generally bring trouble, is that the heir should be selected on the basis of primogeniture and moral excellence. Instances of conflict between the two criteria do exist, of course, but it is the ruler's misguided selection of a younger and worse son as his heir that gives rise to speeches.¹⁰³

The rival ambitions of the sons of a deceased ruler quite often threatened political violence (or even war). The myths of Shun and of Boyi and Shuqi may reflect the depth of concern about this matter. Hence *seeming* to denigrate first sons as compared to their juniors could have made it harder to find work in government or teaching. Savvy aspiring counsellors would not repeat such a saying to the typical ruler or clan head, and might worry about the impression it could give to their prospective or current trainees.

The subfraternity reading at *Analects* 1.2 more or less implies that someone *introduced* a statement that being some man's good younger brother is a big part of the foundation of virtue, among thinkers who saw the virtue of leaders, typically first sons, as the key to good order.¹⁰⁴ Surely in such a milieu,

¹⁰³ Schaberg 2002, p. 151.

¹⁰⁴ The very idea of a root-branch relation between virtues seems to enter the tradition with the statements attributed to Youzi in *Analects* 1.

if a thinker first proposed or even seemed to propose that being a man's good younger brother is a crucial support for general virtue, then as others heard this idea for the first time, they would have pushed back immediately, inspiring the author to change the view or at the very least to clarify the statement so that it did not seem to claim that first and only sons cannot walk the Way.

But if the statement at *Analects* 1.2 originally spoke of filial piety and elder-respect, and a few centuries later Confucians had come to play a longer game, focusing less directly on attaining high office and more on childhood training and metaphysics, while the term for elder-respect had come to be used mainly for subfraternity, then the old statement could have acquired a new meaning.

We do not know how continuously the tradition between Youzi and the Qin catastrophe may have been aware of the statement we have at *Analects* 1.2, or how much of the tradition was aware of it or interested at any given time. But people newly paying attention to it and assuming it meant filial and subfraternal piety might nevertheless have revered that old text. Reading a text as scripture means being very resistant to noticing obvious problems such as obvious falsehoods, contradictions or unwelcome practical implications;¹⁰⁵ and it means accepting weak solutions when problems are pointed out,¹⁰⁶ or too readily

¹⁰⁵ For countless amazing examples see *The Age of Reason*, by the American revolutionary Thomas Paine.

¹⁰⁶ It may be tempting to imagine that the exchange at *Analects* 12.5 raises and answers the problem that the doctrine recorded at 1.2 seems to impugn the virtue of men who have no older brothers; and that in doing so the exchange at 12.5 heads off any future concern about the problem. Specifically, one could imagine that the reason why Sima Niu found his lack of brothers upsetting is that he was concerned for his root in light of the doctrine that subfraternity is half of it. If that was (or even if it wasn't) the concern behind Sima Niu's lament, one could imagine that Zixia's reply gives the party line on that problem. Zixia's reply is that if you are reverential and respectful and ceremonious, everyone will be your "brother." It would follow that respecting your elders would count as respecting your older "brothers." This reply might seem to defend the doctrine that

supposing that problems must be soluble somehow. These things can happen throughout an intellectual community invested in a text. For example, to my knowledge the problem of first sons, inescapably obvious though it should be, is never mentioned in the Anglophone scholarly literature (except in and under blog posts on the matter by me). There is no discussion of how to address it. I do not know whether this absence is due to scholars' having a colorable solution to the problem; but if it is, the solution should be presented in a note whenever an edition of the *Analects* in translation explains *tì* in this passage as subfraternity.

Some early Ruists could have noticed the problem of first sons and so been moved to drop *tì* from the account of the root they were willing to transmit (as many dozens of scholars do today in reporting what Youzi said at 1.2), putting forth instead the account we find in the *Liu de*¹⁰⁷ and *Xiaojing* 1 (cf. *Mozi* 25): that the root of virtue is filial piety.

The subfraternity interpretation of the original meaning of *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 presents us with a choice. Are we to think that (a) the originally intended view did in fact imply that first and only sons are congenitally handicapped for virtue? The alternative is to think that (b) the statement was poorly and riskily composed in that it says nothing to discourage that inference.¹⁰⁸ Interpretive charity is not happy with either of the available options.

subfraternity is half the root (and rescue Sima Niu's moral prospects) by maintaining that what had looked like a doctrine about subfraternity is better understood as a doctrine about elder-respect cast in a brother metaphor. But so conceived, Zixia's defense of the doctrine is problematic, at least as stated. It says that you can get occasion to practice the root of wide virtue if you first practice wide virtue. I submit that 12.5 does not speak to Youzi's doctrine, intentionally or otherwise, even on the traditional reading of 1.2.

¹⁰⁷ Slip 40: Cook 2012, p. 795.

¹⁰⁸ This concern is distinct from the concern that if and only if *tì* at 1.2 originally meant subfraternity, the statement was poorly composed because it does not signal that *tì* is meant in that sense.

Within option (b) we might hypothesize that the author was trying to say only that for *men who have older brothers*, the root is the lineage pair, without addressing the case of other men, who might have workable substitutes for subfraternity. But given the bold wording of the statement, this reading implies that the author mistakenly regarded those other men as few or unimportant. These mistakes would each have been very hard to make; the reading is very uncharitable.

ii. Three compromise proposals answered

Here I shall propose and reject three proposals that try to allow *Analects* 1.2 to offer a root for first sons while preserving the idea that *tì* at 1.2 is something quite like subfraternity.

Proposal 1: Trunk and branch. One might propose that perhaps *tì* was not simply ambiguous as between subfraternity and elder-respect. Instead, elder-respect was regarded as a *growth* from subfraternity, so when one saw elder-respect one could *call* it ‘subfraternity,’ just as when Mary is out of sight around a corner we might point to her visible shadow and say, “That’s Mary.” So when *Analects* 1.2 speaks of subfraternity, elder-respect can *count* as “subfraternity.” Hence first sons can have something *called* “subfraternity”: their elder-respect.

First reply. Two essential parts of this proposal are that (a) people thought elder-respect has to come from respecting older brothers, and that (b) they did not.

Second reply. Probably no word available to Youzi would have been shaped by the relevant linguistic community’s broad acceptance of the idea of

virtues being related as root and branch by way of their similarity, because probably that idea was introduced by Youzi. Though it appears in each of the discussions of virtues attributed to Youzi in the *Analects*, so far as I can tell it appears nowhere else in the *Analects*. I have not noticed it in any earlier text, though others may have looked more thoroughly than I and found something.

Proposal 2: Core and fringe. One might propose that rather than being ambiguous, *tì* was the name for a complex virtue whose core is subfraternity and whose periphery is respect for non-family elders. (On this view *tì* was not a name the role virtue of younger brothers.) Possibly this is how Zhu Xi understood the term at *Analects* 1.2. William Soothill quotes him as explaining, for this passage, “To serve well one’s father and mother is *xiào*; to serve well one’s elder brothers and seniors is *tì*” (善事父母為孝; 善事兄長為弟).¹⁰⁹

Hence for men who had older brothers, *tì* would be mainly subfraternity, but for men who had no occasion for subfraternity, *tì* could be realized in respect for elders among one’s close kin, or in general.

First reply. This interpretation of *tì* does not harmonize with the wording at *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20 and many other early texts, as we have seen. If the core of *tì* were in the home, it would be strange to say, “When you go out, *then* (*zé 則*) be *tì*,” as at 1.6. Why wait? And why distinguish arenas? And if the core of *tì* were in the home, the neighbors would not be its distinctively proper judges, as they are taken to be at 13.20.

Second reply. This core-fringe proposal about the meaning of *tì* may be attractive because it suggests that *tì* was respect for age *weighted* by closeness, and we associate Confucianism with *graded* concern or *graded* ultimate concern.

¹⁰⁹ Soothill 1910, p. 122; cf. Gardner 2003, p. 71

But a virtue whose core is subfraternity and whose fringe is the elder-respect we have seen discussed would not have amounted to respect for age weighted by closeness, for two reasons, one pertaining to the core and the other pertaining to the fringe. First, for men with older brothers, subfraternity would not have been the core of respect for age weighted by closeness. Parents outrank older brothers both in age and closeness. Grandparents are much older than older brothers, but arguably just as close in kinship. Paternal uncles are much older than older brothers but are almost as close. Second, as we have seen, elder-respect abroad was recognized as respect for age *not* weighted by closeness; it was valued partly because it was independent of kinship bonds.

Proposal 3: Cousins. For a handful of other ancient passages that use the words *tì* or *xiōng* 兄 in such a way as to seem to err about who has occasion to respect an older brother, a few translators have proposed that what is meant is respect for elder male paternal cousins rather than older brothers.¹¹⁰ I have not seen a similar reading proposed for *Analects* 1.2, but we can consider the idea here. This reading would significantly reduce the percentage of men who had no occasion to practice *tì*, since only one of a man's patrilineal grandsons would be the oldest.

First reply. It seems a good bet that something like a majority of rulers, clan heads and lineage heads did not have older paternal cousins, for most were oldest sons of oldest sons. Nor would the the leader of the cousins have practiced respect for older cousins.

Second reply. If an ancient text somewhere clearly mentions the virtue of respect for one's older paternal cousins, I have not noticed.

¹¹⁰ For details and discussion, see pp. 111-119 below.

b. What kind of contribution could subfraternity make?

Now let us consider what important and distinctive contribution might be made by subfraternity as a partner to filial piety (at least for men with older brothers), so that subfraternity could have been worth citing alongside filial piety as a comparably important part of the root of the way of the *jūnzǐ*.

One might suppose offhand that subfraternity is filial piety lite. It is everything that filial piety is, but less. So as a companion to filial piety it has nothing unique to contribute to the root, unless that a man's older brother may still be alive when his parents are not.

Or one might suppose that the thought is as follows. Alongside parents or progenitors, one's next most important kin are siblings; and only males count, and necessarily a boy's earliest brothers are older brothers; so the first important family relations are to parents and older brothers, and that is why filial and subfraternal piety were chosen for the statement at *Analects* 1.2. But this line of thinking depends on the implausible premise that the statement is about *xiàotì* in very early childhood. A *jūnzǐ* cannot work on that *xiàotì* of his.

Let us look for other ideas about subfraternity's distinctive contribution, first in the modern literature and then in the ancient.

i. Modern views on the distinct value of subfraternity in the root

It may sometimes be thought that the word *xiào* in *Analects* 1.2 and other early texts is sufficiently broad in meaning that it *encompasses* all the family role

virtues, or all the upward ones.¹¹¹ If this reading of *xiào* at 1.2 is historically correct, then it made little sense to include subfraternity alongside *xiào* in the account of the root. Not only was it unnecessary, it was misleading if there was also the *possibility* of understanding *xiào* more narrowly as the virtue of sons (or offspring) toward fathers (or parents). For if *xiào* could also be meant in this narrower way, then including subfraternity in the root would be a clear signal that *xiào* here is to be understood in the narrower way, not the broader. Hence the broad reading of *xiào* at 1.2 would argue that *tì* did not originally mean subfraternity here.

Even scholars who do not assert that broad reading of *xiào* often say that the statement at *Analects* 1.2 proposes *family* in general as the root—as though they thought the statement had *not* selected two family virtues for mention, and as though they thought it mentioned the family.

