

Exam No. 9509603

**A Comparative Study of Two Doctrines of the
Mean between Aristotle and Confucius**

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1. Introduction

The doctrine of the Mean owns an important academic position in ethics theories both in the Western and Eastern philosophical fields. To understand the doctrine of the Mean will benefit further study of virtuous ethical theories. Therefore, I choose this topic as an approach to studying Aristotelian and Confucian ethics theories. The methodology I have chosen is a comparative study. The literary sources are mainly from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Zhongyong*, which recorded Confucius' theories of the Mean, and Confucius' *Lunyu* as well.

Firstly, I went through the text in *Nicomachean Ethics* and found out the logic of context, in order to understand Aristotle's idea of the Mean. Secondly, I referenced and compared some scholars' interpretations of the doctrine of the Mean, in order to get a fuller understanding. With this approach, I know that the Mean in Aristotle's doctrine is moral virtue itself, which is a settled intermediate state of character, towards virtuous actions. With the same structure and method, I understand the doctrine of the Mean of Confucius. To Confucius, the Mean is Heavenly nature, being Zhong – He "Equilibrium - Harmony" and Cheng – Ming "Sincerity - Intelligence". Confucius thinks that Heaven's nature itself is the virtue of Heaven because it is innately good, so the doctrine of the Mean is a theory of virtue as well. To be virtuous, a man should become one with Heaven and Earth.

A comparative methodology has two benefits. One benefit is that it works as a mirroring function. By mirroring each other, we can see various differences more clearly. For instance, at the end of this paper, one can see that the ways to becoming a virtuous person can vary. Aristotle, for example, argues for the neutral natures of men, while Confucius' ethics theory is based on a claim of innate good natures of men. With acknowledging this difference, we can better understand their ethical theories. The other benefit is we can integrate with broader phenomenon to research, complete the methodology that we have used and open up approaches by a comparative way. Apparently, Aristotle and Confucius have come up with a similar theory utilizes different approaches and methodologies, and

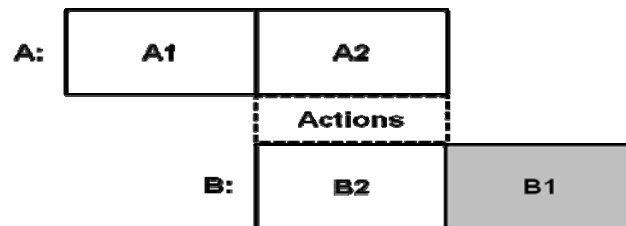
also they were focusing on different facts that existed in different eras and places. So, looking through their theories and then comparing them, we can find more sources to analyze along with double approaches and methods to understand the Mean, especially with these two typical theories in both West and East as the theories of Aristotle and Confucius’.

In the end, to compare Aristotle and Confucius’ theories is aiming to find a true knowledge of humanity. Although there are some objections to the possibility of this comparison, like Alasdair MacIntyre who described it as “incommensurability” (1991), I believe that the truth can be found, no matter the methodologies, approaches and sources used.

2. The Doctrine of the Mean in *Nicomachean Ethics*

Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean is closely related with moral virtue¹. It is formed through the discussion of how moral virtue is acquired and what moral virtue is.

2.1 Moral virtue as State²



Picture 1

¹ Also been translated as “Virtue of character” or “Excellence of character”

² Also been translated as “Disposition”, “Tendency”, or “Condition”

Before explaining the concept of moral virtue, Aristotle's discusses the soul as a background. I have used picture 1 to present a quick understanding of Aristotle's description of the soul. Aristotle retains the previous discussion of the soul to divide it into two parts: part A has rational principles and part B which is irrational in nature. In part B, B1 is distributed with a vegetative element, which causes nutrition and growth and the power of B1 does not distinguish humans from other fully-grown creatures. However, Aristotle believes "*by human virtue we mean not that of the body but that of the soul...*" (1102a 15), so B1 should not be counted in human virtues. Although the other element B2 is resisting rational principle, B2 is somehow sharing part A with the sense of been effecting by part A. This effect is not at the sense of following rational knowledge, but the sense of being persuaded, refrained or tamed. Once the effect works, the state is presented as A2. So part A is twofold with two kinds of elements A1 and A2. A1 is having pure rational principle in itself, while A2 is a state of being obeying rational principles. Based on the division of the soul, Aristotle distinguishes virtue as intellectual virtue and moral virtue. It is clear that intellectual virtue is raised within A1, but it leaves the puzzle of where moral virtue can be acquired. So, Aristotle keeps digging.

"Intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name (ἠθικὴ) is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word ἔθος (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature."

"Neither by nature, then, nor we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit. Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the

case of the arts as well...Again, it is from the same causes and by the same means that every virtue is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every art...For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft. This, then, is the case with the virtues also...Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character correspond to the differences between these..." (1103a24-b23)

Aristotle clearly denies that moral virtue is acquired by nature, because moral virtue comes out as the result of habit and nature cannot be trained into a contrary form. Such as an apple always falling down to the ground and hot air always going upwards, these natural characters cannot be trained to do the opposite. Also, different from nature, moral virtue is not something like sense, which is acquired first then exhibits activities; on the contrary, moral virtue has been received by exercising them first, then as a result manifests itself. Meanwhile, however, the exercising of moral virtues could go to either the good side (produced moral virtue) or bad side (destroyed moral virtue). Aristotle makes this plain by comparing acquiring a character with acquiring a skill. For instance, a man could be regarded as either a pianist or a bad player by the same activity of "playing piano"; a person could become either a just person or an unjust one by the way he is dealing with just acts. So, in order to acquire moral virtue and make us become a virtuous person, the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge, but practical intentions. Apparently, Aristotle thinks that *"we must examine the nature of actions, namely how we ought to do them; for these determine also the nature of the states of character that are produced."* (1103b28-30). Then Aristotle has the following nature of action uppermost in his mind:

"First, then, let us consider this, that it is the nature of such things to be destroyed by defect and excess, as we see in the case of strength and of health...both excessive and defective exercise destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while

that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it. So too is it, then, in the case of temperance and courage and the other virtues....But not only are the sources and cause of their origination and growth the same as those of their destruction, but also the sphere of their actualization will be the same; for this is also true of the things which are more evident to sense, e.g. of strength; it is produced by taking much food and undergoing much exertion, and it is the strong man that will be most able to do these things. So too is it with the virtues...”
(1104a11-b4)

Comparing strength and health, Aristotle depicts three kinds of actions, which affect moral virtue: excessive action, defective action and proportionate action. Excessive and defective actions destroy moral virtue, while proportionate actions preserve it. But we cannot avoid destroying moral virtue by abandoning action, because we could never gain moral virtue if we did so. So far, we can see that moral virtue can be acquired by proportionate actions. But there may be a case against this understanding. When a bad-tempered person is forced to act proportionately with suffering in holding his anger; we should not say he has acquired moral virtue although he is performing proportionate actions. Aristotle noticed that and he further adds two delimitations to actions. One is the actions to acquire moral virtues should be with pleasure and pain.

“We must take as a sign of states of character the pleasure or pain that ensues on acts...For moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones...Again, if the virtues are concerned with actions and passions, and every passion and every action is accompanied by pleasures and pain, for this reason also virtue will be concerned with pleasures and pains...Again, as we said but lately, every state of soul has a nature relative to and concerned with the kind of things by which it tends to be made worse or

better¹; but it is by reason of pleasures and pains that men become bad, by pursuing and avoiding there---either the pleasures and pains they ought not or when they ought not or as they ought not, or by going wrong in one of the other similar ways that may be distinguished...We assume, then, that this kind of excellence tends to do what is best with regard to pleasures and pains, and vice does the contrary.” (1104b4-29)

With this statement, Aristotle indicates that since moral virtue is connected with pleasure and pain, so actions acquiring moral virtues should be with pleasure and pain as well. First, we may feel being pleased or being pained both when we do good things and bad things. We should be trained both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought to from our youth. Thus, we will form relevant passions to actions accordingly. And then, moral virtue is concerned with actions and passions. And every passion and every action is accompanied by pleasure and pain, so moral virtue is connected with pleasure and pain. Third, pleasure and pain is the reason that men turn to bad when they are acting inappropriately. Here “acting inappropriately” means against rational principle so that tends to a lower-grade of the soul (reference picture 1. This situation would tend to things being part B2). Let me make an illustration. Person A is a very honest, decent man. Once, he picked up a purse, which is full of money, on the street. He immediately called the police and handed it in. When man B was in the same situation, he hesitated first because he really wanted to have that money. However he knew what he should do, so he handed it in to the police at last. We may say B is performing with moral virtue, however based on Aristotle’s text that A should be the person who has moral virtue, because he easily acts virtuously without any internal friction. So what matters to whether a man has moral virtue or not depends not merely on what one does but also on what one likes doing. The other delimitation is the actions should be choices, aiming to corresponding with a settled character. *“The agent also must be in a certain condition*

¹ My understanding is: Aristotle thinks the soul with rational principle is the high-grade soul and the vegetable soul is low-grade. So things tending towards the rational principle will make the soul better, vice versa.

when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character” (1105a30-34). So the actions are reducible to a settled character. Since moral virtues are results of actions, we need to know the relation of moral virtue and character.

