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Multi-Cultural Model of Relational Personhood and Implementing Philosophy for Children (P4C): A Refusal of the Illusion of Individualism in America

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MULTI-CULTURAL MODEL OF RELATIONAL PERSONHOOD AND
IMPLEMENTING PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN (P4C): A REFUSAL OF THE
ILLUSION OF INDIVIDUALISM IN AMERICA

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Contents

Introduction: Individualism and the Relational Self.....	1
I. Individualism	
1. The Sources.....	5
2. The Illusion.....	11
II. The American Pragmatist Solution to Individualism: John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and the Social Self	
1. John Dewey.....	16
2. Request for Change.....	24
3. Dewey Continued.....	27
4. George Herbert Mead.....	29
III. Ancient Chinese Model of Relational Selfhood: Confucianism, Daoism, and Relational Self-Understanding	
1. Relational Personhood.....	33
2. Confucianism.....	35
3. The <i>Analects of Confucius</i>	39
4. Difficulties with Language.....	41
5. Confucian Vocabulary: Ren.....	42
6. Etymology of Ren.....	46
7. Confucian Vocabulary: Li.....	49
8. Confucian Vocabulary: Yi.....	53
9. The Hermit.....	58
10. Confucian Vocabulary: Xiao.....	61
11. Daoism.....	66
12. Zhuangzi.....	68
13. Closing Thoughts on the Chinese Relational Self Conception.....	74
IV. Philosophy For Children: Implementing the Social Self and Chinese Relational Self in Education to Reduce or Eliminate Individualism	
1. Starting with Children.....	78
2. Philosophy For Children (P4C).....	80
Conclusion.....	91
Bibliography.....	98

Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to influence a re-evaluation of self conceptions in America in order to influence an alternative relational understanding of one's self and others. This thesis begins based on the premise that individualism is a prominent aspect of American societies meaning its member's understandings of their selves are self-centered, often non-empathetic, and in general more concerned with their own lives than that of others. The first half of this thesis is dedicated analyzing the American situation through an analysis of the sources of individualism and proving that individualism is actually an illusion that individuals falsely believe in. American Pragmatists John Dewey and George Herbert Mead are primarily discussed to offer a more socially oriented understanding of the self that begins the process of this thesis in defending a relational model of selfhood. The second half of this thesis introduces Ancient Chinese philosophy where the relationally constituted model of self is thoroughly fleshed out. An analysis of Confucian and Daoist philosophy is given to explain those traditions unique vocabulary and drastic differences from traditional Western theories of morality and self-understanding. The third half of this thesis uses an hybrid self conception derived from a combination of Pragmatist and Chinese thought to argue the Philosophy For Children (P4C) pedagogical model is the medium in which Americans can learn to re-evaluate their selves starting with educating their children. P4C is shown to be itself a model of relationality where children begin from younger ages to be more other-focused, empathetic, and communally involved.

Introduction: Individualism and the Relational Self

A society consisting of individuals who barely or completely lack empathy, compassion, and care for one another is not an ideal society. Unfortunately, America finds itself in such a situation, dominated by individualism and lacking a large amount of empathetic members who understand one another as interdependent and relational. This thesis is an attack on this apparent dystopia by arguing individualism exists not through it being a necessary aspect of society, but through the rampant belief in its reality, meaning individualism is actually an illusion. I defend this claim through the presentation and argument that individuals in society, usually unaware, are relationally constituted social selves, meaning individuals are interdependent, interrelated, and exist through interaction with one another.

To make a strong defense I rely on the philosophy of early American pragmatists, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, and two major figures from ancient Chinese philosophy, Confucius and Zhuangzi. Arguing against individualism, to prove it is an illusion many Americans believe in that shapes their attitudes and influences their behavior, opens the door for empathy, compassion, and simple care for others to thrive again and, potentially, flourish. Once these traits are present in the minds and hearts of people again, social ills will be reduced, if not eliminated. Through a re-evaluation of one's self, genuine attitude and behavioral change is possible through newfound acknowledgments about one's relationship to others. Only a relational self-understanding, I argue, enables genuine change that increases empathy, compassion, and care for others through the realization of one's connections and influences on other people as well as

other's influences on one's self.

In order to identify and, potentially, eliminate issues within American society, it is necessary to determine the source from which these issues derive. This is a difficult task because there is no consensus in the political or academic sphere about what are in fact real problems, where they come from, and the solutions for solving them. One fact about America, visible to both inhabitants and visitors, is while America has thousands of cultures and sub-cultures, the one thoroughly present culture is a "money culture."¹ The chapter title "America Incorporated" from John Dewey's *Individualism Old and New* defines American culture in its most general terms. As the Industrial Revolution changed from a revolution into an unacknowledged reality, the societal changes that created the culture of money occurred that have continued to reverberate into the present and show no signs of changing. As quickly society changed when industrial and business practices changed is as slowly society is moving away from the "norms" that emerged during the industrialization of America. Within these "norms" are underlying beliefs about the "self" and one's role within society, from which I argue America's present social ills derive. The seed of these beliefs about the self were planted long before the industrial revolution with the influence of European thinkers and religion. Numerous books of extensive length dedicate their time to this history, but for most Americans today those influences are unknown even though they are the foundations of modern American beliefs and attitudes. Since I am concerned with contemporary society and solutions to its problems, I only lightly touch on what I think are major influences that are most clearly recognized in contemporary academic work, politics, business practices, and the general public's consciousness.

¹ John Dewey. *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), 9.

The term I use to define American culture is individualism, a controversial term with no universally accepted definition. My understanding of what individualism means specifically refers only to America, though many of the characteristics are shared in societies around the world. The nineteenth century French aristocratic thinker Alexis De Tocqueville, one of the earliest known persons to use the word “individualism” in his analysis and attempt to define American culture, claimed individualism “... is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself.”² These words summarize and explain the situation America finds itself in one hundred and seventy years later; although, I would argue many individualists even isolate their selves from friends and family. Henry Rosemont Jr. writes in 2014 that “the concept of individualism – especially with respect to constancy, independence and freedom – which, although it is being questioned in some quarters, remains definitive of contemporary Western moral, political, economic and most religious thought...”³

What is important for the analysis of this paper is to understand that the individualistic attitude described in Tocqueville’s observation, the attitude one would hold if isolated from society as Tocqueville explains, requires one to believe one’s self able to live, and itself be conceived of, independent from others. This is the individualistic self-conception I speak of; the individualistic American attitude that entails believing oneself to some degree as independent from others. Such an attitude

² Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969), 506.

³ Henry Rosemont Jr., “Traveling through Time with Family and Culture: Confucian Meditations” in *Landscape and Travelling East and West*, ed. Hans-Georg Moeller and Andrew Whitehead (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 170.

results in a self-understanding that reinforces itself through the individualistic beliefs and the attitudes that follow. It is a vicious cycle that supports itself through false beliefs and illusions about the self. Because one's attitudes are influenced from one's beliefs and vice versa, and one's behavior is influenced by the attitudes and beliefs one holds, if America is to eliminate the type of individualism Tocqueville referred to, as well as the many other forms, then individuals must evaluate or re-evaluate the way they think about their selves and their relations to others. They must be educated as to how their position in society is very much dependent on others, and that the quality of life in society will improve or degrade based on whether individualism is prominent or not. Teaching individuals to think differently about their position in society and their relations to other people is the only way social improvement can occur. People simply must learn to care for and about one another, not just about their own individualistic concerns. The most likely way for this to occur, to reduce the presence of individualism in America, is by influencing individuals to realize they are not *only* individuals, but that their self understanding relies on the existence and influence of others. It must be realized one's self-understanding is co-created with others through one's roles and relationships with others, from which one's own unique individuality then emerges.

I. Individualism

The Sources of individualism in America and how it is an Illusion

1. The Sources

The main problem is that in America's relatively short existence individualistic attitudes have dominated the American mindset. It is not difficult to find evidence that agrees the "dominant Western moral theories on offer today – deontological, utilitarian and virtue-based – are all grounded in the idea of human beings as fundamentally *individuals*, individuals who are, or certainly ought to be, rational, free and autonomous (and usually self-interested)."⁴ Whether it is because of religious convictions, political and social changes, academic circles, or any combination of these factors, American attitudes are individualistic.⁵ One reason individualistic attitudes and behavior are common is because Americans largely believe, whether aware of it or not, the self is unencumbered. Unencumbered in the sense that one's self is "understood as prior to and independent of purposes and ends."⁶ Most importantly, it means the self is understood to exist prior to one's entrance into society, before to forming relations with others.

It is undeniable that John Locke has been an influential thinker in American politics, and even on every day Americans understanding of society or public life. Because of Locke's influence on early American politics, and his defense of an unencumbered self understanding, Locke can be seen as one of the founders of American individualism. To what extent he argues for an unencumbered self conception is a never-ending debate amongst scholars, but what I noticed in my research is that often the focus

⁴ Rosemont Jr., "Travelling through Time with Family and Culture: Confucian Meditations," 171. This is not to say these moral theories have no merit or are not beneficial to society if widely accepted and practiced. The issue with individualistic moral theories is the negative aspects outweigh the positive and this I argue is the reason for the disconnect of individuals between themselves and others leading to bad social practices overall such as major inequalities, lack of positive and useful dialogue, and so forth.

⁵ See Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

⁶ Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, ed. Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 18.

of the debate is missing the most important point; individuals, no matter what they think or believe, are constituted by their social environment. The common debate is over whether Locke defends a hardcore individualist position, or an individual rights position with a communal aspect. I, however, think these debates distract from the more important point that Locke insists there is a way for individuals to exist outside of society—that there is a “state of nature” in which the individual is unencumbered and he/she has a certain amount of “natural rights”.⁷ Locke states in his *Two Treatises on Government*:

To understand political power aright, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.⁸

Locke argues most people are not in this state, yet there are some individuals who are, including some entire states.⁹ My point of focus is not on the truth of his claim or whether his argument can be used to defend a certain political position, but that he argues in the defense of the existence, or the possibility of the existence, of a primacy-of rights based state prior to one’s entrance into society. Whether Locke attempted to defend an individualist position or not, this simple belief of his is a perfect example of the unencumbered individual and a primacy of rights social theory: Both of which are individualist by default and can be, and have been, interpreted as a justification of individualism in America. Locke’s state of nature may have only been a thought experiment and not something he actually believed ever existed, but the point stands that

⁷ An example of the common Lockean debate is shown in essays such as: George Thomas, “John Locke’s America,” *Society* 50, no. 5 (October 2013): doi:10.1007/s12115-013-9690-9.

⁸ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* Book 2, Chapter 2.4

⁹ Locke, *Two Treatises* Book 2, Chapter 2.14 “It is often asked as a mighty objection, where are, or ever were there any men in such a state of nature? To which it may suffice as an answer at present, that since all princes and rulers of independent governments all through the world, are in a state of nature, it is plain the world never was, nor ever will be, without numbers of men in that state.”

even believing in the possibility of his state of nature can be interpreted as a defense of personhood, or the self, that exists without the need of others and prior to social interaction. Proving further that Locke defends a primacy of rights social/political theory, Locke believes “God” has given individuals certain rights which cannot be taken away without doing unjustifiable harm to that person. Society does not create these rights together through a creative process of discussion and debate, nor are they even influenced by society, Locke argues, making them in essence purely self-created (whether “God” exists or not) individualistic rights of primary concern.

Because of the widespread acceptance and application of individualistic conceptions of the self, like the unencumbered self found in Locke’s influential philosophy and others, Charles Taylor argues that in America primacy-of-rights political and social theories “have been one of the formative influences on modern political consciousness.”¹⁰ These primacy-of-right theories “are those which take as the fundamental, or at least a fundamental, principle of their political theory the ascription of certain rights to individuals and which deny the same status to a principle of belonging or obligation, that is a principle which states our obligation as men to belong to or sustain society, or a society of a certain type, or to obey authority or an authority of a certain type”.¹¹ In narrowed down and simplistic terms, this means individual rights are held as more important than the concerns of society as a whole. This does not mean societal concerns are neglected and not important, but instead the concerns of the individual are accepted as primary and more important. The acceptance and following of primacy-of-right political theories, in addition to a belief in the self as unencumbered, is a

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, “Atomism,” in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, ed. Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (New York: Oxford, 1992), 30.

¹¹ Ibid.

combination which also re-enforces itself. American individualism is strengthened and made supposedly justified by the dominant political theories in America that often push for the primacy-of-rights. American individualism is influenced by such theories and sustained by the fundamental belief that the self exists independent of others and prior to one's joining or interaction with society.

It takes little effort to realize why individualistic attitudes exist amongst common Americans if it is accepted that the common self understanding is unencumbered, and that politically primacy-of-right theories take front stage. Many other political theories exist and are debated in the political as well as academic spheres, but it seems obvious that rights are of most dire concern for American individuals. Current debates over right to bear arms, freedom of speech, labor rights, marriage rights, civil rights, and all of these important rights issues cover the news headlines. Mainstream news headlines may not accurately represent the real interests of Americans, but the language used in debates over political and social issues often focuses on rights. The problem is not in the discussion of rights, but the apparent lack of focus on communal rights. Rights such as labor rights, right to freedom of speech, and other rights deemed human rights are concerned with societies as a whole, but an individualist often is only concerned with rights in which he/she is concerned as they affect him/her. Sincere communal language is rare unless it is as Tocqueville observed and one is speaking of their own family, church, school, and so forth. It is not that community does not exist, but that society as a whole seems quite dissolved. There is the society one lives in, the puzzle, but the pieces of the puzzle, the unique communities, are scattered and small, or non-existent. Kevin Dooley describes this dreary situation well:

Some members of the community represent little to nothing to one another. They are those individuals who pass each other on the street on their way to work or those anonymous souls seen at the grocery store. They are merely distractions or indiscriminate bumps along the path to success. They neither impede one's progress, nor accelerate them. Individuals of this kind, which are the most common in today's society, yield anonymity within communities because they are neither envied nor hated; they simply exist.¹²

The majority of Americans' attitudes towards others are neutral; individuals have no potential to advance or harm one's interests, they just let them be.¹³

Participation is not even my primary concern, it is empathy. If individuals cannot learn to care for others beyond their own close personal relationships and self interests how can, or will they care about the larger community/society, and broader, the people of the world. In contemporary America, "while the majority of Americans are neither beneficent nor harmful, they still continue to erode the bonds of community life" because of a lack of care for one another.¹⁴ If one's self understanding changes to be more "other" focused then one's attitudes towards others may change. Changing Americans attitudes I think is the most effective way to start the movement towards addressing major social concerns in America and eventually the rest of the world. Until the individualistic attitudes and behaviors of American people are reduced and/or eliminated completely, genuine social change is impossible. Individuals must learn to become more other focused and caring towards others, not just their own selves. Any conceptions of the self whether metaphysical, ontological or arguably neither, are powerless towards creating positive social change unless the attitudes derived from such conceptions weaken and/or

¹² Kevin Dooley, "De Tocqueville's Allegorical Journey: Equality, Individualism, and Spread of American Values," *The Journal of American Culture* 37, no. 2 (June 2014): 178, doi:10.1111/jacc.12161.

¹³ Neutral concern for others can, and often does, lead to the continuation of issues however. As I discuss in the next section, having a lack of empathy and care often means watching others suffer, or seeing problems thrive because the one's causing the trouble go unchallenged. This is how harmful power structures become invincible.

¹⁴ Ibid.

reduce individualism, but increase empathy towards others. Before moving forward to discussing social change however, there are a few important concerns to address such as the concept of self itself, and the word individual.

The difficulty of a project like this is the concept of self is not universally understood or even acknowledged. The study of the existence of the self, or a self, is a complete project on its own.¹⁵ The focus of this project is just on the American self, and other various understandings of a social/relational self found in American Pragmatism and Chinese philosophy. There is no need to debate the metaphysical existence of the American self because what follows from the discussion above is that there is an innate belief in the self in American minds. If one believes their self to be fully autonomous and believes it possible to conceive of their own unique self and personality without the existence of others, as many Americans believe, then logically it follows that such persons believe in the existence of a self. Self may be understood as simply a linguistic reference to one's personality or uniqueness (if any), one's actual physical autonomy, or various other conceptions, but what matters for this project is that the common American appears to believe in a self, and that this self is individualistic or leads to individualistic attitudes.

A common dichotomy found in philosophy and other academic fields, as well as in the beliefs of many common Americans, is the individual and society. "In sociology the claim of methodological individualism is that individual selves aggregated constitute the primary reality, with *society*, or the *polity*, being a second-order, abstract

¹⁵ See: Charles Taylor, *Source of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), and Jerrold Siegel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

construct...”¹⁶ Alternatively there may also be an theorized split between the individual and others. Psychologists assume “individual persons can exist and be studied independently of other persons.”¹⁷ This assumption I understand as the narrow understanding of word individual, as a reference to the self as either a physical, psychological, and/or social being independent from others. The broad use of the word individual is used as a way to refer to persons singled out from others but not in some metaphysical or substantial way; it is used as a linguistic tool. Unless noted, I use the word “individual” broadly as an alternative to the word one. The distinction between the narrow and broad usage of the word individual is important for it shows how even words are understood differently in the American context because of commonly held metaphysical beliefs.