Anglophone scholars do seem to suppose that subfraternity was not worth mentioning in the statement at *Analects* 1.2. About 80 scholars, almost all of whom understand *tì* as subfraternity, are sufficiently confident that subfraternity was not worth mentioning that they sometimes omit it in translating or paraphrasing the statement at *Analects* 1.2.¹¹² They are willing to decide for the reader that subfraternity can safely be ignored in this context, and indeed that it is best ignored. Granted, three of these scholars translate *tì* as respect for elders when they do include it; but these three seem to assume that in this context respect for elders mainly means respect for *family* elders,¹¹³ a virtue that would seem to have little distinctive importance alongside filial piety

¹¹¹ If this view is true of *xiào* in general, then the word *tì* for subfraternity would be the only early Chinese word for the role virtue of a kinship position.

¹¹² For the citations see Haines 2026, “Blind Spots,” pp. 6ff. n. 4.

¹¹³ Chong 2007, p. 59; Slingerland 2003, p. 1f; Tan 2014, pp. 41, 95.

in the root. Whatever the 80 scholars' reasons for omitting the second half of the root, to regard the omission as permissible one must be confident that in the vision expressed at 1.2, *tì* is not an important part of the root.

Also, as my reader must have observed, when scholars give a two-part account of the root at *Analects* 1.2, they often or usually replace subfraternity with a different family virtue: being a good *brother*. Some might do this to improve the flow of the English at the expense of a point seen as unimportant. Others might be changing the proposed root to make the text more attractive or edifying for modern minds at the expense of a point seen as unimportant.

But if the aim is to improve the theory, why do so scholars more often erase the age asymmetry and keep the gender-specificity, than the other way around? Perhaps the thought has been that while gender-specificity is something one reads past anyway (cf. p. 1 n. 1 above), dropping the age asymmetry **creates** a way to see the second half of the root as a meaningful complement for filial piety rather than a superfluous pale copy. There are several ways in which replacing “good younger brother” with “good brother” might be thought to create a helpfully different partner for filial piety in the root, by replacing the virtue for one side of a rank relation with the virtue for both sides of a horizontal relation.

For example, one might suppose that while filial piety prepares men for other vertical relations, such as the ruler-ruled relation, being a good brother prepares men for other horizontal relations, such as friend and colleague and neighbor and husband. On this view, however, filial piety would seem to prepare men only to be ruled and bossed, not to be rulers and bosses.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ A variant of this approach is proposed by the historian Qian Mu, no doubt inspired by the *Mencius*. In Joseph Chan's paraphrase:

Filial piety (*xiao*) connects people vertically: it refers to a deep respect for the parents and all ancestors of a family, and by extension, to other people's parents and ancestors as well. Brotherhood (*tì*) connects people

But this vision cannot be a candidate account of the original thought at *Analects* 1.2. If *tì* at 1.2 was about the brother relation at all, then the author chose to emphasize the relation's ranking aspect, and chose the lower side of the relation rather than the upper. An interpreter should try to respect the fact that both halves of the proposed root of virtue are virtues of lower positions relating upward, on either reading of *tì*. The statement's illustrative examples seem designed with that feature of the root in mind. If there is a general idea behind the selection of two virtues for the root, that common upwardness is presumably a main clue, not to be jettisoned (and *a fortiori* not to be jettisoned without offering a reason or even an acknowledgment of the amendment).

In sum, if we look to the modern literature to get ideas about *how* subfraternity (more than e.g. elder-respect or trustworthiness or being a good older brother, husband or parent) might have been seen as a helpful complement to filial piety in a proposed root of virtue in men who have older brothers, then what we mainly find is evidence of very widespread agreement that the theory at 1.2 would be improved or at least unharmed by removing subfraternity from the root, and perhaps by replacing it with something else. I agree with that view.

horizontally, which can be extended to anyone in the world, for as Confucius says, all within the Four Seas are one's brother. (J. Chan 2007, p. 65)

(The mention of Confucius is likely a reference to *Analects* 12.5, in which the speaker is Zixia rather than Confucius, and the claim is rather that everyone is a "brother" to any *jūnzǐ* who meets a very high standard. Zixia's thought may be that everyone *responds* like a brother to the respectful *jūnzǐ*.)

But if with Qian Mu we see filial piety as extendable mainly to others' *parents and ancestors*, then why would we not see fraternity as extendable mainly to others' *brothers* or siblings rather than to everyone? Or why not see filial piety as extendable to everyone? When my friend and age-mate has a grandchild, should my relation to the child's parent (my friend's child) become vertical and upward, because that child is now a parent? Does filial piety ground nothing in me toward my childless elders, in or out of my family?

ii. Ancient views on the distinct value of subfraternity in the root

I have found nothing in the *Analects* (or the *Xunzi*) to suggest *how* subfraternity might be thought to be the apt complement for *xiào* in a proposed root.

The *Mencius* seems sometimes to see filial piety as the root of *rén* 仁 and subfraternity as the root of *yì* 義, e.g. at 4A27 and 7A15 on the usual reading of these passages. But the text offers no explanation for that distinction. And as I shall argue in the section on the *Mencius*, it does not make sense to read the passages as referring to subfraternity rather than elder-respect.

Although the first chapter of the *Xiaojing* offers filial piety alone as the root, two other *Xiaojing* chapters give accounts of the special contribution of *tì* as distinct from *xiào* in supporting other virtue. In at least one of these chapters, *tì* is subfraternity.

[Xiaojing 12](#) proposes an account of the distinct powers of *xiào* and *tì* in supporting broader virtue.

子曰：「教民親愛，莫善於孝。教民禮順，莫善於悌。移風易俗，莫善於樂。安上治民，莫善於禮。

禮者、敬而已矣。故敬其父則子悅，敬其兄則弟悅，敬其君則臣悅。敬一人而千萬人悅。所敬者寡，而悅者眾，此之謂要道也。」

The Master said, “There is nothing more effective than family reverence for teaching (*jiao*) the people about love and affection; there is nothing more effective than deference for elders (*ti*) for teaching the people about ritual propriety (*li*) and compliance (*shun*); there is nothing more effective than music (*yue*) for changing the ways and customs of the people; and there is nothing more effective

for safeguarding the lord and bringing proper order to the people than observing ritual propriety.

“Ritual propriety is simply a matter of respect (*jing*). Thus, the son finds pleasure in respecting his father; the younger brother finds pleasure in respecting his older brother; the minister finds pleasure in respecting his lord; and all of the people find pleasure in respecting the Emperor. Those who are respected [敬] are few, but those who find pleasure in showing this respect are legion. This is what is called the vital way (*dao*).”¹¹⁵

Only the first paragraph mentions *tì*. I submit that if the first paragraph is a coherent composition, it is not talking about how to support various qualities in oneself; rather it is talking about which practices by a ruler engender which qualities in the people. Otherwise the paragraph seems to say that *tì* rather than *xiào* is the root of ritual, which is the root of general social order. And it does not explain how.

Just a few lines later, [Xiaojing 14](#) gives an account of what subfraternity has to offer to complement filial piety. Here is the chapter, with Legge’s translation from ctext.org:

子曰：「君子之事親孝，故忠可移於君。事兄悌，故順可移於長。居家理，故治可移於官。是以行成於內，而名立於後世矣。」

The Master said, "The filial piety with which the superior man serves his parents may be transferred as loyalty to the ruler. The fraternal duty with which he serves his elder brother may be transferred as submissive deference to elders. His regulation of his family may be transferred as good government in any official position. Therefore,

¹¹⁵ Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 112.

when his conduct is thus successful in his inner (private) circle, his name will be established (and transmitted) to future generations."

We might find it strange that a man's subfraternity is seen as better suited than his filial piety to ground his submissive deference to his seniors in general. Parents are more senior and command more submissive deference.

The opening of *Liji: Fangji 31* may be in broad agreement with *Xiaoqing 14* about the distinct contributions of filial piety and subfraternity to greater virtue. Here with Legge's translation:

子云：「孝以事君，弟以事長」，示民不貳也，故君子有君不謀仕...

The Master said, "Filial duty may be transferred to the service of the ruler, and brotherly submission to the service of elders" - showing the people that they ought not to be double-minded. Hence a superior man, while his ruler is alive, should not take counsel about taking office (in another state). ...

Toward deciding whether *Xiaoqing 14* and *Fangji 31* might capture what the statement at *Analects 1.2* has in mind about subfraternity, we might ask ourselves two main questions. Can these two chapters' vision of the separate roles of filial piety and subfraternity explain why 1.2 chooses filial piety and subfraternity as the root?

One should say no if one's idea for solving the problem of first and only sons involves the idea that for them, elder-respect can be an accessible substitute for subfraternity. For the two chapters seem to say that the main function of subfraternity as a partner in the root is to ground elder-respect.

One should say no if one thinks it could not have seemed plausible that a man's proper relating with one or two living older brothers he knows well and

has history with, and/or with one or two deceased children, could be a key support for his general elder-respect.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ To think about whether subfraternity could seriously have been thought to be the ground of elder-respect, we might want to distinguish two views to seek in or behind ancient texts: that a young boy's subfraternity is the key foundation of his coming to respect his elders in general, and that a man's subfraternity is the key foundation of his continuing elder-respect. The latter is the relevant idea for interpreting *Analects* 1.2.

Regarding a boy, the view would be that he is naturally shaped toward respect for seniority as such, the kind of virtue that would have the boy polite to his grown-up neighbors and solicitous of the elderly on the roads, and in general *anyone* older than himself, mainly by practicing respect for one or more of the children in his family or household: his own older brother(s)—more than he would be would be shaped for elder-respect by his relations with his parents and other family elders.

Regarding a man, the view would be that the core continuing support for his daily honoring of seniority in his relations with colleagues and neighbors is his apt way of relating now to one or a few of the people he grew up with, whom he might or might not often see.

Toward having an opinion about the case of the boy or the case of the man, one would first ask oneself, "Would a boy or man have great difficulty with elder-respect if he did not have an older brother (in a society where elder-respect is standard practice outside the family)? Would he have *any* difficulty?" Offhand it seems that there are other and ample psychological supports available for elder-respect: tools to conceive it, cues to do it, reasons to do it, rewards it brings, problems it avoids,—enough that subfraternity would not stand out as the main basis of elder-respect. For example, I might respect my parents, who are saliently my elders. Or, my parents might get me started by telling me to respect my elders and to watch how others respect their elders. Or I might have noticed from early childhood that my elders understand things better than I do, and are the gatekeepers of what I want. Or I might have noticed from early childhood that my elder neighbors expect my respect and react badly when they do not receive it. Or I might just notice that other people respect their elders. The idea that I must first respect an older brother implies a strange view of human nature, or very sheltered life.

Another point one would consider is that being a particular man's good younger brother is different from mere elder-respect toward that same man, and not just because subfraternity is more demanding than elder-respect. Bert's relationship with his older brother Andy likely feels unique to that relationship, reflecting Andy's (perhaps very) distinctive personality and character, how Andy treats Bert now and how he used to, the circumstances and secrets and adventures they have shared, and the simple fact

Another reason to think that *Xiaojing* 14 and *Fangji* 31 are not a good guide to the vision at *Analects* 1.2 is that these chapters would suggest that the two branch practices mentioned in 1.2 (not liking to disobey superiors and not rebelling) are both rooted in filial piety, *not* subfraternity.

Further, neither of the chapters suggests that *xiàotì* grounds the whole of virtue. *Fangji* 31 does not mention grounding anything beyond obedience to rulers and respect for elders. *Xiaojing* 14 says that *xiào* and *tì* are *two of three* practices that together ground at least enough virtue to give one a lasting good name.

