Confucian Dialogue: Harmony in Diversity

The twenty-first century has seen unprecedented global interconnectivity, yet simultaneously it has witnessed fragmentation, conflict, and ethnic and religious warfare. Contemporary society appears deeply divided and polarised. The internet and social media have made the spread of misinformation and disinformation widespread; no one lies anymore, they just offer alternative truths. Immoral individuals stoke the fires of division for their personal gain. A few recent examples of these ills include: the Russia-Ukraine war; the rise of the far right in North America and Europe which openly demonises and dehumanises minorities, especially non-white, to the extent that some see them as culturally antithetical. For instance, the German AfD party plans mass deportation of migrants should they gain power. In Narendra Modi's 'Hindu' India, Muslims and Christians are seen as alien cultures. Extreme cases of othering minorities can be seen in the ethnic cleansing of over a million Rohingyas in Myanmar[1]; and the barbarity of the present Palestinian-Israeli war precipitated by the massacre of over 1,000 Israelis (29 children) and some 240 (30 children) kidnapped by Hamas on 7th October 2023. Since then, and as of February 16 at 1pm in Gaza (11:00 GMT) the numbers are as follows: in Israel, officials revised the death toll down from 1,405 to 1,139 with around 8,730 injured. On the Palestinian side, in Gaza, the number killed stands at 28, 775 primarily women (8400) and children (12,300) with 67,552 injured, with 7000 missing.[2] While in West Bank at least 395 people, including more than 105 children and more than 4,450 injured.

No one questions Israel's right to self-defence and legitimate anger at the atrocities committed by Hamas. Yet, the nature of Israel's response entailing collective punishment seems disproportionate: it appears predicated on the dehumanisation of the Palestinian people. Senior Israeli ministers have labelled Palestinians as 'human animals'[3] deserving of no compassion and as such justifying starvation as a weapon of war, and the releasing of 'all' restrictions on soldiers. Others even advocate the use of nuclear weapons. Dehumanising is nothing new, one saw this with the Europeans conquests of the 18th and 19th centuries which resulted in the industrialisation of the slave trade, the genocides of the native peoples of the Americas and Australia, justified on the grounds of the superiority of the European race. The twentieth century witnessed the Holocaust, the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the genocides committed in Bosnia and Rwanda. Yet it is troubling that in the twenty-first century, the education which we receive, has not prevented some from seeing through arbitrary differences concocted by some for self-interest which deny others' humanity.

In response to such tribalism and barbarity this paper offers a classical Confucian perspective on dialogue predicated on a personhood that is metaphysically tied to others, embodying the virtue Rén (humanity) and Lǐ (ritual propriety). Such a person seeks to nurture interpersonal harmony (Hé), presupposing diversity, because difference is part of the human condition. I do not offer a definitive solution to our contemporary issues but discuss how Confucian dialogue, underpinned on such a cultivation of personhood, might be conducted between antagonists to possibly prevent one from seeing the other as someone to be feared, loathed and destroyed.

[1] https://www.hrw.org/tag/rohingya
[2] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker
[3] https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/9/israeli-defence-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza

I begin by considering the Confucian conceptualisation of personhood and the virtues *rén* and *lǐ* that the paradigmatic Confucian person (*jūnzǐ*) should embody. This will allow us to understand the significance of Confucian harmony (*hé*) in diversity and how such an understanding would affect the way we teach *how* to see *other* people and *how* this might affect the way dialogue between antagonists would be conducted. At this point I wish to make it clear that I do not suggest that Confucian dialogue presents a 'quick fix' or provides a magical solution to the conflicts mentioned above. If you were to ask me how does Confucian dialogue help in such cases. My answer would be on the lines of a well-known joke of a tourist asking a local for directions and the local replying: 'Well I wouldn't start from here'. The point being to prevent the conflict from arising in the first place. A Confucian would do this by cultivating/educating a certain conception of personhood which I discuss next.

