

CONFUCIANISM AND NON-HUMAN ANIMAL SACRIFICE

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Abstract. In this paper, I argue that the use of non-human animals in ritual sacrifices is not necessary for the Confucian tradition. I draw upon resources found within other religious traditions as well as Confucianism concerning carrying out even the most mundane, ordinary actions as expressions of reverence. I argue that this practice of manifesting deep reverence toward God (or deities and ancestors in the case of Confucianism) through simple actions, which I call *everyday reverence*, reveals a way for Confucians to maintain the deep reverence that is essential for Confucianism, while abandoning the use of non-human animal sacrifice.

I. INTRODUCTION¹

Whether or not, and to what extent, humans have obligations toward non-human animals is a topic widely discussed by contemporary moral philosophers. Frequently such questions are explored from a contemporary liberal perspective (often importing utilitarian leanings) that attempts to operate from a distinctively moral point of view. But how should one approach such questions from a Confucian point of view? This is a question that has been underexplored. Recently, however, Professor Ruiping Fan has addressed this issue by arguing that for Confucians, the practice of non-human animal sacrifice is both justified

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and necessary in order to uphold the integrity of the Confucian tradition. In this paper I will argue against Professor Fan's claim that the sacrificial use of non-human animals is necessary by showing how the Confucian tradition can maintain its integrity without the practice of non-human animal sacrifice, especially through the practice of what I call *everyday reverence*.²

I will lay out, in Section I, Fan's argument for the conclusion that non-human animal sacrifice is necessary for upholding the Confucian tradition and clarify what I take to be some ambiguities in the argument. In Section II, I will present a desideratum that must be satisfied if the Confucian tradition is to discard the use of non-human animal sacrifice without endangering its integrity. I will attempt to satisfy this desideratum by presenting alternative practices, focusing especially on what I call *everyday reverence*. In Section III, I will make a few remarks about the role and value of traditions and offer a suggestion about how Confucians like Fan could respond to my argument.

In the course of presenting my argument, two questions will emerge: (1) What is the role and value of traditions? (2) How can we determine whether or not a certain practice is necessary for the maintenance of a tradition? Although both questions deserve more attention than I will be able to offer in this paper, my hope is that what I say will at least bring to the surface what makes them significant and worthy of further exploration.

I. FAN'S ARGUMENT

In his article, "How Should We Treat Animals? A Confucian Reflection," Ruiping Fan argues for two central claims. The first is that the Confucian view of using non-human animals for sacrificial purposes is morally justified.³ The second is that the sacrificial use of non-human animals is necessary for sustaining the Confucian tradition. The two claims are logically independent of each other. Even if the second claim is false, the first could still be true (or false). In this paper I will focus primarily on the second claim and argue that there are reasons for rejecting it. Nevertheless, I suspect that Fan and other Confucians would want to

² I am grateful to Justin Tiwald for suggesting the phrase 'everyday reverence'.

³ Fan defends this claim by appealing to the threefold division of love as described in Mengzi 7A45. I will discuss this division in Section Two.

agree that if it turned out that the sacrificial use of non-human animals was morally impermissible, then it could not be essential to the Confucian tradition since all of the practices within the tradition must help one to live according to the Way (*dao* 道), and it would be difficult to see how an immoral practice could help one achieve such a life.

Fan provides the following outline of his argument:

- (1) We ought to revere gods, spirits, and humans in practicing our filial or benevolent love to them.
- (2) We ought not to revere animals in practicing our sympathetic love to them.
- (3) Using animals in certain rituals is *necessary* to show our reverence to gods, spirits, and humans.
- (4) Therefore: we ought to control our natural sympathy with animals and use them in these rituals.⁴

Premise (2) might at first glance look unnecessary, but I think that Fan includes it since if it turned out that even non-human animals require our reverence, it looks like the conclusion, which I take as including an “all-things-considered” ought judgment, might not follow. To make this point more sharply, I think it is helpful to make explicit the assumption that one is permitted to kill an entity if (and only if) it is not necessary to revere it.⁵ So to restate the argument:

- (1) We ought to revere gods, spirits, and humans in practicing our filial or benevolent love to them.
- (2) We ought not to revere animals in practicing our sympathetic love to them.
- (3) It is morally permissible to kill an entity if (and only if) reverence toward it is not required.
- (4) Using animals in certain rituals is necessary to show our reverence to gods, spirits, and humans.
- (5) Therefore: we ought to control our natural sympathy with animals and use them in these rituals.

⁴ See Fan 2010: 90. By “animals” Fan clearly means non-human animals.

⁵ Although I state this as a necessary and sufficient condition, the relevant question here is whether or not the fact that non-human animals do not require our reverence is sufficient for showing that it is morally permissible to kill them. I use a biconditional statement since it seems clear from the paper that Fan also thinks that the fact that an entity does not require our reverence is a necessary condition for the fact that it is morally permissible to kill it.

Let me begin by questioning (3), our additional premise, which is more directly related to the moral defensibility of non-human animal sacrifice. Why think that the fact that reverence toward an entity is not required implies that it is morally permissible to kill it? One might agree that the obligation to revere an entity is sufficient to make it morally impermissible to kill it (at least under normal conditions) but that it can be morally impermissible to kill an entity for other reasons as well. One could think that we ought not to kill non-human animals not because they require our reverence, but because they require what Fan calls “sympathetic love,” one of the three forms of love that Fan draws upon to support his argument that the practice of non-human animal sacrifice is justifiable. Let me pause here to briefly lay out the three forms of love found in the *Mengzi* as discussed by Fan.