Next, in respect of moral virtues’ genus (1106a12), Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of things in the soul: passions, faculties, states of character, and “*virtue must be one of these” (1105b16).*

“By passions I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain; by faculties the things in virtue of which we are said to be capable of feeling there, e.g. of becoming angry or being pained or feeling pity; by states of character the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passion, e.g. with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it moderately; and similarly with reference to the other passions.” (1105b21-28)

After analysis, Aristotle thinks moral virtues are neither passion nor faculties, due to three reasons. First, moral virtues and vices are neither praised nor blamed for our passion or faculties. Passion and faculties are not the necessary reason that for we are called either good or bad. Secondly, moral virtues do not arise by nature and they are modes of choice or involve choice. However, we have faculties by nature and passion is without any choice. Third, “*in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the virtues and the vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way” (1106a5).* We can feel passion, but cannot feel moral virtue. So, Aristotle thinks moral virtue should belong to states of character.

So, by research on how to acquire moral virtues, there is an understanding of moral virtue: moral virtue is a settled state of character that can be acquired by willing acts, which are aimed in a way appropriate to circumstances. This understanding is in terms of practical thinking. But Aristotle also has created a theoretical understanding of moral virtue, when he say: *“we must, however, not only describe virtue as a state of character, but also say what sort of state it is.”* (1106a14)

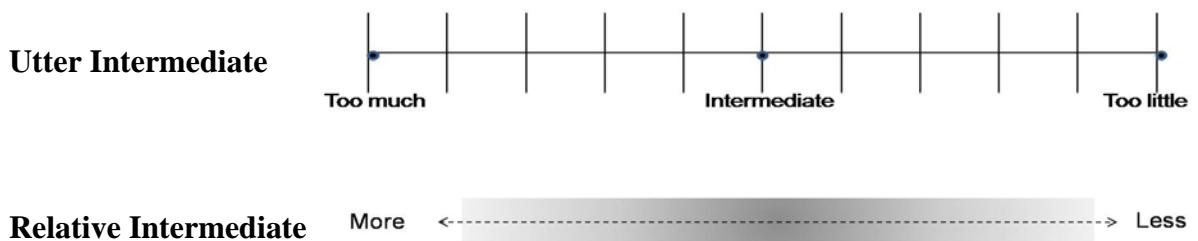
2.2 Moral virtue as Mean

Regarding previous discussion of 1097b22-1098a20, we already know that *“every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well...Therefore, if this is true in every case, the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well.”* (1106a 15-24) To make it plain, Aristotle delves deeper into the nature of virtue.

“In everything that is continuous and divisible it is possible to take more, less, or an equal amount, and that either in terms of the thing itself or relatively to us; and the equal is an intermediate between excess and defect. By the intermediate in the object I mean that which is equidistant from each of the extremes, which is one and the same for all men; by the intermediate relatively to us that which is neither too much nor too little---and this is not one, nor the same for all.....if, further, virtue is more exact and better than any art, as nature also is, then virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean moral virtue; for it is this that is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect, and the intermediate.....Similarly with regard to actions also there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. Now virtue is concerned with passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success; and being praised and being

successful are both characteristics of virtue. Therefore virtue is a kind of mean, since, as we have seen, it aims at what is intermediate. Again, it is possible to fail in many ways...while to succeed is possible only in one way...for these reasons also, then, excess and defect are characteristic of vice, and the mean of virtue...Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.”
(1106a 26-1107a 2)

Aristotle depicts two kinds of intermediates within every continuous and divisible thing¹: Utter intermediate and relative intermediate. The former one is in terms of objects and the latter one is relative to each individual. In these objects, we can find the two extremes of “too much” and “too little”, the intermediate is between them. For instance, if a level of 10 is too much and 2 is too little, then 6 is the intermediate. The utter intermediate is at a fixed point equidistant from each of the extremes and all men will agree with it. However, because intermediate is relative to us, things are different. We cannot find a universal intermediate in things, because there are no exact extremes which will be agreed by all of us. What the extremes of things are is an open question for each of us individually.



Art is relative to us. Aristotle finds that art is aiming to a mean to make artworks perfect, however because excess and defect destroy perfection, only the intermediate preserves it. Moral virtue is better than art, so it must also aim at the intermediate. He makes it plain:

¹ Quantitatively continuous things differ from those quantitatively discontinuous. The former such as lines, times, surface, places, etc. while the latter as numbers and languages. The former things can be divided any part, but the latter things some parts cannot be divided, e.g. syllables in language.

passions and actions that moral virtue is concerned with both have excess, defect and the intermediate. As previously discussed, excess and defective actions, the wrong passions to the wrong actions are things that destroy moral virtue. Only by acting properly with proper passions in all circumstances can be praised by preserving moral virtue successfully. Also, in each circumstance, there is only one way to be successful whilst many possibilities for failure. The intermediate is unique, excess and defect have many paths meaning. Moral virtue must aim at the intermediate. Thus, moral virtue is a settled mean state of our character obeying rational principle, which is the best state of character viz. excellence of character.

2.3 Various interpretations of the doctrine of the Mean

The theory of the Mean is a celebrated doctrine of Aristotle's because importantly, it is related with his definition of excellence of character. However, as J.O.Urmson said "*few philosophical theories have been more frequently and more grossly misunderstood, in my opinion, than the doctrine of the mean*" (1988:28).

"There are three kinds of disposition, then, two of them vices, involving excess and deficiency respectively, and one a virtue, viz. the mean, and all are in a sense opposed to all; for the extreme states are contrary both to the intermediate state and to each other, and the intermediate to the extremes; as the equal is greater relatively to the less, less relatively to the greater, so the middle states are excessive relatively to the deficiencies, deficient relatively to the excesses, both in passion and in actions. " (1108b11-17)

"That moral virtue is a mean, then, and in what sense it is so, and that it is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that it is such because its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions, has been sufficiently stated." (1109a20-25)

This text is easily understood as the triadic thesis that every virtue is a state that lies between two vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency. So, to have moral virtue, one should avoid extremes and that the middle way is the safest. However, Urmson thinks this is a misunderstanding by “*a doctrine of moderation*” (1988:28) to the doctrine of the mean. He said “*unless Aristotle is guilty of a very serious mistake, basic and not in detail, this interpretation must be totally wrong.*” (1988:29)

The reason that it is wrong is because the mean was involved in a scale of action. Urmson thinks that Aristotle’s Mean is an excellence of character, that it is about character; but the doctrine of moderation is about practical thinking and not an attribute of character. “*Excellence of character is a willingness to act in whatever way practical reason requires, and the doctrine of the mean is part of Aristotle’s formal definition of excellence of character. But the doctrine of moderation, however interpreted in detail, is clearly a principle determining what action is appropriate on each occasion*” (1988:29). Further, he argues that if a thesis of moderation was the idea behind Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean, then it would be confused with practical wisdom to a great extent, which is another important concept that Aristotle peculiarly invents to guide our deliberations and our actions. Another objection of the scale of action is that on many occasions, taking the doctrine of the mean as a doctrine about what the ethical agent does when he deliberates is inapplicable or confused. For instance, when a person is thinking how many days to work per week, 7 days is too many 3 days is too little, and then 5 is the middle. However, when he must decide whether to go to work on Sunday, he would not think about the extremes and/or the middle. Instead, he needs to make a right decision. A defense of this would be that this person has aimed at a mean after all. When he makes a correct decision, he has thought through both the benefits and disadvantages of going to work on Sunday and not going, then he has shown a proper degree of concern. In this sense, he aims at a mean in which he avoids paying too much or too little attention, which directly or indirectly exhibits some emotion, to factors that necessarily are related in making a correct decision.

So now the doctrine of moderation involves the mean in a scale of passions. In Aristotle's mind, *"by states of character the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions"* (1105b25). He thinks each virtue is concerned with a particular passion. David Bostock thinks that in following Aristotle, *"it is natural to say that there is a scale associated with each feeling, namely a scale of the intensity with which it is felt"* (2000:41) then each passion can be felt too much, too little and intermediately. So a virtuous person is someone who *"on each occasion, has the right amount of feeling, the degree of intensity of that feeling that is appropriate to the particular situation in which he finds himself."* (2000:41) However, this thesis will meet two objections. First, in many occasions, most passions are entirely out of place, such as "it is time for work". Then, Bostock tried to fix the idea that *"perhaps we might say that in all situations where some people do feel a given emotion – say fear or anger – the right amount of that emotion to feel is always middling"* (2000:42). So our example can be explained like this: a virtuous person when he is asked how he feels about the phrase "it is time for work", he neither likes it very much (as a workaholic) nor dislikes it totally (as a work phobias). But this adjusting still cannot fit the "middle" very well. *"For some people do fear in situations where the right amount of fear to have is zero"*, like our example, sometimes people should do some jobs whatever he likes or dislikes said work. Bostock kept adjusting it by limiting the idea *"in all situations where it is appropriate to feel a given emotion, the right amount to feel is always a middling amount."* (2000:42). He thinks that this formulation automatically countered the cases of zero as the right amount exclusively, but permits the maximum as the right amount. Logically to make this idea work, the following adjusting should be if the "middle" and the "extreme" could coincide, however, Bostock finds that Aristotle does not want to say this. Actually, he stated that *"not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g. spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them"* (1107a8-14). So, it turns out that the doctrine of moderation in a scale of passion does not fit Aristotle's text.

