

Confucius, William James and the Relational Self

Russell Pryba

The Master said, 'Once a gentleman settles amongst them [the barbarians], what uncouthness will there be?'-- Analects 9.14

Introduction

It has been well established by commentators of Confucius that he holds the view that the self is relational. A person's identity is nothing more than a field, network or nexus of the personal relationships that *terminate* in the self. The attribution of this view to Confucius implies more than that human beings are irrevocably social. In an extreme formulation this view implies, as Henry Rosemount thinks, that in the absence of any relationships there is no person; the very being of the self is defined by relations. If this picture is correct then as relationships change so does the person, leaving little room for the autonomous picture of the self favored in the West. A person's sense of self succumbs to the vicissitudes of relations. Collective personal identity seems to leave little, if any, room for a concrete self, an individual.

However, there is good reason to think that this vision of the Confucian self is at odds with Confucius' moral exemplar, the gentleman, and is in need of refinement. The man of *jen* retains his ethical virtue across all contexts. Achieving sagehood frees the gentleman from the relational forces that would otherwise create a different person in different contexts. Thus, as David Wong points out, autonomy is an ethical virtue that the gentleman exhibits across all contexts, regardless of the relations that may abound.¹ *Jen* is not a state that is given by human nature. It is an achievement that emerges out of the basic *relatedness* of human beings that is acquired through the cultivation of virtue within this relatedness. Given this understanding of the relational self, there seems to be an affinity between Confucius' emphasis on cultivation and the insistence of the American Pragmatists, especially Dewey, on processes, on becoming, and on the need to give up dualistic thinking in favor of a constructive realism. In a discussion of Dewey's notion of individuality, Roger T. Ames points to the congruence between Pragmatists and Confucians on the formation of the self.

"Individuality" like "character" is an accomplishment, and since it emerges relationally out of associated living, far from being discrete, has implicated within it a "field of selves." And experience" as Dewey uses this term will not be resolved with any finality into familiar dualistic categories such as "subjective" and "objective" or "fact" and "value." Indeed the inseparability of subject and object is a function of what Dewey understands to be the intrinsic and constitutive nature of personal relations, and the inseparability of fact and value is entailed by the affective content of these relations as what they really are.²

There is clear family resemblance between Ames' reconstruction of Deweyan Pragmatism and the pragmatism of William James, especially the epistemological and metaphysical basis of

James' pragmatism in his doctrine of Radical Empiricism. Although much has been written on the relationship of Dewey's pragmatism and Confucianism, fewer comparisons are available of Confucius and the work of William James. It is, after all, James who provides a theory of relations as constituting the world out of the flux of pure experience. It is the purpose of this paper, therefore, to address some concerns that arise for the Confucian theory of the self within the framework of James' discussion of relations. For James, relations are just as much a part of experience as terms and as such are an important part of constituting the world of experience. James' radical empiricism is an attack on the idea that there is a mind-independent reality that is, in some sense, waiting to be known. Rather, the world (and the 'mind' that knows it) is constructed out of the relations that are given in the flux of pure experience and are conceptualized and understood by grouping these relations together. This paper has two overarching goals. The first is to show how James' notion of pure experience is grouped by relations into "mind" and "world" and how this can be applied to the formation of the self. The second goal is to present a view of the formation of the Confucian self that is in agreement with James on how relations are a part of experience. This discussion will draw on the field-focus model of the self favored by David Hall and Roger Ames. The specific thesis of this paper, then, is to show how by incorporating the Confucian self into the field of experience, it will become possible to elucidate the metaphysical foundation upon which the cultivation of virtue takes place. This can be done by showing that James' thesis that the consciousness of self is brought about by grouping relations together to form concepts presupposes, and informs, the process of cultivating an ethical, relational self. Relations are as stable as terms are for James, and as such, maintaining a conception of the self as relational is as permanent for the Jamesian as substance is for the Cartesian.