This latter vision seems to reflect a (nuclear) **family model** of the source of virtues for public roles. The virtue for any given family relational role supports

that they know each other well. Bert might *feel* that these specifics, more than Andy's being two years older, are what shape and ground the way to relate to Andy. It might be quite unnatural for Bert as a boy or as a man to feel the slightly older Andy as *the representative elder*. All boys' and most men's days are full of other people who are more saliently their seniors than their older brothers are.

On the other hand, childhood experiences are formative and will have shaped any grown man's sense of his older brother. A little boy's older brothers might have been *his representative elders* in this sense: of all the elders around, his big brothers were the elders most comparable to himself. The boy might feel that the grownups are in another league, and the neighbor children are *merely* neighbors.¹¹⁶ And **if** his relationship with his older brothers arises in the matrix of a culture that is verbal about age rank among brothers and uses similar language for elder-respect in the neighborhood, and if he has at least two brothers (and far less contact with other near peers) so that the group of brothers can feel like a *whole* community, **then** taking that brotherly age-ranking as the model for neighborhood life might conceivably feel natural, at least for a boy, or for a young man whose older brothers remain in his daily life.

Whether a grown man's being a better-than-average younger brother to his older brother(s) would remain an essential or the primary psychological *support* for his elder-respect, beyond being an original cause, is another question.

And the straddle reading of *Analects* 1.2 does not have the statement deny that for men with older brothers, respect for their older brothers is psychologically somewhat bound up with their general elder-respect.

the virtue for the specifically analogous public relational role, especially in respect of degrees of upwardness (or downwardness). Hence *Xiaojing* 14 proposes a third family virtue to ground a man's excellence in governing the people: governing his family well.¹¹⁷ This virtue must be for a downward relational position, unlike the upward virtues of the lineage pair.

Like *Xiaojing* 14, *Analects* 1.2 can seem at least at first glance to suppose that upward roots support only upward branches, because both examples of branches it offers are upward. But unlike *Xiaojing* 14, *Analects* 1.2 says that just the two upward root virtues ground the whole way of the *jūnzǐ*. Hence it has been said in commenting on the overall vision at 1.2, "A filial citizenry is one schooled in docility, the Way at which 1:2 aims."¹¹⁸ The comment is quite apt if we grant the *Xiaojing* 14 and *Fangji* 31 vision of the supporting power of the two virtues filial piety and subfraternity. If we take these chapters as our guide to *how* 1.2 thinks of *xiàotì* as supporting *rén* and the way of the *jūnzǐ*, our guide tells us that 1.2 does not think of the *jūnzǐ* as a leader and does not think of *rén* as a virtue for leadership. In these ways the statement at 1.2 would then be disagreeing with the Confucius material in the *Analects*.

How might *Analects* 1.2 imagine that virtues of *upward* roles would support the virtue of a *leader*, without undue complexity?

One way is to set aside the nuclear family model described above, and appeal to what I shall call the **transmission model**. The nuclear family model sees upward respect as the activity of one pole of a dyadic relation, and a root because it is a little blueprint of the right relating to non-family superiors: filial

¹¹⁷ Similarly, a passage in the *Lǐjì: Dàxué* 11 lists filial piety, subfraternity, and parenthood as grounding further virtues; but the assembled passage may be a tangle of two different ideas: that a person's three family virtues support three further qualities in the person, and that a ruler's three family virtues support three qualities in the people.

¹¹⁸ Brooks & Brooks 1998, p. 297.

and subfraternal piety are *analogous* to some of the proper practices of adults. By contrast, the transmission model sees upward reverence as the root because it is a studied receptivity to the blueprint embodied by the higher party and/or recorded in any instructions they may have given: filial and subfraternal piety are *means to learn* the proper practices of adults. Thus each person is an upward-looking link in a hanging chain, as it were, or each person is a section of a chute down which the moral blueprint flows. Society may be woven from different kinds of hanging chain or chute, such as descent, age, precedence in office, and official rank. There is a presumption that the higher parties embody general virtue, and a higher party who happens to exemplify general virtue is thereby a good model for the virtue of anyone below. In that way, *upward* reverence brings *general* virtue, at least if one is fortunate in one's father and other superiors. And being a model for those below is benefitting them; or it is one way of benefitting them. We may find the picture in e.g. *Máoshī* 240 and 243. This picture would seem to fit an image of kinship organization focusing on the lineage rather than the nuclear family or the quality of close relationships.

This view would seem out of harmony with *Xiaojing* 14 and the view of moral psychology common to the Youzi statements in *Analects* 1, for all these statements seem to see the root virtues as similar to the branch virtues, and supporting the branches by way of that similarity, not by being receptiveness to whatever model may be offered. Similarly, when *Mencius* 2A2 attributes to Youzi an argument that (there can be a second sage because) sages are similar in kind to other men, the picture seems to be one of growth, with greater men seen as being more greatly grown.

Within the transmission model we might ask: is general virtue *more* than reverence for those higher up in the chain? For example, honesty and care for inferiors would seem distinct from reverence for superiors. Do they come into the

picture as practices that just happen to be modeled higher up in the chains, so that it is (as we may say) only accidentally or extrinsically connected to upward virtue?

Whatever the details, on the transmission picture it is hard to see reverence for older brothers as a key supplement for filial piety in the root. A man *could* see his older brother as a link to his father, but in fact each man is *directly* descended from his father, and more directly kin to his father than to his older brother. Filial piety links a man to the chain of his patrilineal progenitors, while within the family subfraternity adds a few brothers at most, each of them barely senior to the man and looking up (if he is lucky) to that same chain.

By contrast, adding elder-respect to filial piety would add the whole community, or the whole community of seniority chains. It would be powerful insurance against having a bad father or elder-brother.

We have looked at the **nuclear family model** and the **transmission model** of public order to try to see how *Xiaojing* 14 and/or *Fangji* 31 might describe the importance of a man's subfraternity as a key complement to filial piety in a root for his general and leadership virtue. Neither model seems to succeed.

A third option is the **universality model**. This view takes *xiàotì* as a kind of model or for all relating. That is, the great virtue of a ruler and other men is to relate to many or all in a way that is analogous to the way a *xiàotì* man relates to his parents and elders or older brother. Something akin to this idea is explicit at the beginning of *Mozi* 25 (節葬下): “The *rén* person's tending to the world is no different from the filial son's tending to his parents,” for the *rén* person enriches the world, multiplies its people, and orders its affairs. Upward virtues can in this way be models for good rulership as public service. This universality model

seems not to be the vision at *Xiaojing* 14 and *Fangji* 31. So if we can regard the universality model as Youzi's vision or as an important part of his vision, we cannot easily regard those texts as offering a promising suggestion about how Youzi might have seen the distinct value of subfraternity.

The idea of the universality model would be that great virtue is respect and/or care toward all, and the two upward virtues *xiào* and *tì* (on either reading of *tì*) are miniatures of that, essential grounding exercises in respect and/or care (depending on how we conceive good relating to parents and elders or elder brothers). The Confucius material in the *Analects* does associate governance with public service,¹¹⁹ and with ritual and yielding (*ràng* 讓),¹²⁰ and with *rén*,¹²¹ which in turn is associated with care for all.¹²²

Digging ditches is a kind of public service; but it may feel more like labor than service, because it benefits people one is not close to. Supervising the digging of ditches, setting standards and meeting barbarism with force can be public service because of the motives and consequences of these activities, but concretely they may not look like service. As compared with these, *xiào* and *tì* are vividly service, and are directly compelling kinds of service, and are thus well suited perhaps to ground and orient us in the proper valuation of those spiritually trickier kinds of service (except perhaps for men who do not know their parents, as Confucius did not know his father). Or the picture could be a little more fine-grained, distinguishing the powers of the halves of the root: service to parents grounds the affective or *rén* side of public service, while subfraternity or elder-respect grounds the respecting or *yì* side of public service.

¹¹⁹ *Analects* 8.21, 13.1.

¹²⁰ *Analects* 4.13, 8.1, 11.26.

¹²¹ *Analects* 12.1, 14.16f.

¹²² *Analects* 1.6, 12.22.

In line with the universality model, the statements attributed to Youzi in the *Analects* outside of 1.2 suggest that he saw virtue as respectful concern for all, including respectfulness by the great *toward* the small. *Analects* 1.13 says that respectful conduct (*gōng* 恭) is close to ritual propriety, not just that it is close to the ritual propriety of lower parties relating upward. And regarding ritual propriety in turn, *Analects* 1.12 says that the beauty of ritual is harmony because “great and small follow it.”¹²³ Ritual and harmony would thus be well-developed mutual respectfulness.

Now, on the universality model there is no obvious reason why the root has to be located wholly within the family. While our families are important influences on us, they are obviously not the only influences on us, nor the only people with whom we are engaged in direct personal interaction even in childhood.

An objection to the universality model as a reading of the statement at *Analects* 1.2 is that the two illustrations of *branches* in that statement suggest that Youzi was envisioning *xiàotì* as the root of good following, not of good ruling.

My **reply** is that while the statement might seem not to articulate the universality vision well enough to support this reading, that seeming may not be right, for two main reasons.

First, that seeming could be an artifact of distance. In the context in which the statement was first composed and issued, the shared understanding of *rén* and of the *jūnzǐ* was likely to have been clearer than it is to us now, as we look both from a great distance and under some influence from later brands of Confucianism that were less optimistic about the political prospects of individual Ru.

¹²³ I defend this reading of *Analects* 1.12 in Haines 2008, p. 473f., and under Hagop Sarkissian’s February 6, 2010 blog post “[Translate This!](#)” at Warp, Weft, & Way.

Second, we should see that the sequence of concrete examples paints its picture only indirectly—perhaps because the examples are offered as *evidence* and so must be *manifestly* plausible. The statement sets out three levels of good practice (or omission). To simplify: (a) *xiàotì* supports (b) non-disobedience, which in turn supports (c) non-rebellion. We are probably meant to associate these three good practices with three levels of status or power: private life, the life of an official (or a private person bumping up against the state), and the life of a powerful official—a sequence that could suggest rulership as the ideal culmination. But **(1)** the sequence of good practices seems not to be ordered from the less challenging to the more challenging, elementary to advanced. On the contrary: non-disobedience is more complex and demanding (concretely and emotionally) than non-rebellion. And **(2)** although Youzi’s premises and his metaphor use the idea of high-probability guarantees, surely in saying that *xiàotì* is the root of great virtue he does not mean that it *guarantees* great virtue with a high probability. For what he actually says is only that *xiàotì* guarantees with high probability the avoidance of vice and destructiveness.

Hence we should not read the two concrete examples of practices (omissions) supported by *xiàotì* as descriptions of the sequence of ever greater moral accomplishments supported by *xiàotì*. From the point of view of that reading, the two specified accomplishments would be too low *and* moving in the wrong direction. Rather, the examples should suggest a series of ever greater positions from which to make a difference, or ever greater scopes of activity, naming bare acceptability within each (not liking disobedience, not liking to sow chaos). The explicit observation is that *xiàotì* is sufficient to ward off the minima; the implicit lesson is that it is a necessary help toward the maxima. And where the minimum is *not liking to make chaos*, then the maximum could be liking to

make peace and good order. *Xiàotì* does not guarantee that liking, but it aims us in that direction, away from the opposite.

3. Conclusion

On the one hand, I have argued that elder-respect makes an invaluable partner for filial piety in a proposed root of general virtue.