Confucian Personhood

So, *what exactly is a human 'being'?* This is a question discussed in Plato's *Phaedo* and Aristotle's *De Anima*. In the West, the answer from Pythagoras onwards, 'has been an ontological one: the "being" of a human being is a permanent, ready-made, and self-sufficient soul.' Socrates' exhortation to '"know thyself" …is to know this soul. Each of us *is* a person, and from conception, has the integrity of *being* a person' (Ames 2016, 144). Confucian personhood by contrast views humans as human 'becomings', born with certain potentialities which if nurtured enable them to become *fully* human.[4]

We are human *becomings* because although we are naturally human in the biological sense from birth, in an aesthetic and moral sense this has to be learnt. Tu Wei-ming explains that learning to 'become' human requires learning to *become* 'aesthetically refined, being morally excellent and religiously profound.' For Confucians, learning to become a good person 'is not only the primary concern but the ultimate and comprehensive concern'. This learning, or 'self-cultivation presupposes that the self worth cultivating is never a private possession of a single individual but a shareable experience that underlies common humanity' (1985, 57). Humans as centres of relationships, are

> forever interconnected with an ever-expanding network of human-relatedness. My "Learning for the sake of the self" is a personal task, but it is tantamount to the realization of the communal well-being rather than a quest for private self-interest (Weiming 2010, 188).

This does not mean Confucians dismiss the existence of the individual; instead they see the individual 'produced' out of relations. I can only fully realise my *humanness* through the help of others, because to be human is to be related to others. 'Self-cultivation is a precondition for harmonizing human relations' (Tu 1985, 55). One realises one's own personhood through excelling in ***all*** one's roles and relationships. This understanding of human-relatedness is discerned from the glyph for the cardinal virtue *rén* 仁: the left side (亻) represents a 'person', while the right (二) the number 'two'. Therefore, as Herbert Fingarette says: 'Where there are not at least two truly human beings, there is not even one' (1983: 340):

[4] For Confucius although all persons had the capacity for moral perfection, what differentiated them was practice (*Analects*, 17:2). To actualise our potentiality, one however, has first to possess the desire to self-cultivate this by studying and practising what one had learnt, and this requires lifelong dedication (*Analects*, 2:4).

> "My life" consists substantively of the lived relations of you and me, my wife and me, my child and me, my student and me... There is no substance to "my life" as human when "I" am abstracted from our life together. "I" becomes then an abstraction, at least as far as what is human goes. There is a concrete reality that corresponds to this abstraction –the material body, the human organism. But on entering the relation a new kind of reality comes into being– true humanity (Fingarette, 1983: 339).

One can debate the extent to which one can be a human outside of one's roles and relationships, but what seems undeniable is that our various relationships give *substance* and *meaning* to life: our lives are inextricably tied to others; few of us are hermits.

Admittedly, 'some [relationships] are more important and thus more defining of personal identity than others' (Ames 2012, 644). In his critique of Henry Rosemont's assertion that human beings *cannot* be considered complete outside of the associations they have with other people (Rosemont 2015, 95–94), Daniel Bell informs us that not all our relationships are of equal 'significance in terms of shaping our identity'. Some are *constitutive*, and others *contingent*. For example, the relationship that I have with my mother is constitutive of my identity as it

> is deeply embedded in my identity and not something that I can shed. But my relation with my neighborhood hockey team may be more *contingent*, and it would be a bit of a stretch to say that my identity is constituted by my relationship with that association (2017, 567).

In response to Bell's distinction, Roger Ames argues that 'while all roles are constitutive of whom we become…some are more important and thus more defining of personal identity than others' (Ames 2012, 644). Therefore, be our relationship constitutive or contingent, one cannot dismiss the existence of relationships outside consanguineal ones premised upon our common humanity and which place an obligation to consider their flourishing also.

Our human-relatedness helps understand why for Confucius the paradigmatic person: the *jūnzǐ*, 'wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others' (*Analects*, Legge, 6.28.2). Such affectionate concern for the wellbeing of others can only be cultivated should one reinforce from childhood, at home and at school, the idea that we are relational beings, and thus others' wellbeing is our concern. In fact, for Confucians, *all* humans are an *extension* of the self at various degrees of proximity. As Ann Pang-White explains, in Confucianism there is no *other* to be seen as

> a threat that may potentially annihilate the self nor an unenlightened mind that needs to be taught nor a burden to be tolerated or dispensed with. Rather, the other is an *extended* self that one should respect, care for, and care about. The point of self-cultivation is not for self-aggrandizement but to be able to care for the world — seeing others as the self, and others' families as one's families (2023, 127–28).