2. The Illusion

So far I have argued Americans are individualistic by explaining the prominence of primacy-of-rights theories, the “unencumbered” self, and describing the American understanding of the self as an “individual”. A way to clarify all these seemingly different notions into one concise concept of individualism is by understanding what John Rawls labels the “original position”. John Rawls political thought has been extremely influential in American political theory over the past forty years, making his ideas important to discuss for they influence and perpetuate individualistic strains of thought to continue in America. The original position is a sort of thought experiment, or a hypothetical situation in which individuals imagine their selves free from all labels and categorizations. To imagine this one must look through a “veil of ignorance” (another

¹⁶ Rosemont Jr., “Travelling through Time with Family and Culture,” 171.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Rawlsian term). “To insure impartiality of judgment, the parties are deprived of all knowledge of their personal characteristics and social and historical circumstances.”¹⁸

This means not acknowledging one’s race, gender, age, religion, and any factor that constitutes one’s tradition and self understanding

The reason Rawls creates such an abstract scenario is to make the argument that under these circumstances individuals will choose what is best for themselves, which he argues are his two principles of justice. Putting aside these principles for a moment, what is paramount to acknowledge is the individualism ingrained into his thought experiment. The belief this hypothetical or imaginary “original” position is possible in any sense begs the claim that the self is able to be dramatically separated from others and its own tradition. The self, if possible to be observed through the veil of ignorance and be in Rawls’ “original position”, is the ultimate unencumbered self. Rawls does not argue his thought experiment is metaphysically or ontologically possible though because he is only concerned with political matters.¹⁹ But the fact he would even desire this, or contemplate the possibility, shows how individualistic his thoughts are. The conception of the unencumbered self derived from Rawls’ philosophy is also comparable to John Locke’s theory of personhood.

In Locke’s “state of nature” individuals exist without society and are law makers of their own existence. It does not seem plausible that man or woman in this state would be aware of their gender, age, race, and so on in the manner that individuals do when in a communal/societal setting. Individuals in Locke’s state of nature would think of their

¹⁸ Samuel Freeman, “Original Position,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Stanford University, 1997-. Last modified September 9, 2014. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/original-position/>.

¹⁹ See John Rawls, “Theory of Justice: Political not Metaphysical,” in *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 388-414.

selves comparably to how individuals would think in Rawls' original position. The difference is that for Rawls individuals already exist or live in society, and from this position, must imagine being in the original position. Locke in his *Two Treatises on Government* literally discusses individuals existing in a state of nature prior to and outside of society. Both persons though, the Lockean individual in a "state of nature", and Rawls ignorant individual, would be in a similar mental state free from the influences of others, or at least from others formed into large groups like communities. Both Locke's and Rawls' theories of self and persons are quite individualistic and, unfortunately, highly influential on American thought past and present.

Attempts have been made to argue Rawls does not support individualism, but as Sandel explains in quoting Rawls: "The original position sums up this central claim about us [what is most essential to our personhood is not the ends we choose but our capacity to choose them]. 'It is not our aims that primarily reveal our nature' writes Rawls, 'but rather the principles that we would acknowledge to govern the background conditions under which these aims are to be formed... We should therefore reverse the relation between the right and the good proposed by teleological doctrines and view the right as prior'."²⁰ The Rawlsian point being made here explained by Sandel is that "only if my identity is never tied to the aims and interests I may have at any moment can I think of myself as a free and independent agent, capable of choice."²¹ I argue many individuals do tie their identity with their interests however, but this difference in my opinion from Rawls does not change the fact that under Rawls notion of independence, individuals are "free to join in voluntary association with others..." in a community or society. But

²⁰ Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," 19.

²¹ Ibid.

“what is denied to the unencumbered self is the possibility of membership in any community bound by moral ties antecedent to choice; he cannot belong to any community where the self *itself* could be at stake.”²² Sandel labels this bound conception of community “constitutive”, and for Rawls and many Americans, it is undesirable because it is too tied down or encumbered. Although I argue this understanding of community is the actual form individuals are a part of, it does not mean individuals lose their freedom or sense of individuality as may be believed. The self is not lost in community, but is instead impossible without it.

This last point hints at more progressive ideas that actually existed before the time of Rawls but unfortunately did not gain wide acceptance. Two American Pragmatists, John Dewey, and later discussed, George Herbert Mead, posited a social understanding of the self which avoids the individualism of past and contemporary “liberal” thought. The self does not, and cannot, exist prior to its existence in society, nor does society exist only because individual selves exist; the existence of selves and societies are interdependent meaning neither can exist without the other. It is an illusion that the self can exist without the need of others, and unfortunately because so many hold individualistic beliefs, the illusion is kept alive and well.

The authors of *Habits of the Heart* could not be more correct in stating the “inner tensions of American individualism add up to a classic case of ambivalence. We strongly assert the values of our self-reliance and autonomy. We deeply feel the emptiness of a life without sustaining social commitments. Yet we are hesitant to articulate our sense that we need one another as much as we need to stand alone, for fear that if we did we would lose

²² Ibid.

our independence altogether.”²³ The last sentence of this quote characterizes the common American attitude towards self-understanding most accurately. The concern over rights is often the first concern to arise in any sort of social issue discussed on the larger stage of the many mass media sources. The reason for this is due to what appears to be a common belief in “slippery-slope” occurrences where if one believes one’s rights are being violated it opens the door to further violations. A fear of losing one’s independence has been a common fear since the founding of America, and there is little sign of this fear weakening. Attention to rights, and the primacy of their importance in social situations, is held as a guard against losing one’s independence.²⁴ This is why Americans may be fearful of a self-conception that acknowledges the importance of others as equally important as one’s self. Even more threatening is a theory of selfhood that posits the self as interdependent with others as this leads to fears of having no self. The problem here is a lack of clarity on the real dependence individuals have with one another. Too much speculation is made regarding the consequences of alternative understandings of personhood and what to actually focus on when dealing with social issues; does one focus on one’s own “individual” rights, or does one focus on what is best for everyone in their community? John Dewey believed in the same ambivalence of the self the authors of HOH argue exists, yet he wrote his belief before many of the social changes American has gone through, though little ultimately has changed in American attitudes regarding the self and others.

²³ Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 151.

²⁴ A valid and important concern, although, often skewed and inhibited by one’s overly self-centered focus on one’s own rights and not of a wider audiences’.

II. The American Pragmatist Solution to Individualism

John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and the Social Self

1. John Dewey

Dewey says in *Individualism Old and New* that the present “material culture”, modern post industrial revolution American society, “is verging upon the collective and corporate.”²⁵ On the other hand, America’s “moral culture” along with its ideology is “still saturated with ideal and values of an individualism derived from the prescientific, pretechnological age.”²⁶ The “old” form of individualism was a complicated combination of religious beliefs, European philosophy, and older governmental structures while this new “collective and corporate” society is the “new” form of individualism. Individualism only exists in this new collective and corporate society through belief in it, so society today is inherently contradicting because individuality is actually being snuffed out. Dewey believed the development “of a civilization that is outwardly corporate—or rapidly becoming so—has been accompanied by a submergence of the individual.”²⁷

Dewey’s words correlate closely with the authors of HOH:

We [Americans] insist, perhaps more than ever before, on finding our true selves independent of any cultural or social influence, being responsible to that self alone, and making its fulfillment the very meaning of our lives. Yet we spend much of our time navigating through immense bureaucratic structures—multiversities, corporations, government agencies—manipulating and being manipulated by others.”²⁸

The point here is both Dewey and the HOH authors acknowledge an ambivalence in American beliefs about the self and its role with others.

²⁵ Dewey, *Individualism old and New*, 74.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 51.

²⁸ Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 150.

The authors of *Habits of the Heart* argue Americans believe in and have a “deep desire for autonomy and self-reliance combined with an equally deep conviction that life has no meaning unless shared with others in the context of community...”²⁹ I agree with Dewey that this lack of clarity, these conflicting beliefs Americans hold, are a primary source of social problems. Because of this ambivalence Americans are unable to sufficiently deal with social issues as they arise, for one’s desired ends and means of reaching them are unrealistic due to incoherent beliefs about one’s roles and abilities. In other words, individualistic beliefs about the self inhibit individuals’ abilities to communicate with one another and solve dilemmas because of an unclear, or non-existing, understanding of how the self is interdependent with others.

The concept of rights takes primacy in social and political debates because individualistic conceptions of rights are deeply ingrained in individualistic American self conceptions. Rights, often not fully understood and often abstractly construed, are connected with an individual’s strong belief in their independence from others and desire for autonomy. Individualistic conceptions of rights distracts one from dealing with social dilemmas openly and with concern for the broader good of the society one lives in. This does not mean rights are to be denied or ignored, but without a less individualistic concept of self, rights can do more harm than good in dealing with major social conflicts. There is fortunately an alternative way of understanding rights and their strong importance in communal affairs to avoid more social degradation as is found in societies without certain rights. David Wong presents this alternative argument by stating that community-centered moralities “should move closer to rights-centered moralities, at least

²⁹ Ibid.

in recognizing some of the most fundamental democratic rights.”³⁰ Alternatively, rights-centered moralities must recognize the “indispensability of community for the realization of democratic values of self-governance and social justice. Rights and community are interdependent.”³¹

As discussed above, one’s self understanding both influences how one understand rights, but also how one cares about others rights. An individual more concerned with his/herself more than others obviously will care more about concerns over rights that have an direct effect on his/her life. Of course his/her language in discussion of the rights may be focused on others, but there is a difference between genuinely caring for others rights and only caring in order to gain enough support to defend the right/s in question politically. It may be objected that of course one must have some personal reason for desiring and defending a certain right otherwise why would one care about the right? Gay-marriage rights for instance are often opposed. An individual with a genuine concern and care for others however would never oppose rights be granted to others unless they believed the right in question would be harmful to the right holder, not one’s self. As Wong states “we do not need rights with an autonomy ground to condemn torture of political dissidents or the subjugation of one group by another group on the grounds of the former’s alleged inferiority.”³² The problem lies in the fact that individualist cultures find it acceptable to reject rights granted to others if it is deemed the potential rights holder ought not be granted such rights. This sort of common place behavior in America is from having a severe lack of a sense of community, and just another major issue with

³⁰ David Wong, *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 92.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 93.

the individualism present in America.

In continuing the discussion of Dewey, he was a powerful social critic of American society because he questioned the foundations of common American beliefs such as the concept of the “individual” and “society”. For Dewey categorization of these two concepts has led to incorrect and troublesome beliefs in philosophy as well as politics. Dewey says:

Now it is true that social arrangements, laws, institutions are made for man, rather than that man is made for them; that they are means and agencies of human welfare and progress. But they are not means for obtaining something for individuals, not even happiness. They are means of creating individuals.³³

For Dewey, individuality, or the process of becoming an individual, is achieved, not given from birth, and is continually changing. “Individuality in a social and moral sense is something to be wrought out. It means initiative, inventiveness, varied resourcefulness, assumption of responsibility in choice of belief and conduct. These are not gifts, but achievements.”³⁴ Dewey’s conception of individuality differs dramatically from the unencumbered self born with unique individuality and autonomy.

Just as different is Dewey’s understanding of society. Society is not some concrete external entity from which one is a subordinated constituent of. Society “is many associations not a single organization. Society means association; coming together in joint intercourse and action for the better realization of any form of experience which is augmented and confirmed by being shared.”³⁵ Dewey continues to explain society is the “*process* of associating in such ways that experiences, ideas, emotions, values are

³³ John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 112.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 118.

transmitted and made common.”³⁶ Without “communication of experience from and to others...” an individual “...remains dumb, merely sentient, a brute animal. Only in association with fellows does he become a conscious centre of experience.”³⁷ In addition, society itself becomes “static, rigid, institutionalized whenever it is not employed to facilitate and enrich the contacts of human beings with one another.”³⁸ These re-evaluations of common sociological concepts alone offer a different perspective from which to think of the self less individualistically. But Dewey does not stop there with his critique of American self-conceptions and understandings of American society

Dewey shaped many of his social views from notions in biology, specifically evolutionary biology. Dewey himself did not use the idea of ecosystems as a paradigm for the structure of society and its functions, but Daniel Savage introduces it as a way to make sense of Dewey’s position. Because of Darwinian influence and interest in Hegelian thought, Dewey believed that the diversity of individuals actually allows them to adapt to their environment. This Savage labels “complexity”; the synthesis of differentiation and integration. “The greater the degree of differentiation, the better an organism or system is able to adapt to change because of the larger number of qualities available to meet needs in a new environment.”³⁹ There must be a desire or some factor in place which enables individuals to be integrated however if differentiation is to have positive results, because differentiation without integration “results in disintegration”⁴⁰. A common view held by many libertarian philosophers such as John Rawls is that

³⁶ Ibid., 119.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Daniel M. Savage, *John Dewey’s Liberalism: Individual, Community, and Self-Development* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 61.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

integration is only possible if individuals lose their individuality, what makes them different and unique. Such a position believes individuals can only retain their individuality if, to some extent, they are independent or isolated from others. This leads to a sort of passive view of society where individual rights keep society functioning as a whole because as long as individuals do not violate each other's rights things will go smoothly (integration). Rawls cleverly tries to work around this dilemma of isolation with his original position, but as shown above, the original position is an impossible thought experiment and ultimately an undesirable one for it actually results in individuals losing their individuality; the very thing libertarians are so concerned to hold on to. Dewey rejects the idea that integration is only possible if individuals lose their individuality and instead argues that individuality is necessary for integration. The more diverse individual in society are the more options exist for solving dilemmas. It is true if everyone were the same there would be more easily obtainable integration and harmony, but it would not be worth losing individuality to do so, nor is that possible.

This is the dilemma Dewey's book *Individualism Old and New* is about; how to find social harmony, the balance between retaining individuality and integration. In evolutionary biological terms of course diversity may lead to survival, but society and human personalities are in some ways more complicated. Dewey argues that the "old" individualism as he calls it was the periods in American history where the "pioneer spirit" was prevalent. This pioneer spirit can be understood in contemporary terms as the American Dream. Individuals believed through their own hard work and self-reliance they would be able to achieve the goals they set. Dewey believes at some point in history this may have been true, but over Americas' short history there has been an increase in

the need for social cohesion and the integration of all. This leads to what Dewey labels “new” individualism where individuals have actually become more sheep like and less creative because of the dominance of capitalism and what it requires to function, but individuals still believe themselves capable of being self-sufficient and without the need of others to accomplish their goals. In “new” individualism, individualism is actually an illusion as is the American dream. Dewey rejects the “pioneer spirit”, the American dream, because without others, and integration with others, society cannot function properly or positively because individuals are dependent upon one another and interrelated in such complex ways that this dependency is necessary not just for social cohesion, but even survival itself. Dewey also rejects “new” individualism, as I agree it should, not only because it is nonsensical, but because the state individuals are in now, believing in individualism but in reality completely structured and controlled by business, is resulting in social degradation, in disintegration.

To make more sense of Dewey’s concern over integration and social harmony, Dewey’s conception of the self must be understood. For Dewey, the self cannot exist prior to or without society; complete opposite of what Locke and Rawls propose. The Deweyan understanding of the self is that the self is socially embedded, therefore, rejecting the theory of the unencumbered self. The reason for this is because of Dewey’s belief in contextualism, “that all meaning is contextual.”⁴¹ What this means is that “all human thoughts and emotions are cultivated within particular frameworks of meanings. A cultural tradition, for example, provides a set of norms, value, and beliefs that, for those who are socialized into that culture, become habitual, unconscious, or what some would

⁴¹ Ibid., 41.

refer to as intuitive.”⁴² This is where Hans-Georg Gadamer’s notion of tradition is relevant to acknowledge, because tradition, one’s embeddedness with others, is where one’s understanding of self derives. “In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live.”⁴³

In Dewey’s book *Human Nature and Conduct* he argues humans are habitual creatures, therefore, one can understand why one cannot simply ignore one’s tradition or choose for it to have no influence over oneself; one’s tradition shapes who one is. As others in the same tradition shape and alter that tradition, it then has an influence on the members. This metaphorically can be used to make sense of Dewey’s notion of the self as well as society. One’s self understanding is key to whether one becomes a harmonious member of society or not. The belief in self-reliance, or the libertarian desire for individuals to retain strict independence from others, results in a individualistic self-conception, even though as Dewey argued, it is a false conception. Since one is born into a tradition, one is socially embedded from the start. One can either attempt to believe oneself independent from others, and maybe even believe in the American dream, or one can acknowledge one’s embeddedness and re-evaluate the attitudes held towards others in society. Instead of seeing one’s individuality as a reason for separating one’s self from others, it should be understood as a tool for forming creative solutions to society’s problems. By simply understanding the self through a Dewian perspective it is possible

⁴² Ibid.,41-42.

⁴³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall,. (New York: Continuum, 1998), 76.

for individuals to be persuaded to interact with others differently. This is an essential aspect of the main argument of this thesis.

2. Request for Change

There are numerous ways for human beings to survive, but to survive in an unprogressive and unharmonious society is a more difficult task. Because of fragmentation, of individuals' lack of ability as pieces of a puzzle to come together into a picture, a cohesive community or society, there is environmental degradation, social chaos, political turmoil, economic booms and busts, and lack of positive and creative solutions for working with and helping other countries.

What I am asking is for individuals to re-evaluate their understanding of their own self and its relation to other selves. But it must be clear that there is no choice involved, there is no decision that one is able to make that will dramatically alter one's behavior and attitudes. When one wishes to be less selfish for example one may make attempts to be so, and may successfully do so, but nonetheless it is not a decision that has instant results. The way one understands one's self, one's self conception, is influenced by numerous factors such as one's tradition/historical existence, culture, family, friends, societal, environment, and so forth. If it is accepted who one "is" now is because of all of these factors, then in many ways one has no choice in "who they are". This appears unfortunately quite deterministic, that one's person is determined to be as it is without one's control in the matter.⁴⁴

It is true that one has no choice on how one views and conceives of one's self, but

⁴⁴ Explaining precisely why individualism is so popular, because within America there is always the strong calling and desire for notions of freedom, liberty, and equality. The desire amongst individuals to be who one and one alone determines oneself to be is a primary concern, often making any alternative theory of selfhood that demands one to acknowledge the influence of the roles of others on one's self as equally important, unpopular.

this choice is referring to the action of actively choosing at any given moment. This means that ten minutes from now or two years from now, I cannot at any given moment make the choice to understand myself any differently than I currently do. What this means in other words is that how I view myself is simply how I view myself and I have no choice on the matter, it simply just is. This does not mean one is unable to understand oneself differently because there is no restriction on imagining besides what the imagination is limited to. I may view myself as the only person in the world who really has an understanding of my own existence, or I may think myself the only rational and moral being in my society for instance. I argue many individuals believe themselves to be individualistic and therefore their attitudes and behaviors often fulfill this belief. The point is that it is only a belief though; it is only a conception, which is, not by default, reality. The reality of every individual who plays a role in society, whom is not a lone hermit away from literally every other human being, is that he/she is dependent on others to the extent that genuine individualism is impossible. This is what is meant by having no choice on how one understands and views their self. One may believe, think, or imagine their self as one way or another, but they cannot change the reality that they are a social being whom has roles and relationships which ultimately define their self.