As we have seen, Dewey's insights on relations (as presented by Ames) are sociological in nature and thus similar in content to Confucius. However, James' theory of relations is *metaphysical*. Yet James' project is meant to undermine traditional dualistic thinking in favor of the monism of his pure experience and is concerned with the constructive, constitutive aspects of experience that Ames highlights in Dewey. In fact, by only offering a comparison of Confucianism with *Deweyan* Pragmatism, Ames is overlooking the more basic intersections between the two. Pragmatism, as a philosophy, is a strong anti-Cartesian statement regarding the foundations of knowledge. By denying the irresolute permanence of Descartes' thinking thing (*res cogitans*), Pragmatism provides a fruitful avenue to enter into a comparison with Chinese Philosophy. Developing the strong anti-Cartesian implications in the philosophy of both Confucius and the Pragmatists is an avenue that may provide a better understanding of the Confucian self within the Western framework. In the philosophy of William James there is a constructive attempt to naturalize the function of the cogito by way of experienceable relations. It is this naturalistic outlook on the self and experience which will help to increase the Western understanding of the Confucian self. This is why understanding the alternative to the Cartesian view of the self that is offered by James is essential if there is to be a more fruitful way of speaking of the "Confucian self" in the language of Western philosophy. Therefore, by focusing attention on James' theory of relations, it can be shown how certain metaphysical positions support Confucius' theories of the self and self-cultivation. Further, by focusing on the constituted nature of the self, and the process through which the self is constituted (cultivation of

virtues for Confucius and grouping by relations for James), it will be possible to alleviate the concerns that the relational self is not a stable individual. If stability is cashed out in foundational terms, as in Descartes, then the Confucian self does appear to be unstable. However, we have another option. By way of James' empiricism, it is possible to see the Confucian self as fundamentally constructed of the same basic material that constitute both the physical world and the inner "Cartesian theater."

Given this description of James, there is an intuitive appeal for a comparison with Confucius' theory of the relational self. However, it must be made clear at the onset that while James' radical empiricism is a *metaphysical theory*, Confucius is offering an ethical theory on how to cultivate virtue and is seemingly unconcerned with the metaphysical status of the self. Yet providing a metaphysical basis for Confucius' theory of the self within the framework of James' radical empiricism will illuminate the process by which a relational self comes into being and will provide a more fertile ground on which to interpret Confucius' views within the framework of the Western tradition. It is possible to avoid the concerns regarding the ever changing identity of the self by making a distinction between the *relatedness of the self* (a metaphysical position) and the *relational self* (an ethical position). The former could perhaps best be classified as an *intrinsic* property while the latter is an *extrinsic* property.³ By *intrinsic* I mean a property that a person has in virtue of themselves (a non-relational property) that partially allows for the cultivation of certain extrinsic qualities. Seen as such, the *relatedness of the self* is an intrinsic disposition⁴ (with a metaphysical basis in James' theory of relations), that is best actualized through the development of extrinsic properties such as the *ethical* relational self. Having the intrinsic capability to cultivate virtue does not ensure that a certain extrinsic property will be developed rather than another. This is why Confucius' main concern is providing an account of the how to cultivate *ethical* virtue.⁵ Once virtue is achieved however, it takes on an *intrinsic* character, as a disposition to act in a certain way in relevant situations. Therefore, the exercise of virtue is *extrinsic* on this account (it relies on the relevant external circumstances or relationships being present) but the possession of virtue is *intrinsic* because as the actualization of an intrinsic disposition it becomes in a sense permanent. A person is not virtuous who only acts virtuously some of the time. Instead, virtue is an intrinsic disposition to act virtuously all of the time where what counts as being virtuous is defined, in part, by extrinsic properties i.e. a person's social position. The cultivation of virtue is the cultivation of the self because virtue has an intrinsic root. This account provides for how the possibility of sagehood is open for everyone for Confucius and yet points to why his view of the self has been taken to be exhaustively extrinsic by commentators. Through a comparison with James, it will be shown how the ethical *relational* self emerges from the basic *relatedness of the self*.