This conception of personhood is very different from the dominant Western moral theories which fundamentally view the person as an atomistic self: free, rational, self-sufficient, and autonomous; these essentially make the person independent of others, and where the relationships that one chooses to form are purely contingent and quasi-contractual. Ethical

egoism *à la* Ayn Rand[5] and current libertarianism is the apotheosis of this ethic. Here it is worth noting that the different ways in which personhood has been expressed in the West and in Confucian cultures is important because the way we define personhood, as Rosemont says, 'influences significantly our rank-order of values… If we define human beings as free, autonomous individuals who can be described and analyzed strictly as agents we will tend to prioritize personal and social responsibility' (Rosemont 2015, 23). Rosemont traces the roots of these values to the Athenians and sees them reflected in modern capitalist societies 'wherein each individual may in theory compete for a profit in an open market' (2000, 17). Such autonomous individuals would in all likelihood endorse the following adages as 'truths':

God helps them that help themselves. May the best man win. Every man's home is his castle.

However, Rosemont reminds us, the Western tradition also 'subscribes to a set of "Spartan" ethical principles which de-emphasize the importance of the individual in favor of the wellbeing of a group.' (These have been overlooked due to 'the unparalleled prosperity of the industrialized societies'.) For, although the Bible states that God helps those that help themselves, it also urges all to *'Love thy neighbours as thyself*'. And though there is agreement on *'everyman's home is his castle'*, many also agree with John Donne that: *No man is an island, entire of itself,* [*every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main*] (2000, 17–18).

These adages appear opposing and irreconcilable, yet to many they are *prima facie* uncontroversial and reasonable. Why? Because they are seen as being appropriate in particular situations. Take the adage: 'God helps them that help themselves', this conjures up for me, Aesop's tale of *Ant and Grasshopper*. Ant toils all summer to store up food for winter, while Grasshopper spends his summer singing. When winter arrives, Grasshopper finds himself dying of hunger and begs Ant for food. However, Ant rebukes his idleness and tells him to dance the winter away now. Here one could rightly blame Grasshopper for his indolence because he has brought his situation upon himself. However, one could also argue that notwithstanding Grasshopper's laziness, a loving neighbour (Ant), should offer some food to help Grasshopper see through the winter, and hope that he has learnt his lesson.

According to Rosemont (2015, 2018) by considering both groups of values (individual and communal) in terms of their relative ranking accorded by different people and cultures, one realises for example that cooperative values are not alien to the West. Consequently, we can better engage in dialogue with others *intra* and interculturally (Rosemont 2018, 203).

The Confucian Virtues: Rén and Lǐ

So how do you cultivate a relational person who views others *not* as others but as an extension of the self and whose flourishing she sees as an important part of her self-cultivation and becoming fully human? To answer this question, we need to delve into two cardinal Confucian virtues that this paradigmatic person (*jūnzǐ)* ought to nurture and embody: *rén* and *lǐ*.

[5] Rand believed that self-interest was the over-riding ethical obligation for the individual to consider in her decision-making, and that altruism was immoral (cited in Freeman, 1977, pp. 7-8). It is true that many of our decisions are based on self-interest, but many are not, for example, the love between the parent and child, in many instances involves sacrificing for the other. Many a parent does their best to help their children flourish and have the opportunities they may not have had. This desire to help one's child, is not normally predicated on receiving some future benefit but rather out of love.

Rén 仁 (Humanity)

Variously translated as 'humane,' 'humaneness,' and 'humanity'; 'good', 'goodness'; 'Man of Virtue' and 'Man-at-his-Best'; 'benevolence', 'perfect virtue'; and 'authoritative' and 'authoritativeness' (Di Fiori and Rosemont 2017, 98). *Rén* is the distillation of Confucian *dào*, a vision of the good, of what it is to *be* and *become* 'fully' a person. *Rén* can be seen as an *inner* disposition to show an affectionate concern for others because one's own and others' flourishing are mutually constitutive (*Analects*, 6:28). This, as already explained, can be discerned from the Chinese character for *rén* 仁 which indicates more than one person, the *being-in-relation*. One cultivates *rén* in the first instance by nurturing filial reverence (*xiào* 孝) and then extending this to others outside one's immediate relations: to friends, community, nation and to the world. Inherent in *xiào* is the idea that it is only through loving interactions with those whom we love that we learn to act appropriately towards others. By loving one's grandmother –a concrete person who we know intimately– we learn to act appropriately to all those with the role of grandmother and so on and so forth.