Referring back to the argument made above that “there is no decision that one is able to make that will dramatically alter their behavior and attitudes”, this makes it appear that the general argument of this thesis is contradicting. I claimed that individuals must alter or change their attitudes if they are ever to see positive changes in society. The reason the above statement does not contradict the message of this thesis is because of the one word “decision”. To change one’s attitudes does not require a decision nor is such

decision possible. Changing one's attitudes can only occur by understanding correctly the role one's "self" plays, and then one's attitude may change, unless one enters denial or refuses to change. One must come to realize that through one's roles, relationships, and dependence on others, one comes to form a conception of an individual, unique self. Derived from this self understanding are attitudes which affect one's behavior. Currently the typical western individual does not acknowledge these realities, that one is a relational/social being who is influenced by one's tradition and relationships with others. Western individuals like to believe of themselves as fully autonomous, independent, individualistic persons. But again, this is a belief, a false belief that then influences one's attitudes and therefore determines one's behavior. Just as one does not make a conscious decision to believe this, one also cannot make a conscious decision to believe one is a relational/socially formulated person. One either thinks of their self as either or, but there is no decision to be made. This is equivalent to the case where one thinks they make a decision to be mean or nice. One may say to their self "I decide I will be nice from now on", but one either is or is not nice. This can only be determined after one reflects upon one's previous actions.

If a person lives amongst other people, he or she is a social being whose understanding of their self is relational and dependent on others. This means individualism is simply a myth that many people believe in. One may hold individualistic attitudes and behave individualistically, but this only because they believe their self to be so; it is only a belief and beliefs have consequences. The goal of this paper then is to show western individuals this belief many of them hold, and prove to them that their self is only able to be understood genuinely one "real" way. If this can be accomplished we

will then see genuinely real attitude changes that were not chosen or decided upon, but are acknowledged as being there all along, therefore, resulting in positive behavioral changes. To make these above statements more persuasive I have directed attention to American pragmatists like George Herbert Mead and John Dewey for arguments and evidence that individuals are relational selves, or as many pragmatists labeled, “social selves”.

3. Dewey Cont.

It is helpful to understand why a more social understanding of the self is really beneficial to people’s attitudes, and specifically why the American pragmatists are great thinkers to study for theories on the social self. Dewey would agree with this thesis that there exists a problem of individualistic attitudes in the United States and that these attitudes allow social ills to continue. Dewey admittedly believed personal gain, specifically in the form of money, to be the main reason for the prominence of individualism. While I do not disagree completely, I believe the common citizen is more following a tradition of individualism than purposefully trying to gain as much wealth as possible, though this is a common practice. Dewey does say however that a “distinguished lawyer” he once heard, who Dewey believed to be “logical”, did not “delude himself into supposing that the pioneer gospel of personal imitative, enterprise, energy and reward could be maintained in an era of aggregated corporate capital, of mass production and distribution, of impersonal ownership and of ownership divorced from management.”⁴⁵ The point of emphasis is on what he calls the “pioneer gospel”, or what I interpret as the American Dream. This is the tradition of individualism that too many American individuals are part of; the belief that through personal means, meaning alone

⁴⁵ Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 10.

with little to no help from others, one is able to make something of themselves, or are able to reach some lofty goal that is probably unreachable. It is not pessimistic to reject the American Dream, or refute it as nonsensical because it is just that, a dream. This is not to say people ought to not have dreams or high aspirations, but the specific notion of the American Dream is an illusion if one believes the dream possible to obtain through one's own hard work with little to no need of most people. Now if the notion of the American Dream entailed reaching a social goal such as an improvement to a segment of society through the efforts of a community or society at large, then the American Dream would be sensible. This is the overall message Dewey tried to get across in *Individualism Old and New*. The pioneer spirit, and the old form of individualism where an individual believes their self able to fulfill the life they desire on their own without the need of others, are worthless if not harmful to the goal of achieving societal improvements. Dewey wanted to see a stronger democratic society in which the concerns of the many preceded the concerns of the few; a goal today still unreached and a goal I wholeheartedly sympathize with.

It is important to note that Dewey's use of the word individualism is not exactly the same as what is meant in this thesis. Dewey's notion of individualism is not to be condemned in his philosophy because it means something more similar to what I mean by individuality. For Dewey "old" individualism was the idea that one is a unique individual whom is separate from society to the extent that he/she is able to be productive and successful without the need of others. Another way of understanding the "old" individual is as free, because the "new" individualism posits individuals into a society so structurally rigid that they no longer retain any individuality and in a sense lose their

freedom. Dewey finds both the old and new forms of individualism undesirable. He argues that individuals still believe themselves to be in the position of persons of “old” individualism, and that this blinds them from the reality that America has become so corporate that individuals are now like sheep, all doing the same thing with much less freedom. This allows business free reign in which they control everyone, or at least influence individuals to act in certain ways, preferably to consume. Dewey’s solution is found in the middle between “old” and “new” individualism. Individuals must acknowledge and fight against corporate America in order to obtain individuality, but must also work democratically as socially aware and socially focused beings in order not to fall back into the selfish and undesirable “pioneer” mindset.

The differences between Dewey’s thoughts and my own are that what he means by individualism broadly, I mean unique individuality, and while he was more focused on democracy and science as what citizens must acknowledge to work together, I insist simply changing attitudes will bring people closer together and result in positive social changes. In essence Dewey also argued for an attitude adjustment amongst American individuals, but I think the call for attitude change requires more thorough argumentation and defense. Dewey throughout his works discusses his social understanding of the self that works from the same framework as George Herbert Mead’s, but Mead offers a vocabulary that makes it more explicit what the pragmatists meant by a social self understanding.

4. George Herbert Mead

Although there are multiple differences between Dewey’s and Mead’s philosophies, Mead, like Dewey, developed a “pragmatist ethics which holds that ethical

theory is reflection on the practical procedure for solving moral problems involving the adjustment of an individual organism to its social environment.”⁴⁶ Hall and Ames point out that according to Mead, “the person achieves unity or integrity as a self by virtue of internalizing the attitude of the ‘generalized other’.”⁴⁷ In Mead’s own words:

The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called the “generalized other.” The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community. Thus, for example, in the case of such a social group as a ball team, the team is the generalized other in so far as it enters—as an organized process or social activity—into the experience of any one of the individual members of it.⁴⁸

Continuing with Mead’s words, this time with edits by Hall and Ames:

... only in so far as [one] takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which [one] belongs toward the organized, co-operative social activities... in which that group as such is engaged, does [one] develop a complete self or possess the sort of complete self he has developed.⁴⁹

The “generalized other” is one’s perception of others, and other’s attitudes directed at one’s self, as well as other’s attitudes towards each other. In my case for example, of the generalization of American culture as individualism, the conglomerate of individuals in the general public who hold individualistic beliefs and attitudes is my “generalized other”. This is the conception of a “generalized other” I relate myself to. According to Mead, “the self is constituted by the internalization of alternative roles and attitudes and their organization into a coherent complex.”⁵⁰ In other words, one part of the self is the internalization of the “generalized other”. If this were the only part then I would be exactly as others are; I would share the same beliefs as others, and behave

⁴⁶ Steve Odin, *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 236.

⁴⁷ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 80.

⁴⁸ George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 154.

⁴⁹ Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 80.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 81

similarly. Fortunately, the other part, or “phase in the complex articulation of selfhood” is the ability to respond to the attitudes of others, and therefore the ability to reflect on one’s self. “The self is not merely the individual and social attitudes of others in some [internalized] organized form. This is only [according to Mead] the “me.” “The ‘I’ is the response of the organism to the attitudes of others.”⁵¹ Mead’s conception of self is not only social, but is also relational. As Heather Keith explains:

In his concept of the self, Mead accounts for the development of individuals within a social setting that includes both interaction and reflection. This begins not with an autonomous individual but with her embodiment and environment- a communicative context...⁵²

In Dewey’s *Human Nature and Conduct* he explains that common conceptions of morality in the West are innately individualistic because moral dispositions are thought of “as belonging exclusively to a self. The self is thereby isolated from natural and social surroundings.”⁵³ Morals are restricted to character, and character is separated from conduct; in Dewey’s words, “motives from actual deeds.”⁵⁴ In other words, one’s conduct is not analyzed as right or wrong, but one’s supposed “character” is, of who one is before committing any action. This sort of understanding of morality is found in Kant where one’s *a priori* dispositions determine whether one is moral or immoral, and one’s actions will naturally flow from this disposition. Mead explains these types of theories take “individuals and their individual experiencing—individual minds and selves—as logically prior to the social process in which they are involved, and explains the existence

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Heather E. Keith, “Transforming *Ren* 仁: The *De* 德 of George Herbert Mead’s Social Self,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 36, no. 1 (March 2009): 70, doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6253.2008.01505.x.

⁵³ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: The Modern Library, 1956), 18.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

of that social process in terms of them....”⁵⁵ The problem Dewey has with this, as do I, is the ignorance of context, of one’s environment and tradition. “Honesty, chastity, malice, peevishness, courage, triviality, industry, irresponsibility are not private possessions of a person. They are working adaptations of personal capacities with environing forces.”⁵⁶ These environing forces, what I call one’s context, evaluate one’s behavior, one’s conduct, and influence one to reflect upon his/her own behavior. “Some activity proceeds from a man; then it sets up reactions in the surroundings. Others approve, disapprove, protest, encourage, share and resist.”⁵⁷ “Conduct is always shared... it is not an ethical “ought” that conduct *should* be social. It *is* social, whether bad or good”.⁵⁸

What one does is a shared experience; it involves others and the environment meaning it takes place within a given context, and the environment’s response is what one has to reflect upon to self-evaluate, as well as to evaluate others. Dewey’s ideas make it easy to understand the diversity of morals and taboos around the world because he describes pragmatically how societies create their notions of morality. There are no moral absolutes, nor is one’s self determined by some higher being or universal norms, or so private one’s behavior is unaffected by the influences of one’s environment. It is the process of reflection that ultimately is of most importance, as is expressed in Dewey’s writings, and especially Meads. But the mirror one uses has an effect on the reflection, which is why I will argue below the Confucian concept of *ren* is the most powerful and clear mirror for self-evaluating while retaining careful attention to others.

⁵⁵ Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 223.

⁵⁶ Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 19.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

III. Ancient Chinese Model of Relational Selfhood

Confucianism, Daoism, and Relational Self-Understanding

1. Relational Personhood

It may seem odd to leap from nineteenth-twentieth century American pragmatists to the discussion of a 5th century BCE Chinese figure, Confucius, but there is a sort of natural transition from the one to the other.⁵⁹ The connection is related to Dewey's and Mead's conception of the social self. Derivable from the early Confucian text, the *Analects*, is a concept of the self Hall and Ames, as well as other contemporary scholars, refer to as the relational self; a theory of selfhood that is understood and constituted through one's roles and relationships. What connects the ideas of the social self and the relational self together is both shy away from, and argue against, the individualistic self. Both argue for the importance and necessity of social factors in the construction of the self since self-understanding would be impossible without those factors. Without others and one's relationships with them, the notion and understanding of one's self would not be possible. In Confucianism, however, the focus is on forming and maintaining proper roles and relationships with others. The introducing of Confucianism into this project is not in order to strengthen my arguments against American Individualism by showing comparable ideas from a completely different time and place, but because Confucianism, as well as other Eastern traditions, have something valuable and unique to say. The pragmatist social self is not a complete model of relational personhood, therefore, lacks the necessary elements to fully reject individualism. The Confucian model of selfhood

⁵⁹ See Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, and Steve Odin, *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism*, as examples of this connection.

offers those elements needed to strengthen my hybrid conception of relational selfhood. The Confucian understanding of the self shares a similar foundation to the ideas and vocabulary derived from Dewey and Mead, but offers even more useful teachings to re-think and re-shape one's understandings of one's self and others.⁶⁰

The rudimentary definition of a relational self understanding is that one's self, one's understanding of their being something or some person in this world, is constituted by one's roles and relationships with others. Taking myself as a simple example, the way I understand my "self" is through the acknowledgment that I am a son, brother, friend to so and so, a student, partner, young-adult, U.S citizen, and so on. Through these combined relationships, many of which have necessary roles if I am to commit to and practice the relationship properly, I am able to conceive of myself as a holistic self. If it were possible to have no roles and relationships, like in Locke's state of nature, I could still differentiate myself physically from other things, but I would not be able to differentiate myself as a unique person because roles and relationships are a necessary part of one's self conception. Through individualistic self conceptions, however, one may believe one can conceive of their self without others. This is the individualistic belief I am arguing against through the Confucian conception of relational personhood and the pragmatist social self.

Context is the key word for understanding the Confucian relational model of self, and for understanding the overall project of this thesis. Connected with context is experience. To evaluate human behavior, as Dewey and Mead did, the focus of study

⁶⁰ The arguments I present are based on specific interpretations and translations of Chinese texts without my own translation, so here Gadamerian hermeneutics applies heavily. To avoid harm to the texts, I mostly rely on secondary texts and commentaries about the original sources but these secondary sources themselves are debated amongst scholars.

must be on actual experience and the context of such experience. Beginning from a theory of persons as determined one way or another, influences, if not determines, how individuals will behave instead of allowing for the possibility that persons think and behave based on the context of their environment here and now.⁶¹ The Confucian relational model of self is specifically concerned with context as it is from within the context of one's roles and relationships with others in the family and community that one understands one's self.

2. Confucianism

Roger Ames claims: "There is no discrete, essential, innate, and reduplicated "nature" independent of a person's context; there are only unique yet analogically similar persons constituted by their always specific roles and relationships."⁶² Hall and Ames in an earlier work state: "In the Confucian model where the self is contextual, it is a shared consciousness of one's roles and relationships."⁶³ These two quotations present context as an important concept for understanding the Confucian relational self model. Attention to context is why Hall and Ames, particularly Ames, have been fond of using a "field/focus" terminology to explain the Confucian model of self. They claim their focus/field model "must be understood in terms of the general vision of *ars contextualis*. It is the "art of contextualization" that is most characteristic of Chinese intellectual

⁶¹ Many individualistic theories of selfhood start with assumptions about how people are determined to behave, think, and so forth although this contradicts the foundation of individualism, that individuals determine "who they are" and how they behave, not determined by others. This is evidence in itself how flawed the belief in individualism is since many individualistic theories of self do make claims about "human nature" yet still argue individuals are in full control of their selves. I argue one cannot free one's self from the influence of others, and that one's very relationality determines one to be dependent upon and co-created in a context with others.

⁶² Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, 73.

⁶³ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 26.

endeavors.”⁶⁴ Without going to deep into an already complex model, what Hall and Ames mean is:

The variety of specific contexts defined by particular family relations or socio-political orders constitutes the “fields” focused by individuals who are in turn shaped by the field of influences they focus. *Ars contextualis*, as a practical endeavor, names that peculiar art of contextualization which allows focal individuals to seek out the viable contexts which they help to constitute and which in turn will partially constitute them.⁶⁵

While the field/focus model brings attention to the importance of context for Confucius, Ames offers a more pragmatic way to understand the relationality of persons that is less philosophically complex, making it more clear. Ames says, “It is only by knowing how persons function in the dynamic patterns of the many roles and relationships with others that we really come to know them.”⁶⁶ An individual may believe she knows her true self, but it is through her behavior in particular contexts that others come to know her. Reflecting back on what Mead says, it is the social “me” that one reflects upon to form an “I”. A theory of selfhood that is “irreducibly social certainly precludes autonomous individuality...” in the first place, but “...it does not rule out the notion of uniqueness expressed in terms of my roles and my relationships.”⁶⁷

It is important to note the foundation for the Confucian relational self model is found in the Ancient Chinese cosmological view that everything in the universe is in a constant state of change. Persons, or selves, are part of this ever changing universe, but what specifically changes one’s self is not just one’s inner thoughts, but other people.

⁶⁴ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Anticipating China* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 273.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 273-274.

⁶⁶ Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2011), 76.

⁶⁷ Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, 25.

“One’s ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ selves are inseparable” Hall and Ames argue.⁶⁸ “Here, one is self-conscious, not in the sense of being able to isolate and objectify one’s essential self, but in the sense of being aware of oneself as an locus of observation by others.”⁶⁹ Related to the above reference to Mead, the “locus of self-consciousness is not the ‘I’ detached from the ‘me’, but in the consciousness of the ‘me’.”⁷⁰ In other words, one’s self changes because of others, through one’s roles and relationships with them. And “in the absence of such robust relations, one is quite literally a “nobody”.”⁷¹ This is an important aspect of the Confucian model of relational self understanding and teachings.

One may be aware of the influences of others on one’s self throughout one’s life, yet still feel the need to differentiate oneself in a forceful way to hold onto the belief one is a unique individual who only needs one’s own beliefs and thoughts to know who one is. This is why it is valuable that David Wong discusses “context-specific” traits in order to refute the individualist’s inclination to self-centered beliefs. Wong says it is “an intriguing possibility” that “at least many of our constituting traits involve dispositions that are triggered by specific persons in specific social contexts.”⁷² I think it is not just a possibility but a truth. Ironically, one knows when to adjust oneself to the context of one’s situation whether it be altering language usage depending on whom one is speaking to (friend or family), or changing one’s attire based on whether at school, home, or work. In some ways these changes are trivial, based on believed expectations or concerns of consequences, but how one talks, dresses, and overall behaves are real and important

⁶⁸ Ibid., 26

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, 74.