The Confucian gentleman is defined not only by the relations that he experiences but also by how the community experiences their relation to him. The claim that someone is *jen* is not evidenced by appealing to an intrinsic property but rather by a relational property that they exhibit to others i.e. being benevolent or trustworthy in speech. If someone does not practice virtue, then they cannot be said to be virtuous. However, because the evidence of a virtuous character is necessarily external does not imply that virtue itself is an extrinsic property. If this were the case then the relational view of the self would amount to views like those of Henry

Rosemount, who claims that our relations “weave, for each of us, a unique pattern of personal identity, such that if some of my roles change, others will of necessity change also, literally making me a different person.”⁶ If, under this view, the Confucian gentleman were to go live with the barbarians, it would seem that he would become barbaric, losing the ethical status that the achievement of *jen* affords. It is exactly this type of view that is ruled out by drawing on James’ insights regarding the metaphysical foundations of relations. If the gentleman is to retain his virtue across all circumstances (i.e. if virtue is an intrinsic property as I claim), and is only for what is appropriate (*yi*) (see *Analects* 4.10), then there needs to be more stability of the self than Rosemount affords. This stability is provided by the very relatedness of the self which has foundation in James’ radical empiricism. The moral identity of the self, seen both from the first and third person perspective, is individuated through the cultivation of virtue (*de*) which focuses the entire field of relations at a single point (the self). However, the metaphysical self may be formed in other ways than through the cultivation of virtue (for it is clear that not everyone becomes a sage and yet this does not mean that the small man has no self). The mistake with Rosemount’s position, I believe, is that it takes the fact that the cultivation of virtue is achieved through the fulfillment of certain social roles to mean that in the absence of those same roles, a person *must* fail to be virtuous. This view takes extrinsic properties to be exhaustive of the Confucian self and neglects the fact that *jen* is a personal achievement.⁷ While it is most certainly fostered through relationships with others, virtue cannot be an extrinsic property. Once *jen* is attained it becomes *intrinsic* to a person and as such can survive changing roles and relations. Concerns with theories like Rosemount’s can be explained by illustrating how the moral identity of the self emerges out of a specific environmental context, and yet at the same time, it has foundations in a relation based view of personhood. The formation of the Confucian self, I argue, follows the basic pattern of the organization of the world by way of relations as found in James’ radical empiricism. The interpretative force of this comparison lies in providing a stable foundation for the relational self that is not based on substance. Failing to provide an adequate replacement for the substantial self has significantly impeded the proper understanding of the “self” in both the Western and Chinese philosophical traditions.

De-Psychologizing Confucius: Laying the Grounds for Comparison

Before venturing a comparison between the thought of Confucius and that of William James, it will be helpful to show the dangers of utilizing a substance based view of the self in an interpretation of the Confucian self. Nowhere is the tendency to interpret Confucius in a Western, psychological sense more dangerous than in interpreting the central concept of the *Analects*—*jen* and the way that all virtues are necessarily related to the person that possesses them. It may appear at first that *de-psychologizing* Confucius’ thought would make a comparison with William James more difficult. James is, after all, often thought of as the father of psychology and his work is often seen as accommodating the role of *willing* in the justification of belief. However, James’ later work is firmly entrenched against the tradition initiated by Descartes that gives privilege to an inner, mental life and as such would be unsympathetic with attempts to interpret Confucius in terms of the dominate trends of Western Philosophy. Thus, James’ arguments against mind/body dualism and Confucius’ emphasis on action over theorizing are

both positions that stand opposed to the inner machinery of the Cartesian theater. As such, understanding both James' and Confucius' positions on the inner/outer distinction is a necessary starting point for the discussion of the self as relational.

The commentator who has done the most arguing against the tendency to psychologize Confucian ideas is Herbert Fingarette. Fingarette's analysis of the concept of the self in the *Analects* works from the thesis that the idea of a private, inner, mental life is not even a rejected possibility. As such, it is inappropriate to interpret the central Confucian virtues and terminology as referring to a possible application of a Western theory of the self to Confucius' thought. This point comes out in Fingarette's discussion of the cardinal virtue *jen* and its role in his speech act theory interpretation of *jen* and *li*.

