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## Introduction

### *A Prologue to an Unlikely Project*

“In the beginning was the deed.” Goethe, *Faust I*.

—Quoted by Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, section 396

Among the disciples, there was one who, on his own, had written down the Master’s teachings. Hearing of this, the Master said, “Sages and worthies teach in the same way that physicians prescribe medicine. They always match the treatment to the ailment, taking into consideration the various symptoms and, whenever appropriate, adjusting the dosage. Their sole aim is to eliminate the ailment. They have no predetermined course of action. Were they indiscriminately to stick to a predetermined course [of treatment], rarely would they avoid killing their patients. Now with you gentlemen, I do nothing more than diagnose and polish away each of your particular prejudices or obsessions. As soon as you manage to make these changes, my words become nothing but useless tumors. If, subsequently, you preserve my words and regard them as dogma, you will one day mislead yourselves and others. Could I ever atone for such an offense?”<sup>1</sup>

—Xilu, quoting Wang Yangming

## Introduction

In the course of talking to philosophers about this book, though many expressed some interest in the project, just as many expressed reservations. What possibly could be the connection between Confucius and Wittgenstein? Others seemed to think that even if there were a substantial, important connection, it would be very difficult to establish.

While working on this book, I have become increasingly convinced that the connections I somewhat dimly sensed at the outset are real but that clarifying these connections is considerably more difficult. Some of the difficulties stem from the inherent problems in comparative philosophy, and some have to do with the targets of my comparison: Confucius and Wittgenstein. The difficulties of comparative philosophy concern the nature and possibility and value of comparison across cultural, historical, and linguistic divides; these divides or differences are so extensive that finding sufficient similarities to compare can be nearly impossible. The difficulty of using Confucius and Wittgenstein as objects of comparison has to do with the complex question of which versions of each thinker's positions to select. Even if we could specify only three different versions of each position, we would have nine different possible targets of comparison.

This chapter is a prolegomena to the study I have undertaken. The procedure will be to specify which Confucius and whose Wittgenstein will be compared and then, given these choices, the points of the comparison. I take the goal of comparative philosophy not only to make comparisons between philosophical views from different parts of the world, but also to articulate for each side of the comparison possible problems and resources more readily grasped in the other side. The justification of the selection of versions will come from the textual support for those selections and from the reflective, critical fruit of those versions.

However, if the argument I develop in Chapter 1 is reasonable, interpretive justification is not separable from evaluative argument. For, as I argue, the principle of charity rests on the fact of under-determination of interpretation by textual and historical evidence. This means we are required to adopt those interpretations of texts and authors that maximize the reasonableness of those positions.<sup>2</sup> If that is true, it is inevitable that we acknowledge different versions of Wittgenstein and of Confucius. This is not to say that all versions are equally well defended, but it does mean that in many cases the sort of "gotcha" appeals to textual evidence, designed to refute an alternative interpretation, are not likely to do that by themselves. For even "gotcha" passages will be subject to competing interpretations and differing interpretive weights. What tips the balance in these interpretive arguments is often an unstated appeal to the claim that one version of the position is stronger than the other, that it is thought to be philosophically superior. But one philosopher's thinking that an interpretive argument is superior does not make it so. Simple appeal to textual evidence, with one possible interpretation, will not necessarily refute alternatives. The superiority of an interpretation will be borne out in some way by appeal to reasoning and

explication, making it clear that one version of the position is superior to the other.

Although it is impossible to state the whole range of reasons I have for adopting a particular version of the Wittgenstein position, it is possible to specify that version and to explain why it sheds light on and shows the strength of key aspects of Confucius's project. Nonetheless, my approach contains a few possible problems that I will spell out in this introduction and address in the comparative exposition.

If we draw a standard distinction between normative ethics and meta-ethics, we might wonder how it can be possible to compare Confucius's teachings, which appear normative, with Wittgenstein's later philosophy, which says next to nothing about ethics and would appear, if it were used to think about ethics, to be "meta-ethical."<sup>3</sup> After all, Wittgenstein's discussion of language-games is designed more to clarify how to resolve conceptual confusions about language and concepts rather than to show which, of the range of possible language-games, including ethical language-games, is the correct one (whatever that would mean). In contrast, Confucius is deeply embedded in a moral tradition, which he takes a stand on, studies, and passes on to others. Thus, an attempt to compare Wittgenstein's later philosophy with Confucius's teachings would appear to be a meta-ethical normative ethical divide if ever there were one.