⁷² David B. Wong, “Relational and Autonomous Selves,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 31, no. 4 (December 2004): 422, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6253.2004.00163.x.

changes in the individual. As Wong explains, “I am not warm and generous *simpliciter* but warm and generous to certain people, and other ways to other people. If warmth and generosity are part of who I am, then so are the people to whom I am warm and generous. Who I am partly depends on the situation I am in and on the company I am keeping.”⁷³ The implication of this view about context specific traits is if traits “that are relatively invariant across context are much less important for explaining behavior than we thought, then we are much less the authors of our actions than we thought. We are at least much less the *sole* authors of our actions.”⁷⁴

Above I have presented basic views from David Hall, Roger Ames, and David Wong that offer an alternative viewpoint of the self to the individualistic conceptions in America and elsewhere. Wong points to an important problem, however, that the “social conception of the person and the developmental sense in which we are relational by nature are notable and significant features of the Confucian conception of personhood, but they do not provide the sense in which we are *constituted* by our relationships.”⁷⁵ Overcoming this problem requires further exposition through the analysis of some central Confucian vocabulary otherwise, the relational model of personhood is left in a weakened, half-explained state, and too vulnerable to objections certain to be made by believers and proponents of American Individualism. David Wong argues if one considers the “context dependence of traits as possessed by most people...” then it is not too difficult to say most people “are constituted by their relationships to others.”⁷⁶ While I agree, much more needs to be said to strengthen this claim because context specific

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 423.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 425.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

traits may be argued to be simply influences one one's self from others, not actually what constitutes one's self.

Proving constitution is important as it is what proves the relational model of personhood so powerful in challenging American individualism. What gives the Confucian model of selfhood its power is the fact it “allows us to place agents squarely within the world of natural laws and the multifarious ways they are demonstrably affected by others and by other features of the environment.”⁷⁷ Again, attention to context is what makes the Confucian model of selfhood easy to grasp on a shallow, yet important level, but there is much more about it that is quite complex.

The point being made in this preface to the following section is the Confucian model of personhood is grounded in terminology average citizens can understand and appreciate with some study and reflection, and the message it speaks is pragmatic in its ability to challenge social issues. The Confucian model found in the *Analects* holds the self is co-authored with others, and everything in one's environment and one's unique context are used to make sense of who one is. The basic presentation of this Confucian ideal alone offers a positive, communicative emphasis that brings to attention community and acknowledgment of the interdependence of individuals.

3. The *Analects of Confucius*

The *Analects (Lunyu)* is a collection of sayings and passages attributed to Confucius (*Kongzi* or Master Kong). The text came into existence over a period of 200-300 years, and was written by Confucius's students, and the many students of theirs afterwards. The *Analects* is only one major text in the Confucian tradition, but in many ways is the most important for not only does it have some of the earliest writings

⁷⁷ Ibid., 426.

attributed to Confucius, but the ideas within are extremely valuable, and have been influential to millions of people over the past few thousand years, and continue to be.

The discussion of the Confucian notion of the self best begins by looking at passage 6.30 from the *Analects*. In 6.30 Confucius, in reply to his good student Zigong's question regarding *ren* (authoritative conduct), says: "Authoritative persons establish others in seeking to establish themselves and promote others in seeking to get there themselves. Correlating one's conduct with those near at hand can be said to be the method of becoming an authoritative person."⁷⁸ Confucius here explains the interrelatedness and interdependence of persons and their conduct, defines ultimately how to be *ren*, and explains what a *ren* person does. By "correlating one's conduct with those near at hand", one is following the accepted *li* (social rites/rituals), and by doing so is helping oneself as much as others because of the interconnectedness of individuals (relationality). Ethically this passage is powerful for when one helps another for instance, one ultimately is also helping oneself because of the interrelatedness of individuals. One does not help others for this reason however, because it is just in the nature of our relational connectedness that one benefits by helping others whom one is in relation with. In the same manner, one may hurt oneself by hurting others. The more important ethical point to take from this is a deeper understanding that one's actions intimately affect others; a much different conception of the self from American individualism. One is not an isolated, fully separated autonomous being who is not in need of others, nor does one choose when to help or hurt someone without helping or hurting oneself. Individualistic western conceptions of the selfhood do not acknowledge these truths meaning they do not

⁷⁸ Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1998), 110.

acknowledge the interconnectedness and dependence individuals have with each other.

Analect 6.30 sufficiently contains what needs to be expressed to understand the Confucian understanding of the self, but a major problem hides this knowledge from being easily apparent. The difficulty is the dramatic difference between ancient Chinese language and English. This issue must be dealt with before full understanding of the Confucian self is possible.

4. Difficulties With Language

Ancient Chinese, as well as contemporary Chinese, are processual languages, unlike English that is a substantializing language. In English there is a tendency, or requirement, to make things “things”; there is a sort of emphasis on the “essences” of things, or of making the notion of essence a reality in the first place. Hall and Ames claim English is “basically *substantive* and *essentialistic*, whereas classical Chinese should be seen more as an eventful language.”⁷⁹ For example, from a Western perspective, a tree seen in one’s front yard is:

...clearly the same tree all year long; its *substance*-underlying reality- remains the same, despite differing appearances throughout the year. But in the world of lived experience [ancient Chinese perspective], it is not forced on us to focus on the tree’s sameness, substance, or essence. Rather can we experience the tree with flowers and buds, a tree with green leaves, then with brown leaves, and finally, a tree with no leaves at all. The tree *appears* differently, and why can’t the appearances be “real”? The tree can be perceived eventfully, relationally, with respect to the seasons, other natural phenomena, and with respect to ourselves as well: only during certain times will the tree shade us, and there are other times to rake its relentless crop of falling leaves, still another time to prune it.⁸⁰

Another aspect of the processual characteristics of classical Chinese is that, “the noun-verb distinction regularly gives way to a “gerundical” language. “It is not “What do you mean by ‘government’?” nor “What do you mean by ‘to govern’?” nor “What do you

⁷⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 21.

mean by ‘proper government’?” but “What do you mean by ‘governing properly’?”⁸¹ While “nominal expressions default to verbal expressions, ‘things’ default to events,” underscoring the primacy of process over form as a grounding presupposition in this tradition [Confucianism].⁸² To make sense of this, English uses “the” frequently to substantiate the noun alongside it, but if English followed the Chinese grammar system it would largely consist of gerunds, of “-ing” suffixes and little to no usage of “the”. By understanding Chinese is a processual language, one can attempt to make better sense of the vital Confucian vocabulary needed to understand the Philosophy.

5. Confucian Vocabulary: Ren

One of the most important Confucian terms used over one hundred times in the *Analects* (*ren* 仁), David Hall and Roger Ames translate/interpret as “authoritative conduct”, “to act authoritatively”, or most importantly as “authoritative person”. This meaning Hall and Ames attribute to *ren* is not a widely accepted translation. *Ren* is commonly translated as “benevolence”, “goodness”, and sometimes “humanity”. To give credit to Confucius’ self-denied innovation, *Ren* was not a common word in the writings prior to the writings attributed to Confucius. Throughout the *Analects* Confucius is asked to define or explain *ren* which has led scholars to believe Confucius re-invented the term for his own purposes. Through certain passages of the *Analects* the interpretation of *ren* as “authoritative person” has come about.

To make sense of *ren* it is necessary to understand other important Confucian terms as they are all inter-related in ways that help form a picture of the Confucian understanding of personhood. The importance of words like *li* over *ren* is a common

⁸¹ Ibid., Introduction, 28.

⁸² Ibid., 29.

debate in studies of Confucianism, but I follow the belief that the Confucian vocabulary must be understood as a collection in order to grasp the meaning of each word individually. *Ren* is an extremely important word, evident by the number of times it appears in the *Analects*, and also one of the most complex. Confucius complicates the matter by explaining the meaning of *ren* differently depending on who he was speaking to, explaining why interpretive creativity is required for understanding Confucian thought. The process of “defining” Confucian concepts must be committed to with a different understanding and expectation than defining English. To translate the meaning of concepts like *li*, *yi*, *ren*, and so on into English is a difficult task, and their application relies on an less complicated, though still difficult, task of figuring out an equally difficult task of how to apply them in contemporary contexts as I have sought out to do here. Ritual propriety (*li*) meant something much different in Ancient China than it means for contemporary America for example; “meaning” in the sense of different ritual practices or different contexts of the people attempting to practice those same or different rituals. Part of the project is finding how to make Confucian ideas relevant and persuasive in a totally different world like individualistic America.

In order to explain the meaning of *ren* using English terminology, it is helpful to look at what I think are two of the most important passages in the *Analects*. This task is difficult since Confucius never explicitly defined *ren*, and although he gave consistent explanations of what *ren* means to the numerous students he discussed it with, he did not always give the same explanations. Implicit in *ren* is an emphasis on the importance of others, and an analysis of a few passages from the *Analects* will not only help clarify what *ren* means, but also move the discussion onto the topic of self-understanding, which

requires attention to others, implicit in *ren*.

In *Analect* 4.15 Confucius's student, a future master after Confucius death, Zeng, and a few other students attempt to interpret Confucius's statement that "My way (*dao* 道) is bound together with one continuous strand."⁸³ Master Zeng simply replies "Indeed", showing he understands, but Confucius leaves the other students baffled. Master Zeng explains to the confused students that Confucius's "way" is "doing one's utmost (*zhong* 忠) and putting oneself in the other's place (*shu* 恕), nothing more."⁸⁴ This notion of "putting oneself in the other's place" in some respects is what *ren* entails one to do to be a person of *ren*. But to genuinely put oneself in another's place requires one to cultivate oneself in numerous and often complicated ways. Confucius clarifies this fact through his numerous discussions of *ren*. To comprehensively explain *ren* would require discussion of all of the Confucian concepts such as *zhong*, *xin*, *de*, and the various others discussed throughout the *Analects*, but in this paper I only discuss *li*, *yi*, and *xiao* as these three terms combined sufficiently explain the social aspects of *ren* most useful for addressing American individualism. These social aspects of *ren* are necessary for understanding the Confucian model of relational personhood.

Analect 6.30 is valuable for numerous reasons, but most importantly it has been used extensively by scholars to defend a theory of relational personhood present in the *Analects* as shown above. Confucius explains the interrelatedness of persons and their conduct, and defines ultimately how to be *ren* and what a *ren* person does. By "correlating one's conduct with those near at hand", one is following the accepted *li*, and by doing so is helping oneself as much as others. From a Western perspective this

⁸³ Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects of Confucius*, 92.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

passage seems to imply the self and others as related but in some sense entirely independent concepts, but through understanding *ren* it is apparent this is not the case. A person of *ren* is a person who has reached the ultimate state of humanity, meaning one is completely in tune with others around him/herself, and always does the ‘right’ or appropriate thing. Being ‘in tune’ with others means being fully aware of the situations of others whom one is in relation with and knowing how to handle those situations appropriately within the bounds of the socially accepted *li*. Since few actually reach such a state of “Consummate personhood” (a later Ames translation of *ren*), being in the state of becoming *ren* is or should be the focus of any person concerned with improving their self and the environment they live in with particular focus on other persons. The difficulty of achieving *ren* shall be discussed later in more depth as there is a controversy about whether it is in fact difficult or not because of passage 7.30.

What *ren* actually means is probably still unclear at this point, explaining why so many English translations exist; *ren* is not a straightforward or simple concept. The problem is the numerous translations, whether it be love, benevolence, humanity, and so on all are only individual parts of what *ren* means in entirety. A helpful way to sort through the multiple definitions of *ren* is to understand that a person of *ren*, who displays the behavior and characteristics of *ren*, will practice or be each and every one of the definitions given. A person of *ren* will show love, be benevolent, be humane, and so forth, just a few of the characteristics of being *ren*. This is why Confucius describes *ren* differently to his numerous students in order to emphasize the specific aspect of *ren* to them that they may be lacking in or misunderstand. A student who already knows how to love others for example may still need to learn to treat others humanely. Though these are

related, one can be loving yet be faced with situation where being humane requires more than simply love in an emotional sense. On the other hand, too much love may actually inhibit one from doing what is necessary and humane.

Overall, *ren* can only be understood by acknowledging that it is an ideal one should strive for because this striving is actually the process of “becoming” *ren*. As Confucius says in passage 7.30 of the *Analects*: “How could authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁) be at all remote? No sooner do I seek it than it has arrived.”⁸⁵ This does not mean that achieving *ren* is as simple as desiring to be so, but this quote gives evidence to the theory that *ren* is a process of “becoming”. Besides the point that Chinese is a processual language, it may be that fully achieving a state of *ren* is impossible for anyone besides a sage, therefore, *ren* by default can only be a continuous process of becoming so. Confucius states in passage 4.6 of the *Analects* that he has yet to meet a person truly fond of *ren*, and whether this is a antagonistic comment made to motivate his students or not, the point is that *ren* is only achieved by practicing *ren* behavior. Hence, one who seeks *ren* finds *ren* because practicing *ren*-like behavior is *ren*. As soon as one stops, they no longer are *ren*.

6. Etymology of Ren

To even further analyze *ren* and its importance in Confucian philosophy, it is helpful to look at the etymology of *ren* as it gives insight as to how and why Confucius used *ren* as the key concept to alter from previous definitions, and to teach to his students, whom he wished would be the ones to improve society. In Western thought typically, the self, and an individualistic concept of autonomy, were grouped together, as

⁸⁵ Ibid., 117.

they still are often today, starting in the 17th century with thinkers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. The meaning of autonomy based on its Greek origin means something like self-lawing, or self-governing. If autonomy is grouped with the meaning of self it is evident why self brings about notions of control, uniqueness, individuality, and self-interest in matters relating to one's self. Self in the western context is a loaded word that does much more than simply distinguish one person from another physically, or linguistically. In Ancient Chinese, as well as modern, “*wo*” is used in this manner, as a distinguishing tool. There was no word equivalent to the meaning of the Western concept of “self”.

The earliest composed character for *ren* discovered recently is “constructed with the graphs *shen* 身, an impregnated body, with the heartmind radical *xin* 心 beneath it.”⁸⁶ Ames continues to explain that “scholars have opined that such a graphic representation in expressing the kind of concern one would extend to a pregnant woman captures the soft, gentle, and intimate feelings—*ru* 孺—that are to be presumed as defining of the consummately human conduct we associate with the “gentrified literati learning” (*ruxue* 儒學) tradition” [the group Confucius was part of, the ruists].⁸⁷ A simple point is that this early character gives more evidence to the claims that *ren* entails an attention and care for others just as the character for *ren* (仁) used in the earliest translations of the *Analects* does. This later character is a combination of the characters for person (*ren* 人) and the number two (*er* 二).

It is no coincidence that in modern Chinese the character for *ren* (人) came to

⁸⁶ Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, 176-177.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

mean “person” because, as discussed above, personhood for Confucius implicitly included the acknowledgment and care for others that is found in his unique meaning of *ren* (仁). Through these etymological facts, the claim that *ren* can be understood as the process of becoming human, of becoming a person, is evident, and that the understanding of being a person, of having a self, requires one to acknowledge one’s connectedness to others. Like George-Herbert Mead argued, without others there can be no unique person and no self understanding.

The etymology of *ren* helps explain Confucius’s unique understanding and use of *ren*, and how *ren* holds deeper meaning about one’s understanding of their self and others. While I explained I am not concerned with making ontological claims, I believe thinking about one’s self in the manner Confucius asked his students to do so influences one to re-think one’s behavior and treatment of other people. It is easy for Americans to think of their selves as products of their family and environment, but these acknowledgments do not eliminate the individualistic way of thinking about one’s self as does thinking about *ren*. If the self is understood as autonomous and separate from others in some fundamental way, one only sees their family and environment as influences, not as actually part of what constitutes who one is, but it is not necessary to accept an ontological position regarding *ren* to acknowledge others are a substantial part of one’s self understanding. Although *ren* is an ontological position regarding the self, it need not necessarily be accepted as true or false to acknowledge the power of its message and hopefully to have influence on one’s self understanding and attitudes.

While *ren* requires attention to cultivating the self, *ren* also requires attention to others. The characteristics of *ren* are impossible to practice and meaningless without

others; it is through others that one is able to cultivate the self in the first place. To make sense of this I must now explain *li*, an inter-dependent notion with *ren* in which both only are possible and make sense with the other. An acceptable, yet lacking English definition of *ren* is humanness or humanity, but for Confucius humaneness requires more specific behavior than what is required under the Western notion of being humane. Confucius argued one must treat others in the most appropriate ways (*yi*) that follow the accepted *li* (rituals or rites) of one's family, community, and society.

7. Confucian Vocabulary: Li

The Confucian notion of *li* in some respects is less complicated than *ren*, but since it has numerous English translations as well, it is equally difficult to interpret and understand in English. *Li* is also complicated to write about in English because it can be used linguistically in unique ways based on whether used plural or singular. *Li* plural are rituals, or ritualistic behaviors, but *li* singular in the *Analects* Hall and Ames translate as “ritual propriety”. In the singular, *li* is the action itself of practicing *li* (plural) in the most appropriate way. So *li* can either refer to the actual rituals/ritualistic behavior, or to a sort of specific behavior or attitude of practicing *li* to the utmost sincerity and appropriateness. Ultimately, the meaning of *li* is understood in the context of one's own tradition. *Li* originally were rituals or ritualistic behavior that were deemed appropriate in certain contexts or situations like funerals, weddings, courtrooms, classrooms, and other environments with formalities, but the meaning of *li* “was later expanded to encompass all established ethical, social, and political norms of human behavior, including both formal rules and less serious patterns of everyday behavior.”⁸⁸ This means every

⁸⁸ Chenyang Li, “*Li* as Cultural Grammar: On the Relation between *Li* and *Ren* in Confucius’ *Analects*,” 318.

community's *li* (rituals) are different because expectations of etiquette and behavior are different. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that one will only understand *li* in the context of their own tradition, but since as all meaning takes place within the horizon of one's own tradition, the meaning of every *li* can change as individuals evaluate the *li* they are expected to follow.⁸⁹ This is why it is easier to speak of *li* in a singular tense as "ritual propriety" because only if one is acknowledging and following the accepted *li* of his or her community appropriately is that individual actually practicing *li*. Without appropriateness (*yi*), the commitment to one's community's *li* is lacking, leading to empty rule following. Confucius does not find empty rule following acceptable if one is to become a meaningful person in society. In order to establish oneself, "that is, to become a functioning and contributing member of society, a person has to learn *li*."⁹⁰ Learning *li* does not mean obeying rules simply for the sake of doing so, but because one cares to, because one agrees it is the appropriate thing to do, if one agrees the rule is appropriate to the context in the first place.