Drawing upon the text of the *Mengzi*, Fan develops a tripartite division of love involving three distinct attitudes that are appropriate for the type of relationship involved.⁶ One ought to be devoted to one’s parents (*qin* 親), benevolent (but not devoted) toward the people (*ren* 仁), and caring (but not devoted or benevolent) toward non-human animals (*ai* 愛). Fan uses the term “devotional love” for the love that one should have toward one’s parents, “benevolent love” for the love that one should have toward other human beings in general, and “sympathetic love” for the love that one should have toward non-human animals. These different forms of love generate different requirements for action depending on other morally salient features of the particular situation in which a person finds herself.

Employing this division, Fan argues that while Confucians are obligated to treat animals “seriously, cautiously, and carefully” due to the requirements of sympathetic love, the kind of relationship that ought to exist between humans and non-human animals does not preclude the practice of killing non-human animals for ritual sacrifice. This is ultimately because while both devotional love and benevolent love give rise to the obligation of respecting ancestors, deities, and other humans, sympathetic love does not generate an obligation to respect non-human animals. So even if we do accept, along with Fan, that respect for an entity is necessary for the existence of an obligation to refrain from killing it, the real question becomes why sympathetic love doesn’t also require respect.

⁶ Fan relies upon *Mengzi* 7A45 to develop his account of love.

The reason Fan seems to think that sympathetic love cannot require us to respect non-human animals is because sympathetic love is qualitatively lower than benevolent love (the love that is appropriate to have toward humans) and there can be cases in which benevolent love can generate a more authoritative imperative for us to sacrifice the life of a non-human animal. As Fan notes, “In emergency situations like the burning down of the stables, we should not compute whether we should rescue a horse that has worked hard for us or a human being who is a total stranger, or whether we should save a dozen horses or a single human stranger.” (Fan 2010: 84) One point that should be noted is that the examples Fan gives here are about *allowing* one or more non-human animals to die, for the sake of saving a human life, rather than actively killing non-human animals to save a human life. Those who think that there is a significant moral difference between doing and allowing may agree with Fan’s verdict in the examples, but may still claim that sympathetic love requires one to never actively kill any non-human animals. Nevertheless, Fan’s argument that it can be permissible to kill a non-human subject because the requirements generated by sympathetic love can be overridden by the requirements generated by benevolent love is plausible enough. If my children and I were lost in a forest and the only means of ensuring their survival as well as mine was to kill a local deer for food, benevolent love could override my sympathetic love for the deer, and require me to kill the deer to keep my family alive. But if in a similar situation, even if the only way to keep my children and myself alive were to kill a random human being that we happened to meet for the sake of consumption or to steal the food he had in his possession, I would still be obligated to refrain from killing this person. The relevant issue, however, is whether or not given the requirements of sympathetic love, it is permissible to kill a non-human animal for the sake of ritualistic sacrifice. Since the focus of this paper is not the moral permissibility of non-human animal sacrifice but its necessity for the Confucian tradition, let us grant that (3) is true.

As Fan himself points out, (4) is really the crucial premise of this argument. But as stated, we can interpret it in two ways. The first is that the sacrificial use of non-human animals is necessary for each and every act that manifests reverence toward gods, spirits, and humans:

Action Requirement: If an act manifests reverence toward gods, spirits, and humans, then it must involve the use of non-human animal sacrifice.

I don't think Action Requirement is what Fan has in mind, especially because it is so implausible. There are clearly ways of manifesting reverence toward gods, spirits, and humans that do not involve the use of non-human animal sacrifice, e.g. through prayer or other forms of worship. More will be said about such practices in Section Two.

The second reading, which I take to be the one Fan is aiming at, is that if one is to cultivate and sustain the virtue (here understood as a character disposition to feel and act in a proper way) of reverence toward the gods, spirits, and humans, one must engage in non-human animal sacrifice:

Virtue Requirement: One can obtain and sustain the virtue of reverence only if one practices non-human animal sacrifice.

There is, of course, a difference between what is necessary for cultivating or obtaining the virtue of reverence and what is necessary for sustaining it. But in this paper I will not distinguish the two. Concerning the Virtue Requirement one could also ask more detailed questions, for example, how often must one practice non-human sacrifice to cultivate or sustain the virtue of reverence? Such practical questions, I will also leave to one side.

So what reasons does Fan offer in support of the Virtue Requirement? To support this claim, Fan begins by identifying some of the key features of the attitude of reverence. The first key feature is a special sense of fear that “reflects a sense of appropriate awe in that it is inevitably related to our beliefs about the ultimate reality that lies beyond our control and our comprehension.” (Fan 2010: 90) This feeling of fear or awe is directed toward entities that are “higher or greater” than us (Fan 2010: 90). But while it is understandable to think of someone as standing in awe of gods or spirits, how can such an attitude be directed toward other humans or even our ancestors? Fan provides us with an answer through a Confucian metaphysical account in which all humans are descendants of ancestors who were originally generated by Heaven:

The Confucian understanding is that our original ancestors were generated by Heaven, the ultimate reality, as noble beings who are close to the gods of Heaven and the spirits of the earth. Our ancestors exist as the most spiritual forms of humans, watching over the fates and lives of us, their descendants. Accordingly, we must stand in awe of them and give them deep respect. (Fan 2010: 91)

Following along this line of reasoning, Fan argues that we need to also show reverence toward other human beings because “there is something essential to us that we receive from our ancestors, namely our spirits, which are higher and greater than our material bodies.” (Fan 2010: 91)