A second issue I need to address is that even if I can show that Wittgenstein's later philosophical project and Confucius's teachings share sufficient similarities to overcome this initial objection, I still may not have shown that the comparisons I am making bear any fruit for either position. After all, with sufficient cleverness, any position can be said to be similar to another in some respects. The similarities need, however, to be illuminating and bear some fruit. For, at least in my conception of the comparative philosophical enterprise, the point of comparison should be an examination of the ways in which the comparisons and contrasts bear dialectical fruit, both in terms of the issues they raise and the resources they make available to the positions under discussion.

My task in this chapter will be to provide a general sketch of the ways in which these two positions can be benefited by joining forces. In Chapter 2, I raise fundamental dilemmas facing Confucius's teaching and Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Both projects forego foundational theories, and in doing so, arguably face problems—even if different—of not being able to justify key claims they must make in the course of carrying themselves forward. For, as I will argue, both seek to embody a form of "spirit" that they leave unjustified by theory. By embodying a theoretically ungrounded

“spirit,” it can be argued, they both are subject to the charge of arbitrariness, and both require some theoretical grounding if they are to be carried forward. I will argue that by combining forces, the two forms of spirit can develop even better strategies for addressing these criticisms than they are able to muster alone. In the course of this comparative study, I discovered that the unusual juxtaposition of Wittgenstein’s and Confucius’s philosophies, including their ungrounded spirits, produces not only a different, stronger spirit than either one embodies alone, but in so doing, addresses outstanding issues, such as the meaning and truth of the sentences of the *Analects*, as well as its contemporary relevance.

The way I develop these arguments depends on which versions of Wittgenstein and Confucius I choose to discuss. My version of Wittgenstein shares some similarities with the so-called “New Wittgenstein,”<sup>4</sup> who is suspicious of metaphysical/epistemological theories designed to provide an explanation of justification for ordinary linguistic practices. Wittgenstein holds that once our ordinary criteria for something being true or real are applied to a situation to justify the correctness of a sentence, there are no further epistemological, metaphysical, foundational questions to raise about the correctness of the language-game in which the utterance takes place. As Wittgenstein says of any particular language, “This is the language-game that is being played.”<sup>5</sup> The fate of Confucius’s self-cultivationist approach to ethics and related eschewal of metaphysics, I argue, is wedded to the success of Wittgenstein’s very similar project. However, Wittgenstein’s later avoidance of sustained discussion of ethics benefits from the sort of supplementation offered by Confucius’s *Analects*.

Despite these affinities between my Wittgenstein and the New Wittgenstein, following recent work of Meredith Williams and Nigel Pleasants, I argue that Wittgenstein would not agree with the New Wittgensteinian tendency to be suspicious of traditional moral authority. I take these issues up in some detail in Chapter 2.

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of Confucius’s and Wittgenstein’s teachings. The overview’s goal is to persuade readers that the two philosophers share a roughly similar account of the norms embedded in human life and language, despite the large differences between their projects. I will call these accounts or commitments their shared basic insight that our primary relationship to norms, one necessary for understanding them, is through learning. This approach constitutes a key stumbling block for interpretation and evaluation of both thinkers’ projects. As a result of this insight, both projects address the problems they face—for Confucius, how to restore a life lived in conformity with *dao*, meaning the set of norms governing

human life and, for Wittgenstein, how to resolve conceptual confusion in philosophy and protect shared moral insights of humanity—through appeal to contingent practices and the sorts of self-cultivation designed to bring us in agreement with them, not through the construction of foundational, justificatory theories.