As Urmson argued *“the thesis of moderation, or any other account of the doctrine of the mean that makes it a device for deciding how to act, can have nothing to do with the Aristotelian view put forward in the Ethics”* (1988:29)

J. Donald Monan argues that what is the Mean is not a quantitative but a qualitative question (1968:100). As he noticed when Aristotle said *“if...virtue is more exact than and better than any art, then virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate”* (1106b14), he has already done the transference from the quantitative origin of the category of the “mean” to the field of qualitative category. *“Therefore virtue is a kind of mean, since, as we have seen, it aims at what is intermediate”* (1106b25), namely not aiming at “middle of what” (Bostock 2000:42). So the doctrine of moderation is wrong because it focuses on “too much” and “too little”, which is a quantitative sense. Bostock and Urmson both contribute this misleading understanding to *“a view that one must avoid extremes of emotion and action on every occasion”* (1988:33). But Bostock thinks it is because Aristotle thought *“he could discern a general pattern that applied to all virtues”* (2000:44), whilst as Aristotle clearly said *“but not every action nor every passion admits of a mean”* (1107a9), Urmson finds that plenty of passages in Aristotle’s text prove the doctrine of moderation is a mistake (1988:33).

Urmson thinks that to understand Aristotle’s idea of the mean one should use the Aristotelian style of definition. *“A definition of this type should be constructed by first determining the genus of the thing to be defined, or, less technically, by determining to what wide class of things it belongs and then determining its specific difference, or, less technically, by determining how what is to be defined differs from everything else in the genus”* (1988:30). We have already known that Aristotle has explained that moral virtue as the excellence of character is a settled state of character, which concerns how to feel and display emotions. The further question will be how this state differs from other states in the character. Urmson thinks *“it will be helpful if we know in advance what other states of character Aristotle recognizes; if he were to recognize only one - badness of character - it could be very simply distinguished from excellence; but in fact he*

recognizes many more” (1988:31). Although Aristotle doesn’t distinguish much in Book II, he does distinguish six states in Book VII. Urmson here uses four of them - “as super-human and sub-human, these are perhaps not really states of human character at all, and I shall say no more about them” (1988:31) - for further analysis.

- (1) Excellence of character: the state of the man who wants to act appropriately and does so without internal friction*
- (2) Strength of will: the state of the man who wants to act improperly but makes himself act properly*
- (3) Weakness of will: the state of the man who wants to act improperly, tries to make himself act properly, and fails*
- (4) Badness of character: the state of the man who wants to act improperly, who thinks it an excellent idea so to do, and does so without internal friction*

We can illustrate the situation with a sort of table:

	<i>Want</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Act</i>
<i>Excellence</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
<i>Strength</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
<i>Weakness</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Bad</i>
<i>Badness</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Bad (1988:32)</i>

Urmson’s table clearly distinguishes the four states from each other by showing their different merits in passion, aims and actions. As in our previous example, decent man A handed in the money he picked up to the police immediately without any internal struggle; man B wanted to have the money at first, but he aims to be a good person, so he finally handed it in; there is man C, wanted to have the money and he knows that it is wrong, however he still takes the money; also there is man D, who found the money, picked it up and put into his own pocket without any realization of this mistake. “*So it appears that Aristotle thinks that no emotion is, in itself, either good or bad; what is good or bad is a disposition to display emotions appropriately or inappropriately*”(1988:32).

Now we need to have a look of the notion of propriety. Aristotle distinguished aiming at the intermediate in “continuous and divisible” things from the intermediate we aim at, namely *“the intermediate not in the object but relatively to us”* (1106b6). Bostock has made a good case on the understanding of “relatively to us”. Following Aristotle’s example of athletic training, what is too much for one person may be too little for someone else, therefore *“what is making the difference in this example is that some people are more physically developed than others. So, to apply it to the case of virtue, we may note that some people are more ‘morally developed’ than others”* (2000:40). Thus, a virtuous man will be morally fully developed and other people’s moral development will be compared to his. However, this may be an incorrect conclusion, considering Bostock said *“sinners are not expected to act as saints do; the standards required of them are lower”* (2000:40). Apparently this is wrong and is not what Aristotle believed.

“Fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue” (1106b17-23)

Aristotle does neither show any relevant idea to moral development, nor something as a universal standard to everyone, everything, everywhere, all the time, etc... Thusly, it is clear that what matters to displaying emotions appropriately or not is the manner of feeling and acting according to different occasions. *“For what he actually has in mind is much better described not as a ‘relativity to the agent’ but as a ‘relativity to the circumstances of the action’ (These may, of cause, include the particular way in which the agent is related to other parties involved in the situation)”* (Bostock B. 2000:41).

So far, we can see a virtuous person is someone who has a state of character with correctly displayed emotions, and this state of character is the essential element for

making virtuous actions according to circumstances in which the actions are involved. This state is the Mean, as Urmson nicely said “*excellence of character is explicitly said to be an intermediate disposition towards action and not a disposition to intermediate action*” (1988:34).

3. The Doctrine of Zhong Yong (Confucius’ Mean) in *Zhongyong*¹

Zhongyong was written between the end of the Warring States Period to Western Han in ancient China. It was originally the 31st chapter of the *Book of Rites (Li Ji)*. However, Zhu Xi, a great Chinese philosopher who has been regarded as the most influential rationalist neo-Confucian that formulated the significance notations of Confucius’ theories and the synthesis of all fundamental Confucian concepts in the Song Dynasty in China’s history, recognized the importance of *Zhongyong* in Confucius’ theory system and took it out from the *Book of the Rites*. He canonized *Zhongyong* as one of the *Four Books* together with *Lunyu*, *the Great Learning* and *the Works of Mencius*, as the basic texts to interpret Confucius’ theories. There are two views in terms of *Zhongyong*’s author, one is that it has been edited by Tsze-sze, Confucius’ grandson; the other is that some Confucian scholars in Qin and Han Dynasties compiled it. I here buy Zhu Xi’s view that *Zhongyong* was edited by Tsze-sze, especially recording and collecting Confucius’ thoughts of the doctrine of the Mean. Although it probably has been involved Tsze-sze’s own views, *Zhongyong* is still the typical Confucian book on the doctrine of the Mean. Therefore, I focus on its text to understand Confucius’ theory of Zhong Yong², which is the doctrine of the Mean of Confucius.

¹ Zhong yong as a theory originate from ancient Chinese thoughts. In this article, *Zhongyong* in italic points to the Book of the Mean, with notation by Zhu Xi.

² In this article, Zhong Yong (separating the two characters) points to the doctrine of the Mean of Confucius.

3.1 “Zhong Yong” 中庸 in *Zhongyong*

天命之谓性，率性之谓道，修道之谓教。道也者，不可须臾离也；可离，非道也。是故君子戒慎乎其所不睹，恐惧乎其所不闻。莫见乎隐，莫显乎微。故君子慎其独也。喜怒哀乐之未发，谓之中；发而皆中节，谓之和。

*What Heaven has conferred is called THE NATURE; an accordance with this nature is called THE PATH¹ of duty; the regulation of this path is called INSTRUCTION. The path may not be left for an instant. If it could be left, it would not be the path. On this account, the superior man does not wait till he sees things, to be cautious, nor till he hears things, to be apprehensive. There is nothing more visible than what is secret, and nothing more manifest than what is minute. Therefore the superior man is watchful over himself, when he is done. While there are no stirrings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy, the mind may be said to be in the state of EQUILIBRIUM. When those feelings have been stirred, and they act in their due degree, there ensues what may be called the state of HARMONY. (*Zhongyong*, Chapter 1)*

As the starting chapter, Chapter 1 summarizes by pointing out two important concepts “Equilibrium” and “Harmony”, and one basic claim of *Zhongyong*: things’ natures are endowed by Heaven, so is our nature; our nature can be acquired by the Path, viz. Dao; Dao can be practiced by instruction. Apparently, Dao is a key link with Heaven and human. As Dao cannot be left at all and it is in our daily life anytime and everywhere, we should be very cautious in practicing Dao. When we practice Dao, we should pay attention to two aspects: one is aiming at an Equilibrium state of mind, which transcend any emotion. This is not to say that we should not have any emotion, but that this state of Equilibrium is not controlled by emotions; the other aspect is when there are emotions displayed, we should aim at the due degree to display them, which is a state of Harmony.

¹ In Chinese, the Path is the Dao 道. It also has been translated as the Way.

The Equilibrium state of mind is the internal condition of the harmony state, and the harmony state is the external principle that all actions should follow.

仲尼曰：君子中庸，小人反中庸。君子之中庸也，君子而时中。小人之中庸也，小人而无忌惮也。

Chung-ni¹ said: the superior man embodies the course of the Mean; the mean man acts contrary to the course of the Mean. The superior man's embodying the course of the Mean is because he is a superior man, and so always maintains the Mean. The mean man's acting contrary to the course of the Mean is because he is a mean man, and has no caution. (Zhongyong, Chapter 2)

Now, *Zhongyong* is a collection of Confucius' words to explain its claim in detail, starting with the discussion of Zhong Yong by Confucius. According to the Chinese characters, it has been made clearly that 中 Equilibrium, 和 Harmony and 中庸 “Zhong Yong” are three distinct concepts in Confucius' idea. In my comparative discussion, however, a translation of “Zhong Yong” as “the Mean” will easily mix up Confucius' idea of Zhong Yong with Aristotle's idea of the Mean as its English translation denotes. For better understanding, I would like to use “Zhong Yong” instead of “the Mean” in the following discussion.

Comparing the superior man and the mediocre man, Confucius thinks that the distinction between them is that the superior man maintains Zhong Yong by always being in an Equilibrium state of mind; while the latter² has no caution so that he easily goes to extremes. In *Lunyu*³, Confucius indicated the extremes as “to go beyond” and “fall short”:

¹ Chung-ni is the Cantonese utterance of 仲尼 (zhong ni in Mandarin), the second name of Confucius.