I don't think this argument shows that we must have reverence, in the sense that Fan is using it, toward other humans for two reasons. The first is that as the argument is described we need to only have reverence for the spiritual component of human beings rather than, strictly speaking, human beings. For example, if one holds the view that human beings are animals or biological organisms (the view now known as “animalism” in contemporary metaphysics) and that all biological organisms must be constituted by a body, then it seems like one would not be required, strictly speaking, to revere other human beings.⁷ The second, more important reason, is that since *every* human being possesses the ancestral spirit, the argument is inconsistent with one of the key elements of reverence, namely, the requirement that one looks upon an entity as higher or greater. It does seem a bit strange to claim that we ought to *revere* every human being, although it doesn't seem at all strange to claim that we ought to *respect* every human being. One possible reason is that the source of our respect for other human beings is our shared humanity – we can come to recognize that every human being is “one of us” possessing equal dignity or worth and therefore demands respectful treatment. In this way, no human being is either higher or lower than any other. The reason why it seems much more plausible to revere deities or spirits is because they represent something that *is* higher than us, “that lies beyond our control and our comprehension.”⁸ The same doesn't seem to hold for other humans generally. I submit, therefore, that reverence, in the sense at issue, is an appropriate attitude to have toward gods or spirits (where by “spirits” we may also include ancestral spirits) but not toward other human beings in general.⁹ Accordingly, from this point on, I will direct my attention only to the claim that the ritualistic use of

⁷ For an interesting defense of Animalism see Olson 2003.

⁸ Of course, to an atheist all of this may sound nonsensical. But one simply needs to entertain the possible world in which there are such deities and ask whether reverence toward them would at least be intelligible in such a world.

⁹ I say here “in general” because it may be that children can (perhaps fittingly) have his form of reverence toward their parents by seeing them as beings that are “higher” than them and lies beyond their control and comprehension. I thank P. J. Ivanhoe for bringing up this point.

non-human animal sacrifice is necessary for the cultivation of the virtue of reverence toward deities and spirits.¹⁰

Another key aspect of this attitude, according to Fan, is that it requires us to manifest such reverence through concrete rituals in two major ways: (a) “to shrink oneself” before the revered entity, or (b) to sacrifice for the revered entity the most valuable things one possesses. Fan goes on to say:

Obviously, the most valuable thing one can offer is life, and the life of animals serves this purpose exactly in sacrifice. It is hard to imagine that something else could replace animals in this place because the killing and offering of animals in such rituals takes on a tremendous significance: it adds the dimension of our awe to deities and humans to the rituals as well as manifests the profound seriousness of the rituals. (Fan 2010: 92)

It is perhaps true that the most valuable thing one can offer is life, if one means by “life” one’s own life. But it is unclear why the most valuable thing one can offer is the life of non-human animals, especially given the present circumstances in which for many who belong to the middle class and above, buying a non-human animal for sacrifice will not impose a heavy burden. Instead, one might think that certain moral or spiritual sacrifices, involving a significant amount of one’s time and energy, are more valuable than having to sacrifice the life of a non-human animal. What is being required here is perhaps better captured by the notion of *self-sacrifice*, sacrifice that requires the giving of one’s self. Now what counts as self-sacrifice will depend on the individual and what she finds difficult to give up – the goods that lie closest to her heart – which could very well be non-human animals. But it seems more likely that self-sacrifice will involve other gestures connected to deeper, more personal goods.

One point that Fan may want to make is that the sacrificial use of non-human animals is the only way to express the appropriate sense of awe

¹⁰ What my paper leaves open, then, is that the sacrificial use of animals is necessary for the Confucian tradition because it is necessary for cultivating the attitude of respect towards humans. If non-vegetarian guests arrive, is it possible to serve them a purely vegetarian meal without disrespecting them and undermining one’s general attitude of respect toward all human beings? I think so. As long as one explains to the visitors in a respectful manner the reasons for not serving meat and presenting a vegetarian meal that is clearly the product of time and effort, I do not think that either the hosts or guests must come away with any less respect for each other. One can even explicitly offer other gifts in place of the meat to the guests such as a more elaborate dessert or higher quality tea or wine.

to deities or spirits and to enable us to deeply appreciate the profound seriousness of the rituals. But it isn't quite clear why other rituals or practices cannot meet this demand. In the next section I will argue that practices found within other traditions that I believe can also be found in the teachings of Confucius, provide a way for Confucians to maintain the deep respect that one must hold toward deities and spirits.

II. CULTIVATING THE VIRTUE OF REVERENCE WITHOUT NON-HUMAN ANIMAL SACRIFICE

In order to show how the Confucian tradition might discard the practice of non-human animal sacrifice, without endangering the tradition's integrity, it would be useful to clearly state what would need to be true if, indeed, the Confucian tradition could go on without the sacrificial use of non-human animals. Fortunately, Fan articulates for us just this desideratum: "Moreover, if sparing animals from the rituals does not detract from the virtues of devotional and benevolent love to humans, sympathetic love to animals should lead us to spare animals." (Fan 2010: 85)

Although Fan leaves out of the quote above devotional and benevolent love to gods and spirits, I'm fairly certain that he means to include them since elsewhere in the article he also takes reverence toward them as one of the important reasons for why non-human animal sacrifice is necessary within the Confucian tradition. Moreover, since reverence is not an appropriate attitude to hold with regard to other humans, as I argued above, I will focus only on the use of non-human animal sacrifice and its connection to the virtue of reverence toward deities and spirits. So the desideratum is this: show how the Confucian tradition can discard the use of non-human animal sacrifice in rituals without impeding the virtue of reverence toward deities or spirits.¹¹ I believe that there are strong reasons for thinking that this desideratum can be satisfied and in this section I will discuss some of the resources found within other religious traditions as well as Confucianism that have allowed their adherents to cultivate the virtue of reverence toward God or deities.