For Confucius, as well as other Chinese intellectuals, all acts in one's life, whether simple or very important are to be done "properly", meaning according to the accepted *li*. With *li*, like social norms, the individual members of a society create the rituals to be practiced, but then determine as a whole society how to actually practice them correctly such as the proper place, time, and emotion or feeling.⁹¹ Every individual has their own opinions and tradition that influences their beliefs regarding *li* and how

⁸⁹ "In a conversation, when we have discovered the other person's standpoint and horizon, his ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him; so also when someone thinks historically, he comes to understand the meaning of what has been handed down without necessarily agreeing with it or seeing himself in it." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 303.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁹¹ In *Analects* 3.4 Confucius says for example: "In observing ritual propriety, it is better to be modest than extravagant; in mourning, it is better to express real grief than to worry over formal details." Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects of Confucius*, 82-83.

they are to be practiced, but every individual must find a way to either influence others to accept their opinion about doing things, or find a way to assimilate into the society of which they become part of. This ability to influence or assimilate is important to acknowledge in order that *li* are not miss-interpreted as strict unchangeable norms, while also acknowledging that *li* are culturally formulated. These two characteristics of *li* differentiate it from the more narrow and strict understanding of Western social norms. Hall and Ames claim that a given society's sum total *li* "are a social grammar that provides each member with a defined place and status within the family, community, and polity."⁹² As noted above, by following *li* one establishes themselves as a meaningful person in society. Confucius says "correlating one's conduct with those near at hand can be said to be the method of becoming an authoritative person"⁹³; in essence this is the real importance of *li* and what makes them more than empty rules. Ritual propriety (*li*) is about more than being moral, or being ethical in order to be a good person for whatever reasons; *li* is about fostering and cultivating positive and meaningful relationships between oneself and others.

Through the explanation of *li* above, it is evident that *li* defined by English terms like ritual, customs, etiquette, propriety, morals, rules of proper behavior, and worship are all present at the same time in the Confucian notion of *li*. *Li* can be compared to social norms, but *li* requires more effort from the individual in order to practice them with propriety. Social norms in the western context are often spoken of with a derogatory tone and are often the focus of rebellion by youth. Norms bring about concerns over rigidity, control, conservatism, and lack of creative freedom. What is missing from social norms

⁹² Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 51. Chenyang Li takes the metaphor of "social grammar" further and uses it as a helpful tool for understanding *li*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 110. *Analects* 6.30.

but present in the notion of *li*, is the acknowledgment of one's influence on *li* and the creative transformation of *li* from one generation to the next. It is true that to practice ritual propriety during one's childhood, one must to some extent be conservative in following the *li* of one's elders, but upon becoming an adult or a meaningful member of society the *Analects* suggests *li* are quite malleable. As Chenyang Li explains, just as the rules of grammar can change, *li* can change as well, and evidence shows Confucius was not against change.⁹⁴ In passage 9.3 of the *Analects* Confucius acknowledged that in the observance of ritual propriety a silk cap was the new accepted practice when once it was hemp, but Confucius still considered the use of hemp as observing the proper *li*. But since he believed the use of silk as a "matter of frugality" he chose to accept that new practice.

In the same passage, however, Confucius also notes an instance of his conservatism towards tradition. Analect 9.3 continues with Confucius statement: "A subject kowtowing on entering the hall is prescribed in the observance of ritual propriety (*li*). Nowadays that one kowtows only after ascending the hall is a matter of hubris. Although it goes contrary to accepted practice, I still kowtow on entering the hall."⁹⁵ This latter half of 9.3 gives evidence to my point above that *li* and social norms are not at all the same. Confucius acknowledges the "accepted practice", the social norm, yet he distinguishes this from what he considers the proper practice of *li*. This helps explain another important point that *li* may be practiced conservatively and strictly based on tradition, but it is possible to transform *li* in new meaningful ways when it is proper to do so. Hall and Ames agree in saying *li* are "life forms transmitted from generation to

⁹⁴ While the analogy of *li* and grammar explains adequately Confucius' generally conservative attitude toward *li*, it also explains why he was not an absolutist on rules of *li*. Although in a society the rules of *li* largely remain constant, they can change, and Confucius was in principle not opposed to change.

⁹⁵ Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 126.

generation as repositories of meaning, enabling the youth to appropriate persisting values and to make them appropriate to their own situations.”⁹⁶ *Li* are not rules designed and created to simply produce order as laws are meant to do. *Li* exist and function in ways laws do not; *li* allow people to still retain control of their own lives while trying to better themselves, others, and the society in which they mingle. Laws, at least the way they function now, limit person’s control of their lives in order to reduce the general populations control over anything. *Li* and laws may share the same aim of reducing societal chaos, but the Confucian notion of *li*, and the practice of observing *li* as social rituals, allows for the creativity and ability to adapt that is required for self-cultivation, building of communities, and overall social harmony.

Since *li* enables the possibility for self-cultivation, it should be clear how *li* is connected to *ren*. Without the notion of *li*, *ren* would be an impossible ideal to reach because *ren* requires the acknowledgment of tradition, proper behavior, care of others, care for cultivating one’s self, and all of what is entailed in observing ritual propriety (*li*). The next concept necessary for understanding the Confucian conception of self, is *yi* (appropriateness). Already the words proper and appropriateness have appeared a few times in the discussion above of *li* and *ren*. Both of which are connected to the meaning of *yi*. Without the notion of *yi*, *li* would not fully make sense, and without *li*, the ideal of *ren* would be impossible to reach.

8. Confucian Vocabulary: Yi

Throughout my analysis of *ren* and *li* I have frequently referred to the Confucian concept of *yi* translated simply as appropriateness. This usage is vague only if one searches for a deeper meaning for *yi* than appropriateness. *Yi* is best translated as

⁹⁶ Ibid., 51.

appropriateness because it best summarizes the role *yi* plays in the *Analects*, though the term has been translated and taken in many directions. I wish to keep the usage of *yi* and its meaning simple because what *yi* does in some regards is simple, it moderates *li*. It may be questioned how *li* as social rites or rituals can be moderated when they are agreed upon by a group of people in a community or society, but as discussed above, *li* are not to be taken as strict inflexible rules with the expectation that all persons follow them dogmatically. This is why *li* is best translated in its singular form as “ritual propriety” because *li* must be followed properly if the rites or rituals in question are to be in fact *li*, not just empty rituals. *Li* as ritual propriety represents the inseparable relationship between *li* and *yi* clearly; *yi* translated as appropriateness is the moderator of *li* (rituals) making sense of *li* singular, translated as ritual propriety when combined with *yi*.

Some difficulties facing this understanding of the relationship between *yi* and *li* is who or what determines the appropriateness of a specific ritual (*li*) under what circumstances, and who or what determines the appropriate way of actually practicing a ritual. This dilemma is brought about through differing translations and interpretations of the *Analects*, and is the primary reason for most of the issues in attempting to understand Confucian vocabulary. Jinyuan Yu explains that in interpreting *yi* some scholars understand *yi* as an attribute of an action, as a moral standard which he labels the “outer appropriateness” aspect of *yi*. The alternative view held by scholars, the “inner appropriateness” aspect of *yi*, claims that *yi* is an attribute of an agent, or an intellectual faculty. The concern with the outer aspect interpretation is it brings with it the baggage of a Western conception of morality where there is some strict yet universal morality in the universe that declares some actions wrong and others right. The beauty of Confucianism

is Western morality is avoided through the “inner appropriateness” of *yi*, which is an “agent’s intellectual capacity for judging and choosing, and is the ability to adopt social rites [*li*] to one’s life situations.”⁹⁷

The “inner appropriateness” aspect of *yi* has its own concerns however. It seems “inner appropriateness” is an ability where claiming something right or wrong will be based purely on one’s own opinions excluding attention to others. This is why Jiyuan Yu argues that both the outer and inner appropriateness aspects of *yi* are actually “...related and indeed inseparable. It is precisely because the agent has an intellectual quality of appropriateness [inner aspect] that he or she is able to reach what is appropriate in action [outer aspect].”⁹⁸

Both inner and outer aspects combined form a unified notion of *yi* whose primary ability is to moderate *li*. It must be remembered first that *li* as rites or rituals are not rigid social norms that must be obeyed for the sake of law or some other determining force separate from the people. *Li* may become, through the influence of society, rigid and expected to be dogmatically obeyed. But to practice *li* with propriety is to practice them with appropriateness (*yi*), so the rigidity and dogmatism can be avoided. Confucius says “exemplary persons (*Junzi*) in making their way in the world are neither bent on nor against anything; rather they go with what is appropriate (*yi*).”⁹⁹ Jiyuan Yu claims “when discrepancy between what is appropriate and what is ritual occurs, the appropriate comes before the ritual.”¹⁰⁰ With these claims in mind, the roles the aspects of *yi* play in moderating *li* can now be made more clear.

⁹⁷ Jiyuan Yu, “*Yi*: Practical Wisdom in Confucius’s *Analects*,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33, no. 3 (September 2006) 336.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 337.

⁹⁹ *Analects* 4.10: Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 91.

¹⁰⁰ Jiyuan Yu, “*Yi*: Practical Wisdom in Confucius’s *Analects*,” 338.

Outer appropriateness is important because while a person “generally follows social rites [*li*]...” there are occasions “...on which the rites do not specify what is right to do, or a ritual action is not the appropriate action.”¹⁰¹ The outer aspect of *yi* sets a standard by which persons can evaluate a rite or ritual based on how it works in a given situation irrelevant of one’s intellectual or personal beliefs. The standard is not set by abstract ideas like those found in Western conceptions of morality such as Utilitarianism, Kantian Deontology, or Christian morality, but by people as a group. The inner quality of *yi* has a similar function to the outer aspect in that it is the “intellectual quality to determine whether social rites can be departed from and what is appropriate to do under a given circumstance.”¹⁰² The difference is that with the inner aspect of *yi* one determines appropriateness based on one’s own intellect, while the outer aspect determines appropriateness through group participation. Together both aspects work effectively to harmoniously moderate *li*; with both at work, *yi* is the intrinsic aspect of *li* that enables and explains why it is best to translate *li* singularly as “ritual propriety”. *Yi*, understood with both outer and inner senses of appropriateness, moderates social rites/rituals, and by doing so they become *li*. And as explained in the section on *li*, the reason for translating *li* singularly as ritual propriety is because rites/rituals practiced without propriety, without the appropriateness of *yi*, are not in fact *li*. Before Confucius time *li* may have been the word used to describe certain rites and rituals, but Confucius limited the concept of *li* to refer only to the appropriate rites and rituals and the practice of.

It is reasonable to think of the outer appropriateness of *yi* as the objective aspect; objective referring to the analysis of others to determine the appropriateness of a specific

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 338.

¹⁰² Ibid.

rite or ritual. This part of *yi* fits in nicely in the Confucian picture alongside *ren* with its focus on others. A person of *ren* is concerned with the thoughts and concerns of others so of what he or she deem appropriate or not in society is a primary concern. The inner aspect of *yi*, which is not unreasonable to think of as the subjective aspect, presents a concern however over the intellectual ability all have to determine appropriateness of a rite or ritual. A potential objection is this intellectual ability to judge appropriateness is based on biases in the form of emotions and opinions, and these biases will conflict with others resulting in an unbalanced society where determining *li* is impossible. This concern is found twice in the *Analects*.

First in 2.4, Confucius is concerned with not “overstepping the line” while still following his heart’s desire. Overstepping would be allowing one’s own opinions or emotions to forcibly override or ignore socially agreed upon rites and rituals without sufficient justification such as inconvenience or personal benefit. The second passage is 19.11 where Confucius’s student Zixia says: “In matters which demand surpassing excellence (*de* 德), one never oversteps the mark; in minor affairs one has some latitude.”¹⁰³

To avoid one’s inner ability to determine appropriateness from “overstepping the line” one must remember one’s person, ones personality and mental abilities, are conditioned by one’s tradition and the people in one’s life. In Confucian thought there is nothing like Western notions of autonomy where it is believed one’s mental abilities and opinions are not influenced by others. Confucianism argues: When one attempts to determine what is an appropriate, all of the influences of others are present in these

¹⁰³ Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 220.

decisions. This is why *li* are appropriate social rituals, not empty rules, for they are determined socially to be one way or another. If one questions the appropriateness of a ritual, one does so with the conditioning of their interaction with others their entire life behind it.

“To be a virtuous person, one must internalize traditional values, and this process involved intellectual reflection later than a matter of blind observance. However, when the inner appropriateness determines whether the rites are applicable or need to be adjusted, its aim is to make the rites more appropriate, rather than abandoning the fundamental efficacy of social rites.”¹⁰⁴ Individuals cannot “be completely free of the constraints of a tradition in their quest for self-actualization.”¹⁰⁵ This is why *yi*, understood together with *li*, helps to explain the Confucian notion of self or personhood. The role of others on one’s self understanding cannot be over-emphasized for it is, according to Confucianism, the determining factor of how one understands who one is, and how to behave.

9. The Hermit

In order to explain the concept of relational personhood even better it is helpful to look at the common figure in both Confucian and Daoist traditions of the hermit, or one who chooses to live outside the boundaries of society. From a western perspective, and possibly a Daoist one that I will discuss later in this paper, the hermit is completely self-reliant, self-sustaining, and without needs of others both physically and socially. It may be argued, during the hermit’s life away from all others, he or she is no longer influenced by any other person. The relational self model proves this is not true. The first reason it is

¹⁰⁴Jiyuan Yu, “*Yi*: Practical Wisdom in Confucius’s *Analects*,” 340.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

not true the hermit is free from all influence is because the person the hermit is today was influenced and co-created alongside others, maybe only family. The way the hermit thinks of his or her self as a person, his/her self-understanding and conception, cannot be free from the influences of his/her past roles and relationships. The hermit may change now that he/she is free from those influences, but the way the hermit responds to this new life, the way the hermit adapts to the environment is going to rely on how he/she lived previously. Individuals are not born alone, as a hermit later chooses to live, "...we are born helpless and ready for nurture. Whatever we become, we become through the help and hindrance of others."¹⁰⁶ This is what David Wong labels the "developmental sense of relationally".

A second important acknowledgment realized by studying the hermit is the fact one is born with the need of others for survival, and these others will influence one's self conception. One may object the hermit, since he/she lives alone, is not relationally connected to others, not even to the people who raised him/her to an age where he/she can be self-sufficient. This objection is false because, in the case of the hermit, separation itself is his/her relation to others; separation is still a relation to other people that will continue to have an effect on the hermit's life and conception of self as well as on the persons who knew him/her. David Wong labels this the "constitutive sense" of relationality. The developmental sense is how the hermit developed his/her traits that determine how he/she responds to life events, even in isolation; the constitutive sense is how the hermit is constituted by the relationships themselves. This is why living separated from others is still a relationship that constitutes who the hermit is, of how the hermit understands his/her self.

¹⁰⁶ Wong, "Relational Selves," 421.

The developmental and constitutive senses of relationality combined are the model of relational personhood Hall and Ames, David Wong, Henry Rosemont Jr., Tu Weiming, and others defend, all with their own differences, but the basic model is the same. The real power of this model of selfhood is that the dualism of individual and society does not exist. It is replaced by the understanding that the interconnectedness of persons with each other means there is not only a necessary dependence, but the individual and society cannot exist without being fundamentally intertwined. The hermit displays this best because, although the hermit is self-sufficient physically and possibly emotionally, even in isolation he/she still reflects upon his/herself based on previous relationships, and the society he/she lived in is still effected by the lack of his/her presence.

The model of relational selfhood above is not unlike what is found in the writings of Dewey and Mead, but Confucianism offer a unique philosophy, not present in Dewey and Mead, explaining how to achieve harmony in relationships. Again the hermit makes the relationality of persons very clear. Even if it were argued once one lives in isolation one is no longer is influenced or constituted by others (not true), it is still true from the moment one leaves for solitude one effects the people one had relations with.¹⁰⁷ Any roles one has as brother, sister, friend, teacher, student, etc, would be altered, not eliminated, and the persons involved in these roles would be effected. Confucianism influences one to think about the consequences not only of one's own actions, but of who one is and the consequences of that. The Confucian concepts presented above aid one in

¹⁰⁷ The hermit began his/her life vulnerable in need of others care as a baby and child, may be able to survive alone provided he/her is physically able, but will eventually become old, feeble, therefore once again vulnerable and in the need of others or he/she will die. Psychologically and socially the hermit and the others in his/her life will always be mutually connected and influential on one another however.

figuring out how to handle one's self and treatment of others. *Ren* for example in a fundamental way is a representation of the Confucian relational model of self. *Ren* focuses on the interconnectedness of our selves, emphasizes loving and caring for others in order to develop positive meaningful relationships, and ties together *li* and *yi* with *ren* as a model for how one can live ethically.

The Confucian relational model of selfhood presents “selves who are not human apart from social relations, who become selves in relationship to others, and who should strive for a kind of autonomy that does not separate them from others but makes them worthy of other's trust.”¹⁰⁸ The difficulty of this sort of autonomy is how does one begin the process of learning how to balance one's own desires or wants with others when everyone is so different that conflict is inevitable? In my discussion of *li* and *yi* the solution becomes semi-apparent, but following social rites appropriately while also working with others to change them does not completely avoid major disputes. For this reason, Confucius believed family, and familial piety (*xiao* 孝) was of most importance. For Confucius, how one treats their family is the model one should follow to treat others in society after. If everyone did this, full social harmony would be possible.