### Bedrock Practices

An important caveat to any comparative presentation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy alongside Confucian teaching in the *Analects* is that whereas Wittgenstein offers a view of language that would play a role in investigating and resolving the problems of philosophy, Confucius's teaching is designed to clarify *dao* with the goal of fostering self-cultivation and culture-wide recovery of *dao*, which had been left in disrepair with the gradual dissolution of the political and cultural power of the Zhou Dynasty. Despite these differences, Wittgenstein's project centers on the key issue of understanding the role of norms within human life with an emphasis on language. Confucius's project is formed out of a sense of the basic character of *dao*, the norms governing human life and, primarily, the care of human relationships. It is true that some later passages in the *Analects* take up the political project of rectifying names, but Confucius does not develop an interest in language and rectification of names in general, beyond his limited interest in functional terms, like "father" and "ruler." These terms imply norms, which, when strictly applied to people, require applying them to people who must live up to those norms.<sup>6</sup>

One additional noteworthy similarity between the texts is their preoccupation with teaching and learning. Confucius describes the need for a devotion to learning 好學 (*haoxue*), especially of ritual 禮 (*li*), as the principal first step in self-cultivation and also offers a phenomenology of what it is like to move along the path from novice to master of *dao*. Moreover, one of Confucius's disciples, Master You (Youzi), supplements Confucius's focus on learning ritual with an account of how performing relatively concrete practices, like keeping one's word 信 (*xin*), provides a basic practice that prepares one for the more complex range of practices that make up righteousness 義 (*yi*). Youzi's focus includes an emphasis on being filial or obedience to parents, which he generalizes to obedience to those in authority. Both Confucius and Youzi emphasize that basic, bedrock practices are the first steps and constitutive features of understanding and practicing norms.<sup>7</sup>

Although there is reason to think that as an adult, learning *dao* from a teacher is different from learning language and related basic concepts for the first time from one's parents; if we analyze this apparent difference using Wittgenstein's approach to clarifying the content of concepts and norms by appeal to learning contexts, this difference does not matter for purposes of conceptual clarification. Wittgenstein's learning contexts in the opening passages of *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, focus on the learning situation of those who lacked the key concepts being taught. Learning contexts in the *Analects*, however, focus on the learning of young adults and adults instructed by Confucius. But Wittgenstein in other writings, such as *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, focuses on the learning situations of a range of learners. What a concept or norm consists of is shown in the way it is learned and taught. What is bedrock will be displayed in the learning context. In discussing paradoxes in mathematics, Wittgenstein claimed, "All the puzzles I will discuss . . . can be exemplified by the most elementary mathematics—in calculations which we learn from ages six to fifteen."<sup>8</sup> But his discussion of learning in *Philosophical Investigations* also takes up teaching how to help adults (presumably) to weigh and balance imponderable evidence of whether another person's feelings are genuine.<sup>9</sup>

Although Confucius does not discuss the ritual of teaching children and their learning, Youzi's account could apply to children even if Youzi, like Confucius, is concerned only with moral cultivation in adults. In contrast, Wittgenstein focuses on language-games, which he describes as the sorts of simple language usages learned by children that adults use to clarify and critique philosophical views. Those same usages of language, he says, also apply to the process of learning concepts and related words as constitutive of their meanings. Although Wittgenstein does not say much about moral language and concepts, he does say something; thus, it is possible to imagine fruitful use of his mode of clarification to reflect on the meanings of moral concepts. Wittgenstein's views tend to blur this distinction between children and adult learning while offering enough resources for the reader to discover both similarities and differences.<sup>10</sup>

In the rest of this section of the Introduction, I will explore some of the connections between Wittgenstein's and Confucius's views of learning and teaching as they apply to what Wittgenstein takes as "bedrock practices," those practices, which, as the inherited background of our actions and beliefs, we convey in teaching-learning contexts, and which, as constitutive of those beliefs and actions, are not justifiable by us. He says of them: "Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do.'"<sup>11</sup>

The Confucian project of self-cultivation and understanding *dao* as grounded in the fundamental master-novice relationship is the means by which norms, which are embodied, are transmitted and understood. In certain contexts, emphasis is given to the parent-child (father-son) relationship and in other contexts, to the teacher-disciple relationship. Nevertheless, this project provides room for reflection on these norms but only as an outgrowth of learning practices.