Let me begin with the Christian tradition, which came to explicitly reject the practice of non-human animal sacrifice. While the exact

¹¹ Here I simply assume that Fan thinks of the "virtues of devotional and benevolent love" as equivalent with the virtue of reverence.

historical reasons for why the early Christians did not continue the practice of non-human animal sacrifice remains open, it is clear that at least up until 70 A.D. Christians not only were well aware that the sacrificial use of non-human animals was one possible form of worshiping God, but some Christians, possibly including St. Paul, even participated in the sacrificial rituals.¹² At some point in the 2nd Century, however, Christians came to explicitly reject the practice of non-human animal sacrifice for a variety of reasons.¹³ Nevertheless, they did not abandon the view that the highest duty of human beings was to worship and revere God, and a number of early Christians, if we are to take their writings as well as their willingness to sacrifice their lives as evidence, expressed a profound reverence for God, the kind of reverence that Fan takes as necessary for Confucians, albeit toward a different object. So both Confucians and Christians hold at least this much in common, that one of the essential aspects of the tradition is to express reverence toward certain entities: God in the case of Christianity, and deities and spirits, in the case of Confucianism.

Now the following question is significant for our discussion: were the early Christians still able to cultivate the virtue of reverence toward God even without the practice of non-human animals sacrifice? I think the answer is, yes. Of course, one way to express reverence toward God, exercised by the pagans and ancient Jews, is the sacrifice of non-human animals as offerings. But a number of other practices have been employed by Christians to express reverence. Three practices especially have become integral to the Christian tradition: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. In order for such practices to truly foster a deep spirit of reverence, they must be exercised both mindfully and with the right intention. Neither simply going through the physical motions, nor partaking in the exercises for external benefits such as the admiration of others, will enable one to develop the virtue of reverence. Such ideas also chime with the teachings of Confucius: “If I am not fully present at the

¹² See Petropoulou 2008: Ch. 6. Much of my understanding of the history of non-human animal sacrifice within Christianity is indebted to her book.

¹³ One reason is the theological belief that because God is perfect, God is lacking in nothing and so the sacrifice of non-human animals has no value. Another reason seems to be the desire to distinguish themselves as Christians from both Jews and pagans. For more on these reasons see Petropoulou 2008: Ch. 6. From a Christological point of view, since Christians view Christ himself as the ultimate sacrificial offering, they may also have found the need to sacrifice non-human animals as no longer necessary.

sacrifice, it is as if I did not sacrifice at all.” (*Analects* 3:12)¹⁴

I believe that these three practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, when performed with the kind of mindfulness that Confucius advocated, enables one to go a long way toward fostering and sustaining the virtue of reverence that is required by the Confucian tradition.¹⁵ But I think that besides these *particular* practices which can help one to cultivate deep reverence, Christianity also emphasizes the importance of reorienting one’s *whole* life toward the service of God so that even the most mundane, everyday actions can be made into an opportunity to revere and glorify God. Call this *everyday reverence*.¹⁶ Many Christian thinkers emphasize the importance of not only making sure that the large-scale, ceremonial actions are performed to express one’s reverence toward God, but also making sure that one’s daily life which consists of a multitude of small, seemingly inconsequential actions, are also directed toward the glorification of God. In his commentary on the Thessalonians, St. Thomas Aquinas offers the following way to satisfy St. Paul’s exhortation to “Pray without ceasing”:

“Pray constantly” means to pray continuously. But then prayer is considered under the aspect of the effect of the prayer. For prayer is the unfolding or expression of desire; for when I desire something, then I ask for it by praying. So prayer is the petition of suitable things from God; and so desire has the power of prayer. “O Lord, thou wilt hear the desire of the meek” (Ps. 10: 17). Therefore, whatever we do is the result of a desire; so prayer always remains in force in the good things we do; for the good things we do flow forth from the desire of the good. There is a commentary on this verse pointing out: “He does not cease praying, who does not cease doing good.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Slingerland 2003.

¹⁵ A question that would have to be addressed is to what extent Confucians could incorporate these three practices into the Confucian tradition. I don’t see any reason for thinking that they cannot all be carried over into the Confucian tradition. In fact prayer, broadly construed, already appears to be a component of the Confucian tradition.

¹⁶ In this book on reverence, Paul Woodruff also notes how pervasive reverence is: “... reverence is all around us, even in the most ordinary ceremonies of our lives. It is as if we have forgotten one of the cylinders that has been chugging along in the vehicle of human society since its beginning.” (Woodruff, 2001: 12-13)

¹⁷ This is the second of three ways that Aquinas offers for satisfying St. Paul’s exhortation. The first way is to always make sure that one prays at the appointed time for prayer. The third way is to give alms which may cause others to pray for you continuously. See Duffy 1969.

Aquinas recognizes that to “pray constantly” cannot mean to continuously repeat verbal prayers whether vocally or within one’s mind. That would be psychologically too demanding and would impede one’s ability to carry out the daily tasks necessary to live a well-functioning human life.¹⁸ What Aquinas suggests is that we may think of prayer in terms of the effects of prayer – or as he puts it, “under the aspect of” the effects of prayer. In this light, we can see prayer as being carried forward in its effects long after the particular vocalized form of prayer has ceased. So when our prayer is directed at the attainment of the good, we are simultaneously expressing our desire for the good, and since that desire is what moves us to do what’s good, prayer, understood in terms of its effects, is carried on through those actions that aim at and achieve the good.