² The superior man also has been translated as “the gentleman” and the mediocre man also can be called as “the small man”, in Mandarin they are called “Jun Zi” and “Xiao Ren”.

³ Viz. “The analects of Confucius”

子贡问：师与商也孰贤？子曰：师也过，商也不及。曰：然则师愈与？子曰：过犹不及。

Tsze-kung asked which of the two, Shih or Shang, was the superior. The Master said, "Shih goes beyond the due mean, and Shang does not come up to it." "Then," said Tsze-kung, "the superiority is with Shih, I suppose." The Master said, "To go beyond is as wrong as to fall short." (Lunyu, 11:15)

So, to Confucius, "to go beyond" and "fall short" are things that Zhong Yong will definitely avoid. Furthermore, Confucius gives another detailed description of Zhong Yong, in which Confucius emphasizes that Zhong Yong should be life-long and constant.

子曰：人皆曰：予知。驱而纳诸罟获陷阱之中，而莫之知辟也。人皆曰：予知。择乎中庸，而不能期月守也。

The Master said, "Men all say, 'We are wise'; but being driven forward and taken in a net, a trap, or a pitfall, they know not how to escape. Men all say, 'We are wise'; but happening to choose the course of the Mean, they are not able to keep it for a round month." (Zhongyong, Chapter 7)

Then, Confucius further shows the power of Zhong Yong.

故君子和而不流，强哉矫！中立而不倚，强哉矫！国有道，不变塞焉，强哉矫！国无道，至死不变，强哉矫！

Therefore, the superior man cultivates a friendly harmony, without being weak. -- How firm is he in his energy! He stands erect in the middle, without inclining to either side. ---- How firm is he in his energy! When good principles prevail in the government of his country, he does not change from what he was in retirement. --- - How firm is he in his energy! When bad principles prevail in the country, he maintains his course to death without changing. ---- How firm is he in his energy! (Zhongyong, Chapter 10, section 5)

He emphasizes that once a person obtains Zhong Yong, he becomes the superior man with great energy. With the energy, he can reach the harmonious state of his actions and this state is hardly broken; with the energy, he can own the equilibrium state in mind; with this energy, the equilibrium and harmony will not be changed with circumstances. So, Zhong Yong is a state related to both equilibrium and harmony. Then how to acquire Zhong Yong?

Confucius has given Zhong Yong a high praise by implying a great difficulty of acquiring it. *“The Master said, the kingdom, its states, and its families, may be perfectly ruled; dignities and emoluments may be declined; naked weapons maybe trampled under the feet; -- but the course of the Mean cannot be attained to. 子曰, 天下国家可均也, 爵禄可辞也, 白刃可蹈也, 中庸不可能也”* (Zhongyong, Chapter 9). In *Lunyu*, Confucius treated Zhong Yong as the greatest of all virtues. *“The Master said, perfect is the virtue which is according to the Constant Mean! Rare for a long time has been its practice among the people. 子曰: 中庸之为德也, 其至矣乎! 民鲜久矣! ”* (Lunyu, 6:27) But Confucius only mentioned Zhong Yong once in *Lunyu*. Why was such an important concept in Confucius’ ethics seldom mentioned in *Lunyu*, the main book of his ethic theories? Let me put aside this question for a while and go on looking through the text of *Zhongyong*.

In *Zhongyong*, as in *Lunyu*, Zhong Yong has been claimed as the greatest virtue as well.

故君子尊德性而道问学, 致广大而尽精微, 极高明而道中庸。

Therefore, the superior man honors his virtuous nature, and maintains constant inquiry and study, seeking to carry it out to its breadth and greatness, so as to omit none of the more exquisite and minute points which it embraces, and to raise it to its greatest height and brilliancy, so as to pursue the course of the Mean. (Zhongyong, Chapter 27, section 6)

子曰：舜其大孝也与？德为圣人，尊为天子，富有四海之内……故天之生物，必因其材而笃焉。故栽者培之，倾者覆之。《诗》曰：‘嘉乐君子，宪宪令德。宜民宜人，受禄于天。保佑命之，自天申之。’故大德者必受命。

The Master said, "How greatly filial was Shun! His virtue was that of a sage; his dignity was the throne; his riches were all within the four seas"..... "Thus it is that Heaven, in the production of things, is sure to be bountiful to them, according to their qualities. Hence the tree that is flourishing, it nourishes, while that which is ready to fall, it over throws. In the Book of Poetry, it is said, 'The admirable, amiable prince displayed conspicuously his excelling virtue, adjusting his people, and adjusting his officers. Therefore, he received from Heaven the emoluments of dignity. It protected him, assisted him, decreed him the throne; sending from Heaven these favors, as it were repeatedly.' We may say therefore that he who is greatly virtuous will be sure to receive the appointment of Heaven." (Zhongyong, Chapter 18)

Apparently, Zhong Yong is not only a virtue but also the virtue on its greatest height and brilliancy. Confucius believes that Heaven will deliver appointments to things according to their qualities. For instance, Shun has showed a great filial piety¹, so he got big favors from Heaven. Here, Confucius wants to emphasize a twofold meanings: on the one hand, since Heaven delivers appointments according to things' quality, men should keep nurturing their virtues, approaching as close as possible to the greatest height and brilliancy of virtue in order to receive the appointment from Heaven and follow its way; on the other hand, if we realize the appointment of Heaven and follow Heaven's way, we naturally will have already had the greatest virtue viz. Zhong Yong. So, Zhong Yong is reward from following the way of Heaven. Confucius further explains what the Heaven's way is:

¹ In Confucius' ethics, filial piety is the root of his virtue system “孝弟也者，其为仁之本与” (*Lunyu*, 1:2). Shun has showed a great filial piety, so he has been regarded as a great virtuous person

诚者，天之道也；诚之者，人之道也。诚者，不勉而中，不思而得，从容中道，圣人也。诚之者，择善而固执之者也：博学之，审问之，慎思之，明辨之，笃行之...人一能之，己百之；人十能之，己千之。果能此道矣，虽愚必明，虽柔必强。

Sincerity is the way of Heaven. The attainment of sincerity is the way of men. He who possesses sincerity is he who, without an effort, hits what is right, and apprehends, without the exercise of thought; ---- he is the sage who naturally and easily embodies the right way. He who attains to sincerity is he who chooses what is good, and firmly holds it fast. To this attainment there are requisite the extensive study of what is good, accurate inquiry about it, careful reflection on it, the clear discrimination of it, and the earnest practice of it.....If another man succeed by one effort, he will use a hundred efforts. If another man succeeds by ten efforts, he will use a thousand. Let a man proceed in this way, and, though dull, he will surely become intelligent; though weak, he will surely become strong. (Zhongyong, Chapter 19)

Therefore, the Heaven's way viz. Tian Dao is "Cheng" Sincerity, the men's way viz. Ren Dao¹ is the attainment of sincerity. Ren Dao is a state where Tian Dao works through in humans. A man, who has had Tian Dao "Cheng" Sincerity, can be "不勉而中" viz. having the Equilibrium state of mind without an effort; "不思而得" viz. understanding things without thinking; "从容中道" viz. acting with a harmony state easily². This sort of man is a sage who naturally has attained sincerity, namely naturally having Tian Dao working through him as Ren Dao. However, a common man cannot do this naturally. But Tian Dao "Cheng" Sincerity can be pursued with great efforts. Thus, to acquire Zhong

¹ Tian Dao is the Mandarin utterance of 天道 means the way of Heaven; Ren Dao is the Mandarin utterance of 人道 means the way of men.

² Legge's translation here does not show the three aspects clearly and completely. So I translate it again according to the origin text.

Yong, we should pursue Tian Dao and let it work through us as Ren Dao. Confucius names this progress of forming “a ternion” with Heaven and Earth.

*唯天下至诚为能尽其性；能尽其性则能尽人之性；能尽人之性则能尽物之性；能尽物之性则可以赞大地之化育；可以赞天地之化育则可以与天地参矣
It is only he who is possessed of the most complete sincerity that can exist under heaven, who can give its full development to his nature. Able to give its full development to his own nature, he can do the same to the nature of other men. Able to give its full development to the nature of other men, he can give their full development to the natures of animals and things. Able to give their full development to the natures of creatures and things, he can assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth. Able to assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, he may with Heaven and Earth form a ternion. (Zhongyong, Chapter 22)*

Confucius thinks that only when a man possesses the most complete “Cheng” can he fully develop his nature. Once he fully develops his own natures, he can fully develop other men and other things’ nature. Once he fully develops other men and other things’ nature, he can interact with Heaven and Earth. By doing these, he can form a ternion with Heaven and Earth. In the ternion, Confucius emphasizes the three elements: Heaven with Tian Dao “Cheng” Sincerity, Men with Ren Dao “attainment of sincerity” and Earth as the place where all men’s actions happen within. The ternion is the ideal state when these three points become one. By then, Tian Dao “Cheng” Sincerity works through as Ren Dao “attainment of sincerity”, so that the Earth can be well treated as well as the man developing himself well by easily carrying out right actions.