On the other hand, as we have seen, scholars of early Chinese philosophy today seem to see subfraternity as not worth mentioning alongside filial piety in a proposed root of general virtue. There were some ancient attempts to describe the distinctive contribution of subfraternity as a partner of filial piety in supporting some broader virtue, but these accounts see the contributions of each in too limited (and perhaps implausible) a way to fit the idea that filial piety and subfraternity are the root of the whole of virtue. If the author of the statement at *Analects* 1.2 had a clear good reason to make subfraternity the partner of filial piety in the root of complete virtue, the vision would seem to have been lost to the tradition early on.

For these reasons the straddling pair is a better interpretation of *xiàotì* at *Analects* 1.2. This reading of the statement at 1.2 is likely more illuminating about the right way to live, more likely to be true of Youzi's milieu, and more likely to have felt true in his milieu. Charity prefers the elder-respect reading of *tì* at 1.2.

IV. The *Mencius*

In the *Mencius*, the word *tì* never appears except as a partner virtue of *xiào*. I shall argue that the partners are the straddling pair in a majority of the passages in which it appears, including half of the passages where it appears in the compound *xiào-tì*. I think the preponderance of the evidence is that is the straddling pair in most of the rest as well, i.e. two of the remaining three passages where it appears in the compound *xiào-tì*. The straddling pair is not an impossible reading in any passage.

After we look at the passages with *tì*, we shall review the passages without *tì* that nevertheless seem to speak to whether the root of the Way is the lineage pair or the straddling pair.

A. In the *Mencius*, *xiào* and *tì* are more often the straddling pair.

Just one passage in the *Mencius* includes the term *tì* without also including the compound *xiào-tì*:

***Mencius* 3B4**

於此有人焉，入則孝，出則悌，守先王之道，以待後之學者，而不得食於子。
子何尊梓匠輪輿而輕為仁義者哉？

Here is a man who, at home, is filial and, in the outside world, deferential to elders. He holds to the Way of the former kings and waits for those who will study it in the future, yet you will not support him. Why is it that you will honor the woodworker and the carriage maker and disparage one who practices humaneness and rightness?¹²⁴

This passage uses the same six-character string we find at *Analects* 1.6. In this context, *tì* refers to a companion virtue of filial piety, a companion whose main arena is relations with non-kin. Most translators render *tì* here as elder-respect, as in *Analects* 1.6.¹²⁵ It cannot be subfraternity.

The straddling pair is offered here as a sort of summary or core of *rényì*.

In every other passage where *tì* appears, it is part of the compound *xiàotì* at least once in the passage. *Xiàotì* appears in six passages in the Mencius, but in identical paragraphs in two of these. Let us review each passage.

***Mencius* 6B2**

夫人豈以不勝為患哉？弗為耳。徐行後長者謂之弟，疾行先長者謂之不弟。夫徐行者，豈人所不能哉？所不為也。堯舜之道，孝弟而已矣。

Now, why should people be worried about being unable (to be like Yao or Shun)? They simply do not do it. To walk slowly behind one's elders is called *tì* [弟]. To walk quickly ahead of one's elders is called *bútì* [不弟]. Is walking slowly something that people are incapable of? It is merely that they do not do it. The Way of Yao and Shun is

¹²⁴ Bloom 2009, p. 64

¹²⁵ It is elder-respect in Bloom 2009, p. 64; Dobson 1963, p. 95; Eno 2015, p. 38; Lau 2003, p. 67; Legge 1970, p. 270; and Van Norden 2008, p. 80.

nothing other than *xiàotì* [孝弟].¹²⁶

The context is that a shallow and literal-minded (or mocking) interlocutor has asked whether everyone can be a Yao or Shun, and Mencius is trying to persuade him that everyone can. To do this, Mencius takes walking slowly behind one's elders to stand for *tì*, takes *tì* to stand for *xiàotì*, and takes *xiàotì* to stand for the Way of Yao and Shun.

Three translators represent *tì* here as elder-respect,¹²⁷ five represent it as subfraternity,¹²⁸ and one is ambiguous.¹²⁹

But there is nothing in this passage to suggest that *tì* here is subfraternity, and there are seven or eight reasons to think it is elder-respect.

First, the action offered here as emblematic of *tì* is said to be in relation to one's elders (*zhǎng* 長). The passage offers nothing to suggest that we should read this term creatively as “one's older brother(s)” or “one's elder kin.”

Second, walking behind an elder is one of the examples of elder-respect offered in the long passage on elder-respect quoted from the *Liji: Jiyi* on p. 4f. above.

Third, walking “slowly” behind someone suggests walking behind the elderly, who are emblematic of one's elders in general. It is typical of the elderly to be slower than their juniors, as we all notice in refraining from overtaking

¹²⁶ The English here is from Van Norden 2008, p. 159. Couvreur 1895 reads this *tì* as elder-respect (p. 584); Ames 2021 reads it as elder-respect (p. 219) and as subfraternity (p. 310).

¹²⁷ Couvreur 1895, p. 142; Gassmann 2016a, p. 288f.; Lau 2003, p. 134.

¹²⁸ Bloom 2009, p. 133; Dobson 1963, p. 102; Eno 2015, p. 155f.; Legge 1970, p. 425; and Van Norden 2008, p. 159.

¹²⁹ Hinton 1998b, p. 216f.

them; but it is not typical of older brothers to be slower than their younger brothers.

Fourth, a similar argument is made in 1A7 in connection with elders (though translators disagree about whether it is about bowing to them, breaking sticks for them, cracking their joints, or something else).

為長者折枝，語人曰『我不能』，是不為也，非不能也。

‘Collect kindling for an elderly person.’ If you tell others, ‘I am unable,’ you are simply not acting, not genuinely unable.¹³⁰

The similarity to 6B2’s “walking slowly behind” is especially close if D. C. Lau and Irene Bloom are right to read *zhézhī* 折枝 here as bowing.¹³¹

Fifth, at 6B2 the observation that every man can walk behind his elders was chosen to respond to a shallowly literal challenge and show that the Way, encapsulated as *xiàotì*, is possible for every man. But if *tì* here means subfraternity, then the reference is to walking behind one’s elder brother, which is *obviously not* possible for every man. A literal-minded person who understood Mencius to be referring to subfraternity would be especially likely to notice this impossibility and object that the example proves the falsehood of Mencius’ claim that *xiàotì* is possible for every man. If Mencius is talking about the lineage pair, the objection is obvious, correct, and apt. A competent rhetorician would not have offered an argument to a shallow-minded challenger that the challenger could reasonably be expected to recognize as a bad mistake. And we are not told that the main raised the objection.

¹³⁰ Van Norden 2008, p. 11, translation slightly modified.

¹³¹ Lau 2003, p. 11; Bloom 2009, p. 9.

Sixth, Mencius and his followers could not have regarded walking behind one's older brother as emblematic of the Way of Shun, who had no older brother.

Seventh, *tì* here is taken as emblematic of *xiàotì*. That makes more sense if *xiàotì* is the straddling pair. Bruya & Li 2026, for example, translates *xiàotì* in the straddling sense as “respect for elders inside and outside the family.”¹³²

Eighth perhaps, if the tradition about Mencius' childhood is true and if the passage was written among people aware of the basics of his biography, the passage would not have represented Mencius as summing up the Way in a kind of action that Mencius himself could never perform.

Mencius 1A3 and 1A7

謹庠序之教，申之以孝悌之義，頒白者不負戴於道路矣。

If one is careful about providing instruction in the village schools, emphasizing the righteousness of filiality and *tì*, those whose hair has turned gray will not carry loads on the roadways.¹³³

This sentence appears in a passage common to both 1A3, addressing King Hui of Liang, and 1A7, addressing King Xuan of Qi.¹³⁴

A similar example of elder-respect is given in the long *Liji: Jiyi* discussion of elder-respect quoted on p. 4f. above, and chosen as one of the two illustrative examples of elder-respect in the scholarly literature's main discussion of *tì*.¹³⁵

¹³² Bruya & Li 2026, p. 455f.

¹³³ The English is from Van Norden 2008, p. 5 (and similarly on p. 15).

¹³⁴ It does not follow that the passages are not authentic, given the skills and practices of an oral age.

¹³⁵ Knapp 2003, p. 604.

Subfraternity typically cannot be exercised toward the elderly except by the elderly, who themselves might have trouble carrying burdens. The emphasis here on conspicuously elderly people in maximally public contexts, people easily identified by the typical stranger as “older than me,” strongly suggests that elder-respect outside the family is a leading part of what is meant by *xiàotì* here, so that presumably *tì* here is elder-respect.

It might be supposed that at 1A3 and 1A7, the thought is that in a society of filial and subfraternal piety, any elderly people would be amply served by their younger kin. But the *Mencius* assumes in 1A5 that many elderly people lacked close kin even under King Wen, and the topic in 1A3 and 1A7 is effects a king may expect during his own reign by changes of policy.

It might be imagined that at 1A3 and 1A7, Mencius is using *tì* to mean subfraternity and is relying on a tacit premise that a man’s good conduct within his nuclear family has a chance of giving him, eventually, the analogous practices in public life, hence arguably elder-respect, at least if conditions are good. But this speculative and contrived reading does not fit the context. In each of 1A3 and 1A7, Mencius’ claim that inculcating *xiàotì* in the schools would benefit the old on the roads appears within a speech aiming to persuade a king who is presumably not familiar with Ru doctrine.¹³⁶ In this speech, the statement with *tì* is the concluding item on a list of claims about the effects to be expected from Mencius’ proposed policies, and each of the other claimed cause-effect connections is perfectly transparent, not reliant on any special doctrine.

We have now seen that *tì* means elder-respect rather than subfraternity in

¹³⁶ A would-be counselor would not make it a priority to tell kings that he thought being a good younger brother is crucial for general virtue.

- at least half the distinct passages where it appears in the *Mencius*, and hence half of the distinct passages where it is partnered with *xiào* in the *Mencius*;
- at least one passage in three of the four Books that use the term; and
- at least three of the six passages, and at least two of the five distinct passages, where *tì* is part of the brief string *xiàotì*.

***Mencius* 1A5**

In this passage Mencius assures a king that benevolent governance by gentle tax and penal policies will so benefit agriculture that

壯者以暇日修其孝悌忠信，入以事其父兄，出以事其長上
 ... the strong-bodied, during their days of leisure, shall cultivate their filial piety, *tì*, sincerity and truthfulness, serving thereby, at home, their fathers and older brothers, and, abroad, their elders and superiors, ...

By contrast, the rulers of other states

奪其民時，使不得耕耨以養其父母，父母凍餓，兄弟妻子離散。
 rob their people of their time, so that they cannot plough and weed their fields, in order to support their parents. Their parents suffer from cold and hunger. Brothers, wives, and children are separated and scattered abroad.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Legge 1970, p. 135f.

Séraphin Couvreur reads *tì* here as respect for one's elders or betters;¹³⁸ Eno and Slingerland read it as elder-respect.¹³⁹

The context of the mention of *xiàotì* here in 1A5 is similar to the context in 1A3 and 1A7, reviewed just above, where *tì* is elder-respect. This similarity is a significant reason to expect key words to be used in the same sense in 1A5 that they possess in the similar argument in 1A3 and 1A7. Other similarities between the larger passages are great enough to have led E. Bruce Brooks to conclude that 1A5 (at least the part of it with *tì*) and the passage quoted above from 1A3 and 1A7 are among the very few passages in the *Mencius* that are “probably genuine.”¹⁴⁰ This too may be a reason to expect key words to be used in the same sense in 1A5 as in 1A3 and 1A7.