I think that we can draw upon Aquinas’s insight and apply it to the Confucian tradition. If one was to genuinely desire to express one’s reverence toward the deities and spirits by structuring one’s life in accordance with the Way, we can take that desire for reverence as being manifested through those actions that accord with the Way, even if those actions were not intentional under the description, “I’m now doing this for the sake of the Way.” In living one’s life in accordance with the heavenly mandate by being attentive to what one does in everyday life, one can express one’s reverence toward the deities and spirits. What better way to honor the deities and spirits than by living rightly?¹⁹

To put things more concretely, we may take each day as an opportunity to pay tribute to God (or for Confucius, the deities and spirits) through small acts of sacrifice in the midst of our ordinary life. This can occur in a variety of ways, for example, by doing a favor for someone that one doesn’t like, or by attentively performing one’s duties even when they are difficult to do. That how we conduct ourselves in our day-to-day life has significant psychological consequences is supported by empirical evidence. Recent research revealing the regrets of divorced men and women listed lack of “affective affirmation” consisting of small gestures

¹⁸ I will come back to this objection below.

¹⁹ One problem, however, might be that while exemplifying the requirements of the Way in one’s life is a good thing, it is unclear how by doing so, one also would be expressing reverence toward the deities and spirits. After all, the Way and the deities, even if metaphysically connected in some way, remain distinct objects. I think given the Confucian metaphysical picture there is no genuine problem since every virtuous action that comports with the Way also fulfills the desires of the deities and spirits.

such as compliments, hugs, or simple words of gratitude as one of the top five regrets.²⁰ In order to develop a good relationship with one's spouse, it is not only important to make sure that one remembers to treat her or him well on special occasions (e.g. birthday, anniversaries, etc.) but also on a daily basis through local, concrete actions.²¹

Besides small acts of sacrifice, we may also express reverence through everyday actions by manifesting a spirit of gratitude. An action that expresses gratitude toward the deities or spirits seems to me to be a prime example of a reverential action.²² Appreciating the goods that one enjoys as a gift from the deities and spirits, especially one's ancestors, is an important way, I think, of showing reverence. One way to make this a daily practice would be to actively appreciate every meal as a gift and consuming the food with a spirit of thankfulness.

So through *everyday reverence*, by performing acts of small sacrifice, carrying out one's daily affairs with gratitude, and attentively trying to live in accordance with the Way, one can cultivate and sustain the virtue of reverence. Reflecting once again upon the notion of sacrifice, dedicating one's entire life to following the Way can itself, I think, be an exemplification of self-sacrifice *par excellence*. Of course, how one carries out such a commitment will individually vary depending on the details of one's circumstances. So if we take an expanded notion of what sacrifice can involve, the opportunities for sacrifice is almost limitless, especially given the multitude of ways in which we can work for justice

²⁰ These findings are part of a 25 years long research on marriage and divorce funded by the NIH. Interestingly, it is men who appear to need more affective affirmations during marriage. See Orbuch 2012.

²¹ One might object here by saying that the example is disanalogous since the affective affirmations seem to be necessary for the sake of the other person, rather than the cultivation of a particular disposition for oneself. Although it is certainly true that the affective affirmations clearly help one's partner develop a more positive attitude, I think that they are also clearly important for the person who is also expressing the affective affirmation. It seems quite reasonable to think that by expressing affection in a sincere way through verbal and physical actions, the subject doing the expressing also cultivates a more positive attitude toward his or her partner through those very acts. We may think of this as a kind of "performative reinforcement."

²² According to Barbara Fredrickson, gratitude, like other positive emotions, "broadens and builds" our personal character by enriching our intellectual and emotional resources for carrying out tasks and meeting future obstacles. (Fredrickson 2004) This can also help reinforce and strengthen one's commitment to living according to the Way by providing the necessary tools for dealing with those difficulties and challenges that disrupt a person's path toward living a virtuous life.

and peace in this world. This idea that we may manifest reverence through sacrificial acts of virtue is prominently featured in the Old Testament:

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.²³

The sacred texts of other religious traditions also confirm the importance of trying to make one's daily activities an expression of one's devotion to the deities. So we find in the Bhagavad Gita: "It is true, this world is enslaved by activity, but the exception is work for the sake of sacrifice. Therefore, ... free from attachment, act for that purpose" (III,9). "Whatever you do, or eat, or sacrifice, or offer, whatever you do in self-restraint, do as an offering to me," says Krishna (IX, 21).²⁴ Krishna is here also exhorting everyone to exercise reverence through everyday actions. Every action provides an opportunity to express reverence toward Krishna, and it is only by engaging in an act with a spirit of sacrifice, that one can achieve genuine freedom and no longer be "enslaved by activity."

We also find the significance of our daily affairs emphasized within the Confucian tradition:

Master Zeng said, "Every day I examine myself on three counts: in my dealing with others, have I in any way failed to be dutiful? In my interactions with friends and associates, have I in any way failed to be trustworthy? Finally, have I in any way failed to repeatedly put into practice what I teach?"²⁵

The emphasis here is on our daily interactions with others through which we can treat them with the respect that they deserve. Master Zeng realizes that much of our character formation depends upon how we deal with others within the context of ordinary life and that we must continually remind ourselves to conduct our daily affairs with propriety. We can also find this idea in the teachings of Confucius himself:

Confucius fell ill, and Zigong went out to make a divination. Confucius remarked, "When I take my seat I do not dare to put myself first, I dwell as if practicing austerities, and I eat and drink [sparingly] as if preparing

²³ *New American Bible*, Isaiah 58: 6-7.