We are tempted to go further than I have above and to say *jen* refers to the attitudes, feelings, wishes and will. This terminology is misleading. The thing we must *not* do is to psychologize Confucius's terminology in the *Analects*. The first step in seeing that this is so is to recognize that *jen* and its associated "virtues," and *li* too, are not connected in the original text with the language of "will," "emotion" and "inner states." The move from *jen* as referring us to a person on to *jen* as "therefore" referring us to his inner mental or physic conditions or processes finds no parallel in the *Analects*. Certainly there is no systematic or unsystematic elaboration of any such connections.⁸

It may appear odd to begin a comparison of Confucius with William James by denying that Confucius' discussion of virtues leads us to the inner psychological processes of a person. However, this denial is not detrimental to the comparison given that James' later work moves away from describing the inner workings of psychological processes. In fact, James' reasons for moving away from the dualism of *The Principles of Psychology* reveal a basic similarity between the philosophy of the later James and Fingarette's interpretation of Confucius. In the *Principles*, James maintains a psycho-physical dualism because he believed that this would enable him to avoid the problems of metaphysics and provide a natural scientific grounding for psychology. However, James finds that many of his psychological doctrines require that he first provide metaphysical positions. This aspect of the *Principles* leads to the move away from the mind/body, inner/outer dualism in favor of his doctrine of a monistic "pure experience." Although James' location within the tradition of Western philosophy requires that he must *reject* dualism, for Confucius, it (the metaphor of an inner psychic life and the dualism it entails) is "not even a rejected possibility."⁹ Yet both James and Confucius stand opposed to privileging the inner, mental realm over and above the world of shared experience. For both thinkers the import of the "self" lies in the ability to affect the world through action. The influence of the self is something that can be experienced. For Confucius, this insight is the impetus for the relational view of the self. For James, it is the origin of his radical empiricism which takes into account the role of relations in experience. Before moving on to the relational view of the self and its foundations in James' theory of pure experience, it will be helpful to examine the passages in the *Analects* where Confucius refers to "looking inward" in order to accommodate these passages within the de-psychologized interpretation of *jen* and other Confucian terminology presented by Fingarette.

There are several passages in the *Analects* in which Confucius directs his disciples to introspection. In 12.4 we learn that the gentleman is free from fears and worries if, “on examining himself, a man finds nothing to reproach himself for.”¹⁰ In 4.17 the Master comments that when you meet someone who is your inferior you should “look within and examine your own self,” and in 5.27 Confucius laments that he should give up hope because he has “yet to meet a man who, on seeing his own errors, is able to take himself to task inwardly.” It is clear then that there are several references in the *Analects* to the process of looking inward at one’s self. However, this does not mean that Confucius is assenting to the Western view of the self and the metaphysical assumptions that come along with it. Rather than supporting the idea of the substantive self that can be discovered through inner examination, these passages point to the necessarily relational aspect of the self. This point can be best brought out by understanding Confucius as offering a view of the self in which it is cultivated, partly by the types of relationship that a person has with others around them, and partly by reflecting inwardly on themselves in order to encourage the actualization of the capacity to be virtuous. Thus, the gentleman, on meeting an inferior, looks inward to reaffirm the possession of virtue in the wake of a negative influence. If virtue were an extrinsic property, this would hardly be possible. Confucius also comments that “the gentleman helps others to realize what is good in them; he does not help them to realize what is bad in them. The small man does the opposite” (12.16). It is important to read “realize” in this passage as meaning something along the lines of “helping to bring about” rather than as pointing to a realization, although the latter may be a necessary part of the former. This reading of Confucius on introspection fits in well with David Wong’s view that autonomy is an ethical virtue that the gentleman achieves in part through understanding the potential invasive influence of others on the self that is at the heart of Rosemount’s view. However, attaining *jen* also provides for a stable state that one can examine when this autonomy is threatened by changing contexts. Autonomy then, as an ethical virtue, not only allows for non-context specific character traits (intrinsic properties) but also allows the gentleman to aid in the development of those around him. Thus, as Ames points out in his discussion of Dewey, experience resists being reduced into dualisms given the understanding of character as emerging out of the process of relational living. Attempting to treat Confucius then, as offering a view of the self that can be fit into dualistic Western categories is to deny the role played by cultivation and to significantly minimize the *achievement* of ethical virtues. If this reading of Confucius on introspection is correct, then we should not look to substance as providing the context in which the self can be understood as emerging out of the process of attaining virtue. Given what Confucius says about introspection points us to a relational understanding of the self it is now possible to turn to the ways in which looking at William James’ radical empiricism can aid in the understanding of the Confucian self.