Another clue to the meaning of *tì* in this passage is more ambiguous. It is that the string *xiàotì zhōngxìn* 孝悌忠信 appears to be followed by a longer rough paraphrase. Of course it is possible that the longer paraphrase does not divide neatly into elements each corresponding to an element of the shorter string *xiàotì zhōngxìn* 孝悌忠信, and it is possible that the paraphrase is not mere paraphrase but also mentions some consequences. But as the longer string may be a clue to the meaning of *tì* in this passage, we should look to see whether we can plausibly map parts of the paraphrase to parts of the string with *tì* that it paraphrases. In fact there are two kinds of mapping that each have some plausibility.

¹³⁸ Couvreur 1895, p. 309.

¹³⁹ Eno 2016, p. 21; Slingerland 2003, p. 152.

¹⁴⁰ Brooks 2010, p. 150.

First mapping: *tì* is subfraternity.

Items on the brief list	Corresponding items in the paraphrase
孝悌	入以事其父兄 serving father and older brothers
忠信	出以事其長上 serving non-kin elders and superiors

Second mapping: *tì* is respect for elders (or elders and superiors).

Items on the brief list	Corresponding items in the paraphrase	
孝	入以事其父兄 serving father and paternal uncles	
悌	出以事其長上 serving non-kin elders & superiors	出以事其長 serving non-kin elders
忠信	(faithfully)	上 and superiors

One might favor the first mapping on the grounds that the term *fùxiōng* 父兄 means fathers and older brothers. But as noted earlier, this term need not be read in that way. It often means the sons of one's paternal grandfather, and in that sense it might be associated with filial piety as distinct from elder-respect, as in the second mapping.

Also as noted earlier, the *rù/chū* format that marks the two halves of Mencius' paraphrase was associated long before and after with the partnering of *xiào* inside and *tì* outside. We have found this association elsewhere in the *Mencius*, at 3B4; and also in the *Analects*, the *Xunzǐ*, the *Huainanzǐ*, and the *Yantielun*. We have also found *rù/chū* used to partner family virtue with elder-

respect in the *Liji* and in essays on two topics in the *Mozi*. Only on the second mapping above do the two halves of the *rù/chū* format line up with *xiào* and *tì* in the standard way.

After the paraphrase, Mencius goes on to describe the effects of the rival policies, speaking first of parents and then of brothers, spouses and children, without mentioning elders in general. This point may seem to suggest the subfraternity reading of *tì* here, but it would be more significant evidence had spouses and children not been mentioned in the same breath as brothers, and had the speaker not connected these consequences so directly with tax policies and penal policies.

Mencius 7A32

孟子曰：君子居是國也，其君用之，則安富尊榮；其子弟從之，則孝弟忠信。
... Mencius replied, “When a superior man resides in a country, if its sovereign employ his counsels, he comes to tranquility, wealth and glory. If the young in it follow his instructions, they become filial, obedient to their elders, true-hearted, and faithful. ...”¹⁴¹

Several other scholars¹⁴² agree with Legge in rendering *tì* here as respect for elders, perhaps because it is attributed to the young in general. It is not true in general that the young men in a state could be subfraternal. Many of the most important ones could not.

¹⁴¹ Legge 1970, p. 467f.

¹⁴² Couvreur 1895, p. 623; Eno 2016, p. 129; Hinton 1998b, p. 247; Lau 2003, p. 152.

Here *tì* appears in the phrase *xiàotì zhōngxìn* 孝弟忠信, the same phrase we found in 1A5 above. That fact is some reason to think the term is used in the same sense in both passages.

Mencius 7A39

... 孟子曰：「是猶或紆其兄之臂，子謂之姑徐徐云爾，亦教之孝弟而已矣。」...

... Mencius said, “That is just as if there were one twisting the arm of his older brother, and you were merely to say to him ‘Gently, gently, if you please.’ Your only course should be to teach such an one filial piety and *tì*” ...¹⁴³

In 7A39 it is natural to take the example to suggest that “弟” is meant in the sense of subfraternity. But the elder-respect reading is not impossible. For, first, twisting one’s older brother’s arm would be a vivid sign of a lack of *filial-piety-and-elder-respect*, as pertaining somewhat to each.

And second, 7A39 is the only passage with *xiào* and *tì* where the lineage pair reading is a *prima facie* significantly stronger candidate than the straddling pair reading. The hypothesis that *xiàotì* is the straddling pair at 7A39 thus amounts more or less to the hypothesis that the *Mencius* never uses *xiàotì* in the lineage sense. So to test that hypothesis we should not ask ourselves not which sense of *xiàotì* the *Mencius* would choose to employ here given the example. And one thing we should ask ourselves is whether the passage as is could have been composed by someone who thought of the root as the straddling pair, unambiguously called *xiàotì*.

¹⁴³ Legge 1970, p. 472.

And as we shall see in the next section, there is reason to think that in the context of discussing the root of virtue, the *Mencius* may repeatedly use the term *xiōng* 兄 to refer to a person's elders generally.

In sum, in the *Mencius*, though *tì* is always closely paired with *xiào*, the term does not usually mean subfraternity. At most it means subfraternity in nearly half of the passages in which it appears, or fully half of the different passages. On the other hand, it might never mean subfraternity. If and insofar as we have significant reason to regard the book as the authentic report of the words of one man or of a coherent school writing in a narrow range of time, we have reason to read the uncertain cases in line with the certain cases. And insofar as we see *xiàotì* used in different senses in different places, that difference is one more clue as to how we might divide the text into parts with different origins.

B. The *Mencius* sees filial piety and elder-respect as the roots of *rén* and *yì* respectively.

This final section of the paper turns from an investigation of the meaning of a word in the *Mencius* to an investigation of its philosophy in general, and in particular asks whether the *Mencius* would favor the lineage pair or the straddling pair as a candidate for the root of virtue.

We saw that 6B2 hyperbolically identifies the straddling pair with the Way of Yao and Shun. And we saw that 3B4 offers the straddling pair as a sort of emblematic core of *rényì*.

On the other hand, as we have seen, 7A39 seems to suggest that the root is the lineage pair. Other *Mencius* passages with *xiàotì* make no comparably clear suggestion about the importance of the pair, however conceived.

But three passages without *tì* seem to speak to our question “Which *tì* is filial piety’s partner in the root?” These are 4A11, suggesting elder-respect; 4A27, usually taken to suggest subfraternity; and 7A15, seemingly of two minds on the point. Some scholars read all three passages as speaking of elder-respect and not subfraternity; none reads them all the other way. (No passage in the *Mencius* proposes that subfraternity is the root of elder-respect.)

***Mencius* 4A11** puts forth elder-respect as filial piety’s partner with no apparent mention of subfraternity.

孟子曰：「道在爾而求諸遠，事在易而求之難。人人親其親、長其長而天下平。」

Mengzi said, “The Way lies in what is near, but people seek it in what is distant; one’s task lies in what is easy, but people seek it in what is difficult. If everyone would treat their parents as parents and their elders as elders, the world would be at peace.”¹⁴⁴

The passage does not explicitly offer the two virtues as the root of comprehensive virtue. But it can be taken to suggest that once we make that easy start, the rest of the Way comes easily.

***Mencius* 4A27** seems to paint a different picture. Here is the relevant part, with English from Bryan Van Norden:

¹⁴⁴ Van Norden 2008, p. 95.

孟子曰：「仁之實，事親是也；義之實，從兄是也。...」

Mengzi said, “The core of benevolence is serving one’s parents. The core of righteousness is obeying one’s *xiōng* 兄. ...”¹⁴⁵

Robert Eno,¹⁴⁶ David Hinton,¹⁴⁷ Hongkyung Kim,¹⁴⁸ Maija Bell Samei¹⁴⁹ and Edward Slingerland¹⁵⁰ translate *xiōng* 兄 in 4A27 as elders rather than older brothers. David Nivison¹⁵¹ suggests the same understanding.

(Robert H. Gassmann too seems to see the problem with the “older brothers” reading, for he interprets *xiōng* here as older brothers and paternal cousins.¹⁵²)

Other scholars translate *xiōng* here as older brothers, without noting any potential problem. But on that reading, to understand even the broad strokes of the passage’s thinking about *yì* one would have to think through hard questions that I have not seen raised, as follows.

Suppose we read *xiōng* here as older brothers. We might read *shí* 實 with most scholars as **(a)** “core” or “substance,” or else with Zhu Xi as **(b)** “seed,”¹⁵³ or else with Legge as **(c)** “richest fruit.” Let us consider these options in order.

¹⁴⁵ Van Norden 2008, p. 101.

¹⁴⁶ Eno 2016, p. 79.

¹⁴⁷ Hinton 1998b, p. 138.

¹⁴⁸ H. Kim 2016, p. 157 n. 42.

¹⁴⁹ Z. Li 2010, p. 61.

¹⁵⁰ Slingerland 2003, p. 81.

¹⁵¹ David Nivison writes,

In book 4 (4A27) we read that caring for parents is the core activity (*shih*), so to speak, of what Mencius calls *jen* (benevolence, kindness) and obeying elders (literally, elder brothers) the core of *i* (rightness or dutifulness). (Nivison 1979, p. 427)

¹⁵² Gassmann 2016a, p. 241; Gassmann 2016b, p. 53; Gassmann 2016c, p. 169.

¹⁵³ Quoted in A. K. L. Chan 2004, p. 169f.

(a) Now, we may disagree about whether *yì* means something like the right, or justice, or duty, or fulfilling one’s relational roles well. But even the beginnings of a practical grasp of the right, or of justice, or of duty, or of fulfilling relational roles well, would put beneath consideration the view that the **substance** of any of those things—its main bulk or main point—is obedience to one’s older brother(s).

(b) What about the idea that obedience to older brothers is the **seed** or **socio-psychological core** of *yì*? If we read the statement this way, we are taking it to imply that *yì* was largely unavailable to Emperor Shun (whose *yì* was especially well grounded according to *Mencius* 4B19¹⁵⁴), to King Wen (who is said at *Mencius* 4A13 and 7A22 to have been “good at caring for the old”),¹⁵⁵ to Mencius himself if the biographical tradition is correct, to most rulers a counsellor might hope to counsel, to most heads of clans and lineages, and to the men whom subfraternity follows (*cóng* 從).¹⁵⁶ The remainder of the passage would then imply that these people have limited access to wisdom and the benefits of ritual and music.

¹⁵⁴ 4B19 says that the sage emperor Shun “由仁義行，非行仁義也”—or as Irene Bloom translates, “Humaneness and rightness were the source of his actions; he did not just perform acts of humaneness and rightness” (Bloom 2009, p. 89). Shun’s filial piety is a model, and a recurring topic is the ways his family seems to challenge his virtue; but no passage comments on his lack of an older brother as a specific potential problem for his pursuit of *yì*. Shun is exalted also at *Mencius* 2A8, 2B2, 3A1, 3A4, 3B9, 4A1, 4A2, 4A26, 4A28, 4B1, 4B28, 5A1, 5A2, 5A3, 5A4, 5A5, 5A6, 5A7, 5B1, 5B3, 5B6, 6B2, 6B3, 6B10, 6B15, 7A16, 7A25, 7A30, 7A35, 7A46, 7B6, 7B33, 7B37, and 7B38.

¹⁵⁵ King Wen is exalted also at *Mencius* 1A2, 1B2, 1B3, 1B5, 1B10, 2A1, 2A3, 3A1, 3A3, 3B9, 4A7, 4A13, 4B1, 4B20, 6B2, 7A10, 7A22, 7B19, and 7B38.