10. Confucian Vocabulary: Xiao

Family, Ames argues, is the “governing metaphor” in Confucian thought partly because it receives primary attention in the *Analects* as well as other Confucian texts as family does in Chinese culture in general, but mostly because of the importance of its role in people's lives. “The family metaphor pervades this text [The *Analects*], encouraged by the intuition that this is the institution in which the members give themselves most fully

¹⁰⁸ Wong “Relational and Autonomous Selves,” 427.

and unreservedly to the group nexus, in interactions that are governed by the customs (*li*) appropriate (*yi*) to the occasion.”¹⁰⁹ Family is a metaphor for the process of becoming *ren*, and a metaphor for the sort of treatment one ought to give to others. In other words, we learn to follow *li* and behave in ways based on the way we ought to treat our family members. Ames explains that family bonds “properly observed are the point of departure for understanding that we each have moral responsibility for an expanding web of relations that reach far beyond our own localized selves.”¹¹⁰

From reflecting on one’s familial interactions, and through the acknowledgment of dependency at infancy through early childhood, one learns that human experience is “inescapably interdependent”. Acknowledging dependency is not enough to eliminate individualism on its own however, though it helps start the process. Since an individual is relationally constituted, one’s individualistic behaviors and patterns of action and one’s individualistic attitudes are products of one’s roles and relationships. I referred to this problem as a vicious cycle where one learns individualism by living amongst it and this perpetuates individualistic attitudes and behavior. How family members relate and interact then must be more empathetic and caring for one another if their individualistic tendencies are to be eliminated. This is what is required of all people in society if individualism is to be eliminated from it too.

The interactions one has with their family, if functional, typically are more respectful and effective in reaching solutions to problems through positive communication. From these “familial patterns of effective communication” Ames claims “thriving family-based community” is derived. Even non-family based communities

¹⁰⁹ Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 57.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

benefit from what one learns through their experiences with their family because ones familial roles provide a strategy for “getting the most out of relations...” and thus are an “inspiration for order more broadly construed-social, political, and cosmic order.”¹¹¹ In other words, how one understands their position, the roles they have in their family, consequently determines how one treats their family members; one who believes their self respected and liked by their family treats their family members the same while one who feels disrespected will often treat their family poorly. Provided one treats their family well, this is how one should try to treat others in society. One’s behavior and treatment of others can be traced back to the roles one lives within their familial sphere.

For Confucius, an exemplary person practices *xiao*, translated by Hall and Ames as “filial piety” and Ames later as “family reverence”. *Xiao* was one of the most important concepts for Confucius because he believed it is from “appropriate family feelings” that the “ground from which our pathways through life emerge”, as discussed above.¹¹² But what makes *xiao* unique and different from western attitudes about family is that *xiao* takes the focus away from what family does to support oneself, the primary concern of most individuals in the west, and refocuses on how one can support one’s family. This is most explicitly shown in the old Chinese character for *xiao* that is constituted by the graph for elders (*lao* 老) and the graph for son, daughter, child (*zi* 子).¹¹³ The earliest form of the character for elders (*lao* 老) depicts an old person being supported by a walking stick. What is fascinating is the oldest form of the character for *xiao* is the same character for elder person, but the image of a youth has taken place of

¹¹¹ Ibid., 98.

¹¹² Ibid., 183.

¹¹³ Ibid.

the walking stick in order to support the elder.

While the implications for what it means to actually practice filial piety, or having reverence for one's family are debated in discussions about hierarchy, patriarchy, strict obedience, and so forth in the *Analects*, the real importance of *xiao*, to be supportive of one's family, is shown in the ancient character for *xiao*. The *Analects* teaches methods of how to support one's family appropriately, but the notion of appropriateness is where current debates spark from. I think what is most important for a contemporary western audience steeped in individualism is to simply think of the family as the root for how to treat others and as the root for being a good person. As Confucius says in *Analect 1.2*; "As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of authoritative conduct (ren)." ¹¹⁴

The problem in contemporary America is there is no longer a widespread cultural tradition surrounding appropriate familial bonds to look to for guidance. ¹¹⁵ *Xiao* is not so easily found in American families, therefore totally unexpected to be found in relationship outside the family. This is why it is not especially useful to analyze the familial model Confucius believed most appropriate because it is simply an unrealistic model to attempt to shape American families and societies around. What are useful for the American context are two traits of *xiao*, respect and support. The two major conflicting familial relationships in America are children not having respect for their parents, even at old age, and parents not having respect for their children, especially at young ages. Without respect, there is no care, and without care there is little to no support.

¹¹⁴ Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 71.

¹¹⁵ There may still be the presence of something like "Christian family values", but the actual attention and application of these seems to be fading from practice or changing dramatically, or has been since the 1950s. See Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society*, for an interesting analysis of such cultural changes in America.

This is why too many children during important years of development are neglected and often in very harmful ways, and why many elderly parents end up in nursery homes. Children and elder parents are seen as a burden whether because of finances, time, or both.

In a common family, if *xiao* is present amongst the members, then respect and care will lead to support of one another.¹¹⁶ The difficulty for families is the concept of *xiao* presented to a family may not result in its acknowledgment and practice. *Xiao* must be cultivated in each individual member, and each member must have the desire to improve their self in order to reach familial harmony. What hinders this cultivation often is a general dislike of each of the members of the family that treat the others poorly; an issue quite common in the American family and one that understandably prevents respect and care for each other. The solution for a lack of *xiao* in American families is to realize one's family does not need to be blood related; the family can be a group of friends, or a friend's family. In Confucius's time *xiao* was learned and cultivated within the family then extended outward. In contemporary America, one's family may consist of members outside biological bonds, and from this one can use it as a model for how to treat others. Take everything that is said about family and *xiao* in the *Analects* but apply it to one's family that is not blood related such as classmates and co-workers, and the same consequences will result.

To summarize the Confucian teachings, self-cultivation begins through familial relationships as is learning the interdependency of people. Through familial relations, one is able to develop the proper mentality, attitude, and conduct through *xiao* that is then

¹¹⁶ In her book *Learning from Chinese Philosophies* Karyn Lai points out *Analects* 2.7 and 2.8 show that “*Xiao* must be accompanied by respect (*jing*)...” (pg 25). Though she is primarily concerned with the relationship between parent and child, I believe her claims regarding *xiao* can apply to all relations.

applied to others in one's community and social interactions in general. Also through proper behavior and familial reverence (*xiao*) one develops a disposition to understand *li*, *yi*, and *ren* and how they apply to one's self-cultivation and others. "*Xiao* is fundamental in Confucian philosophy because it is the basis from which all other virtues arise."¹¹⁷ This disposition is shown in passage 2.5 of the *Analects* when Fan Chi asks Confucius about *xiao*. Confucius's first two replies were simply "do not act contrary". When Fan Chi pushed for more explanation, Confucius replied; "While they [parents, but can be applied to all family members] are living, serve them according to the observations of ritual propriety (*li*); when they are dead, bury them and sacrifice to them according to the observation of ritual propriety."¹¹⁸ Karyn Lai does a great job presenting and working through some major objections facing *xiao* that I have chosen to avoid discussing in order to present an understanding of *xiao* that can best benefit individualistic societies.¹¹⁹

11. Daoism

What I cannot avoid is an objection both present during the time Confucius's teachings were being spread, and present in contemporary scholarship. The objection, derived from Daoist thought, claims the self or concept of personhood derived from Confucius's teachings is too determined; too restricted by one's upbringing and social situation that then limits an individual's ability to be unique, creative, and in some sense "free". In the Daoist classic the *Zhuangzi* this objection can be clearly derived if not

¹¹⁷ Karyn Lai, *Learning from Chinese Philosophies: Ethics of Interdependent and Contextualised Self* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 26.

¹¹⁸ Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 77.

¹¹⁹ For example, Lai states: "An important question that arises from this debate concerns how *xiao* might appropriately be extended to apply in relationships outside the family. In other words, what is instilled in or cultivated by individuals in their training within the family context that equips them for interaction with others in the larger social environment? Is it a set of norms or values, skills, an approach, or an attitudinal perspective?" Lai, *Learning from Chinese Philosophies*, 28.

found directly through Zhuangzi himself.¹²⁰ This is a major concern because I do not want the model of selfhood I defend to be interpreted as such. I think the objection is best explained and dealt with by looking at some basic Daoist ideas.

The Chinese word *dao* (道), present in both Daoism and Confucianism, is an extremely important concept central to both philosophies as well as other Chinese schools of thought. *Dao* is difficult to define broadly because it contains many different meanings and often contextually derived ones. The word *dao* appears around eighty times in the *Analects* but, like *ren*, there is no clear consensus of how the word is used and what it denotes. Ames explains that at its most fundamental level, *dao* seems to denote the active project of “road building,” and by extension, “to connote a road that has been made, and hence can be traveled.”¹²¹ These metaphors are why *dao* is “often nominalized” in translation as “the way”.¹²² It is not just a path to follow however, but a path one creates and makes one’s own. This is a complex explanation, but by looking at *dao* in both Confucian and Zhuangzian perspectives the meaning will become more clear.

Ames explains that for Confucius *dao* “is primarily *rendao* 人道, that is, ‘a way of becoming consummately and authoritatively human’.”¹²³ In Analect 15.29 Confucius says: “It is the person who is able to broaden the way, not the way that broadens the person.” A basic interpretation of this passage is the way (*dao*) is not some pre-determined destiny one is forced to go along with, but one’s way is an active process where one goes along with some things, but also changes things in their own unique ways.

¹²⁰ Zhuangzi italicized refers to the collection of works attributed to the only possibly existing figure Zhuangzi. Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi) most likely existed, but it is unlikely he authored the text and inner chapters alone.

¹²¹ Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 45.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 46.

One is unable to change everything that happens in their life, but one plays an effective role in changing what they deem necessary to do or attempt to change. Taking *ren* as example, one will not be *ren*, or be practicing *ren*, by obediently following all socially determined *li*; one must also alter and adjust to the *li* as they see appropriate (*yi*).

The meaning of *dao* is equally complex in the daoist tradition as is present in how the word is used in the two most famous daoist classics, the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. With the basic notion of *dao* as a path of life one follows while simultaneously shaping in mind, it is easy to see where Confucius and Zhuangzi differ on their interpretation of *dao*. Confucius is concerned with actively being involved in the direction and shaping of one's *dao* while Zhuangzi emphasizes non-coercion and "spontaneity". Non-coercion and spontaneity are two of the most important concepts in the *Zhuangzi* that aid in deriving a conception of self or personhood.

12. Zhuangzi

Interpretations of the *Zhuangzi* vary so extremely that some interpret Zhuangzi as attacking concepts of self, and defending a strict position of no-self. Others such as the contemporary scholar Xu Keqian offer a more moderate interpretation I think more accurately represents Zhuangzi's thoughts on self-hood or what it means to be a person. As evident from the title of Xu Keqian's essay "A Different Type of Individualism in *Zhuangzi*", Xu Keqian presents what can be understood as a direct challenge to the Confucian notion of *dao* and self-understanding. Xu Keqian does not argue Zhuangzi defends a theory of no-self but instead a form of individualism different from Western individualism. Xu Keqian's main claim is that "according to Zhuangzi, 'self' can be an integrated and complete individual 'one' existing independently from many others and

the society, rather than an incomplete ‘part’ of a general ‘whole’.”¹²⁴ This is why I earlier used the example of the hermit because the hermit figure’s characteristics supposedly “emphasize the uniqueness of an individual that Zhuangzi admires and values highly” Xu Keqian claims.¹²⁵

The problem with Xu Keqian’s claims about eremitism is most of the claims Xu Keqian makes about Zhuangzi are derived from quotes in the “outer” chapters of the *Zhuangzi* canon. The outer chapters offer a fairly different Philosophy than do the “inner” chapters, the chapters believed to be earliest and closest to Zhuangzi’s actual thoughts, if he even existed. The text is an accretion text making interpretation all the more difficult because of apparent contradictions and changes of opinion between chapters. Xu Keqian presents multiple aspects of Zhuangzian thought he thinks correlate with a form of individualism. I only address one since it is discussed in the inner chapters and the only one I think presents any real challenge to my Confucian theory of self.

Xu Keqian claims the ultimate goal of Zhuangzian philosophy is to pursue the “carefree wandering of the individual spirit without any restraints. Zhuangzi hopes that individual spirit can be rid of all the ties and bonds caused by the restrictions of social constructions such as man-made laws, institutions, rituals, moral standards, and worldly concepts.”¹²⁶ I think a hint of this attitude is present in the first inner chapter of the *Zhuangzi* as is seen in A.C. Graham’s translation of the title of the chapter “Going Rambling without a Destination”. In this chapter Zhuangzi definitely emphasizes non-coercion and in some vague way freedom, but he does not go as far as to “hope the

¹²⁴ Xu Keqian “A Different Type of Individualism in *Zhuangzi*,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 10, no. 4 (November 2011): 448, doi:10.1007/s11712-011-9244-z.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 449.

individual spirit can be rid of all ties and bonds” in any real way, but metaphorically. This may be present in the outer chapters, but in the inner chapters the emphasis is on avoiding coercion and living a life of spontaneity. Spontaneity, not meaning randomness, but free from the categorization of life that limits one’s thoughts and abilities. A.C. Graham says: “Man has stunted and maimed his spontaneous aptitude by the habit of distinguishing alternatives, the right and wrong, benefit and harm, self and others, and reasoning in order to judge between them.”¹²⁷ Xu Keqian is close to reaching this understanding of Zhuangzi’s emphasis on spontaneity, but he does not notice it is not the actual social constructs themselves to avoid, but the manner in which they are presented and used to limit an individual’s movement and behavior.

What makes Xu Keqian’s focus on social constructs even more misdirected is Zhuangzi is actually concerned with linguistic categorization, not the real social constructs that exist, because social constructs must exist for a society to exist. The only one who is free from social constructs is the hermit, and even then he/she is in relational to them in separation. A.C. Graham explains Zhuangzi’s concern about language is the “fundamental error is to suppose that life presents us with issues which must be formulated in [words] so that we can envisage alternatives and find reasons for preferring one to the other.”¹²⁸ The point Zhuangzi makes is creating categories for everything through language inhibits one’s *dao* from moving in its own direction, its own “free flowing” way that one is in harmony with. Xu Keqian is right that Zhuangzi does criticize social constructs, especially Confucian norms of the time, but Xu Keqian misses the real point that social constructs can and must exist, and the manner in which they do is wrong.

¹²⁷ A.C. Graham, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001), 6.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Not because they exist, but because they are founded on unnecessary categorizations created through language. Social constructs are not allowed to “be as they are”, to follow their own course in harmony with those who make them up. Too often are social constructs not understood as constructs, but as fixed and dogmatic rules, of “rights” and “wrongs”. Once social constructs are justly understood as constructs they can be creative and flexible, therefore able to be shaped in harmony with social needs. A.C. Graham explains:

This course, which meanders, shifting direction with varying conditions like water finding its own channel, is the *Tao*, the ‘Way’, from which Taoism takes its name; it is what patterns the seeming disorder of change and multiplicity, and all things unerringly follow where it tends except that inveterate analyzer and wordmonger man, who misses it by sticking rigidly to the verbally formulated codes which other philosophical schools present as the ‘Way of the sage’ or ‘Way of the former kings’.¹²⁹

This quote brings the discussion back to Zhuangzi’s contrast with Confucianism while still showing how Xu Keqian’s analysis of Zhuangzian thought does not correlate with what is found in the inner chapters. A.C. Graham is explaining above how Zhuangzi’s notion of *dao* is different than Confucius’s in that Zhuangzi thinks Confucius limits and restricts *dao* by trying to mold it in ways according to “verbally formulated codes”. Zhuangzi believes this prevents one’s self from developing spontaneously, in the way it naturally would if it develops without coercion.

The keyword here is spontaneity which helps clarify what is meant by “naturally”. The classic story of Cook Ding in chapter three of the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* best explains what is meant by spontaneity in a Daoist sense.¹³⁰ Cook Ding is able to butcher

¹²⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁰ Graham, *Zhuangzi: The Inner Chapters*, 63-64.

an ox with such skill, like a form of art, that he does it so precisely without mangling the meat or damaging his blade. He does with an appearance of effortlessness. He butchers spontaneously because he does it without coercion; he does not force quickness, does not over analyze his position, blade holding, method of cutting, and so forth. He does not create categories, meaning he does not think about how not to cut the meat vs. how to, he just does. This is spontaneity, an ability so well cultivated through trial and error and practice to the point where it almost becomes effortless, though much work had to be done to reach that skill level. If Cook Ding is faced with a difficult place to cut, a spot in need of extreme intricacy, he knows to slow down, make his observations, and then simply cut without over thinking it. Zhuangzi is primarily concerned with one's actions though, not skills though both are interrelated and equally important. But the idea is to acknowledge cook Ding's ability to butcher with spontaneity, and aim for this in one's ethical actions. There is no I vs. them, or individual vs. society as Xu Keqian seems to allow even if not on purpose; those are categories which prevent spontaneous behavior that is in harmony with oneself and others. In order to live one's life to its utmost, and in accordance with one's *dao* without coercing others (to live ethically), one must learn to live spontaneously. After listening to Cook Ding explain his ability and spontaneity in butchering, Lord Wenhui exclaims, "Excellent! Listening to the words of Cook Ding, I have learned from them how to nourish life."¹³¹

It is helpful to think of society as the ox, and citizens as Cook Ding. If the ox is understood under Xu Keqian's belief of ridding all ties and bonds, then citizens will mangle and destroy the ox leaving nothing to cook but terrible cuts of meat with bones and cartilage. Again Zhuangzi emphasizes a "cultivated disposition" through practice and

¹³¹ Ibid., 64.

trial and error. Cook Ding did not become so skilled through some mystical force or luck. What is most important to note is “spontaneous action is a mirroring response. As such, it is action that accommodates the “other” to whom one is responding. Such spontaneity involves recognizing the continuity between oneself and the other, and responding in such a way that one’s own actions promote the interests and well-being both of oneself and of the other.”¹³² In other words, if citizens of a society develop like Cook Ding, by developing selves that are in tune with others, through trial and error, they eventually will develop dispositions to handle social needs almost effortlessly, but appropriately.