William James’ Radical Empiricism

Provided the way that commentators have discussed the relationship between Confucianism and Deweyan Pragmatism, it seems natural to explore the place that a relational theory of the self has in the radical empiricism of William James in which all relations are part of experience. In turn, the different ways that these relations can be grouped account for the traditional categories that

make up the dualisms of Western philosophy. The initial urge of commentators then, to speak about Confucius' theory of the self in the language of Descartes, can be recast in a pragmatic light, providing on the one hand a stable foundation for the self, and on the other an understanding of how this is achieved by way of *relation* rather than *substance*.

For James, an empiricism is *radical* if it does not include anything that can not be experienced nor exclude anything that can be experienced. Further, "the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and *any kind* (my emphasis) of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system."¹¹ I take this to mean that the relations that connect any one person to their environment and surroundings are part of experience itself, and as such, play an important role in the conceptual formation of the self from both the first and third person perspective (recall that the sage is not only defined by the relationships that he has with others but also by the way that others stand in relation to him). This means that for James, we can experience the self, either our own or another's, through the experience of the *relations* that bind the experience of the self into a conceptual unity. If the process of grouping relations together did not take place then experience would remain chaotic and no conception of "self" or "world" would emerge. If this were the case then the process of self-cultivation would fail to take place. The temptation to psychologize Confucius, as I understand it, arises in part from the traditional view, which goes back to Aristotle, that the relations that hold between two things are predicated upon substance. The "self" is the stable term that is given to denote a view of substance that metaphysically presupposes the relations of which the "self" makes up one part. As such, substance has had a favored view in the history of Western metaphysics. James' thesis is a departure from that tradition insofar as it posits that relations, as parts of the field of experience, are as stable as terms. The initial urge to think of the Confucian self as a substance that "wills" and has "inner states" is extinguished through a comparison with a system that affords relations the same empirical stability as terms. There is no need to rely on the notion of substance for the stability of the self in a thoroughgoing radical empiricism. Even James himself comments on how his theory affords the view of the self as being constituted by relations although he spends little, if any, time elaborating on what that might entail. In a discussion of the different degrees of intimacy between relations, James ultimately comes to the position that the relations that constitute the self are of the most intimate kind.

...Finally, the relation experienced between terms that form states of mind, and are immediately conscious of continuing each other. The organization of the Self as a system of memories, purposes, strivings, fulfillments or disappointments, is incidental to this most intimate of all relations, the terms of which seem in many cases actually to com-pen-entrate and suffuse each other's being.¹²

It may be objected at this point that James and Confucius mean two very different things in their respective discussion of relations and the relational self. James seems to be exclusively speaking about the relations that make up what he called the "stream of consciousness" and that the self is built upon relations that are so intimately connected that they follow one after another in an almost imperceptible flow. This "self" is vastly different from the *ethical* self which Confucius is

interested in cultivating. Further, James discusses the organization of the self in terms of the states of mind that follow from one another as if that organization is a personal, psychological process. However, James claims that the *social* organization of the self is incidental, or secondary, to the relations that bind the self together as in self-consciousness. Therefore, the metaphysical basis of the relational self is found in the very relations that combine to form our own unique awareness of selfhood. The relational self only emerges after the formation of this more primitive, fundamental sense of self.