Outside of the family, to nurture an affectionate concern for all human beings (*rén*), it is important to teach in school the fact that geographical and cultural demarcations are artificial and arbitrary human constructs, one need only look at the history and map of any state to realise this. Our shared humanity cuts across frontiers and tribal allegiances. The parable of the Good Samaritan attests to this as does charitable work undertaken by persons. People and cultures have intermingled since time immemorial; purity and homogeneity are myths, even Homo *sapiens*, Neanderthals, Denisovans, and Homo *heidelbergensis* interbred (Ko 2016). Understanding that human diversity is the norm could facilitate the cultivation of *rén* and the obligations that flow from being persons-in-relations.

Lǐ 禮

Rén requires concrete manifestation in the form of the virtue *lǐ*. Lǐ has been variously translated as 'ceremony,' 'ritual,' 'rites,' 'propriety,' 'rules of propriety,' 'good custom,' 'decorum,' 'good form,' 'natural law' and so forth (Tu 1972). Etymologically, the character for *lǐ* originally signified 'a religious sacrifice' (Chan 1967, in Tu, 1972, p.190). Later its meaning extended 'to encompass all established ethical, social, and political norms of human behavior, including both formal rules and less serious patterns of everyday behavior' (Li 2007, 318). Lǐ is a form of social grammar

> that provides each member with a defined place and status within the family, community, and polity, [encompassing] all formal conduct, … table manners to patterns of greeting and leaving … and so on and so forth (Ames and Rosemont 1999, 51).

To make *lǐ* meaningful, each generation has to personalise it to their particular time, context and situation (Ames and Rosemont 1999, 51) through an *evolutionary* process building on, in the words of Matthew Arnold (1869) in his essay *Culture and Anarchy*, 'the best which has been thought and said' (quote in Johnson, 1972: 165). However, as Standish explains: 'The past is not valuable because it is the past. It is valuable because it offers us the developing history of attempts to get at the truth of things and to understand what matters in human lives' (Standish, 2007: 44). As such education, as Michael Oakeshott (1962) would have it, it *initiates* us into the 'conversation of mankind' and learning from 'the best that has been thought and said'. Nevertheless, all *lǐ* must conform to *rén*, to prevent social norms from

becoming 'empty formalism' incapable of conscious improvement… and liable to destroy any true human feelings' (1968, 34). In fact, any established *lǐ* can be revised, suspended or eliminated by stating its incompatibility to *rén* (*Analects*, 3:3; 9:3) and doing that which is morally fitting (*yì*) in any given situation (Ames 2011, 201). Mencius exemplifies this in his discussion of what a man should do were he to see his sister-in-law drowning (Mencius and Lau 2004, 4A.17). According to the *lǐ* of the time, it was inappropriate to have any physical contact with one's sister-in-law, but in this situation, if a man could save his sister-in-law by giving her his hand, then it would not only be the morally right thing to do, but also the appropriate: *yì*. Not to do so on the basis of following *lǐ* rigidly is to misunderstand the original intent of this social norm: the inappropriateness of engaging in any physical relationship with one's sister-in-law.