其次致曲，曲能有诚。诚则形，形则著，著则明，明则动，动则变，变则化。唯天下至诚为能化。

Next to the above is he who cultivates to the utmost the shoots of goodness in him. From those he can attain to the possession of sincerity. This sincerity becomes

apparent. From being apparent, it becomes manifest. From being manifest, it becomes brilliant. Brilliant, it affects others. Affecting others, they are changed by it. Changed by it, they are transformed. It is only he who is possessed of the most complete sincerity that can exist under heaven, who can transform. (Zhongyong, Chapter 23)

Although the ternion state is an ideal one, it is attainable. As long as a man cultivates to the utmost the shoots of goodness, going through being apparent, being manifest, being brilliant, changing others and transforming others, he can attain sincerity; as long as the man possesses sincerity, he has already formed the ternion with Heaven and Earth; as long as the man has done the ternion, he will have made Tian Dao work through Ren Dao, and then he has already possessed Zhong Yong as a result. From this process we can get that possessing Sincerity is the possessing of Zhong Yong, and then we get Zhong Yong equals to Sincerity. So far, we can see the reason why “Zhong Yong” has rarely been mentioned in *Lunyu*, is that *Lunyu* specially discusses how a man cultivates to the utmost of the shoots of goodness in Ren Dao “attainment of sincerity”, but it does not discuss Tian Dao in its system. So, the related discussions of Zhong Yong have been found in *Zhongyong*, as its name shows, explaining on the concept of Zhong Yong and how to acquire it. Now, we have understood that Zhong Yong is Sincerity, so the following question is what “Cheng” Sincerity is?

诚者，自成也；而道，自道也。诚者，物之终始，不诚无物。

Sincerity is that whereby self-completion is effected, and its way is that by which man must direct himself. Sincerity is the end and beginning of things; without sincerity there would be nothing. (Zhongyong, Chapter 25, section 1-2)

Confucius thinks that Sincerity is the basis of the Heaven’s Way and Human Way, which is genuine without any duplicity. It is also constantly getting through all things in the world by forming their principles of nature, within which the virtues are encompassed.

Namely, Sincerity enacts all these virtues and nurtures without claiming reciprocal merit or gain.

誠者，非自成己而已也，所以成物也。成己，仁也；成物，知也。性之德也，合外內之道也，故時措之宜也。

The possessor of sincerity does not merely accomplish the self-completion of himself. With this quality he completes other men and things also. The completing himself shows his perfect virtue. The completing other men and things shows his knowledge. Both these are virtues belonging to the nature, and this is the way by which a union is effected of the external and internal. Therefore, whenever he – the entirely sincere man – employs them, - that is, these virtues, - their action will be right. (Zhongyong, Chapter 25, section 3)

However, Sincerity cannot be accomplished by itself. It has to be qualified by things and men. Confucius thinks that when a man completes his nature himself, he attains the sincerity by showing Ren as the perfect virtue; when a man completes other men and things' natures, he attains the sincerity by showing his knowledge. When a man appears Ren and knowledgeable, he has owned the virtue of nature “性之德也”, viz. the Sincerity. And when a man owns the virtue of nature, he will deliver right actions. Therefore, Sincerity is the virtue of nature.

3.2 Various identifications of “Zhong Yong” 中庸

As we know, Confucius thinks that Zhong Yong is “Cheng” Sincerity, viz. “Tian Dao”, the virtue of Heaven's nature. However, we have also got the idea that Zhong Yong is a settled, constant state of mind, which is the equilibrium between two extremes, and it is the internal condition of ensuring the harmonious state of external actions. Are these two ideas of Zhong Yong the same or what their relationship is? How to rightly understand Confucius' idea of Zhong Yong? These questions have been discussed for thousands of

years and the various interpretations of Zhong Yong are mainly focused on the just identification of the characters “Zhong Yong” 中庸. How to interpret the two characters shows how a man understands Zhong Yong of Confucius.

郑云：名曰《中庸》者，以其记中和之为用也。庸，用也。（十三经注疏第六卷，礼记正义，第1422页）

“Chang Kang-chang¹ said ---- 名曰中庸者，以其记中和之为用也。‘The work is named 中庸, because it records the practice of the non-deviating mind and of harmony.’ He takes 庸 in the sense of 用, ‘to use,’ ‘to employ,’ which is the first given to it in the dictionary, and is found in the Shu-ching, I, I, par. 9.” (James Legge: 347)

Zheng Xuan, also named Zheng Kangcheng, is a great Confucian in Eastern Han dynasty. He interprets “Yong” 庸 as “to use” and understands “Zhong Yong” as the practicing of “Zhong” and “He”, namely the Equilibrium state of mind and the Harmonious state of actions. So, Zheng Xuan gives the first interpretation to “Zhong Yong” as a practicing of the equilibrium state of mind and harmonious state of actions. This interpretation has mentioned the two important concepts of “Zhong” and “He”, but there is a question: if “Yong” means “to use” and “Zhong” “He” are things should be used, why did not Confucius name this practice as “Zhong He Yong”? Did Confucius forget harmony “He” when he named the practice “Zhong Yong”? Apparently, Confucius did not want to put Zhong and He both as practicing. In several paragraphs, Confucius actually praises the character of virtuous person, within which his actions entailed.

子曰：舜其大知也与！舜好问而好察迩言，隐恶而扬善，执其两端，用其中于民。其斯以为舜乎！

The Master said, “There was Shun: ---- He indeed was greatly wise! Shun loved to question others, and to study their words, though they might be shallow. He

¹ The Cantonese utterance of Zheng Kangcheng

concealed what was bad in them, and displayed what was good. He took hold of their two extremes, determined the Mean, and employed it in his government of the people. It was by this that he was Shun!” (Zhongyong, Chapter 6)

To justify the relationship of Zhong “Equilibrium” and He “Harmony”, there are other interpretations coming up as following. Cheng Yi, a great Confucian in Northern Song Dynasty interprets “Yong” as “unchanging”¹: “*My master, the philosopher Chang*², *says – ‘Being without inclination to either side is called Chung*³; *admitting of no change is called Yung*⁴” (Legge:347). And Zhu Xi further develops Cheng Yi’s idea to interpret “Yong” into “ordinary, constant”.

中者，不偏不倚，无过不及之名。庸，平常也 (Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu 四书章句集注, Zhu Xi:17)

“This appears to have been the accepted meaning of 庸 in this combination, till Chang I introduced that of 不易, ‘unchanging,’ as in the introductory note, which, however, the dictionary does not acknowledge. Chu His⁵ himself says ---- 中者不偏不倚，无过不及之名，庸，平常也。 ‘Chung is the name for what is without inclination or deflection, which neither exceeds nor comes short. Yung means ordinary, constant.” (Legge:347)

James Legge understands this interpretation as: “*The dictionary gives another meaning of Yung, with special reference to the point before us. It is said ---- 又和也, ‘It also means*

¹ See the original text as 子程子曰：不偏之谓中，不易之谓庸 in “Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu 四书章句集注”, Zhu Xi, page 17

² Chang is the Cantonese utterance of Cheng, means Cheng Yi here

³ Chung is the Cantonese utterance of Zhong 中

⁴ Yung is the Cantonese utterance of Yong 庸

⁵ Chu His is the Cantonese utterance of Zhu Xi

harmony;’ and then reference is made to Kang-Chang’s words given above, the compilers not having observed that he immediately subjoins ---- 庸，用也， showing that he takes Yung in the sense of ‘to employ’, and not of ‘harmony’. Many, however, adopt this meaning of the term in chap, ii, and my own opinion is decidedly in favor of it, here in the title. The work then treats of the human mind: ---- in its state of chung, absolutely correct, as it is in itself; and in its state of hwo¹, or harmony, acting ad extra, according to its correct nature” (Legge:347-348).

So, Zhu Xi’s interpretation has twofold meanings: first, “Zhong” viz. the Equilibrium state is in human mind as nature; second, “He” viz. the Harmonious state can be achieved only when employing “Zhong” in mind. In this sense, “Yong” is interpreted as “to use”, “to employ”. Namely, adjusting Zheng Xuan’s interpretation of using “Zhong” and “He”, Zhu Xi’s interpretation is treating on the human’s mind only and emphasizes that “Zhong” is the necessary mental condition of “He”. Also, Zhu Xi’s interpretation of “Yong” as “ordinary and constant” is in line with the text, because it means Zhong Yong should govern people’s daily life anytime and anywhere.

Although Zhu Xi’s interpretation of the Mean has been used as the canonical one for hundreds of years, it also faces challenges. First, his interpretation of “Zhong” as “being without inclination to either side” easily falls to the doctrine of moderation. Second, although he has emphasized the necessity of having “Zhong” as to having “He”, he did not realize the inevitability of having “Zhong” is to have “He”, viz. “Zhong” is aiming to “He”. In this sense, his interpretation also weakens “He”, which is not in line with the text. I see the reason of those challenges to Zheng Xuan and Zhu Xi’s interpretations are due to their uncompleted understandings of “Zhong Yong”. Their interpretations of “Zhong Yong” only have shown an understanding of “Zhong” and “He”, but did not involve another important part of “Zhong Yong”, “Sincerity” and “attainment of Sincerity”.