Confucius offers, however, nothing in the way of a metaphysics of norms and little or nothing of what we would call normative theory. Some commentators have found this feature of Confucius's project problematic. We can distinguish three basic interpretive approaches to Confucius's project:

- A. Embodying a version of some Western philosophical theory
- B. Being insufficiently philosophical
- C. Presenting an alternative to Western philosophy.

MacIntyre<sup>12</sup> and Slingerland,<sup>13</sup> who read the *Analects* as presenting a view similar to Aristotle's virtue ethics, as well as Hall and Ames,<sup>14</sup> who understand the text in terms of Whitehead's process philosophy or Dewey's pragmatism, exemplify type A. Fingarette,<sup>15</sup> Graham,<sup>16</sup> Hansen,<sup>17</sup> and Schwartz<sup>18</sup> exemplify type B by treating the *Analects* as philosophically unsophisticated and in need of some theoretical foundation. Both of these types arise from a fundamental principle held by many philosophers, that a non-Western philosophical text is philosophically significant only if it contains a theory that provides a principled justification for actions or beliefs. In contrast, I join with those of type C, the pluralists (Eno<sup>19</sup> and Nivison<sup>20</sup>), who treat the *Analects* as an alternative to Western philosophy but do so by arguing that the *Analects* offers not theory, but self-cultivation practices and reflections 思 (*si*).

Nonetheless, despite his departure from standard forms of philosophical theory, Confucius, I argue, is still some sort of realist about norms. Although he offers no metaphysics of norms and is more concerned to guide others' self-cultivation than to offer abstract clarifications of *dao*, Confucius says that the *dao*, which set of norms governing human life, is something a society either has or fails to have.<sup>21</sup> He also says that *dao* is something a culture can get closer to and possibly even embody through a life self-cultivation.<sup>22</sup> These are formulations nearly all realists would be happy with even if they were to think more needed to be said. Yet, we might wonder, how can Confucius proceed with any confidence about the "reality" of norms if he lacks any philosophical account to give of its "reality"?

This problem seems all the more pressing given that when Confucius discusses *dao*'s constitutive ideals, such as goodness or humanity (仁 *ren*), filiality (孝 *xiao*), and trust (信 *xin*), he often characterizes them in various ways.<sup>23</sup> And in some cases, his characterizations seem designed specifically for the person with whom he is talking. Lacking any comprehensive definition and any account of the reality of *dao*, one might argue that it is hard to see what basis Confucius might have for treating *dao* as "real." Without such an account, we might think we need to accuse him of ethical provincialism if not wholesale bias.<sup>24</sup>

There are several aspects to an adequate account of Confucius's so-called realism. If he is a realist, then he is a realist without a theoretical elaboration of his realism. Confucian realism would have to be understood as one would understand it from the vantage point of his fundamental project of self-cultivation in those practices, attitudes, and reflective understandings and forms of sensitivity and responsiveness that constitute *dao* (the norms of living well).

The burden of my argument will be to show what Confucius's form of realism involves and why philosophers might want to take it seriously as an alternative to theoretical, metaphysical accounts of the reality of norms. To that end, I examine Wittgenstein's approach to realism in Chapter 2. Unlike Confucius's realism, Wittgenstein intentionally seeks to place limits on the meaningfulness of metaphysical language as a way of protecting our complicated forms of life and those ways of thinking and speaking central to it. Before that argument is made, it is important to understand Confucius's and Wittgenstein's shared basic insight, which is central to the form of realism that Confucius adopts. I borrow a term from Wittgenstein scholar and philosopher Cora Diamond; she uses "realistic spirit" to capture Wittgenstein's realism. Confucius also embraces the realism of the "realistic spirit."

At this point, I wish to capture one aspect of that spirit, specifically the way in which Confucius appears to have no interest in questions of metaphysics and definitions of key normative concepts; nevertheless, he thinks of *dao* and its constitutive norms as "real." In the account I offer, the reality of *dao* together with its constitutive ideals are embodied in Confucian practices of learning; these practices constitute and illustrate real instances of *dao* and its ideals. The primary way to understand those ideals is to learn the ritual practices that embody them. If this is true, then all we need to know about Confucian ideals comes from learning and acquiring them with the assistance of someone who has mastered them. Confucius's down-to-earth instructions plus any extensions of the ideals taught by master practitioners,



such as Youzi's modifications of Confucius's teachings, will provide us with all there is to know about these concepts and ideals.