Such judgement requires moral discretion (*quán* 權**)** to interpret because the realm of ethics, as Aristotle points out in *Nicomachean Ethics*, is outside the bounds of 'precision' (1094b. Aristotle and Ross 1989, 3). It is not always possible to foresee the consequences of enforcing established rules, or all the possible situations that the rules might apply to, there is always room for interpretation in application. And here one must teach that in order to apply moral discretion, one needs to adopt an open, flexible and broadminded approach (*kuān*) to all issues. One should avoid entertaining preconceptions about what may or may not be permissible and refuse 'to entertain conjectures or insist on certainty, …or to be egotistical' (*Analects* 18:8, 9:4). Flexibility in interpretation is important given our relative ignorance of facts and the indeterminacy of aims of any particular rule or standard. Moral discretion requires arriving at a judgement that is *morally fitting* for the context (*yì*): the judgement has to be 'timely' (*shí* 時). This means *not* accepting a position simply on the basis of being a moderate between two extremes (7A:26 Mencius and Lau 2004, 151). As Aristotle reminds us that while excessiveness anger is blameworthy, as it can lead to rashness and violence, so is deficiency; anger is a morally required and legitimate response to insult and injustice against oneself or those close to one. To fail to get angry can be a mark of a slavish disposition (*Politics*, 1126a7-9). To fail to defend oneself or one's family or dependents would be "shameful" ('*aischron'*, *Rhetoric*, 1379b27-28). However, any response to be legitimate, would need to be proportionate, and not deny the other's humanity.

A second element of *lǐ* relates to how it is actually enacted; given that *lǐ* is the actualisation of *rén*, any *lǐ* ought to display aesthetic sensibility to ensure that one's outward words and behaviour exhibit cultural refinement (*wén* 文) to demonstrate respect for the other person.[6] The relationship between elegance and morality and between vulgarity and immorality are inseparable.[7] For this reason, humans as *persons-in-relations*, to realise their full personhood, must cultivate each and every relationship to a *consummate* level, because each relationship contributes to the self-realisation of one's own personhood. The *jūnzǐ* understands that the '*beau idéal* of humanity' is only achieved when one displays in one's relationships aesthetic and ethical sensibilities, adhering to norms of *lǐ* that are underpinned by *rén*: only then can one elevate human relations beyond matters of contract and negotiation. The point is not just

[6] *Wén* was reputedly taught by Confucius as one of the four subjects of Confucius' teachings along with, moral conduct (*xing* 行), doing one's best (*zhōng* 忠), and being trustworthy in what one says (*xìn* 信) (*Analects,* 7:25).

[7] It is possible to appreciate something purely for its aesthetic experience such as music, but devoid of the moral it has corrupting influence: 'The Master [Confucius] said of the shao [music] that it was both perfectly beautiful and perfectly good, and of the *wu* that it was perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good' (*Analects*, 3:25).

that our non-Confucian relationships are conventional or matters of decorum but that they are *contingently* entertained, with a view to furthering individual or shared projects, *not* as being the very substance from which those projects and that individuality comes. To realise the *beau idéal* of humanity requires educating and cultivating from a young age, at home and in school, the idea of treating those not members of one's immediate family with respect and affection because they are members of our *extended* human family: an extension of the self, and *not* strangers to be feared, hated or destroyed, as is the case in the examples given at the start.

Confucian Harmony (Hé 和) in Diversity

Rén and *Lǐ* form the foundation of Confucian harmony (*hé* 和), a harmony that presupposes diversity rather than uniformity (*tong* 同). *Hé*, in accordance with doing that which is morally appropriate (*yì*) seeks to achieve an appropriate balance (*ping* 平) in difference. In a passage in the *Zuo Commentary,* the two are explicitly contrasted by Yan Zi. In conversation on good governance with his lord, the Marquis of Qi, he explains *hé* thus:

> Harmony is like a broth, wherein water, fire, vinegar, minced meat, salt, and plum sauce are used to boil fish meat. Cooking it over firewood, the chef harmonizes it, proportioning it with flavor: adding to what falls short and taking away from what is in excess. The proportionate blending of the five flavors and the harmonizing of the five tones by the former kings was done for the purpose of setting their minds in balance and bringing perfection to their governance…. Now with Ju [i.e., another minister], it is not thus. What your lordship deems acceptable, Ju also calls acceptable; what your lordship deems inadmissible, Ju also calls inadmissible. If water were added to [enhance] water, who could make a meal of it? If the *qin* and *se* zithers struck the same [notes], who could [bear] listening to them? It is thus that uniformity is unacceptable (Angle 2010, 62–63).

From this passage we can discern certain significant elements in the composition of harmony. First harmony, like a good broth requires an *appropriate* blending of various ingredients to achieve harmony: akin to needing different instruments and their different pitch (with appropriate balance (*ping*), to create harmony. Appropriate balance has to accord with the appropriateness of the occasion, for instance festivals might require music that is loud, fun and joyful, whereas a sombre occasion such as a funeral, music that is the direct opposite.