¹ The Cantonese utterance of He 和

Qian Mu, a remarkable Chinese historian, Confucian and Educator in modern China, argues that there are two important aspects in the doctrine of Zhong Yong. One is “Cheng – Ming” (Sincerity and Intelligence), the other is “Zhong – He” (Equilibrium and Harmony).¹ Qian Mu goes on looking through the two aspects and finds their connections:

Qian Mu agrees with Zhu Xi’s understanding of Sincerity as the Truth or Authenticity of everything’s existence “诚者，真实无妄之谓，天理之本然也”。² The truth or Authenticity has externalizations through things. “Sincerity is that whereby self-completion is effected...Sincerity is the end and beginning of things; without sincerity there would be nothing. 诚者，自成也；诚者，物之终始，不诚无物” (Zhongyong, Chapter 25). Thus, human as an existence in the world also owns the Truth as nature, “the attainment of sincerity is the way of men 诚之者，人之道也” (Zhongyong, Chapter 20). Because of this, men’s nature and its external appearances share Sincerity. In this sense, men have the ability to attain Sincerity, namely to become one with Heaven. Once a man has attained Sincerity, he has “Ming” viz. intelligence. And intelligence keeps this progress going.

This aspect of Zhong Yong has shown a great respect for the nature of everything’s existence. However, it is not saying that everything is good, otherwise, why there are still virtuous choices for goodness? Now, let us see the other aspect of Zhong Yong: “Zhong – He”, Equilibrium and Harmony. “This EQUILIBRIUM is the great root from which grow all the human actings in the world, and this HARMONY is the universal path which they all should pursue 中也者，天下之大本也；和也者，天下之达道也。致中和，天地位焉，万物育焉” (Zhongyong, Chapter 1) Equilibrium is the nature of Heaven. For instance,

¹ See the origin sentence as “中庸阐述天人合一，主要有两意：一曰诚与明，二曰中与和” in the book “The history of Chinese academic theories, Book 2, P283” 《中国学术思想史论丛》第二册第 283 页

² See the book “Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu”, Zhu Xi:31. 四书章句集注，朱熹撰，第 31 页

the Sun and the Earth are in an equilibrium state, but it does not mean they are in a middle place of somewhere. It is saying that they are in a harmonious state. So, Equilibrium and Harmony are connecting each other, complementary to each other and they cannot be existed without one another. Because Heaven exists with equilibrium and harmony states, so does the nature of men. *“While there are no stirrings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy, the mind may be said to be in the state of EQUILIBRIUM. When those feelings have been stirred, and they act in their due degree, there ensues what may be called the state of HARMONY. 喜怒哀乐之未发, 谓之中; 发而皆中节, 谓之和”* (Zhongyong, Chapter 1) It is saying that our mind is naturally equilibrium and our feelings naturally go to harmony, but they are always ruined in daily life by external things. So, we need to develop our mind to reach equilibrium and train actions to harmonious states by attaining Sincerity, and then we become intelligent. Being intelligent makes us constantly attain Sincerity. To attain Sincerity, we should become one with Heaven and Earth.

Here, we should understand one important point: Confucius is not saying that Zhong – He is the best state of Heaven’s nature. Actually, he is saying that Zhong – He itself is the Heaven’s nature, Sincerity “Cheng” itself as the truth is the Heaven’s nature. And because we have already known that Sincerity is the virtue of nature, then we can get that Heaven’s nature is naturally virtuous. It shows that Confucius respects Heaven with its original state as virtue and he thinks that admitting Heaven’s original way and state as virtue is Sincerity. Since Sincerity works through men as Ren Dao, namely the attainment of Sincerity, it is saying that we should respect our original nature, which is given by Heaven’s nature, as virtue itself. *“Men at their birth are naturally good. 人之初, 性本善”* (Three-word Chant, Chapter 1)¹. So, a virtuous man should return to his original nature by becoming one with Heaven and Earth, order to attain Heaven’s nature.

¹ 三字经, 作者(宋)王应麟。Although this book is edited by Wang Yinglin in Song dynasty, it effected by Confucius’ theories and shows Confucius’ idea here.

However, this process is not only happening in man's own mind, attaining Sincerity should not be separated from other things and other men. Actually the attainment of Sincerity happens with full development of other things and other men's natures. Qian Mu emphasizes this point according to several passages in the text of *Zhongyong*:

子曰：道不远人。人之为道而远人，不可以为道。

The Master said, "The Path is not far from man. When men try to pursue a course, which is far from the common indications of consciousness, this course cannot be considered the Path." (Zhongyong, Chapter 13, section 1)

君子不可以不修身。思修身，不可以不事亲。思事亲，不可以不知人。思知人，不可以不知天。

Hence the sovereign may not neglect the cultivation of his own character. Wishing to cultivate his character, he may not neglect to serve his parents. In order to serve his parents, he may not neglect to acquire a knowledge of men. In order to know men, he may not dispense with a knowledge of Heaven. (Zhongyong, Chapter 20, section 7)

诚者，非自成己而已也，所以成物也。成己，仁也；成物，知也。

The possessor of sincerity does not merely accomplish the self-completion of himself. With this quality he completes other men and things also. The completing himself shows his perfect virtue. The completing other men and things shows his knowledge. (Zhongyong, Chapter 25, section 3)

Dong Qiming further emphasizes this point viz. men should not be isolated from other things and other men to pursue Sincerity, by explaining "Yong" in a new angle. He combines the knowledge of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and then argues that "Yong" is used to lower the process of pursuing Sincerity down to men's ordinary life, in order to prevent men from falling into Narcissism and Mysticism. By this way, men can keep the equilibrium state of mind and have harmony in actions in daily lives and will not

lose themselves. Like Confucius said: “*Earnest in practicing the ordinary virtues, and careful in speaking about them, if, in his practice, he has anything defective, the superior man dares not but exert himself; and if, in his words, he has any excess, he dares not allow himself such license. Thus his words have respect to his actions, and his actions have respect to his words; is it not just an entire sincerity which marks the superior man?* 庸德之行, 庸言之谨; 有所不足, 不敢不勉; 有余不敢尽. 言顾行, 行顾言, 君子胡不慥慥尔!” (*Zhongyong, Chapter 13, section 4*)

I think that Qian Mu’s interpretation has completely covered the two aspects of the doctrine of Zhong Yong in *Zhongyong* and Dong Qiming’s idea has made a good case of understanding of “Yong”. By referring to all the main interpretations of “Zhong Yong”, I would like to give my own argument: First, I argue that keeping “Yong” as a verb, but not as an adjective. This is in line with the origin of “Yong” in *the first Chinese dictionary*¹ also. Second, combining the understanding of “ordinary” and “to use”, I argue that “Yong” means “to vulgarize”. Third, the target of vulgarization is lowering the Heaven’s way “Cheng” Sincerity down to men’s way, viz. lowering Heaven’s nature of “Zhong - He” viz. Equilibrium – Harmony down to men’s nature. This understanding not only covers the two aspects of the doctrine of Zhong Yong, but also corresponds with the acquiring process of Zhong Yong, viz. letting Tian Dao “Sincerity” work through Ren Dao “attainment of Sincerity”. Thus, Confucius’ doctrine of Zhong Yong argues that Zhong Yong is Heaven’s nature, being attainable as men’s nature. Zhong Yong is a constant equilibrium state of mind and aiming at a harmonious state of actions. The way to acquire Zhong Yong is becoming one with Heaven and Earth. To become one with Heaven and Earth, one should practice Tian Dao Sincerity as Ren Dao attainment of Sincerity everywhere and anytime in the daily life.

¹ See the origin as 《说文》用部有：庸，用也，从庸庚 in *The First Chinese Dictionary*

4. Comparison of doctrines of the Mean between Aristotle and Confucius

When we put Aristotle and Confucius' ethics theories together, we feel amazed that those two great philosophers, who lived in totally different eras and far away from each other, both discussed the Mean in their theories. What similarities do they share and what are the differences? What is the reason for the differences? Thus, a comparison study should be done. It will help us to understand both Aristotle's and Confucius' theories by mirroring each other. By this way, we can filter the essential parts of their theories and complete them with each other's methods, so that we can achieve the truth.

4.1 Structural similarity

As previous explanation, though Aristotle's definition of the Mean is a settled state of character as a psychological excellence internally, the whole doctrine of the Mean also includes the external aspect of its content.

But it makes, perhaps, no small difference whether we place the chief good in possession or in use, in state of mind or in activity. For the state of mind may exist without producing any good result, as in a man who is asleep or in some other way quite inactive, but the activity cannot; for one who has the activity will of necessity be acting, and acting well. (1098b33-1099a2)

To Aristotle, moral virtue needs to be delivered by virtuous actions externally. Without virtuous actions, the virtuous agent will be hollow. In this sense, moral virtue cannot exist without actions, neither can the Mean as the excellence of character. Thus the Mean is a behavioral virtue because of its motivation of actions, like Monan said: "To the extent,

therefore, that the explicitation of the reasons for the application of a value-language is constituted by psychological analyses, it is carried out within the framework of the category of the mean. But that explicitation also leads ultimately to the setting out of motives of action which merit praise and blame. This brings Aristotle to the specifically moral dimension of human conduct.” (1968:101)

The same sense appears in Confucius’ doctrine of Zhong Yong as well. Actually, Confucius directly involves the external sense in his identification of Zhong Yong. As I have already discussed, Zhong Yong has two layers concerning external actions: one layer is the harmony of a state of actions when a man completes his own nature and completes other men’s natures and things’ natures. The other layer is that when a man has Sincerity, he is intelligent and keeps doing right actions aiming at harmonious state. For instance, the Sun, the Moon and the Earth are working on their own trajectories, which are not in some middle ways in the space or to each other, but in a harmonious state. This harmony state is derived from the relationship between the Sun, the Moon and the Earth’s natures, which is the equilibrium state. Without the equilibrium state of nature, they cannot work in a harmonious state; without the harmonious state of working, the existence of the equilibrium state will be unknowable and meaningless. So, harmony is a linkage of internal mind and external actions. The way to accomplish this linkage is “Yong”, namely “to vulgarize”.