²⁴ These are passages that come out of Robert Adams's splendid book, *Finite and Infinite Goods*.

²⁵ *Analects* 1.4.

to perform a sacrifice. I have been performing my own divination for quite some time now.”²⁶

Commenting on this passage Edward Slingerland notes, “The theme in this version is similar: one should live one’s entire life in a disciplined and reverent manner, rather than adopting discipline and reverence only when one wants to curry favor with the spirits or receive special guidance from heaven.” (Slingerland 2003: 76) That is to say, we must make each day a unified expression of our reverence toward the deities, and not only on special occasions. This practice certainly requires both an active awareness of one’s daily actions as well as a continuous effort to act rightly. Carrying out each day in this manner would require a practice like the one Master Zeng recommends, examining oneself daily and reflecting upon whether or not one’s actions successfully embodies the Confucian spirit.²⁷

If a Confucian, even having abandoned the ritual of non-human animal sacrifice, were to truly take the advice of Aquinas, the Bhagavad Gita, Master Zeng, and Confucius, by examining one’s daily actions thoroughly and mindfully, and find simple ways to express devotion to the deities and spirits throughout the course of one’s day, it is difficult to see how such a person could fail to cultivate the virtue of reverence that Fan is advocating.

One worry, which I noted earlier, was that carrying out one’s daily life in this extremely conscientious manner could become too restrictive and close a person off from exhibiting the level of spontaneity that seems important and perhaps even necessary for any healthy and flourishing life. What is being advocated here, however, is not to make sure that during the course of every action, one always brings to surface an occurrent belief like: “and by this I am now revering the deities.” Attempting to always do this would, indeed, make anyone’s life oppressively confined and too psychologically taxing. Rather, the idea is to reorient one’s life so

²⁶ This passage appears in a lost fragment from the *Zhuangzi* that is preserved in the *Imperial Readings*. Compare with 7.35 of the *Analects*.

²⁷ The focus on cultivating a certain kind of character through constant monitoring of one’s everyday life is emphasized well by P. J. Ivanhoe: “for Confucians, the freedom of human agency is more a matter of steering than rowing. Their goal is to cultivate a greater awareness, attentiveness, and care for our thoughts and feelings, our actions, speech, comportment, and demeanor, the clothes we wear, the music we play and listen to, and how we conduct ourselves in our interactions with fellow human beings, other creatures, and the greater natural world” (Ivanhoe 2013: 76-7).

that even when one is engaging in minor tasks or small acts of sacrifice, one does them with the implicit belief that they are being done for the sake of honoring the deities or spirits. What this involves may require developing what Robert Audi calls “the disposition to believe” to affirm that one’s ultimate goal in performing a particular act is for the sake of expressing reverence toward the deities or spirits.²⁸ One can imagine, for example, a loving father whose purpose of working as a plumber during the day is structured around his deeply grounded concern to materially provide for his family. But if we focus in on a particular moment while he’s at work, for example, fixing a leaky faucet, we may be unable to find any occurrent thoughts about his family. Mark Berkson aptly captures this phenomenon in his account of Xunzi on rituals: “While the body is involved in the moment-to-moment postures and sensory awareness of sights, sounds, smells, textures, and utterances, the mind is directed toward larger contexts of meaning ... which leads to a deeper appreciation of the ritual act.” (Berkson 2003: 170) The key insight that Berkson provides for us here is that even simple actions can involve a more reflective conception of what we are doing as part of a larger narrative structure, even though from the external point of view, the agent may appear to be carrying out a fairly mundane activity like fixing a leaky faucet. For a Confucian, this larger narrative could be taken as structuring one’s life according to the Way. And even though the thought that the final end of all of one’s pursuits is the attainment of the Way may not rise to the surface of an agent’s mind during the course of every activity, the endorsement of this vision can play a powerful regulative role in determining both what one does and doesn’t do, and the way in which one chooses to carry out an action.

Taking up this Confucian attitude of structuring one’s whole life according to the Way will, of course, require significant attentiveness

²⁸ Audi makes a distinction between dispositional beliefs (sometimes referred to by philosophers as “tacit” or “implicit” beliefs) and dispositions to believe. He criticizes philosophers for over-attributing beliefs to agents and argues that what most people think of as dispositional beliefs are in fact dispositions to believe. Dispositions to believe, unlike dispositional beliefs are not a species of belief but the “readiness to form a belief” that requires an intermediate process of coming to form a belief through the instantiation of one of the realizers for that disposition. I think that developing the disposition to believe that every act is ultimately done for the sake of achieving the Way would avoid the problem of excessive psychological burden while still allowing for the agent’s desire to obtain the Way to structure her life as a whole. See Audi 1994.

and effort. However, the tendency for most of us is not to be excessively attentive and careful about our everyday lives, but to go through them mechanically, with little focus or engagement. Being more attuned to what we are doing on a daily basis, and trying to act in ways that manifest reverence, can help us become more attuned to the world, and consequently, help us live more meaningful and satisfying lives.²⁹

There is of course a limitation on what kinds of activities can serve as an opportunity to practice *everyday reverence*. Certainly what one perceives as evil or malicious is excluded. It is also perhaps a bit silly to think that one can embody reverence even in going to the bathroom, watching a movie, or taking a nap. But although not every action presents an equal opportunity to express one's reverence toward the deities and spirits, the main point here is that the opportunities for expressing reverence in one's daily affairs is much wider than one might think. Even in doing something as ordinary as watching a movie, one can try to avoid movies that do not achieve any genuine goods, or are detrimental to one's character. It is perhaps the accumulation of such seemingly simple, inconsequential actions that end up determining what kind of person one becomes.