Second, harmony is opposed to 'uniformity', and does not come from agreement or blind loyalty but from negotiating with difference. Harmony is achieved when each person makes her appropriate contribution to the given situation. For instance, it ought to be the role of ministers to give good counsel and when appropriate to correct inappropriate or selfish inclinations of the ruler, rather than to simply express agreement, for this is sure to lead to imbalance, strife and struggle. *Hé* therefore should not be confused with sameness or with seeking perfect agreement or blind loyalty but must be arrived at through negotiating with difference to accord with that which is morally fitting (*yì*) given the context. The rejection of sameness means that harmony eschews the conformity of mainstream norms, especially when they conflict with *rén* and *yì***:** that which is morally fitting**.**

Finally, *hé* 'is sustained by energy generated through the interaction of different elements in creative tension. ...[F]riendliness or love is not a necessary condition for harmony. Even

unfriendly parties can co-exist in harmony' (Li 2014: 386). *Hé* therefore, does *not* avoid conflict but works *through* it, to set peace in motion. This is undoubtedly difficult in cases such as those of the Palestinians and Israelis. However, the fact that great friendships and loves are formed daily across nationalities, ethnicities and cultures, despite differences, could be used to illustrate that the notion of difference is natural and *not* something alien.

Confucian Dialogue

We can consider Confucian dialogue and how it can help where views seem wholly divergent. Now, were the two sides similarly disposed to a Confucian concept of personhood, then a dialogue on the following lines could take place to cultivate harmony. Being a person of *rén* would require an understanding that one is relationally connected to the other person. Thus, one should have an affectionate concern for one's interlocutor even if they hold antithetical views. One would therefore be more open to listening to the interlocutor's views, especially with the understanding that difference is a natural part of the human condition, and not to be feared. Thus, it would behove a person, as Plato emphasised, that when engaged in dialogue with an interlocutor, that they do so as a friend and adopt a 'gentler and dialectical way'. This means 'not merely giv[ing] true responses, but basing our replies only on that which the interlocutor admits that he himself knows' (Meno, 75c-dp, in Hadot 1995, 91). Pierre Hadot helpfully informs us that only by beginning from the interlocutor's understanding, do we prevent 'the dialogue from becoming a theoretical, dogmatic exposé, and instead forces dialogue to be a concrete, practical exercise. For the point is not to set forth a doctrine, but to guide the interlocutor towards a determinate mental attitude (ibid.). The aim of Platonic dialogue is not to emerge 'victorious…. It is not enough to disclose the truth. It is not even enough to demonstrate it. What is needed is *persuasion* … which demands the explicit consent of the interlocutor at every moment' (ibid., 92).

However, persuasion on its own is insufficient, Confucians would concur with the Daoist master Zhuang Zhou that any consent arrived at should not be won through rhetorical skillfulness: this is not equivalent to arriving at truth. In the *Zhuangzi*, he asks us to reflect on the following:

> Suppose you and I have an argument (*bian*). If you have beaten me instead of my beating you, then are you necessarily right and am I necessarily wrong? If I have beaten you instead of your beating me, then am I necessarily right and are you necessarily wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Are both of us right or are both of us wrong? If you and I don't know the answer, then other people are bound to be even more in the dark. Whom shall we get to decide what is right? Shall we get someone who agrees with you to decide? But if he already agrees with you, how can he decide fairly? Shall we get someone who agrees with me? But if he already agrees with me, how can he decide? (quoted in Littlejohn and Li 2022, 1525).

Zhuang Zhou was aiming his critique at disciples of Mozi, the *Mingjia* (School of Names), also called *biànshì* 辯士 (translated as 'disputers' or 'rhetoricians').[8] These thinkers were adept 'in argumentation, making finely grained distinctions between concepts and exposing the flaws

[8] In Chinese, *bian* (辯) is often used for 'argument,' but it can also mean to dialogue in order to clarify and articulate what is known' (Littlejohn and Li 2022, 1524).

in received beliefs and traditional knowledge claims' (Littlejohn and Li 2022, 1524). However, Xunzi claimed:

> They [the *biànshì*] investigate things with extreme acuteness but without any beneficent intent, and they debate matters but provide no useful results. They … can cite evidence for maintaining their views, and they achieve a reasoned order in their explanations, so that it is enough to deceive and confuse the foolish masses. (Chapter 6, Xunzi and Hutton 2016, 41).