¹⁵⁶ This last point is a simplification. If a third son is obeying a second son who is, unbeknownst to the third son, disobeying the first son, then the third son is subfraternal and obeying someone who *can* be but is not being *yì*.

By contrast, regarding the practice of general elder-respect as the socio-psychological root of *yì* would not have been unthinkable. Unlike subfraternity, elder-respect is a pattern of relating to something like society at large. Seniority order is an order for society as a whole. Unlike subfraternity, the practice of elder-respect was fully available to all the important men just listed. And the idea that elder-respect is the socio-psychological root of *yì* would help explain why, when the Mencians and Gaozians dispute in 6A, the Mencians do not challenge the Gaozian use of treating elders as elders as emblematic of *yì*, though Mencius does more or less imply in the latter part of 6A5 that pouring first for one non-kin neighbor in a ceremony is not as significant a part of respectful practice as is a younger brother's general respect for his older brother. Regarding elder-respect as the root of *yì* would also help explain why at 3B4 the straddling pair is loosely identified with *rényì*, and at 6B2 is loosely identified with the Way of Yao and Shun (which in turn is loosely identified with *rényì* at 2B2).

(c) If instead we read *shí* 實 as **richest fruit**, the passage suggests only indirectly that serving one's parents and following one's *xiōng* support *rén* and *yì*. These practices would support *rén* and *yì* by giving people access to special rewards for being *rén* and *yì*. Hence on the "older brother" reading the passage implies that people without older brothers have no access to the best attractions of *yì*. The audience of such a claim may be expected to take it as implying that on average first and only sons would likely do a worse job of practicing *yì* than other men would. All translators who use "fruit" here insert a modifier: "richest" or "greatest" or "principal," perhaps reflecting the thought that the stronger the modifier the lesser the magnitude of the problem, making the passage on the surface say, not that *all* the fruits of *yì* depend on having an older brother, but only that the very best fruits depend on that. But the *Mencius* uses no modifier.

The *Mencius* nowhere discusses whether first or only sons are less successful at *yì* than other men are; it seems unconcerned about whether the core of rightness is to follow someone congenitally hampered from reliably choosing what is *yì*. The *Mencius* does not directly question primogeniture as the default principle for selecting the heads of clans and lineages, and it does not challenge the preference for oldest sons as state leaders. In defending a method of choice different from inheritance, the *Mencius* foregrounds the accession of Shun, who was an oldest son.

The entire absence of comment on any of these implications is evidence against understanding *xiōng* in 4A27 as “older brothers”—or rather against *both* reading the term that way and regarding the passage as indicative of the views that generated the rest of the collection, and thus against citing the passage toward characterizing the general philosophy of the collection.¹⁵⁷

A passage in *Liji: Jiyi 13* poses a similar problem for the “older brother” reading of *xiōng*. Here is the passage, with Legge’s translation as at ctext.org.

至孝近乎王，雖天子，必有父；至弟近乎霸，雖諸侯，必有兄。

He who is perfectly filial approximates to being king, for even the son of Heaven had the father (whom he must revere); and he who is perfectly fraternal approximates to being presiding chieftain, for even a feudal lord had his older brothers (or cousins), (whom he must obey).

¹⁵⁷ To this claim one might object that perhaps the *Mencius* did not discuss these implications because it would have been awkward to do so. But these implications of 4A27 on the “older brothers” reading should not have been *obscure*.

If we read *xiōng* here as older brother, the text says that every feudal lord necessarily has an older brother. Presumably for that reason, Couvreur takes *xiōng* here simply to mean “elders.”¹⁵⁸ That reading removes what appears to be an absurd factual falsehood from the passage,¹⁵⁹ and suggests that *xiào* and *tì* in the passage should be understood as the straddling pair, as they are understood elsewhere in the *Liji: Jiyi*.

Legge’s reading of *xiōng* as “older brothers (or cousins)”—presumably he means older male paternal cousins—replaces the assertion that every feudal lord necessarily has an older brother with the assertion that every feudal lord necessarily has an older male paternal cousin. This reinterpretation ameliorates the problem only if we suppose also that by *tì* the passage meant, not subfraternity nor general elder-respect, but being a good younger co-patrilineal-grandson to the older ones.

A problem with Legge’s proposal about *Jiyi* 13 is that it is unlikely to have been true that the typical lord had an older paternal cousin. In a society quite familiar with both paternal cousinhood and primogeniture, a Ru would not have

¹⁵⁸ Couvreur 1899, vol. 2 p. 284.

¹⁵⁹ One might **object** to Couvreur’s “elders” reading on the grounds that *Jiyi* 13 begins with “Therefore” (*shìgù* 是故) and *Jiyi* 12 had very recently used *xiōng* clearly not in the sense of elders generally (perhaps to say that the ruler’s elder-respect would teach subfraternity to the people). A **reply** to the objection is that the two chapters were probably not composed as part of a continuous discussion, for **(a)** though *Jiyi* 12 repeatedly uses 近於, *Jiyi* 13 uses 近乎 instead; **(b)** the chapters apply that metaphor of nearness in two very different ways; and **(c)** any supposed connection between the claims of the two chapters would make the inference to the claims in the latter chapter a plain non sequitur on any reasonable reading of *xiōng*. The chapters seem to have different origins, and to have been juxtaposed (and linked by “therefore”) for very superficial reasons.

supposed that feudal lords *usually* have older male paternal cousins, much less that they “must.”¹⁶⁰

Another early text in which reading *xiōng* as “older brothers” generates a problem that might be addressed by reading *xiōng* instead as “elders” is [Xiaojing 16](#). Here is the relevant passage, with Legge’s translation from [ccontext.org](#). The term *xiōng* appears at the end.

故雖天子，必有尊也，言有父也；必有先也，言有兄也。

Therefore even the Son of Heaven must have some whom he honors; that is, he has his uncles of his surname. He must have some to

¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, small children might not have known to doubt the claim that every feudal lord must have an older paternal cousin, and to my ear the thesis of the passage strongly suggests that small children might have been the original intended audience of the material recorded here. The little falsehood about cousins might serve the temporary purpose of helping little boys come to terms with having to be respectfully deferential to their older brothers or cousins. For that purpose, Legge’s interpretive device might sufficiently rescue the passage.

Yet another reading of this passage arguably does a better job of addressing the problem that feudal lords need not have older brothers (though not as good a job as Couvreur’s proposal does), and also addresses another of the big problems about the passage, a question that Legge’s and Couvreur’s proposals do not address: What *difference* between the situations of a king and a hegemon could the text have in mind, in choosing which virtue to map to which high office? We can address both problems by reading the passage’s proposed reason why being *tì* is like being a hegemon (*suī zhūhóu, bìyōuxiōng* 雖諸侯，必有兄) as follows: “Even among the feudal lords [notional brothers], some must be older.” Hence necessarily the *typical* feudal lord and (perhaps) therefore the typical hegemon would have an elder in that group. Thus the typical hegemon had a notional older brother in a way that the Son of Heaven did not, while the Son of Heaven had a notional father that the feudal lords did not. A problem with this reading is that if we pursue the brother metaphor, the hegemon would seem to be a notionally oldest brother and thus to lack a notional older brother.

whom he concedes the precedence; that is, he has his cousins, who bear the same surname and are older than himself.¹⁶¹

I am not sure why “father” does not suffice as a translation of *fù* here. An emperor likely does not have a living father, but filial reverence can be shown to the deceased. A problem with the “elder paternal cousins” reading of *xiōng* in this passage as in *Liji: Jiyi 13* is that it is far from clear that the typical emperor would have had an elder paternal cousin.

Paul R. Goldin renders the term here in as “elder brothers,” and says in a note, “In practice, these two requirements were often irrelevant, because the Son of Heaven did not typically have a living father or elder brothers of any kind.”¹⁶² But we need not suppose that the text assumed that filial reverence ends with the father’s death. Indeed the opening of the chapter seems to say that the former kings were in fact filial, and just after the quoted sentence the chapter seems to speak of the emperor’s filial service in the ancestral temple. Hence the potential problem centers on *xiōng*, and there is no parallel between father and elder brother regarding their absence as relevant to the passage’s vision.

Goldin’s note, in saying that the requirements this passage is concerned with were typically “irrelevant,” seems to take the force of *bì* 必 in the passage to be, “He has to put someone first in this or that way [*if* he happens to have this or that relative],” while the tacit condition’s typical falsity makes the explicit part of the general statement typically false. But as the chapter is about the important

¹⁶¹ Rosemont & Ames 2009 may intend the same idea in translating *xiōng* as “his elder brothers’ generation,” (p. 104); though the reason for turning to a complex reading is that the emperor likely has no elder brothers. Also any man’s elder brothers’ generation in his lineage would be the same as the man’s own generation, and probably some of these would be the man’s juniors.

¹⁶² Goldin 2005b, pp. 111, 112 n. 22.

benefits to governance that come mainly from the emperor's filial piety (and perhaps *tì* alongside), I think the force of *bì* must be to express the need to do what procures those benefits: *xiào* (which is always possible) and, quite secondarily here, *tì*.

We can find a neater solution suggested in the vocabulary notes to *Literary Chinese by the Inductive Method, Vol. 1: The Hsiao Ching*, edited by Herrlee G. Creel and others. The note to *xiōng* in this passage refers us to an earlier note that glosses *xiōng* as “elder brother, senior.”¹⁶³ If the note is correct in representing “senior” as a more common meaning of *xiōng* than “elder male paternal cousin,” then we should prefer the “senior” reading at *Xiaojing* 16 on the grounds that the the other readings are more problematic. And then *xiàotì* in that chapter must refer to the straddling pair.

Mencius 7A15 is the third and last *Mencius* passage without *tì* that can seem to describe the root of complete virtue as the lineage pair or as the straddling pair. But on the usual reading, the passage seems to be of two minds on the point.

孟子曰：「人之所不學而能者，其良能也；所不慮而知者，其良知也。孩提之童，無不知愛其親者；及其長也，無不知敬其兄也。親親，仁也；敬長，義也。無他，達之天下也。」

Mengzi said, “That which people are capable of without learning is their genuine capability. That which they know without pondering is their genuine knowledge. Among babes in arms there are none that do not know to love their parents. When they grow older, there are none that do not know to revere their elder brothers. Treating one's parents as parents is benevolence. Revering one's elders is

¹⁶³ Creel, Chang & Rudolph 1938, pp. 145 n. 828, 139 n. 720.

righteousness. There is nothing else to do but extend these to the world.”¹⁶⁴

Roger T. Ames,¹⁶⁵ Robert Eno,¹⁶⁶ David Hinton¹⁶⁷ and James Ware¹⁶⁸ render *xiōng* 兄 here as *elders* rather than *older brothers*, but do not say why. (Robert H. Gassmann translates *xiōng* here as older brothers and paternal cousins.¹⁶⁹) Others understand *xiōng* here as older brothers.

Several considerations favor the elders reading over the older brothers reading.

One, perhaps, is that the passage says revering one’s *xiōng* 兄 does not come early. It would take some time to learn a practice as general as elder-respect.

Another is that on its face the sentence with *xiōng* directly implies that everyone has had *xiōng*—an implication that is unmistakably absurd if *xiōng* means older brothers, but unmistakably true if *xiōng* means elders in general.

Another is that on the elders reading of *xiōng* the two arguments of the passage are precisely parallel, so that the argument about *yì* is just as simple, clear and straightforward as the argument about *rén*. The overall idea of the passage can then be that none of us adults has been blocked by lack of understanding from practicing *rén* and *yì*. We have all had the necessary understanding early on, from the beginning of adulthood or earlier. Here are

¹⁶⁴ Van Norden 2008, p. 175.