III. TRADITION AND REVISION

Nothing that I have said in this paper implies that Confucianism can simply discard every large-scale ritual without incurring significant loss. It is quite reasonable to think that Confucianism needs to carve out the space for occasions in which its members can ceremonially express the deep reverence they have toward the deities and spirits. But, as I have argued in this paper, I think such ceremonies can be carried out without the use of non-human animal sacrifice and still express the kind of reverence that Fan wants to preserve within the Confucian tradition.

Any healthy tradition must keep alive the possibility of reform.³⁰ But the difficulty lies in understanding whether a reform destroys the

²⁹ In his illuminating account of happiness, Daniel Haybron notes attunement as one of the central elements of happiness (Haybron 2008: 115-120).

³⁰ There are, however, some Confucians who may claim that Confucianism has achieved maximal perfection and cannot be revised to be made better. I find the claim highly implausible and not one that Confucians need to accept. In fact, the fact that a tradition is fixed or static may be evidence for thinking that the tradition is dying or dead. See MacIntyre 1984.

tradition by altering its very essence, or if it only revises and develops elements that already are inherent in the tradition. In the modern age, the prevailing attitude has been that the only good arbiter for evaluating the worth or permissibility of a practice is neutral, impartial reason that is independent of all attachments to local traditions or particular forms of life. On this view, we must, if we are genuinely concerned with morality, adopt what Henry Sidgwick called “the point of view of the universe” and judge whether or not a certain practice, or even a particular tradition, ought to go on. A number of philosophers, most notably, Alasdair MacIntyre, have rejected this view, arguing that there is no neutral vantage point from which to operate.³¹ We all belong, in one form or another to a particular tradition and we cannot but make judgments from within that tradition. This is clearly an epistemological view, and one that need not fall into metaphysical relativism about value. All it claims is that even if there are objective values, we can only access them through traditions, traditions that hopefully have developed in ways that allow their members to grasp moral truths.

I think that if we are to take any robust tradition such as Confucianism seriously, we cannot simply view traditions as vehicles by which we disseminate values that have been checked and processed by the instruments of impartial reasoning. If this is all that traditions are good for, then it is difficult to see why we ought to adhere to any tradition in the first place. One of the prerequisites for being a genuine member of any

³¹ See MacIntyre 1988: 349-369. Of course, MacIntyre’s account of traditions has also been the subject of criticism. Most recently, Tom Angier argues that MacIntyre’s conception of traditions is based too closely on the way that traditions within scientific enquiry operate, thus giving moral traditions a rather procrustean picture, misrepresenting moral traditions “as homogeneous, tightly integrated systems” that results in an overestimation of “the extent to which they are, in general, rivals incapable of communicating or interacting” (Angier 2011: 18). P. J. Ivanhoe also criticizes MacIntyre for modeling his view of moral tradition on the paradigm of scientific traditions, and unduly accepting a Hegelian picture in which eventually there will be a “unified moral order,” akin to the unified order that we observe in science, through the process of conquest by one tradition over another (Ivanhoe 2011: 168-169). I think both Angier and Ivanhoe are right in criticizing MacIntyre for taking the analogy between scientific traditions and moral traditions too far. I would note though that MacIntyre does reject the aspect of Hegelianism that claims there will come to be one absolute and complete moral tradition: “... the Absolute Knowledge of the Hegelian system is from this tradition-constituted standpoint a chimaera. No one at any stage can ever rule out the future possibility of their present beliefs and judgments being shown to be inadequate in a variety of ways” (MacIntyre 1988: 361).

significant tradition is a sense of loyalty and trust, which requires one to give at least some independent weight to the practices endorsed by one's own tradition, even if, in the end, one comes to reject the particular practices found within the tradition, or in extreme cases, abandon the tradition altogether. Good traditions allow us to begin our enquiries from a starting point that itself is the product of historical development, enabling us to work with resources and tools that can help us to continue the process of revision and argument.³² The epistemological model on which traditions are built is not that of Cartesian foundationalism, but of Neurath's ship: even while we know that the ship we are riding on is damaged, we must keep afloat on it, slowly repairing it in time, plank by plank.

One possibility that I have not addressed in this paper is the existence of reasons internal to the Confucian tradition that makes the practice of non-human animal sacrifice essential, reasons that are only accessible to those who understand the tradition "from the inside." This is a point that I think needs emphasis, especially because we all too readily denounce practices of other traditions without understanding that there may be "goods internal to those practices" that may be crucial for the tradition's survival.³³ In fact, I believe that focusing on this point would be one possible way for Professor Fan to respond to my argument. Along this line of thought, he could identify certain unique goods that can only be realized through the sacrificial use of non-human animals, goods that are integral to the Confucian form of life. Perhaps one way to do this would be to capture the depth and significance of the sacrificial ritual by bringing to the surface its symbolic value. Doing this may enable those of us outside of the Confucian tradition to gain a clearer grasp of just what is at stake in carrying out the ritualistic sacrifice of non-human animals. Confucius himself clearly believed that there is something important worth preserving in the sacrificial act:

Zigong wanted to do away with the practice of sacrificing a lamb to announce the beginning of the month. The Master said, "Zigong! You

³² P. J. Ivanhoe rightly points out another important value that traditions promote: they enable us to see ourselves as parts of something that transcends just our own individual lives. Drawing upon the work of Xunzi, Ivanhoe remarks, "only those who recognize that most of the activities in which they engage and which they enjoy are parts of an ongoing tradition find full satisfaction in what they do. Only such people see themselves and what they do as part of a long and majestic lineage." (Ivanhoe 2013: 12)