In Confucianism then, one engages in dialogue with a *beneficent* intent, this requires being open enough to being persuaded by others also. Practically speaking, a Confucian would try to put herself in the interlocutor's position and seek to understand rather than dismiss outright anything that was contrary to her knowledge, experience and beliefs. The externalisation of *rén* —an affectionate concern for the other— means adopting a *lǐ* that exhibited respect for the interlocutor's knowledge, beliefs and lived experience and took them seriously, and not deride them. The Confucian would therefore wish to ascertain the interlocutor's reason for their stance and or beliefs rather than dismiss them simply because they conflicted with theirs.

The Confucian would display aesthetic sensibility to ensure that her outward demeanour, words and behaviour was imbued with cultural refinement (*wén*). She would avoid any rudeness that would prevent the nurturing of interpersonal harmony. As such, she would listen *intently* to what the interlocutor had to say without interrupting or interjecting abruptly, trying to be empathetic and understand their viewpoint. Thus, when questioning the interlocutor, a Confucian would adopt an indirect style of discussion rather than an adversarial or confrontational manner to avoid loss of face or cause the interlocutor to become defensive.

Now you may rightly say, this is all good and well, and ask but what might one do in the present case of Israelis and Palestinians, two deeply traumatised populations led by self-interested leaders who deny the other's humanity and right to exist. Dismissing their fears as unnatural is not going to make them amenable to the other. Unfortunately, the two sides are unlikely to come together or even seek a resolution until both are thoroughly tired of war and realise that they cannot impose the solution they would choose. In such a situation, a third party(ies) is/are needed to mediate. What would such parties cultivated in Confucianism do?

To temper the dehumanising rhetoric, and to begin to engender a sense of the other's humanity, one could, for instance remind the Israelis and Palestinians of their common heritage and how *intimately* they are connected: both share ethnic kinship, being people with semitic antecedents. And biblically, Jews and Arabs trace their lineage to Abraham (the former via his first wife Sarah and her son Isaac, the latter via Abraham's second wife Hagar and her son Ishmael). One could reinforce this by providing the antagonists examples from history to illustrate times when both coexisted side by side in relative peace and did not view the other as an enemy. One could contrast this to the pogroms, ethnic cleansing, and genocide suffered by Jews at the hand of Europeans over the centuries. Such contextualisation would underscore the fact that relationships *can* and *do* change over time.

Further, one would remind them of the *Golden Rule* in their respective religions: of treating

others well. One would remind the Israelis of the story of Rabbi Hillel in the Talmud. Hillel lived around the time of Jesus. A pagan came to him saying that he would convert to Judaism if Hillel could teach him the whole of the Torah in the time he could stand on one foot. Hillel replied, 'What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole Torah; the rest is just commentary.' Similarly, Islam teaches Muslims to treat others well: 'Verily, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others; and giving like kindred' (Quran, 16:91.) Moreover, one must deal justly even with those who hate us: 'O ye who believe! be steadfast in the cause of Allah, bearing witness in equity; and let not a people's enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice. Be always just, that is nearer to righteousness' (Quran, 5:9).

One could then ask the two parties:

- Do they wish to perpetuate the cycle of violence?
- Do they think the use of violence will make them safe?
- Doesn't violence beget violence and would only radicalise the other further?
- Wouldn't they like to see, 'from the River to the Sea, people living with equal civil and political rights' (Varoufakis, 2023, 11:35)?[9]

One could further point to examples from the recent past to illustrate that even enemies can become friends: Germans, once violently anti-Semitic being responsible for the Holocaust, are now very much Israel's allies. Likewise between the Japanese and Americans. Other examples being the series of bloody European wars of religion waged during the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries following the Protestant Reformation in 1517. Today it is difficult to envisage German and German, or French and French waging war on the basis of religion.