To summarize, Zhuangzi does not reject social constructs as Xu Keqian argues, but explains how to develop a disposition to handle social constructs most spontaneously and in accordance with one’s *dao* and others’. If this were achieved social harmony would be achieved. “Escape the fixed routes to worldly success and fame, defy all reproaches that you are useless, selfish, indifferent to the good of the Empire, and a perspective opens from which all ordinary ambitions are seen as negligible, the journey of life becomes an effortless ramble.”¹³³

My analysis of Zhuangzian spontaneity and self-cultivation I think compliments my understanding of Confucian relational personhood, but Zhuangzi clearly in many sections of the inner chapters does not side with Confucius.¹³⁴ Zhuangzi possibly was bothered by the communal situation he lived in where rituals were to be strictly obeyed, hierarchies existed, and many scholars, including followers of Confucius, looked to past sages as models. For Zhuangzi this must have been too restrictive and not in accordance

¹³² Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making this Life Significant’: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 2004), 24.

¹³³ A.C. Graham, *Zhuangzi: The Inner Chapters*, 43.

¹³⁴ In Inner chapter two for instance, Zhuangzi “thinks of Confucians and Mohists who stick rigidly to their affirmations and denials as lighting up little areas of life and leaving the rest in darkness...”: *Ibid.*, 53.

with the non-coercive spontaneous *dao*. To some extent I understand Zhuangzi's worries, but in the *Analects* there is an interpretation of Confucian thought I defend that avoids the rigid aspects of tradition and does not disagree with Zhuangzi's philosophy. Although Xu Keqian's essay offers interesting insights and ambitious claims, through the analysis of spontaneity and *dao* in the *Zhuangzi*, I do not believe Xu Keqian proves the existence of Zhuangzian individualism. Xu Keqian himself concludes "Zhuangzian individualism does not cause any major collision with Confucianism, despite its disagreement with Confucianism in many aspects."¹³⁵

13. Closing Thoughts on the Chinese Relational Self Conception

If becoming a sage is practically out of question according to Confucius, it is not such a lofty aspiration to wish to be a *junzi* (君子), most commonly translated as nobleman or gentleman but preferably as exemplary person. In English terminology the *junzi* can be thought of as a moral exemplar, a person whom others model themselves after. Becoming a *junzi* is a realistic goal, unlike becoming a sage, because practicing *ren* is achievable while a sage in an abstract sense is *ren*. Part of Confucius's project in the *Analects* was teaching how to be a *junzi* as is evident by the numerous passages dedicated to telling what a *junzi* does or how he/she behaves. I introduce the ideal of the *junzi* because I agree it is an admirable goal as the actual attempt to become a *junzi* requires practicing *ren*. And if it is remembered, practicing *ren* is "being" *ren*; and "being" *ren* means one is living in harmony with others as they are his/her focus. A realistic starting point to challenge the American individualist's understanding of their self is to present *ren* as a lens to look through to aid in reflecting on the self, and to rid one's

¹³⁵ Xu Keqian, "A Different Type of Individualism in Zhuangzi," 460.

individualistic inclinations; in other words, to influence individuals to become *junzis*.

The Chinese relational model of personhood teaches the self is constituted by other selves, but only because one constitutes others as well. The self is conceived of and understood through one's roles and relationships, and one's unique individuality is discovered through one's roles and relationships as well. One's self is only realized through relationships and the active participation in them and the roles one lives. This is why I favor the Chinese processual language and cosmology of change because the worry of whether the self exists or not is ignored as hardly important because *the real concern is relationships*. The vocabulary discussed in this chapter was chosen to direct the reader's attention away from the more common Western concerns of autonomy, rights, and overall individualistic concerns. The concern if the self is not fully autonomous and individualized then a slippery slope appears where one will eventually be controlled by others, is a trivial argument that misses all the other factors that prevent this from ever occurring.

The concept of *li*, accompanied with *yi*, enables one to understand one's ability in appropriately shaping one's life, and other's lives in one's society, without doing so in a harmful, forceful way. *Li* understood either plural and singular is a powerful concept because it allows one to acknowledge the power they possess in creating change, but shows one how to do so that is in accordance with one's tradition in order that one does not be coercive. And if one's tradition needs changing, *li*, unlike social norms, allows this process to occur harmoniously.

In connection with the idea of non-coercion, I presented a Daoist understanding of *dao* and the Daoist notion of spontaneity. This was done to further explain the non-

coercive, water like fluidity of the Confucian and Daoist model of personhood. Wong explains that “part of the achievement of noble persons [*Junzi*] is this ability to retain ethical excellence and exert influence over others wherever they go and with whomever they live”, but for a *junzi* who practices *ren*, this ability is only possible because of the *junzi*’s open and empathic attitude towards others and their concerns.¹³⁶ As will be discussed, when thinking about how to solve issues in a family, community, or society at large, this sort of attitude towards one’s self and others is unbelievably powerful in cultivating meaningful, positive, and creative conversation to solve such issues.

Xiao was discussed for it is the model from which one learns how to begin thinking about *ren* like behavior; to begin the process of self-cultivation by practicing proper ways of treating one’s family, and using this as a model for how to treat all others. In *Analects* 1.6 Confucius says; “As a younger brother and son, be filial (*xiao* 孝) at home and deferential (*di* 弟) in the community... If in so behaving you still have energy left, use it to improve yourself through study.”¹³⁷ Through the desire to cultivate one’s self, and the model of proper familial relationships to follow, one is set on the right path towards becoming a person of *ren*, concerned with “establishing others in seeking to establish themselves and promote others in seeking to get there themselves.”¹³⁸

The Confucian and Daoist concepts I have chosen to discuss present a conception of a Chinese relational self that itself is a model for thinking about one’s self. This project was not a straight forward attempt to argue for an actual metaphysical and/or ontological self as true or real, but instead to influence less individualistic ideas regarding the self in

¹³⁶ Wong, “Relational and Autonomous Selves,” 425.

¹³⁷ Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 72.

¹³⁸ *Analects* 6.30. Ibid., 110.

hopes that the concerns of other people become the primary concern. Altering conceptions of the self is an effective way for persuading one to see the world, and one's role in it, in a new way. It may be objected I have still argued for the existence of an ontological self, but this claim itself points out the beauty of my Chinese relational self understanding. One's self is so intimately connected and interrelated with others that even if I technically am defending an ontological self, the consequences of this self are also consequences for others. Therefore the ethical implications still stand even if the model of self is not accepted as representing reality.

IV. Philosophy For Children

Implementing the Social Self and Chinese Relational Self in Education to Reduce or Eliminate Individualism

1. Starting with Children

If it is believed one can know one's self without the existence of others, then it is easy to see how one's self-interest can become a primary concern. If one ultimately needs no one to else to develop into an ethical being, then what one decides is right or wrong is justified in being decided on one's own. This is currently why social debates become so difficult. The common attitude of American individualists is: "My belief is my belief/opinion, and I do not need anyone to tell me otherwise because they do not know me and what I am thinking or feeling". With the relational model of selfhood, it is acknowledged individuals are dependent on one another and intimately connected, meaning it is acknowledged one's actions have widespread effects on everyone.

This project was never intended to push for one conception of selfhood over another, but designed to acknowledge the ills of the individualism present in America, present a model of relational personhood to address these ills created through individualistic self-conceptions, to introduce ideas from American pragmatists and Confucianism in order to influence individuals to think about their current beliefs about their selves in hope that this will cause major attitude adjustment in their treatment of others and beliefs about one's position in society. *Ren* I argue is the strongest concept, the clearest lens to see through, that enables this process of self-evaluation to occur. And with the aid of comparable and complimentary ideas from the American pragmatist tradition, I presented a powerful and positive philosophy of selfhood able to overcome

American Individualism.

Heather E. Keith explaining Mead's thought in her own words says the nature of humans is to be "transformed and transformative—evolving from, reflecting upon, and creating culture in which we live."¹³⁹ And notions of morality, of right and wrong, are part of culture, therefore are created through social means. Throughout Mead's lectures there is a re-occurring discussion of how the self is created.¹⁴⁰ When one begins to understand one's self as a unique self, one fashions one's self "...on the model of other selves. This is not an attitude of imitation, but the self that appears in consciousness must function in conjunction with other selves."¹⁴¹ But most importantly, the "child's consciousness of its own self is quite largely the reflection of the attitudes of others toward him."¹⁴²

Experience within a given context is what actually leads to a conception of self, separate from others. Biologically/physically one distinguishes oneself from others, but this leads to overly individualistic notions of separateness of one from others. But for Mead, as Keith explains, "sociality does not occur when an individual learns that she exists in an environment full of others; rather, social behavior (and the development of mind or self) begins when one learns, through interaction within a world of others, that she exists somewhat separately."¹⁴³ "Interaction" is the keyword for it points out that it is experience that enables one to differentiate one's self from others; the process of differentiation will not occur by simply acknowledging others exist. One's experiences

¹³⁹ Heather E. Keith, "Transforming *Ren* 仁: The *De* 德 of George Herbert Mead's Social Self," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 36, no. 1 (March 2009): 69, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6253.2008.01505.x.

¹⁴⁰ George Herbert Mead, *The Individual and the Social Self*, ed. David L. Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 53-56 and Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 135-226 for example.

¹⁴¹ Mead, *The individual and the Social Self*, 54.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Keith, "Transforming *Ren* 仁: The *De* 德 of George Herbert Mead's Social Self," 71.

are largely constituted by reactions of other's to one's behavior, to one's conduct. When one reflects upon a day's event, or a memorable experience from the past, often what is thought about is others and how they acted towards one's behavior. A child reflecting on their punishment the week before does not necessarily think about the punishment, but about the disappointment of his/her parents and the obviousness of this on their facial expressions. One's conduct is affected by these sorts of reflections. A child learns early and quickly what sort of behavior receives praise and admiration and what receives punishment or condemnation. This process of reflection occurs through one's entire life until death. Reflecting upon other's reactions to ones behavior, and reflecting upon one's own feelings towards other's behavior, leads to self-evaluation and evaluation of others. It is the context of one's conduct, and/or the context of others' contexts that alters one's evaluation also. Individualistic conceptions of rights, laws, and the negative aspects of individualism discussed in the first chapter, corrupt one's ability to fully evaluate a given experience or conduct of one's self or others. The more individualistic the concept, the more detached one's evaluations become from others. What is needed for society to live ethically is open participation by all individuals while having careful acknowledgment and care for other's positions, opinions, point of views, arguments, and so forth. And when doing this, attention must be given to context; attention to the situation in which an act was committed and the response in the environment.

2. **Philosophy For Children (P4C)**

The target of this thesis is all members of society, but really the focus should be on children because self-conceptions and attitudes about the self are so individualistic in adults already that change is difficult, though not impossible. Mead continually discusses

children because the consciousness of self begins when one is a child. It is the influence of individualism experienced at a young age that corrupts children's ability to think any different. Children are taught from a young age to be self-centered, self-concerned, and to distinguish themselves completely from others, often in negative ways through stereotyping and discrimination. In today's political sphere, at least how it is presented through mass media, debates often focus on notions of rights as discussed in chapter one. In some cases the discussion of rights is helpful and even necessary, but such a concept is easily misunderstood by children especially when it is taught incorrectly by a child's parents. If American society is ever going to rid itself of individualism, children must be taught empathy, self-reflection, and to acknowledge people are interconnected and interdependent with one another.

If it cannot be expected for parents to be able to, or willing to do this, then it is up to teachers; often the only people a child has to learn from properly in their life anyways. Dewey, as well as numerous other great minds, believed education is the answer to solving societal issues, and I agree. Through a program called Philosophy for Children (P4C) I will discuss at the end, a form of self-understanding is teachable that leads to *ren*, and the positive, other-focused behavior that comes with it.

First it is necessary to paint the picture of what is a realistic conception of a relational self understanding in individualistic America. Realistic meaning capable of being influential on one's attitudes towards one's position in relation to others: Unrealistic being to expect society to model itself after Confucius' vision in the Analects. In this thesis I have not completely shied away from arguing in defense of an ontological model of selfhood, but I think the first steps in transitioning the American mindset to be

less individualistic are challenging enough to not think it necessary for anyone but academics to concern themselves with the major philosophical concerns of accepting a relational model of personhood. An analysis of Confucius', Dewey's, Zhuangzi's, and Mead's ideas alone are influential in altering one's self-understanding.

The first step in influencing individuals towards *ren* like behavior, or the desire to cultivate one's self in order to be *ren*, is to address family life in America and bring the Confucian concept of *xiao* into practice. While it is true it is common in America for an individual "to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends" this is of no benefit when one's treatment of his/her friends and family is not extended outward to others. *Xiao* is a powerful idea that if taken seriously could have positive consequences in how individuals treat members of society outside family and friends. *Xiao* is inherently other focused as it emphasis the family as a supportive unit as a whole, not how family supports the individual member or how the individual member supports the family.

Education is the most important, yet too often ignored, topic for philosophical discussion. Through educating children, society is able to shape future citizens in both good and bad ways, and since students are the future, it is of most importance that they are prepared and cultivated in ways that will benefit the society in which they live. Current educational models continue to perpetuate individualistic attitudes and traits amongst America's youth and fail to prepare them to face society in a positive and creative manner.¹⁴⁴ Having the ability to positively and creatively critique and shape

¹⁴⁴ For discussion on how traditional school settings are lacking in creating socially concerned adults see: Philip Cam, "Philosophy for Children, Values Education and the Inquiring Society," *Educational Philosophy and Theory: Incorporating ACCESS* 46, no. 11 (2014): 1203-1211, doi:10.1080/00131857.2013.771443. Also see the numerous P4C articles noted in bibliography.

society requires having a self understanding that enables one to face difficult social issues in a productive and ethical manner through open minded and creative actions and solutions. Cultivating such a self-understanding requires alternative pedagogies like P4C.

The classroom is just as an important arena for a child's growth as is the household; for many children the classroom is the only real arena where they can express themselves, and learn in a free environment where they can be their selves. It is important then that school is an institution where a child not only learns about the world, but learns about his or her self and how to interact with others in positive and meaningful ways. School prepares a child for life as an adult in a complex society, and the manner a child learns can have severe effects on how the individual thinks and behaves for the rest of his/her life.¹⁴⁵

The progressive pedagogical program, Philosophy For Children (P4C), is an effective and powerful program that allows for the sort of learning I believe is required for students to form relational self understandings that enable them to overcome the individualism present in America, setting them up for becoming progressive and valuable participants in American political and social spheres. Specifically "collaborative philosophical inquiry" (CPI) is the part of P4C I think is most important for showing how a P4C classroom cultivates children to develop a relational self-understanding that is also in accordance with *ren*.

CPI in some sense is what P4C entails: "The terms are often taken to be interchangeable, and there is at least considerable overlap between them."¹⁴⁶ CPI involves

¹⁴⁵ I do not want to de-emphasize the importance of what a child learns and cultivates from familial and private social interaction, but to emphasize the importance and power education and social interaction at school have on influencing a child's self-cultivation and attitudes towards others.

¹⁴⁶ Stephen Millett and Alan Tapper, "Benefits of Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry in Schools," 547.

“rational questioning and intelligent agreement and disagreement among students. Guidance from teachers helps the students to build a constructive dialogue in which concepts are clarified, meanings are explored, and where through a process of dialectic a shared understanding is achieved.”¹⁴⁷ It is not a stretch to picture this process as similar, if not exactly what Confucius practiced with his students, or similar to Socrates in his discussions with Athenians, highlighting similar themes as self reflection and genuine dialogue. What is so powerful about CPI, and P4C in general, is there is a “built-in social dimension because participants are required to listen carefully and to respond respectfully to the ideas of others. It can be thought of as the practice of ‘thinking together’.”¹⁴⁸ CPI creates an environment where students are actively practicing *ren*, and by doing so are in essence being *ren*, or learning how to be *ren*. A common American high school student has been ingrained with individualistic ideals since birth and upon participating in CPI those ideals will become apparent to the student and possibly overcome simply through open discussion with others. What makes discussions different in P4C is CPI, that the discussions are not one’s opinions against everyone, but one’s opinions being presented to a group who are listening and respecting the speaker from which the speaker is open to counter-arguments, acknowledging his/or assumptions, biases, and prejudgments, all while having an open mind to the replies of others. Through CPI, one’s self is acknowledged and fully known, but is also shaped by others through discussion. One’s self is cultivated through others, and others are cultivated through one’s self. This is the relational model of personhood in practice, of *ren* in practice.

What a P4C classroom actually looks like will differ based on numerous factors

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

be it the instructor, the accepted practice of a school, and so forth. There is not necessarily a wrong or right way to practice P4C except there must be CPI. The concept of CPI came about originally through the original notion in P4C literature of a “community of inquiry”. The community of inquiry is when the students and teacher form a circle in the classroom and then hold discussion. As Benjamin Lukey explains: “In spite of the many different ‘flavors’ of p4c Hawai’i, one undeviating element involves the creation of a community for intellectually safe philosophical inquiry.”¹⁴⁹

Thomas E. Jackson further explains:

In an intellectually safe place there are no putdowns and no comments intended to belittle, undermine, negate, devalue, or ridicule. Within this place, the group accepts virtually any question or comment, so long as it is respectful of the other members of the circle. What develops is a growing trust among the participants and with it the courage to present one’s own thoughts, however tentative initially, on complex and difficult issues.¹⁵⁰

Initially the creation of safety must be aided by the instructor such as handling pre-existent beefs between students, disparity of communicative ability, and so forth. As the process of CPI continues the students eventually will, without the instructor’s insistence or interaction, talk to one another peacefully, openly, and productively.

A common practice of P4C is to create a community ball; a ball the class creates together through the wrapping of yarn around a paper tube while passing it along around the circle. During this, the student wrapping the yarn must answer a question chosen by the instructor that enables the other students to get to know one another.