¹⁶⁵ Ames 2011, p. 152.

¹⁶⁶ Eno 2016, p. 126.

¹⁶⁷ Hinton 1998b, p. 240.

¹⁶⁸ Ware 1960, p. 151. But at 4A27, Ware takes *xiōng* to be older brothers (p. 105).

¹⁶⁹ Gassmann 2016a, p. 277.

paraphrases of the two arguments so understood, giving in bold the parts that are explicit in the passage.

A1. Each person has known (or knows) to love their parents.

A2. Loving one's parents \approx *rén*

(to complete it, just extend the love to all).

A3. So *rén* is open to each person. (1,2)

B1. Each adult has known (or knows) to respect their elders.

B2. Respecting one's elders \approx *yì*

(to complete it, just extend the respect to all).

B3. So *yì* is open to each adult. (1,2)

If we read *xiōng* as “older brothers,” the only way to make the argument about *yì* intelligible on its face, and not fallacious on its face, *and* the only way to make it run parallel to the argument about *rén*, is to suppose both that (a) it is speaking only of people with older brothers, and that (b) *jìngzhǎng* 敬長 here means “respect one's older brothers,” so that the argument is as follows:

C1. Each adult with an older brother

has known (or knows) to respect their older brother(s).

C2. Respecting one's older brother(s) \approx *yì*

(to complete it, just extend the respect to all).

C3. So *yì* is somehow open to each adult with an older brother. (1,2)

On this reading the argument about *yì* does not aim to show that *yì* is somehow available to every adult; rather it conspicuously implies the opposite. But here

are six reasons to suppose that the intent of the passage was in fact to show that *yì* is available to every adult.

- The view that great virtue is somehow open to everyone is a prominent Mencian theme in general.
- The argument about *rén* supports the view that *rén* is somehow open to everyone, and the way the two arguments are presented (a bit of one, then the corresponding bit of the other, then the next bit of the one, and so on) strongly suggests they are to be seen as parallel and similar.
- The language of both arguments foregrounds the idea of everyone.
- The passage stresses that learning and cogitation are not necessary.
- As we have seen, *Mencius* 1A7, 4A11 and 6B2 suggest on simple quick arguments or none at all that elder-respect is easy for everyone, so it would be odd for 7A15 to defend the availability of *yì* on grounds of a defense of the availability of elder-respect that is limited to the case of younger brothers.
- If the conclusion at 7A15 is not that *yì* is open to all, but only that it is open to all who have older brothers, then the people not covered by the argument would include many or most of the men whose practicing *yì* was of most concern to the early Ru, including one whose *yì* is said at 4B19 to be especially well grounded.

(The concluding sentence of 7A15 might give us a reason on either side or neither, depending on how we interpret it.)

If the author of the remark at 7A15 meant that people know respect for their *elders* generally, one can perhaps see why the passage might nevertheless have used *qí xiōng* 其兄 rather than *qí zhǎng* 其長 in saying so. For *qí zhǎng* 其長

is used in a completely different sense to introduce this very clause. And for two reasons the author should still have expected their hearers or readers at least to think of the idea that *xiōng* here might stand for elders, if that was linguistically possible. First, the arguments about *rén* and *yì* are presented in parallel. Hence the reader can be counted on to try to think of ways to read the two arguments as parallel (and I suppose we all do try, at first). Second, readers can be counted on to notice the absurdity of the “brothers” reading. The song “Everybody Ought to Have a Maid,” from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, relies on even the casual general audience to notice a similar absurdity—but a lesser one, both because (a) it is theoretically possible for everyone to have a maid and because (b) the song title can be taken in what medieval logicians called a “distributed sense,” as saying only that each person would be better off if they had a maid, while the claim that everyone actually learns respect for his older brother can have no parallel defense.

One might propose to read the passage as arguing that **(a)** everyone of a certain age understands relating to an elder brother (because that is easy to understand without having an elder brother) and therefore **(b)** everyone can practice elder-respect (because the understanding required is similar), so that everyone can be *yì*.

But even if there is a kind of knowing that can fit that reading,¹⁷⁰ still on the older brother reading the *Mencius* says people know relating to *their* older

¹⁷⁰ **Acquaintance** logically requires actual experience. Wang Yangming likely was thinking of a kind of acquaintance when he said, “If you say that someone knows *xiào* and knows *tì*, it must be someone who has actually practiced *xiào* and practiced *tì*. Only then can you say the person knows *xiào* and knows *tì*” (“就如稱某人知孝、某人知弟，必是其人已曾行孝行弟，方可稱他知孝知弟，不成只是曉得說些孝弟的話，便可稱為知孝弟，” quoted in Fung 2012, pp. 283, 297f.).

Instinct. We might imagine that people have a delayed-onset natural instinct that is functionally equivalent to acquaintance with respect for older brothers but does not

brothers (*qí xiōng* 其兄). And (2) knowing subfraternity might not be similar to knowing elder-respect in general or abroad, so that the former could root the latter, *especially* for men who have no older brother, or who have just one or two. Some years of experience with a brother might acquaint a man with what it is like for him to respect or love that brother, with all his idiosyncrasies and in the context of their shared history and specific expectations of each other. But if family counts for anything and has any distinctive flavor, and if a man's

require actual experience; rather as, in the film *The Matrix*, knowing kung fu was loaded into someone through a cable. But the claim about knowing at Mencius 7A15 seems to be offered as a premise the audience is expected to accept, so the claim should not be outlandish.

Knowing how. A brotherless person might know how to respect an older brother, at least in broad strokes. But such knowing would take some thought (which 7A15 denies), and it would not go as far as the ordinary virtuosity of a practiced feel for interacting with an actual older brother. The person would not know how it feels to respect an older brother, or how to navigate the hard parts—unless the assumption is that everyone can know this by interacting with *other* elders, in which case we might capture Mencius' main line of thought about *yì* more clearly by translating *xiōng* as *elders* rather than *older brothers*.

Knowing to. A person cannot correctly be said to “know to do X” when they are unable to consider doing X, unable to think or suspect that they should do X, and unable to believe they ever did or ever will have occasion or reason to do X—especially when these inabilities express the person's easy firm practical knowledge of a main simple permanent framework condition of their life and identity. I cannot, then, be said to know to respect an elder brother if I have none.

Conditional knowing-to. Like millions of other people my age, I know to eat my bowl of live serpent worms by hand and with apparent enjoyment of their deaths, should I find myself at table with Klingons (warlike humanoids native to a planet far from here), though that conditional knowing what to do does not amount to my ever knowing what to do. Similarly, a brotherless man might know what to do in the imaginary scenario that he has an older brother. But this conditional knowing-to would not come without thought (as 7A15 requires) or go deep.

Knowing that one should respect any older brothers one might have can come only with much thought, especially for people without older brothers. And it might be hard to accept a parallel claim that infants know that one should love one's parents, or that they should love their own.

relationship with his older brother is personal, that acquaintance may not acquaint him with what it is like in general to defer to indefinite numbers of adult strangers and differently specific colleagues, many of whom are not 2 but rather 20 or 40 years older than he.

In sum, the “elders” reading of *xiōng* at *Mencius* 7A15 and 4A27 may be a slight linguistic strain on the word, but the “older brothers” reading seems far more problematic.

And if we do accept the “elders” reading of *xiōng* in such passages, as a number of scholars do, then we might rethink the idea that at 7A39, when the text speaks of twisting the arm of one’s *xiōng*, it specifically means twisting the arm of one’s older brother. The meaning might not be so definite, in which case it would be much more likely that *xiàotì* throughout the *Mencius* refers to filial piety at home and elder-respect abroad, the root of *rényì* 仁義.

Of course it is possible that the *Mencius* is of two minds about whether the root of virtue is the lineage pair or the straddling pair, or even muddled about the distinction.

The formulaic pairing of *xiào* and *tì*, apparently antedating the idea that the pair is the root of complete virtue, may originally have reflected an interest in balancing men’s lineage ties with their more public involvement. In the centuries after Youzi’s time, the claim that the pair is the root of virtue or of some virtue was restated and interpreted in various ways, reflecting various associations with the terms and various philosophical and factual considerations. The ambiguity of *tì* and of related terms may have encouraged people not to decide on a definite conception of the root in the face of considerations and texts pushing in different directions. Thus the intelligible association of respect for

elders with *yì* as against *rén* may have generated a less explicable association of respect for older brothers with *yì* as against *rén*.

Appendix: *Analects* 1.2 is not about children

The statement at *Analects* 1.2 is sometimes thought to be focusing on childhood preparation for morally excellent adulthood, or at least to be speaking in very significant part of the *xiàotì* of children.¹⁷¹ But that point is not explicit in the passage.

I shall offer four reasons in support of what I imagine to be the view of most scholars, that *Analects* 1.2 did not originally have childhood in view.

A. The *Analects* does not otherwise have children in view.

The first reason to think Youzi was probably not talking about children is that no interest in the habits, practices, training or education of anyone under 15 is displayed in any of the dozen or so remarks attributed to Youzi in pre-Qin texts,¹⁷² nor displayed in any other statement by any speaker in the *Analects*¹⁷³ (except insofar as we take

¹⁷¹ Angle 2022, p. 25; Berger 2025, p. 139; Bruya 2018, p. xiv; Cline 2015, p. 43; C. Li 2023, pp. 68, 97f.; Peterman 2015, p. 15; Van Norden 2007, p. 128; Van Norden 2011, p. 24.

¹⁷² One might wonder whether *Lǐjì: Tángōng II: 164* is an exception. But there Youzi is not complaining about a child; he is complaining about a mourner acting like a child; compare the parallel clause at *Lǐjì: Tángōng I: 67*. Also the term *rúzi* 孺子, used there, can simply mean “offspring” rather than “child,” as at *Lǐjì: Nèizé 11*.

¹⁷³ There are just three passages in the *Analects* where Confucius touches on how a parent might relate to living offspring. At **13.4** he says that when a country is governed well people will immigrate, bringing their children “strapped to their backs.” People will choose physical and economic hardship for the sake of good government. At **13.18** he says that a good father will cover up for a son who has committed a crime. The context does not suggest that the age of the person who needs shielding is relevant; and the one son mentioned in the passage is old enough to have reported his father. In a late Book, at **17.21**, Confucius mentions that parents hold their infants during the first years. But he does not suggest that this practice helps shape the child’s character, except as

providing grounds for much later gratitude. In the case at hand his point is that the son is ungrateful though his parents presumably held him because all parents do that.

Erin Cline has argued that the *Analects* does display at least *some* interest in the education or moral development of young children or teens (Cline 2015, p. 44-47). The evidence offered, aside from 1.2, is inadequate. It is in four passages.

At **7.29** Confucius recognizes that a teen has ritually purified himself toward an audience with Confucius. Confucius holds that the act adequately qualifies the teen for an audience. Cline infers that Confucius thinks a teen can already have made progress in virtue. **Reply:** The text does not mention virtue as distinct from mentioning the ritual act itself. A reason to think Confucius does not have virtue in mind is that he explicitly disavows confidence in the boy's future conduct. The passage is thus no indication that Confucius thinks the youth may have made progress in his habitual practices or reliable character.