These examples could help illustrate the fact that relationships *can* and *do* change over time: the bitterest of enemies can become 'friends'. Further, that the concept of friend and enemy are constructs that are created by certain groups to further their interests. I'm not saying such questioning would for example lead to understanding and empathy between Palestinians and Israelis given the horrific and traumatic experiences experienced by both parties during the current war and over decades of *othering*. But, without trying to understand the root cause of a hatred that breeds violence by seeking to understand the reasons for the beliefs of one's 'adversary' from their viewpoint, one can never hope to end the vicious circle of hatred begetting violence. The point is to lead the antagonists to understand that the other is a fellow human to whom one has obligations, and thus prevent dehumanizing rhetoric from gaining a foothold.

Adopting an indirect approach to dialogue, however, is not *carte blanche* for seeking some deadening bland agreement because Confucian harmony is predicated upon difference. And, given that a questioning and inquiring mind is fundamental in Confucianism —Confucius encouraged his disciples to engage in discussion, to openly question his conduct (*Analects*, 6:28), and to correct his actions (*Analects,* 7.31; 17:3). Such behaviour was expected and encouraged, and its omission was akin to stupidity (*Analects*, 2:9) — one would avoid any dialogue either descending into a mere shoring up of one's position or turning into mere politesse, with the parties so concerned about avoiding offence that they end up seeking that

[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OAniUDMA1Y

which is similar between their respective worldviews and indulging in mutual admiration. Or hatred resulting in slurs and insults. This application of *yì* requires that one disagree with the interlocutor should her ideas conflict with what was morally fitting. As such, one would question the interlocutor's position and seek justification as well as presenting the opposite viewpoint, or how it might be perceived by the other side.

Were one to engage in rude behavior, causing people to lose face, this is sure to make them unreceptive to you. When one's ideas are 'attacked', or 'ridiculed', one can feel a sense of humiliation and loss of face, becoming either defensive, or offensive, as such methods of critique can affect our status claims, and are not easily recoverable.[10] In addition, one should not underestimate the influence of motivated reasoning and conscious and unconscious biases, and beliefs (especially those that are identity confirming). We often seek that which affirms our beliefs; often 'our explicit reasoning processes serve to rationalize behavior rather than to cause it': a case of the cart before the horse (Taber and Lodge 2016, 62). We have a tendency to hold onto a belief despite evidence showing it to be false (Mercier and Sperber 2011, 67). One need only look at the continued claim made by many American Republicans of voter fraud in the 2020 presidential elections to realise this. This is without taking into consideration the effect of cognitive bias: we often take mental shortcuts (heuristics) deviating from rational objectivity including system errors in the thinking process (Haselton, Nettle, and Murray 2015).

Consequently, one can question the effectiveness of only adopting either a rational, or the direct (adversarial) Western (Anglophone) individualistic pursuit of the truth-at-all-cost criticality approach that undercuts respect of the interlocutor and her belief. For early Confucians, as already stated, 'there was no sharp distinction between manners and morals' (Rosemont and Ames 2008, 24). Rude or boorish behaviour is seen as undermining the development of thick relations premised upon an affectionate concern and respect for the other person. Poor behaviour diminishes 'the meaning invested in relations, and in so doing, loosen[s] and ultimately threaten[s] the moral fabric of society' (2008: 24).

To conclude, were one's education to cultivate a conception of personhood that sees us not simply as autonomous individuals, but as metaphysically tied to others, then the cultivation of the self would be seen as inextricably involving others. Such an understanding of human beings would make it easier to think of others not so much as 'others' but more as extensions of the self, as members of an extended human family to whom we have obligations. Further, given Confucian harmony (*hé*) presupposes difference as a natural part of being human, and not something to fear or destroy: like a good broth we need many ingredients, of appropriate balance. Making the connection of human-relatedness and seeing difference as natural can offer a way for antagonists to be more open to recognising the other's difference and see through artificial and arbitrary binaries of *us* and *them* that some individuals and groups create to exploit for self-interest. In terms of engaging in dialogue, the Confucian indirect method premised upon respect and affectionate concern for the other, supports the cultivation of interpersonal harmony and offers a way through polarising beliefs and conflicts.

[10] For example, in the scientific community reputation is considered the most highly coveted resources (Petersen et al. 2014).

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