¹⁴⁹ Benjamin Lukey, “Philosophy for Children in Hawai’i: A Community Circle Discussion,” *Educational Perspectives* 44, no. 1-2 (January 2012): 32. He refers to P4C Hawai’i specifically because of the prominence of its practice there though P4C is practiced across the world and it has taken on different “flavors” all over.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas E. Jackson, “The Art and Craft of ‘Gently Socratic’ Inquiry,” in *Developing Minds: A Resource for Teaching Thinking*, 3rd ed, ed. Arthur L. Costa (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001), 6.

This question can be anything the teacher thinks will draw out the children, such as, “What is your favorite food or music?” or “What do you like best about school?” When the teacher finishes speaking, she passes the cardboard to the student beside her, who begins to wrap and rap (!) as the teacher takes over feeding the yarn. This process - one person wrapping and speaking, and his neighbor feeding the yarn - continues until all have had the opportunity to speak.¹⁵¹

Once the ball is created, it is tossed around from student to student since only the holder is allowed to speak. One simply raises their hand when they wish to speak and wait for the ball to be thrown to them. The topic to be discussed is typically picked by each student writing a question on the blackboard and the class holds a vote where usually one's two favorite questions are chosen. The most voted for question then is asked to the classroom by the inventor of the question and the discussion begins. This is just one practice of P4C, but the most important one as it is itself the CPI. The smaller details of this practice differ based on the instructor and class, but the principle is the same; the class participates in open discussion of topics they determined and in an intellectually safe setting. Through CPI, a student learns to evaluate his/her self in a manner not present in traditional school settings, or at all. Through this reflective process, while at the same time learning about others and how to interact with others, the student develops a relational self-understanding, or is put in a situation where this is possible. As I have noted many times, individualism is an illusion perpetuated by individualistic beliefs about the self and one's relation to others. Through CPI this illusion is overcome and one learns of one's actual relation to his/her self and others.

The traditional educational value of P4C has been well documented, and for my

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 8.

purposes, is not the main highlight of P4C.¹⁵² P4C, as a practice, should be squeezed into school a few times a week because of the social benefits. The social benefits of P4C, through CPI, “arise not so much from the topics raised as from the manner in which they are discussed.”¹⁵³ As I have said above, P4C is powerful not just because it helps students care about school and improve their learning, but students learn something new about their own self and more importantly about others. “The classroom experience of philosophy should be *collaborative*. Students should learn not just cognitive skills but also how to engage in cooperative dialogue, and thus become skilled at cooperative behavior more generally.”¹⁵⁴ This claim by Millett and Tapper is the heart of P4C and the process of CPI. As Dewey claims in reference to his model of “new” schools: “...the primary source of social control resides in the very nature of the work done as a social enterprise in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility. Most children are naturally ‘sociable’.”¹⁵⁵ The claims by Millet and Taper, and Dewey show that through P4C students learn how to understand *ren* and how to practice *ren*. They learn to be social beings that understand their own selves through interaction and understanding of others.

Understanding *ren* requires attention and knowledge of one’s interconnectedness with others through relational self cultivating behavior. P4C allows for such an environment through active participation and discussion, self-reflection, and through the

¹⁵² See: Maughn Gregory, “Philosophy For Children and its Critics: A Mendham Dialogue,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 45, no. 2 (2011): 199-219, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9752.2011.00795.x. Christine Doddington, “Philosophy, Art or Pedagogy? How should children experience education?” *Educational Philosophy and Theory: Incorporating ACCESS* 46, no. 11 (2014): 1258-1269, doi:10.1080/00131857.2012.755753. And Millett and Tapper, “Benefits of Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry in Schools.”

¹⁵³ Millett and Tapper, “Benefits of Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry in Schools,” 556.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1938), 56.

following practices taught by Confucius: (1) Communally forming *li* and practicing the appropriate (*yi*) behavior in accordance with those *li*. And (2) with the knowledge of the concept of *xiao* known by the students, they can learn to acknowledge the importance of family both at home and at school, from which they learn of the relationality of their selves, and the benefit of cultivating respectful yet constructive relationships with their family members. Learning these Confucian ideals, and learning how to practice them, eventually leads to positive spontaneous behavior where notions of *li*, *yi*, *xiao*, and *ren* are not always consciously thought of, but simply exist in the students behavior. This is the practice of *ren*, of being *ren*.

To further express the power of P4C in altering children's' self conceptions, it is helpful to show how the Confucian vocabulary discussed above fits into the P4C model. Part of having CPI is having an environment where the students feel "intellectually safe" meaning they feel they can express their thoughts and feelings without being put in a situation where they are either being mocked, hated, discriminated against, and so forth. "Intellectual safety, then, should not be understood as feeling comfortable. Rather, it should be conceived as a feeling of trust in oneself and one's community to honestly and genuinely engage in thinking together."¹⁵⁶ To reach this state, the community or a classroom, must determine the plural *li* of the class and determine what is the appropriate (*yi*) practice in order to have *li* singular, or "ritual propriety". The *li* of the classroom will consist of largely the rules of the community circle and ball. The first major rules being only speak when holding the ball, and raising one's hand as a signal for wishing to speak next. These are rituals of CPI all in the classroom must

¹⁵⁶ Ashby Butnor, "Critical Communities: Intellectual Safety and the Power of Disagreement," *Educational Perspectives* 44, no. 1-2 (January 2012): 31.

agree upon for CPI to work. By practicing these rituals appropriately (*yi*), they become *li*. Intellectual safety is brought about through co-determining the *li* of the classroom and appropriately practicing them, and making changes where needed.

Rules may have to be set by the instructor at first such as setting what is required for intellectual safety: no insults, no disrespect in general, no discriminating, listen openly and carefully, and others required to create intellectual safety. At first students may find this dictatorial, stringent, and against the supposed openness of the class. But in following *Analect* 2.1: “The Master said: ‘Governing with excellence can be compared to being the North Star; the North Star dwells in its place, and the multitude of stars pay it tribute’”¹⁵⁷; it is remembered that a *junzi* often must lead first. In a properly held P4C classroom the instructor in a sense is a *junzi*, and the students eventually will learn the reasons for the instructor’s rules and learn to agree to them, making them communally accepted *li*.¹⁵⁸ The instructor is like the North Star guiding the class towards creating an environment of intellectual safety, of productive CPI, and of *ren*.¹⁵⁹ Best of all, the lessons learned from participating in P4C are extendable to a student’s interaction with the world.

Family was noted as the “governing metaphor” in Confucius’ philosophy, and the metaphor applies beautifully to a P4C classroom. It was discussed last chapter that *xiao*, or familial piety or reverence, was to be practiced at home with actual family

¹⁵⁷ Ames and Rosemont Jr., *The Analects*, 76.

¹⁵⁸ What is great about a P4C classroom is the instructor is as much a part of the class as the students. The instructor just guides the class a little more pronounced because of his/her knowledge and more life experiences. In P4C the instructor is a *junzi* through being part of the classroom, not being significantly above and superior to the children like in a traditional classroom.

¹⁵⁹ As students become better at this, their roles in shaping the class and the *li* of the classroom become more involved, and ultimately co-produced alongside the instructor.

and hopefully then extended outward to school and society at large. This is hopeful, but for many young individuals, an unlikely occurrence because it is difficult to practice *xiao* at home if one lives in a broken, dysfunctional, abusive, or simply negative household. Again, this is why P4C is so helpful in schools because it creates an environment for *xiao* to be learned, understood, and practiced. For many students, their classmates may become their family. Over time through positive and meaningful interaction, students who are unable to understand the notion of familial reverence at home may come to develop a notion of what it means to revere one's family members. Reverence is only possible at home and at school if respect for each other is mutually given. Through P4C practices, this is a very plausible occurrence. While the discussions are open as possible, the communally accepted *li* stabilize the environment to make it feel welcoming and loving like a home, and once genuine CPI occurs the students will learn to treat each other as family members do or ought to. As Thomas Yos believes and argues: "Our schools ought to purposefully cultivate loving human relationships."¹⁶⁰ I agree completely, and believe with the interaction possible between students through P4C, and with the respect for one another that leads to *xiao*, students will learn to love each other and in doing so, will learn how to love others in general. There are reasons why *ren* has been often translated as benevolence or discussed in relation to love for humanity. Love is only one aspect of *ren*, but it is certainly part of it as is shown when individuals come together in an open, creative, and respectful environment and interact. They learn how connected people are and of their own relationality.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas B. Yos, "Raising the Bar: Love, the Community of Inquiry, and the Flourishing Life," *Educational Perspectives* 44, no. 1-2 (January 2012): 53.

Conclusion

P4C and Education are the Solution for Ending Individualism in America

I argued in chapter one that individualism is the prominent form of self understanding in America, and I attempted to show how it is actually an illusion, a false belief about one's self in relation to others. The problem is this false belief is often formed in very young ages, or at least the modeling of one's behavior and attitudes starts at a young age. When the attitudes seen by a child are individualistic, and the actions of others they experience are often individualistic, a child has little contrary influence to resist following in the footsteps of the adults around them. After school programs, sports teams, hobby clubs, and such groups may introduce some notion of community and working as a group, but once the attitudes of the children involved are individualistic, even these experiences are not as open and communal as they can be. One only needs to ask a student of public schools how they feel about group projects to see individualism at work. Most claim one student does all the work, a few do absolutely nothing but mess around, many want to do something, but do not and make excuses for why not, and the rest do as little as possible while still kind of doing something. This is not the case in P4C, because P4C involves an entire class. As Benjamin Lukey explains: "Once in a circle, cultivating an intellectually safe community of inquiry requires time, patience, and a commitment to fundamental practices of talking, listening, and thinking with one another in class. From kindergarten, the groundwork is laid so that by the time children are in 2nd grade, they are already modeling the behavior we would like to see as

adults.”¹⁶¹

Much of what students learn at a young age they will take and apply the rest of their life. That is why it is so important to start P4C like practices such as CPI at a young age. It is amazing however that even if a student does not participate in P4C until high school, it is often still successful. But if the attitudes and actual self-conceptions are to be radically influenced to be unlike the individualism prevalent around students today, it is better to start P4C when children are young. The practice of CPI itself effects students’ understanding of their selves and others in ways that weaken individualism, but there needs to be genuine discussions of philosophical topics in addition to CPI if P4C is to be effective. “The idea of philosophy taking place at a meeting space where dialogue and collaboration are valued places the focus on the *processes* of understanding and the *purpose* of education.”¹⁶²

CPI instigates and allows for the sort of open discussion necessary for students of any age to genuinely learn about one another while learning about their own selves, but topics deemed “philosophical” are necessary to discuss in order to have open, creative, meaningful, and life changing experiences in the P4C classroom. “Allowing ourselves to admit that we do not have all the answers and, more importantly, thinking with others as we examine possible answers, is the philosophical activity that Socrates advocated and which garnered him so many admirers. This openness to wonder that is characteristic of Socratic dialogue, which is rarely practiced in public high schools, is what philosophy can help reintroduce and cultivate.”¹⁶³

Having safe and open discussion where all individuals are able to participate

¹⁶¹ Lukey, “Philosophy for Children in Hawai’i: A Community Circle Discussion,” 32.

¹⁶² Ibid., 40.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

enables genuine discussion of important topics to occur, but the topic of the discussion can change based on what extent a student learns and is challenged to question things he/she believes are fundamentally true. Individualism being so prominent means unfortunately many students' fundamental beliefs and attitudes are individualistic or self-centered without even necessary acknowledging them as so. Discussions over religion, beliefs, sexuality, societal norms, and any topic that truly challenge one's self understanding, helps teach one of one's relationality to others, therefore enabling the evolution of one's self. This is why philosophical discussion, both in practice through CPI, and of subject matter, is needed.

As great as I have made P4C out to be, it may be wondered how the process of CPI can really change students self-understanding so drastically. The simple answer is because of communication. In a P4C circle students must talk to each other. Genuine communication amongst peers in traditional classrooms often only occurs in short periods, and only usually amongst friends. Many students get left out while the majority of students only speak to a few different people so that they may never speak to a large number of students during the entire year. This leaves much room for bullying, purposeful segregation, and for many, feelings of isolation and loneliness. In a P4C circle students that never speak to one another will at least finally hear ideas, opinions, thoughts, and feelings of each other. This unsurprisingly often brings about new friendships, or at least better understanding of one another. Especially students who are bullied or largely ignored, they finally are able to be heard by their peers which is both healthy for them as well as for others. Friendships may form that otherwise would never have because students learn about individuals they previously knew nothing about

because they never spoke. Whether friendships form or not is not actually what is most important, but that the students learn to understand how to deal with each other in healthy, respectful, and progressive ways, especially when opinions differ so drastically.

Controversial topics that divide students such as discussions of sexuality, differences in appearance, race, and even religion amazingly are eventually, as the class grows together, able to be discussed without anger, discrimination, rejection, insult, and dysfunction. This is a feat often not possible with groups of adults, even of the same family or friendships.¹⁶⁴ It is because of the guide of the instructor, the *junzi*, that the students learn how to be *junzis*. Genuine discourse in an environment of intellectual safety dramatically alters how individuals think and behave towards one another. A major reason for this is because students in some sense are made to sit and listen to each other. A lack of communication is the cause for many, if not most, issues in politics for instance. The structural *li* of the P4C circle helps guide the classroom to respectful behavior, and the fact students determine what to discuss helps keep their interest. The structural *li* also helps the instructor keeps trouble causing students in line, and being unable not to listen to each other, the students learn a lot about each other. Eventually as the group starts to form cohesion, there will be numerous instances where feelings of similarity and sameness will occur. Or students will see that what they say has an effect on others. This makes them realize how connected they really are to each other, and how connected others are to their own selves. In P4C a relational understanding of self is realized, adhered to, and cultivated.

¹⁶⁴ A failure to speak and listen respectfully and openly is a plague amongst individuals whom were raised in traditional school settings. More often than not individuals raised in traditional school pedagogies have individualistic beliefs about their selves and relations to others. Schools can be instigators and enforcers of individualism.

There are genuine concerns about P4C of course, one being about how to influence all students to participate in discussion when many are shy, quiet, both, unable to speak the native language well, uncomfortable due to bullying outside of class, and other numerous reasons why a child may not speak up. It may be objected these type of students may get lost in the class and never find opportunities to speak or be heard because they choose not to, or because they are purposely excluded by others. Exclusion by others is easily solved through the instructor's ability to involve the students by ordering the community ball to be given to the excluded students. Or if the class votes to discuss an excluded student's question, the student must read the question to the class and is influenced to respond to it first. While there is literature and known solutions on how to directly deal with an student's voluntary choice not to participate in P4C activities, I think a reminder of the Zhuangzian understanding of *dao* and spontaneity better explains how over time a quiet/shy student will become part of the classroom family.

Dao can help remind the students, as well as the instructor, that forcing a student to speak violates his or her way (*dao*), resulting in possible harm to the student's mental well being and ability to learn. If force is used, a student is no longer intellectually safe, nor will the rest of the students feel safe, and the shy/quiet students may close up even tighter, or potentially commit harmful behavior towards his/her self or others. In no way should a child in a P4C classroom feel attacked, alienated, or singled out, but allowing a student to isolate him/her self is not desirable either. But what has been found to occur in a P4C classroom over time is a self excluding student more often than not will eventually participate in the classroom activities in some manner as he/she "feels" the sense of family in the classroom forming. As long as a student participates even in the slightest,

often this is enough to not feel left out and become part of the “family”. Again, through simply listening to others, and sitting in a circle with only the acknowledgment of the possible ability to participate, a student will feel included. A P4C classroom avoids coercing students, therefore allowing one’s *dao* to form, shape, and flow “naturally”, and allows one to act spontaneously; spontaneous meaning free and personalized to one’s *dao* without being limited, restricted, or controlled by the instructor or other students. Students are neither restricted nor coerced in P4C, but participate in an environment where they can cultivate their own unique *dao* and personality, influenced by others, but not forced or restricted.

The treatment towards quiet/shy students is not a special treatment however, but should be applied to all students equally. There are simply different degrees in which attention and energy must be directed to each student. Some students are overzealous and talk too much so they must be limited in some manner while not restricting them too much. Through the concept of *dao* and spontaneity it is easy to see how through dialogue and listening the classroom as a whole can find a solution for handling any type of student. Over time each student will practice spontaneous participation; a form of cultivated behavior in which they participate in P4C activities effortlessly and appropriately. Finding solutions for handling quiet/shy students or their opposites, takes time, but the more a class learns of each other, and the more they develop together, the more easily issues are ironed out. It is difficult to prove this fact on paper, but numerous teachers who for years analyzed P4C classrooms have argued that classes do shape together, and students learn how to be positive members of their classrooms, and later of society. It is very important to remember what students learn through P4C they take with

them the rest of their lives. The appropriate behavior a student partakes in at home he/she will apply or learn in a P4C classroom, and what is cultivated in the classroom eventually is taken to his/her relationships with others in society.

Through the interactions practiced in a P4C classroom, students learn to think of their selves in two important ways, as social selves, and as relational selves. Through the philosophy of Dewey and Mead I argued in defense of the ontological claim that individuals and the way individuals understand their selves is socially constructed. Then through the philosophy of Confucius and Zhuangzi I argued how these social selves are also relationally constituted. The point of these two arguments is to refute the common belief in the illusion of individualism in America. This is an important task, one Dewey and Confucius were dedicated to as well in their own unique times and places, because too little empathy is found in contemporary American culture. Too much harm is done and often justified through individualistic beliefs and attitudes, and too many social ills are derived from the lack of empathy and abundance of individualism. Instead of relying on the call for the utopia of an idealistic society to be made possible, I instead ask individuals to self-reflect primarily through the Confucian concept of *ren* in order that they come to realize their relationality, interdependence, and reliance on others. The reason for hoping individuals will acknowledge these traits as part of their social reality is so they reject the common individualistic dispositions that result in attitudes and behavior that I argue have created or perpetuated the current problems that plague societies all around the world, but especially in America. P4C and education are the solution for solving America's belief in the illusion of individualism; self-aware relationally constituted children who implement *ren* into their lives are the future.

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