³³ Here I borrow the concept of "internal goods" of practices from MacIntyre 1984.

regret the loss of the lamb, whereas I regret the loss of the rite.” (*Analects* 3:17)³⁴

What exactly did Confucius see in the rite that was the source of regret? Confucius seems to be lamenting here about something of value that is *inherent* in the very practice of the sacrificial act, rather than some calculative benefit external to the activity. One way to capture this intrinsic significance might be to identify those aspects of the sacrifice (assuming that there are any) that make it attractive or appealing, and forge a connection to the larger narrative structure that constitutes the Confucian form of life. By doing so, it may be possible to transform what may at first appear to be simply a gruesome and violent ritualistic act into something perhaps dignified or even beautiful. I find this to be the most promising line of thought for those seeking to defend the practice of Confucian non-human animal sacrifice. I still believe, however, that the account of *everyday reverence* I have developed above could still provide a way for Confucians to abandon non-human animal sacrifice while developing and sustaining the virtue of reverence through living the kind of sacrificial life I’ve sought to describe and to illustrate.

None of this implies that we cannot criticize other traditions or that traditions should never revise their own rituals or practices. Nevertheless we do need to take traditions, especially those that are constitutive of a way of life, seriously, by attempting to obtain a genuine understanding of the goals and values that shape the attitudes and perceptions of those who adhere to them. We should first seek an informed account of why those within another tradition accept those values and beliefs that are constitutive of that tradition, even if initially they appear unpalatable from our own ethical point of view.³⁵ By doing so we can more easily

³⁴ Slingerland 2003. This particular passage is beautifully explored by Richard Wollheim, in which he argues that utilitarianism cannot adequately capture the kinds of value that is exemplified by significant ritualistic practices like those of the sacrificial use of the lamb. I thank P. J. Ivanhoe for alerting me to Wollheim’s paper and for further discussions about how Wollheim’s ideas are relevant to the issues of this paper.

³⁵ One could object here by drawing upon examples that involve what appear to be extremely egregious practices, e.g. female genital mutilation or ancient practices of child sacrifice, and question whether or not we should even start entertaining the possibility that such practices can be justified or valuable in some way. My view would be that although we may psychologically be unable to reflect on the validity of such practices because they may appear to us as “beyond the moral pale”, we should still try to understand what those who have engaged in those practices found appealing about them. My strong suspicion is that even if we were to examine such seemingly horrendous practices carefully, we would

avoid useless misunderstandings of alien traditions and preserve the possibility of actually learning from them. Only after attempting to enter into the perspective of another's tradition, should we begin to step back and critically evaluate the tradition's values and beliefs.³⁶ Refutation need not be the central drive for those trying to understand another tradition. We can be sufficiently motivated by the judgment that a radically different tradition may offer a new, fresh perspective, and provide novel intellectual resources for building on our own tradition.

IV. CONCLUSION

I have argued that by drawing upon the resources of other traditions, as well as ideas that can be discovered within the Confucian tradition itself, there is a way for Confucians to preserve the virtue of reverence without having to partake in the practice of non-human animal sacrifice. To do this I have focused on the ways in which our daily lives present a variety of opportunities to cultivate and sustain a reverential attitude through small but meaningful acts of self-sacrifice. This picture of expressing reverence through everyday actions, I believe, captures the *spirit* of the Confucian sacrificial rites by preserving the core idea that such practices require one to offer up something of value to the spirits and deities. My suggestion was that by organizing one's entire life to live according to the *Dao* as an expression of gratitude toward the deities and spirits, an individual's daily activities can be transformed into sacrificial offerings that express one's reverential attitude. If we assume that the deities and spirits are closely attuned to the *Dao*, we should believe that striving to embody the *Dao* in all that we do would most satisfy what the deities and spirits really want for us. So on this account, not only would the offerings of *everyday reverence* help reinforce our reverence toward the deities and spirits but also, at the same time, bring them satisfaction as well.

I have, however, left room for the possibility that there may be reasons internal to Confucianism for preserving the sacrificial use of non-human animals that only those firmly entrenched in the tradition

still continue to maintain the judgment that they are completely unjustified. In fact, such reflection could even *strengthen* our opposition to such practices.

³⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre has elaborated upon the need for us to imaginatively enter into the perspective of an alien tradition in many of his works. See especially MacIntyre 1988.

can grasp. One way to do this, I have suggested, is to identify internal goods that only the sacrificial rite can achieve. Now whether or not there are such goods remains to be seen, and even if such goods were to be identified, we would still need to determine whether they are sufficient for justifying a practice we seem to have good reasons to reject. What I have demonstrated in this paper is that non-human animal sacrifice is not necessary for achieving the virtue of reverence.

Despite the commonly held view that Confucius was a parochial moralizer, unreflectively sticking to traditional practices, he was in fact quite aware of the importance of striking a balance between the need to modify and revise one's tradition, on the one hand, and of resisting changes that may unduly harm its integrity, on the other.

The Master said, "A ceremonial cap made of linen is prescribed by the rites, but these days people use silk. This is frugal, and I follow the majority. To bow before ascending the stairs is what is prescribed by the rites, but these days people bow after ascending. This is arrogant, and – though it goes against the majority – I continue to bow before ascending."

Confucius' point is that we ought neither to support nor reject a traditional rite simply because a majority of people follow it; rather, we should reflect upon the reasons for supporting or rejecting the rite and act upon the results of such reflection.

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