It is important to remember two things about James' larger project of radical empiricism. First, James' denial of psychophysical dualism is a denial that consciousness exists as an entity, as a substance in the Cartesian sense. He does not claim that the *function* of consciousness is unimportant or that it is not carried out. To the contrary, James is attempting to explain how this function can be carried out by experienced relations. Second, the purposes, strivings and fulfillments (we could easily add "virtues" to this list) that James points to as making up the self are themselves connected relationally to "less intimate" relations such as similarity or difference. Further, for James, these relations inform the content of the states of mind which constitute the self. The main thrust of James' arguments about the experience of relations is aimed at pinning down the flux of pure experience by way of concepts in order to make the chaos of immediately felt experience easier to navigate. As such, the cultivation of character and the interpersonal relationships that Confucius emphasizes as constitutive of the *ethical* self are part of the states of mind that bind the *metaphysical* self together. This is done, via radical empiricism, by the relations between the states of mind themselves and not by conceiving of the self as a substance. Thus, the ethical relations between human beings that Confucius stresses can be supported metaphysically by the view that the consciousness of the self is made up of the relations between states of mind. The intrinsic nature of consciousness of the self (that it is made up of relations between cognitive states which continue one another) is the foundation for the understanding of the self as comprised of extrinsic relations. It is this point that supports what Confucius says about introspection above. Although it seems that James' theory is couched in the same psychological terminology that is wrongly imported into Confucius, in actuality, James' metaphysical doctrines show that the function of the Cartesian ego need not be explained by way of substance but rather can be accommodated by a view of relations. The objection that on the one hand James discusses relations as accommodating the function of consciousness and that on the other, Confucius is talking exclusively about interpersonal relationships should be rejected. This is so because James' view provides a much more harmonious comparison of the Confucian and Western selves than views that equate the self with substance. It is important to emphatically note, however, that this comparison in no way shows that Confucius held metaphysical views similar to those of William James. On the contrary, it is well known that Confucius did not provide a metaphysics of selfhood and is instead concerned with ethical cultivation. What the comparison has revealed thus far is that metaphysical considerations like James' are much more useful in understanding what is meant by the relational self than resorting to the inner mechanisms of the substantive self. *If* Confucius were to have had a metaphysical system underlying his ethics, we should expect that it would look much closer to that of James than to that of Descartes.

It may be further objected at this point that it is absurd to suppose that James' thought, which is perhaps best known for making room for *willing* in settling beliefs that are beyond that scope of reason, can be useful in arguing against the tendency to speak about the Confucian self in terms of psychological mechanisms. However, this view presupposes that we first accept a substance based view of the self. This position, as we have seen, is an inadequate starting point for any comparison of Confucius and Western thought. What matters for both Confucius and James is the way in which the self influences the environment and in turn how the environment influences the construction of the self. The inadequacy of James' monism as expressed in the notion of pure experience is not at issue here. Rather, the point of the comparison is to show how James' radical empiricism provides a better framework for understanding the Confucian self than traditional Western views.

The Field-Focus View of the Confucian Self

Thus far, I have only focused on Herbert Fingarette's interpretation of Confucius in order to illustrate how James' radical empiricism is more accommodating to a relational view of the self than traditional Western metaphysics. However, a closer analysis of Confucius' view, and those of other commentators, is necessary in order to illustrate the extent that James' position is compatible with that of Confucius. Since, for James, the function of consciousness is carried out in the same way for everyone, there needs to be a clear distinction between self-identity and moral identity. Otherwise, the Jamesian picture of consciousness would not further the understanding of ethical cultivation. It is important not to conflate the constitution and knowledge of the self with the ethical cultivation of the self. This distinction is emphasized in the way the self is cultivated. Therefore, this may in fact be a matter of the will contra Fingarette. However, it is important that any understanding of the relationship between willing and virtue is placed within a single interpretation of the Confucian self. The one that holds the most promise for a comparison with James is the field-focus view of the self defended by Roger Ames and David Hall.

One passage in the *Analecets* that is commonly pointed to in defending the view of the self as relational is 1.4. "Everyday I examine myself on three counts. In what I have undertaken on another's behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say? Have I passed onto others anything that I have not tried out myself?"¹³ The virtues of doing one's best and being trustworthy in speech are couched in terms of the relation to others. It makes no sense to be trustworthy in isolation, outside the rules that constitute relationships. An understanding of virtue (*de*) within the Confucian tradition will be helpful in understanding the relational self. In their discussion, and dismissal, of four basic Western metaphors for understanding the Chinese self, Hall and Ames relate the rejection of the "willing" self, along with Fingarette, to the relationship of virtue with will.