So, Jiyuan Yu summarizes this structural similarity of Aristotle and Confucius’ doctrines of the Mean as they all have an internal Mean and an external Mean. They also both require practicing of the Mean.

Aristotle’s doctrine of the Mean:

- 1) Internal Mean in character*
- 2) External Mean in actions and passions*
- 3) Practicing internal Mean, aiming to external Mean*

Confucius' doctrine of Zhong Yong:

- 1) *Zhong: internal Mean*
- 2) *He: external Mean*
- 3) *Yong: practicing internal Mean, aiming to externally Mean(Jiyuan Yu, 2009:83)*

Further, Jiyuan Yu argues that from this structural similarity, we find that both Aristotle and Confucius' theories are aiming to hit the external Mean. This is just like the pattern of "archery", not necessarily hitting on somewhere in the middle, but necessarily hitting on the right point. Actually, we can find this metaphor in both their texts.

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? (1094a18-24)

子曰，射有似乎君子。失诸正鹄，反求诸其身。

The Master said, "In archery we have something like the way of the superior man. When the archer misses the center of the target, he turns round and seeks for the cause of his failure in himself". (Zhongyong, Chapter 14, section 5)

Jiyuan Yu thinks misunderstandings of the doctrine of moderation can be avoided by understanding the comparison with archery. Also, he claims that this "archery" pattern explains the internal and external Mean nicely (2009:89). However, I think that it is good at pointing out the internal and external sense of the Mean, but it does not explain the difference between Aristotle and Confucius' doctrines of the Mean. The difference is in how to practice the internal Mean.

4.2 Different methods: Habit and Ritual

In the discussion of a virtuous person in Book II, Aristotle emphasized that *“his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character”* (1105b1). And a character has the power to go in either a good way or a bad way in a kind of virtue.

We see that all men mean by justice that kind of state of character which makes people disposed to do what is just and makes them act justly and wish for what is just; and similarly by injustice that state which makes them act unjustly and wish for what is unjust..... (1129a6-17)

That is to say that a character itself is not action, but a state of nature as an active condition of actions, which men are holding internally when they perform actions. Aristotle thinks character can be acquired and perfected by habit, *“rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit”* (1103a25). And once we get habituated to a habit, our character will be fixed accordingly. So our lives are full of collections of habits. By training ourselves with habits, we can get habituated with them and then those habits become our character. Once our character is settled, it becomes our nature. Habits are not a part of character, but the things to set up a character as a consequence of habituations. This is to say that habits are the things that make all the difference and are indispensable but are not necessarily the only causes of what they produce. So, a character can go in either a good way or a bad way, while there are good habits and bad habits. Thus, habits are very important because *“it makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference or rather all the difference”* (1103b23-25). So, we need to be trained up with good habits to form moral virtues as the Mean, viz. the excellence of character. But we also need to know how to develop good habits into forming the Mean.

Since we have previously said that one ought to choose that which is intermediate, not the excess nor the defect, and that the intermediate is determined by the dictates of the right rule, let us discuss the nature of these dictates...but if a man had only this knowledge he would be none the wiser...Hence it is necessary with regard to the states of the soul also not only that this true statement should be made, but also that it should be determined what is the right rule and what is the standard that fixes it. (1138b18-30)

For Aristotle, the Mean is determined by the dictates of the right rule. The right rule is in the part of soul with the rational principle. Further, he divides this part into two: one is the scientific part, which is used to contemplate things whose origination causes are invariable; the other is the calculative part, which is used to contemplate variable things. The work of both the scientific and calculative parts is truth, and therefore their excellences are the states that reach truth. *“The work of both the intellectual parts, then, is truth. Therefore the states that are most strictly those in respect of which each of these parts will reach truth are the virtues of the two parts” (1139b11-14)*. Within those states that reach truth, there are five ways to affirm or deny truth: art, scientific knowledge, practical wisdom, philosophic wisdom, and intuitive reason (1139b15). After analysis, Aristotle thinks that only practical wisdom is what we are looking for, which contemplates variable things by deliberation and seeks for human goods. First, practical wisdom is a capacity to plan one’s life well (1140a24-28). This capacity involves deliberation within men’s control. Science involves demonstration of necessity, which cannot be reached by deliberation. Second, *“it is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man” (1140b6)*. It means that there is no excellence in practical wisdom itself. It has to be connected to human goodness. However there is excellence in art itself, so art’s virtue is not dependent on men. Third, intuitive reason is for grasping the first principles, which are invariable. Fourth, philosophic wisdom is something universal but not for seeking for human goods. *“Philosophic wisdom is scientific knowledge; combined with intuitive reason, of the things that are highest by nature...it is not human goods that they seek” (1141b4-6)*. So,

practical wisdom is the state that we should aim at during our self-cultivation of moral virtue. Practical wisdom and moral virtue are necessary and sufficient conditions for each other. *“It is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral virtue.....for with the presence of the one quality, practical wisdom, will be given all the virtues” (1144b30-1145a2).*

Confucius also explains his way to practice internal Zhong and aiming to external He.

自诚明，谓之性；自明诚，谓之教。诚则明矣，明则诚矣。

“When we have intelligence resulting from sincerity, this condition is to be ascribed to nature; when we have sincerity resulting from intelligence, this condition is to be ascribed to instruction. But given the sincerity, and there shall be the intelligence; give the intelligence, and there shall be the sincerity (Zhongyong, Chapter 21).

Confucius thinks that there are two ways: One is having sincerity naturally and being intelligent, so that one can keep an equilibrium state inside and achieve a harmonious state outside. The other way is following the instructions to attain sincerity. Once having sincerity, one becomes intelligent and then can know equilibrium and aim to harmony. Either the innate way or the acquired way is fine. However, the former way is only exists for sages so, as common men, we should follow the instructions.

天下之达道五，所以行之者三。曰：君臣也，父子也，夫妇也，昆弟也，朋友之交也；五者，天下之达道也。知、仁、勇三者，天下之达德也。所以行之者一也：或生而知之，或学而知之，或困而知之；及其知之一也.....子曰：好学近乎知，力行近乎仁，知耻近乎勇。知斯三者，则知所以修身；知所以修身，则知所以治人；知所以治人，则知所以治天下国家矣。

The duties of universal obligation are five, and the virtues wherewith they are practiced are three. The duties are those between sovereign and minister, between father and son, between husband and wife, between elder brother and younger,

and those belonging to the intercourse of friends. Those five are the duties of universal obligation. Knowledge, magnanimity, and energy, these three, are the virtues universally binding. And the means by which they carry the duties into practice is singleness.....The master said, "To be fond of learning is to be near to knowledge. To practice with vigor is to be near to magnanimity. To possess the feeling of shame is to be near to energy. He who knows three things knows how to cultivate his own character. Knowing how to cultivate his own character, he knows how to govern other men. Knowing how to govern other men, he knows how to govern the kingdom with all its states and families." (Zhongyong, Chapter 20, section 8-11)

Here, Confucius introduces the basic instructions for completing Ren Dao and explains how to follow them. There are five constant virtues as the basis of Ren Dao, which exist within the relationships between sovereign and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger, and the relationships between friends. These five basic virtues have been further interpreted as: Ren "humanity" as perfect virtue in Confucius' ethics, Yi "righteousness", Li "ritual" or "propriety", Zhi "wisdom" and Xin "trustworthiness"¹. To follow the five basic virtues one should practice three things: learning, vigor and possessing the feeling of shame. With those practices, we attain knowledge, magnanimity and energy. With the attainment of knowledge, magnanimity, and energy, men can cultivate their characters and then further complete other men and things' nature. The five virtues in Chinese are named "Wu Chang 五常" and the three things that need to be practiced are named "San Gang 三纲". Apparently, practicing "San Gang" to follow "Wu Chang" is the instruction for completing men's nature, which is given by Heaven's nature. Following "Wu Chang" viz. Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi and Xin, and "San Gang" is attaining Sincerity, so that one practices the equilibrium state of mind all the time and aims at the harmonious state of actions in the whole social circumstance.