The best way to make sense of this approach to *dao* and its constitutive ideals, in terms of Wittgenstein's and Confucius's shared notion, is that as novices we learn the basics of how to embody norms. Later, after years of study and practice, we may become masters of how to embody those norms in their full complexity. It is possible to understand Confucius's project of inquiry into morality along the lines of inquiry into the nature and meaning of the game of chess. Someone who wants to understand chess first needs to learn the basics of chess. After extended practice mastering the basics, the novice will, perhaps by being offered examples of exemplary chess moves from the history of chess, be able to operate at higher levels of mastery, and eventually, if lucky, be able to create his own exemplary chess moves. We can imagine such a level of mastery as being accompanied by reflection on the meaning of chess as playing a role in the human form of life. This reflection depends on the person's earlier levels of mastery and would not be possible without them. But this project would be a form of "realism" about chess, its basic rules, its history, its exemplary moments, and so forth. Confucius's similar realism lies in his acknowledgment that central normative practices can be taught by those who have mastered them and that learning from this teaching establishes students' basic competency. His acknowledgment that the basic norms can be mastered and taught to others limits what those norms are.

Given this basic approach, like Wittgenstein, we can view Confucius as proceeding in a realistic spirit in his self-cultivation teaching project. He can insist that students be trained in basic practices of propriety. He can also embrace a certain depth of *dao* that escapes simple clarification in terms of definitions yet allows for clarification as learners move to higher levels of mastery of basic practices or mastery of even higher-level practices.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he can allow that some folks exhibit a higher degree of mastery of how to conform to *dao* than others. In short, *dao* can be understood beyond clear formulas, and it can be considered "real" precisely because its norms can be taught and students can choose to act on this learning either correctly or incorrectly. From the vantage point of someone engaged in a self-cultivationist project, this is "realistic" enough.<sup>26</sup>

My basic approach to this "realistic spirit" of Confucianism derives from the way that Wittgenstein investigates how norms are learned and how they work in the context of various practices. In his later investigations, Wittgenstein presents a sustained examination of rule-following and how

understanding concepts is constituted by learning bedrock, norm-governed practices. He offers a way to understand these phenomena without offering abstract, overly simple views of them, which gives rise to irresolvable paradoxes. For example, an intellectualistic view of rule-following might allow that to understand a formula involves grasping the rule that allows an individual to carry it out, but because rules can be interpreted in various ways, rule-following rests on grasping an acceptable interpretation of the rule. But even deciding whether the interpretation of the rule is acceptable or correct can be interpreted variously.<sup>27</sup> Wittgenstein concludes that this account makes it unclear what rule-following consists of and, indeed, makes rule-following impossible due to its required distinction between getting the rule right or wrong. In place of a view that gives central place to interpretation, Wittgenstein argues that there has to be a way of understanding a rule that is not an interpretation. Instead, Wittgenstein claims, rule-following is a practice.<sup>28</sup> In addition, in *On Certainty*, he maintains that some empirical propositions function as rules that are part of the bedrock practices that lie at the bottom of our ways of thinking and talking:

94. But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.

95. The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules.<sup>29</sup>

In these passages, Wittgenstein makes the point that to learn the rules and the ways of thinking and talking connected to them is to learn those practices. And those practices are learned from master teachers who, when they can, instill in novices the basic competency required to operate with basic beliefs and concepts within the target area of belief and language. But learning bedrock practices does not exhaust how we learn concepts. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein also discusses whether a person can learn to become an expert in judging the genuineness of others' feelings. Such judgment requires being influenced by "imponderable evidence." A master can teach a novice to use such evidence not by teaching a system, but through teaching correct judgments and giving the right hints.<sup>30</sup> Witt-

Wittgenstein's account of how concepts are learned finds important parallels in Confucius's account of moral learning. Next, I will investigate these parallels.