As Herbert Fingarette has observed, the absence in the classical Chinese tradition of any individual faculty of will distinct from the act of willing suggests that, for Confucius at least, no distinction is drawn between intentionality and what is intended. That is to say, there is

no “will” separate from what one wills. Under this assumption, both intentionality and specific intentions are, like one’s self, social facts. What the self wills and *how* it wills are mutually determining. Thus, as an ongoing process specific to social, cultural, as well as natural conditions, human action is patterned by contingency.¹⁴

According to Hall and Ames, the classical Chinese tradition does not make any distinction between the act of willing and what is willed. Rather, both aspects are located within the social sphere of the world that can be experienced. It should be clear how this position is analogous to James’ insistence that “subjective” and “objective” facts (such as intentionality and that which is intended) are located within the flux of pure experience and not in ontologically separate mental and physical realms. Seen this way, the Chinese tradition is firmly entrenched against the dualism of mind and matter and, as such, Confucius does not need to provide a foundation for *social* facts in a private, inner, willing ego.

Hall and Ames go on to discuss how *de* refers to what is extended outward and constitutes the social patterns of being virtuous. Virtue conceived as such, and not as the possession of a “substance” that is “private,” but literally located in the sphere of experience, provides the means by which the gentleman can be recognized by himself and by others. “*De* denotes the emergence of particularity as a determining focus of the field that contextualizes it. The range of its particularity is variable, contingent upon the way in which it is interpreted both by itself and by other enviroing particulars.”¹⁵ For Hall and Ames, the self emerges as a particular by providing a focus for the larger field that constitutes it by way of cultivating virtue. Since virtue emerges as social patterns that constitute the self by way of dispositions to act excellently, the “particular” is engaged in an ongoing process of composing the world through cultivating the self. Further, Hall and Ames go on to claim that the experienced regularity of the world is a “vector negotiated out of the interplay between oneself and the elements of one’s context.”¹⁶ The “experienced regularity” of the world is exactly what James’ doctrine of radical empiricism accounts for by way of relations. Given this aspect of the field-focus model of the Confucian self, there is a natural connection to James’ view that the consciousness of the self is the continuation of one experience after another bound by relations. James talks about how concepts are tools for navigating the chaos of pure experience. Even the concept of the self is pinned down out of the flux of experience in order to provide for the regularity of the world. For both James and Confucius then, the self is something that constitutes, and is constituted, by the world. Further, it is by virtue of the way in which discrete particularities are held together by their very relatedness that accounts for the uniformity of the world and self. This point is echoed by Hall and Ames when they say that *de* is both the particular (the focus) and the field construed from its own perspective. *De* then has two capacities. In the one sense the cultivation of virtue has the capacity to individuate the field as focus. In another, the possession of virtue allows the collapse of the *dao-de* distinction through its integrating capacity.¹⁷ The cultivation of *de*, insofar as it allows for the individuating of the field into a particular, also provides a focus of the field. Thus, the self is not an unstable flux of relations. Rather, it is the whole field as construed from a particular vantage point as well as being its focus. The above interpretation of James is meant to show that this view of the self (that it is constituted by the field of relations around it and constitutes those relations as well) is compatible with his own position in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. The

“self” is not a term that directs us to something that is outside of the field of experience. It is concept that is employed to denote the way in which the field becomes a “focused field.” On the Confucian side, this is accomplished by the cultivation of virtue which produces social patterns for behavior. These patterns, in turn, are codified by *li* into the ritualized, traditional and cultural patterns of behavior that constitute the relational self.