At **9.23** Confucius says one's chance of impressive future achievement is negligible if one has done nothing impressive by age 40 or 50. Cline infers that Confucius thinks the youngest are capable of the quickest progress. **Reply:** His remark does not say that he thinks those who make significant progress make their least progress after 40 or 50. His account of his own progress at 2.4 begins with his taking an interest in study at age 15, the second milestone is 15 years later, and the next four are at intervals of 10 years. Even if there is something right about Cline's inference, Confucius' remark is no indication that he drew it. His never discussing children is a powerful counter-indication. Also a parallel argument would conclude that it is as toddlers that we make our quickest progress in trigonometry. Even if we regard learning to count as major progress in that trigonometry, we do not infer that such progress in infancy and how to promote it are of interest to any given trigonometry tutor, or are important to the art of teaching trigonometry.

At **18.7** an aged recluse formally introduces his sons living with him to Zilu, and Zilu observes that since the old man values the relationship between elder and junior as he should, it is inconsistent of him not to value wider sociopolitical ties and duties. Cline takes this to show "that child-rearing practices were widely agreed upon and valued, even in the midst of political disagreement." **Reply:** First, an unusual man's not abandoning his minor children need not suggest his interest in, nor societywide agreement on, practices of childrearing for character. It could suggest a wish for help in getting food. Second, this man's advanced age and the formal introduction both suggest that the sons were well into their adulthood when Zilu met them. The text does not suggest that his seclusion began before their adulthood, or whether their mother was present. If the man took his sons away from their mother when they were children, his conception of childrearing may have been unrepresentative. Third, the story does not

general statements as generalizing about every person, including children). In the *Analects* the main concern about the cultivation of virtue is men's practical concern to cultivate their own virtue, in consultation with others, Confucius' concern to help them with that, and the idea that rulers influence the people.¹⁷⁴

Today we might be strongly inclined to read *Analects* 1.2 as speaking to the situation of children because we mainly think of children when we think of relations to parents, or relations to siblings, or the foundation of character. We take for granted that childhood experiences are crucial to moral development, and even that family relations in early childhood are at the root of the individual psyche more broadly. We think that these are universal lessons we have learned, not cultural forms localized in time and place; and we may be right.

But even if our vision of the importance of family is relevant to interpreting an ancient text, no reading of *tì* at 1.2 makes the statement reflect or (fairly)

suggest that it was typical of philosophical hermits to live with their sons; it can be taken to suggest the reverse.

At **19.12** in a conversation between two disciples of the deceased Confucius, Zizhang refers to all or some of Zixia's students as “門人小子,” which one might take to mean “the children among your disciples.” Zixia's reply may speak of the chronological order in which different kinds of thing should be taught, thus suggesting a concern about what kind of education is most appropriate for the beginners among the disciples—at least some of whom are children on the abovementioned reading of “門人小子.” **Reply:** On this reading the Confucian Zizhang had child disciples and so had encouraged the practice of children's spending their days (and nights?) away from their parents. In fact “小子” was also a way of addressing one's own disciples familiarly without implying that they were children (e.g. at *Analects* 5.22, 8.3, 11.17, and 17.9). But it was not always a vocative term; for example, adult disciples could refer to themselves in this way (17.19). So Zizhang's long phrase in all likelihood simply meant “your dear disciples,” signaling a sense of camaraderie and shared responsibility with Zixia (and perhaps a bit of passive-aggressive irony).

¹⁷⁴ There are comments on what promotes the virtue or at least the good behavior of the many; but there are also indications that the best that can be hoped for from the many is good behavior, not stable virtues (e.g. *Analects* 1.15, 2.3, 8.9, 12.17-19, 17.13).

suggest our modern vision about that. Much of our modern vision of how childhood family life shapes the individual psyche is about the formative impact of how a child's family elders treat her, and of how they model for her in relating to each other. *Analects* 1.2 says nothing about the conduct of the *jūnzǐ*'s family elders, or the *jūnzǐ*'s experience of them.

B. Xiào was for adults

The preponderance of the evidence is that Youzi would not have associated *xiào* with childhood; indeed there is reason to think that on his understanding of *xiào*, this virtue is less accessible to children than other virtues are.

No other ancient passage attributed to Youzi discusses *xiào*, so if we seek evidence on what he is likely to have thought about whether *xiào* is a practice for children, we must look to other sources. We have evidence of how the term was understood by **(A)** old texts Youzi may have studied, **(B)** Youzi's contemporaries in general, and **(C)** Confucius and therefore probably Confucius' students (and their students), with whom Youzi associated and who may have been part of the intended audience of the statement at 1.2.

(A) In earlier times, and hence in some old texts that Youzi may have known and revered, *xiào* referred to practices of sacrifice and the political loyalty implied and reinforced by those practices. So understood, *xiào* would have been a practice primarily of adults, not of children.

(B) Regarding contemporary general opinion or usage, Confucius reports in *Analects* 2.7 that most people in his day thought of *xiào* as material support of one's parents. If his report was true, most people in Youzi's day thought of *xiào* as a practice mainly of adults, not of children.

It may also be interesting to note in this connection that when *Liji: Nèizé* 76-80 lays out the practices and training appropriate for males of different ages (first the age when they can eat food, then the age when they can speak, then ages numbered 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 20, 30, 40, 50, and 70), it introduces *xiàotì* at age 20.

(C) When in the *Analects* Confucius discusses *xiào* as he understands it, most of the actions he mentions are not (or should not be) for children. He speaks of supporting parents (2.7, 2.8), remonstrating with restraint (4.18), refraining from long-distance travel (4.19), serving one's parents as informed by one's study of the *Odes* (17.9), acting with observable life-aspirations during one's father's lifetime (1.11), preserving the way of one's father for three years after his death (1.11, 4.20), continuing to employ one's father's aides after inheriting his office (19.18), and obedience in accord with ritual – specifically, service, mourning, and sacrifice (2.5). Confucius thinks of *xiào* as a desirable quality in a ruler (12.20) and a scholar-official (13.20). These points suggest, though they do not demonstrate, that the practice of *xiào* as Confucius saw it was *less* available to children than were other good practices such as honesty, frugality and respectfulness. What the points do demonstrate is this: the fact that a remark by Confucius was about *xiào* does not lean at all in favor of any surmise that the remark had children in view.

Further, we see Confucius giving very elementary instruction on *xiào* to his disciples, who are not children (*Analects* 2.7f.). We do not see him offering them instruction on childrearing to inculcate *xiào*, and we do not see them asking.

In sum, our records suggest that because of the nature of *xiào* as understood in Youzi's milieu, when Youzi and his audience thought of *xiào* they

would be thinking at least primarily of the *xiào* of adults, and likely not thinking of children at all.

C. The Youzian philosophy

In each of Youzi's two illustrative examples of the efficacy of *xiàotì* in blocking bad practices (and presumably supporting the opposite good ones), Youzi is speaking of the relation between *concurrent* practices. For example, he says it is rare for someone to be *xiàotì* and to like going against his superior. His chain of two statistical assertions adds up to the claim that it is rare to be *xiàotì* and to want to stir up disorder in the state. It would seem to follow that the *xiàotì* that is thought to function as the root of the way of the *jūnzǐ* is the *xiàotì* of a *jūnzǐ* as he treads his path.

Granted, Youzi's illustrations of branch practices also suggest progress over time. A person is in a position to obey or disobey a superior before being in a position to stir up serious trouble.¹⁷⁵ Youzi may have had in mind such a succession of two levels (or possibly three levels, if he envisioned being in a position to be *xiàotì* but with little occasion to go against a superior in officialdom). But one normally retains those earlier positions as one acquires the later.

Analects 1.2 is one of three statements attributed to Youzi in Book 1. These statements say, regarding each of four major good practices, that it is supported by one or two analogous but more modest practices. In each case the practical conclusion Youzi seems to draw is that to carry out the branch practice we must *be practicing* the root practice—not that we must *have practiced* it. In 1.2 he says

¹⁷⁵ But perhaps a person could have an attitude toward superiors in general before being in a position to be *xiào*.

that the *jūnzǐ* is scrupulous about the root. In 1.12 he says that attempting the branch practice (harmony) without regulating it by the root (ritual) will not work. In 1.13 he suggests the same point for two other root-branch pairs, by way of a concluding kinship metaphor.¹⁷⁶

D. *Běn* 本

One might suppose that a metaphorical *běn* 本 (root, stem, trunk) would be a beginning, and the beginning of moral development must be in childhood. Further, the line “The root is established and the Way grows forth” (本立而道生) suggests a process over time, beginning with *xiàotì* and without the rest of the Way.

But while “beginning” may be one of the things that the term *běn* could suggest in ancient usage, that meaning is a poor fit with the botanical image. The more common metaphorical significance of a *běn* in ancient usage was a basis, source, support, core, or main part (as at *Analects* 3.4). Note that when we speak of the “source” of the Nile or “support” for something, we normally mean something acting as such today. My “source of income” is not where I earned my first dollar. The clear plant metaphor for a beginning, a first or prior stage, would be the seed or the sprout, not the rootstem.

The conventional English translation of *běn* as “root” rather than “rootstem” could obscure these points. In English, the “roots” of the typical plant are not included in the plant one sees. They are hidden and below the plant one sees,

¹⁷⁶ I defend these readings in Haines 2008, pp. 473-479.

whose growth we think of as upward. Thus when we use the English word metaphorically, we often mean an *antecedent cause*.

But the verb “stand” in *Analects* 1.2 (as well as the standard contrast elsewhere between *běn* and branch, *mò* 末) suggests that the image in this passage is more stem or trunk than root.¹⁷⁷ A stem or trunk is the visible core of the developed plant. One never envisions the plant as something distinct from the stem or trunk. The trunk is the center, not something else underneath. What is distinct from the trunk is the branches. The most obvious supporting role of a trunk is visible in the architecture: it is to anchor the branches and make them parts of a living thing, as your trunk supports your arms. Deprived of the trunk tomorrow, the boughs would fall.

A rootstem is an *ongoing* necessary support or core, like a trunk or a backbone or a main artery. That is how the metaphor of a *běn* is most often understood in early Chinese philosophical applications. Unlike a seed or sprout or the first step of a journey, a *běn* does not cease to exist once it has done an initiating job. And unlike the foundation of a house, the clay for a pot, or the canvas for a painting, a *běn* is not complete before the rest can be realized. Rather, the trunk you see today did not exist in the days of the sapling; only today’s big *běn* could be the *běn* of today’s branches.

Further, the one practical conclusion Youzi draws in 1.2 is that “the *jūnzǐ* works on the *běn*.” The *jūnzǐ* is not a time traveler who can work on his own childhood.

¹⁷⁷ If we are thinking of a tree, the great bulk of the rootstem is the trunk, while the roots are mostly branching. To look at the root of another kind of plant we would yank it out, in which case we might find mainly a single root, extending down like an extension of the stem, especially because the fine roots will be left in the ground. But in principle the *běn* 本/*mò* 末 contrast makes sense below ground as well as above.

Note also that this statement comes just *before* the comment, “The rootstem stands and the Way grows forth” (本立而道生). This sequence suggests that the “standing” in Youzi’s image is not only or primarily an act of standing up that had to precede the man’s becoming a *jūnzi*, but is rather primarily a state of standing there that the man ensures while he is a *jūnzi*, as he makes his way. Or if it is a standing up, it is a standing fully up, as in a mature plant, whose branches will by then be well underway.

In sum, the evidence suggests that Youzi’s primary vision of *xiàotì* as a *běn* was a vision of the ongoing supportive or nourishing role of the *xiàotì* of a man, not the antecedent generative role of the *xiàotì* of a child.

For the above four reasons it would appear that the statement at *Analects* 1.2 has in mind the *xiàotì* of adults, not the *xiàotì* of children.

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