¹ See "Lun Heng. Wen Kong", Wang Chong, Han dynasty. 《论衡·问孔》：五常之道，仁、义、智、信也。王充【汉】

凡事豫则立，不豫则废。言前定，则不跲；事前定，则不困；行前定，则不疾；道前定，则不穷。

In all things success depends on previous preparation, and without such previous preparation there is sure to be failure. If what is to be spoken be previously determined, there will be no stumbling. If affairs be previously determined, there will be no difficulty with them. If one's actions have been previously determined, there will be no sorrow in connection with them. If principles of conduct have been previously determined, the practice of them will be inexhaustible. (Zhongyong, Chapter 20, section 16)

Further, Confucius emphasizes that the instructions should be set up as the guide for all actions. Without relying on those instructions, actions will go wrong. However, those instructions are not hollow slogans in Confucius' ethical theory. He makes the instructions much closer to men's lives by the concept of "Li" Ritual. Confucius' concept of Ritual has been explained in detail by describing a gentleman's life. Actually, all of Book 10 of Lunyu is devoted to specific rituals associated with various activities, such as what attitude should be shown when facing different people, how to dress in particular occasions, how to treat other people, and even how to eat at any given time. This is because that Confucius thinks men should be careful when they perform those rituals. *"Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety, speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety 子曰: 非礼勿视, 非礼勿听, 非礼勿言, 非礼勿动". (Lunyu, 12:1)*

By following rituals, men can attain Ren, because Ren is to love people and return to Ritual¹. *"Yen Yuan asked about perfect virtue. The Master said, 'To subdue one's self and return to propriety, is perfect virtue'. 颜渊问仁. 子曰: 克己复礼为仁" (Lunyu, 12:1). By attaining Ren, men can reach Yi, because "义者, 艺之分, 仁之节也*

¹ Later I will explain that Confucius' ritual means rituals in Zhou dynasty. So, "following rituals" means "return to ritual"

Righteousness is the harmony state of Ren, like skills in their excellent level” (Shi San Jing Zhu Shu, Li Ji Li Yun, 1999:1413). Attaining Ren is the condition for having wisdom “子曰: 里仁为美. 择不处仁, 焉得知! The Master said it is virtuous manners which constitute the excellence of a neighborhood. If a man in selecting a residence, do not fix on one where such prevail, how can be wise?” (Lunyu, 4:1) And then, when a man attains Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, he will be completed by actions with Xin, and therefore he will become a gentleman. “君子义以为质, 礼以行之, 孙以出之, 信以成之. 君子哉! The Master said, the superior man in everything considers righteousness to be essential. He performs it according to the rules of propriety. He brings it forth in humility. He completes it with sincerity. This is indeed a superior man” (Lunyu, 15:17). Thus, by following “Li” Rituals, the five virtues can be achieved, so the three things can be practiced. “The Master said, the wise are free from perplexities; the virtuous from anxiety; and the bold from fear. 子曰: 知者不惑, 仁者不忧, 勇者不惧” (Lunyu, 9:28).

From the different self-cultivation ways, we can see that although practical wisdom and “He” harmony share the same meaning of a state of nature, which is connected to actions, they have different degrees that Aristotle and Confucius’ doctrines of the Mean have involved. Apparently, Aristotle’s doctrine of the Mean is separated from practical wisdom as to its intimacy with actions. It shows that he wants to purify the Mean and emphasize the Mean as a state of character. This state leads to virtuous actions, but does not direct the actions. Aristotle leaves the practical part out of the Mean in a conceptual sense. Confucius’ doctrine of Zhong Yong involves the practical part. His doctrine of Zhong Yong is a dynamic system for a complete process of how a man can acquire moral virtue. In this sense, I revise Jiyuan Yu’s previous way of explaining Aristotle’s doctrine of the Mean and Confucius’ doctrine of Zhong Yong internally and externally.

Aristotle’s doctrine of the Mean:

- 1) *Internal Mean: Moral virtue as Mean*
- 2) *Practice method: Practicing practical wisdom by self-cultivation of habits*
- 3) *External result: Virtuous actions*

Confucius' doctrine of Zhong Yong

- 1) *Internal Mean: Zhong, Equilibrium*
- 2) *External Mean: He, Harmony*
- 3) *Practice method: Yong, practicing instructions "San Gang" "Wu Chang" by returning to "Li"*
- 4) *External result: Virtuous actions*

This revised frame clarifies that Aristotle's Mean is a state generating virtuous actions, but is not directly connected with actions. Aristotle has not given any individual concept for external virtuous actions. His identification of the Mean only matters for the state of character internally. Based on this understanding, if we take Aristotle's doctrine of the Mean as the frame of reference, thus Confucius' doctrine of Zhong Yong should be translated as the doctrine of "the Mean and Harmony" in English. It also shows Confucius' great respect for external circumstances and the importance of our interactions with the external world, including other people and things.

4.3 Different natures: neutral nature and innate good nature

From the way to cultivate internal Mean, we can see that moral virtue as a state of character is cultivated by habits. As a settled state, moral virtue becomes a second nature. *"For it is easier to change a habit than to change one's nature; even habit is hard to change just because it is like nature, as Evenus says: "I say that habit's but long practice, friend, and this becomes men's nature in the end" (1152a31-33).* Second nature has the basic ability of first nature to receive virtues, but it can perfect virtues particularly. This idea shows that Aristotle believes that nature is innately neutral, and moral virtue as the second nature makes it good.

Confucius has a different idea of human nature. When Confucius' said "return to Li", he means the detailed rituals of the Zhou Dynasty. In Confucius' ethics system, Zhou dynasty is a model of just society, men should follow the rituals of the Zhou dynasty to become a virtuous person. Because Confucius believes that Zhou dynasty has reached Tian Dao, its society is established by Heaven so that its nature follows Heaven's nature. "周之德，其可谓至德也已夫！*The virtue of the house of Chau may be said to have reached the highest point indeed*". (Lunyu, 8:20) So, returning to rituals of the Zhou dynasty is returning to Heaven's way, becoming one with Heaven so that we can attain "Sincerity", the nature of Heaven. And this truth of the Zhou dynasty is universal and will last forever.

子张问：十世可知也？子曰：殷因与夏礼，所损益，可知也。周因于殷礼，所损益，可知也。其或继周者，虽百世，可知也。

Tsze-chang asked whether the affairs of ten ages after could be known. Confucius said, "The Yin dynasty followed the regulations of the Hsia: wherein it took from or added to them may be known. The Chau dynasty has followed the regulations of the Yin: wherein it took from or added to them maybe known. Some other may follow the Chau, but though it should be at the distance of a hundred ages, its affairs may be known." (Lunyu, 2:23)

So far, we can see through Confucius' perspective that Ren Dao is natural positive because it is established by the nature of Tian Dao Sincerity. Naturally following Ren Dao, men will be sages, namely men are naturally good. A sage's virtue is just as great as Heaven's virtue. "*Chung-ni handed down the doctrines of Yao and Shun, as if they had been his ancestors, and elegantly displayed the regulations of Wan and Wu, taking them as his model. Above, he harmonized with the times of heaven, and below, he was conformed to the water and land. He may be compared to heaven and earth in their supporting and containing, their overshadowing and curtaining, all things. He may be compared to the four seasons in their alternating progress, and to the sun and moon in*

their successive shining. 仲尼祖述尧舜, 宪章文武, 上律天时, 下袭水土. 辟如大地之无不持载, 无不覆帔, 辟如四时之错行, 如日月之代明”. (Lunyu, Chapter 30)

However, Tian Dao is difficult to follow and a sage is an ideal. People in realistic lives, when they practice Tian Dao are always changing the way and get far away from it. “*The Master said, By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart. 子曰: 性相近也, 习相远也*” (Lunyu, 17:2) In comparison with the nature of Heaven “Sincerity”, people have duplicities in their lives. When they select duplicities, their innate goodness will get worse. That is the reason why attaining Sincerity is so important.

Although Confucius faces the duplicity in real life and people can seldom realize Sincerity for becoming a true gentleman, he tries to tell us how to practice Sincerity in daily life. The whole book of *Lunyu* is about the self-cultivation of virtues. He believes that this innate goodness can be developed and actualized through education, self-reflection, and following rituals. Man should select right instructions by removing duplicities, namely attaining Sincerity, and then he will see the goodness inside himself. “*The Master said, is virtue a thing remote? I wish to be virtuous, and lo! Virtue is at hand 子曰: 仁远乎哉? 我欲仁, 斯仁至矣*” (Lunyu, 7:29). If a man can practice in this way constantly, being cautious about everything, he becomes a gentleman, viz. a virtuous person.

Thus, through the comparison, we understand that Aristotle believes that the nature of men is neutral. Different habits will lead men to attain different states of character. In order to attain moral virtue viz. the Mean to deliver virtuous actions, men should be trained with good habits. Meanwhile, Confucius’ believes that the nature of men is naturally good. With duplicities, the innate goodness will become unseen and far from reach. So men should return to rituals, follow instructions, admit and attain Sincerity. Once they attain sincerity, their eyes are bright and they become intelligent. They will know the appointment and natural goodness from Heaven, and then become virtuous by delivering virtuous actions.

5. Final thought

Confucius starts *Lunyu*, the book of the doctrine of his ethics, by describing three psychological states of a scholar.

子曰：学而时习之，不亦说乎。有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎。人不知而不愠，不亦君子乎。

The Master said, "Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application?" "Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?" "Is he not a man of complete virtue, who feels no discomposure though men may take no note of him?" (Lunyu, Chapter 1)

Confucius thinks that a scholar should regard study as happiness and do it constantly. Friends will come to visit the scholar to discuss questions and acquire knowledge, even though they are from places far away. Even if people do not understand his theory, the scholar will not get angry, because he is a true gentleman. Nowadays, comparison studies between western and Chinese philosophy have been increasingly common. Confucius' theories thus have been studied again and again; even though friends are from different eras and different continents, they come to see and go through his theories. I think Confucius would be very happy now, just as he forecasted. However, he did not realize that people can understand his theories, even by comparing them with other theories. Although Aristotle did not make the same predictions, his theories have been affecting the western world for centuries and attracting people all over the world to study them.

The difference between their methodologies directly led to the different roots of western and Chinese cultural systems, moral systems, education systems, and religious systems in their societies. Namely, western society is rooted in law, people focus on self-development by logical thinking and the education emphasizes contemplation; Chinese

society is rooted in relationships between families, something about filial piety and humanities. People focus on completing themselves by attaining social values, which should be in a harmonious state. This process is completed by understanding of nature. Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism aim to cast off earthly things and go back to the original nature. However, in spite of the difference, there is one thing just out there as truth, which is our destination in pursuing the good life and human goodness.

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