It is important that we return to the quotation with which this investigation began. There is a legitimate concern given certain understandings of the relational self that a person’s self-identity is something that they can lose given their changing roles. However, by focusing on the field-focus model of the self favored by Hall and Ames, this concern is alleviated by conceiving of virtue (*de*) as expressing social patterns for behavior that recognizes the proper relationship of the sage to others. The self is the focal point from which the field is constituted and yet is mutually determined by the field itself. For Confucius, virtue is a character trait that is exhibited across all contexts. Understanding what it means to be virtuous is to understand how the environment helps in the cultivation of virtue. One way that this is done is by the social relations that constitute a person. However, the role played by social interaction is only a *sufficient* condition for the cultivation of virtue. It also requires a strong personal effort. By placing the interpretation of the relational self within the sphere of James’ radical empiricism, and not by forcing an overly rationalist interpretation of Confucius, it is revealed that one does not have to import substance in order to provide for the stability of the identity of the self. Self-identity is a social fact and as such is part of experience. Experience is fixed for James through the use of concepts that secure the otherwise chaotic nature of experience. Social facts are one way that experience can be grouped and, as we have seen, the formation of the self, for both Confucius and the Pragmatists, is a dynamic process of becoming that occurs within the realm of social interaction but is not exhausted by these interactions. Society does not cultivate virtue by itself, but neither does a person become a sage in isolation. This fact is supported by James’ position that the world does not come pre-conceptualized but neither does the self stand opposed to the world to give it meaning. The very consciousness of the self, which presupposes and supports the potential to cultivate an ethical self, is determined by focusing the flux of pure experience at one point by grouping experience together by relations. The conceptualization of experience at one point is the emergence of the consciousness of selfhood. Only once this ordering has taken place is it permissible to speak of the cultivations of an *ethical* self.

Rather than pointing to a convergence of doctrines, the comparison between Confucius and James points to a methodology that fosters a better understanding of the relational self than traditional Western models provide. Although James’ radical empiricism rests upon positions that Confucius would certainly fail to endorse, providing a basis for comparison that takes the role of relations as they are given in experience as primary enables a clearer understanding of the interplay between the metaphysical self, the cultivation of an ethical self, and the role of social context in self-consciousness and self-cultivation. If Confucius were to go live with the barbarians outside of the ritualized social patterns that recognize him as being virtuous, he would not fail to be virtuous in that context. For if the latter were the case, what grounds could we have for saying that he was virtuous at all?

NOTES

1. See David Wong, "Relational and Autonomous Selves," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 31:4 (December 2004), 419-432.

2. Roger T. Ames, "Confucianism and Deweyan Pragmatism: A Dialogue," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30: 3&4 (September/December 2003), p. 407.

3. The usefulness of this distinction was brought to my attention in a conversation with Tim Connolly.

4. By calling the relatedness of the self an intrinsic property my view implies that the conception of the self relies upon a corresponding conception of the other. This point is alluded to in Peirce. He states "The conception of the self implies the possibility of an *other*." Insofar as my position is meant to provide a foundation for the relational view of the Confucian self (which is ethical) the implication of a merely possible other is too weak a view. However, there are interesting implications to the view that the relational view of the self has foundations in Peirce's category of secondness. See Charles S. Peirce, "On a New List of Categories," *The Essential Peirce*, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 6.

5. Jiyuan Yu puts it in the following way: "Confucius is concerned with moral rather than metaphysical identity of the self. He is interested in the development of an ethical character rather than what it is that remains in the same person over time." However, this is not to say that it is *impermissible* to provide metaphysical positions that best underlie Confucius' stated concerns especially since one goal of this paper is to show how a substance based metaphysics regarding the self has led to unclear interpretations of the Confucian self. See Jiyuan Yu, "Confucius' Relational Self and Aristotle's Political Animal," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 22:4 (October 2005), p. 290

6. Henry Rosemount, "Rights-Bearing Individuals" in *Rules, Rituals and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated to Herbert Fingarette*, ed. Mary Bockover (La Salle, Indiana: Open Court, 1991), pp. 90.

7. On how virtue requires personal effort, understanding and feeling see Yu 2005, p. 292. On my view Confucius' moral particularism implies the intrinsic status of virtue.

8. Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius—The Secular as Sacred* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1972), p. 43.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

10. Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D.C. Lau (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 113. All subsequent references to the *Analects* will be to the Lau translation.

11. William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1912), p. 42.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 45

13. There is good reason to think that this passage was not written by Confucius but by his disciple Zhengzi. This point was brought to my attention by Jiyuan Yu.

14. David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 38.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 40.