### Bedrock Learning

A key feature of bedrock learning is that a novice is required to follow blindly the teaching of the master. What distinguishes bedrock learning from other forms of learning is the fact that we do it without justification. It is just what we do. As Wittgenstein says:

“How am I able to obey a rule?”—If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my acting this way in complying with the rule.

Once I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say, “This is simply what I do.”<sup>31</sup>

My act of obeying a rule rests on bedrock practices, which, while they supply me with a way to justify proceeding as I do, are not themselves justified. They are what I do. But Wittgenstein is at pains to point out that what “I do” is the by-product of learning from someone who is already a master of the practice I am engaged in. So at this bedrock level, a person could just as well say, “This is what I learned.” Or, “This is what we accomplished practitioners do.” Or, “This is what a master of this practice does.”<sup>32</sup>

The novice lacks a grasp of the conceptual terrain he is being initiated into, and only later, after mastering a bedrock practice, can he come to have the basic concepts of that terrain. Therefore, Wittgenstein distinguishes between “ostensive teaching” and “definition”: the latter requires concepts in the terrain of the definition, but the former does not. So, if I am to ask what the meaning of the word “tree” is and understand possible answers, I already need to have mastered the concept of plants, height, longevity, and so on. In contrast, ostensive teaching simply involves pointing and naming, as a basic form of learning required before a person has understood the concepts of tree, plants, and so forth.

Meredith Williams discusses this feature of Wittgenstein's view of concepts in a way that is instructive. She argues that for Wittgenstein, how a person learns a concept is constitutive of that concept. She quotes Wittgenstein in support of her claim:

It may now be said: “The way the formula is meant determines which steps are to be taken.” What is the criterion for the way the formula is meant? It is, for example, the kind of way we always use it, the way we are taught to use it.<sup>33</sup>

For this reason, Wittgenstein often turns to the question of how a concept gets learned in the course of clarifying the concept. But what is distinctive and important about Williams’s account is her clarification of the master-novice relationship. This relationship is crucial, for unless we understand this relationship, we will mischaracterize the character and context of bedrock learning.

A master cannot function to teach a novice about a concept, for example, the concept of expressing appreciation, without a good deal of stage setting. The context of teaching presupposes the practice of saying “thank you” in various contexts, done with the right expression of gratitude. The master herself must have mastered those practices. Based on her prior learning, she intends to teach the child and through a pattern of imitative behavior expects the child eventually to learn to engage in this behavior without prompting. The novice begins learning this language without the concept of gratitude, which she will only later come to understand. But until the novice’s “thank you” utterances come as matter of course, are suitably expressive, and she feels that she must utter them in the right contexts, she will not yet have adopted the concept of gratitude. Her developed sense of what she “must” do in situations where we typically feel a need to express gratitude constitutes her grasp of a new concept. As Wittgenstein indicates in his discussions of learning mathematical concepts: “This *must* shews that he has adopted a concept.”<sup>34</sup> Prior to this, the child will have a feeling of pleasure at those things that please her teacher. Her first efforts to imitate her teacher are only courtesy attributions of understanding of the concepts to be learned.<sup>35</sup> Until she has a mastery of the basics of the concepts and related judgments and knows when and how she *must* employ them, she lacks those concepts. The sort of bedrock learning, say, of the concept of table, requires blind obedience on the part of the novice that finally issues in this sense on the part of the learner that she must say “table” to describe certain objects.<sup>36</sup> This requirement is fully clear in Wittgenstein’s discussions of the problem of skepticism, especially in a passage on learning in which he seems to liken the adult skeptic to the difficult child who doesn’t believe his teacher or schoolbooks:<sup>37</sup>

314. Imagine that the schoolboy really did ask “and is there a table there even when I turn around, and even when no one

is there to see it?" Is the teacher to reassure him—and say “of course there is!”? Perhaps the teacher will get a bit impatient, but think that the boy will grow out of asking such questions.

315. That is to say, the teacher will feel that this is not really a legitimate question at all. And it would be just the same if the pupil cast doubt on the uniformity of nature, that is to say, on the justification of inductive arguments.—The teacher would feel that this was only holding them up, that this way the pupil would only get stuck and make no progress.—And he would be right. It would be as if someone were looking for some object in a room; he opens a drawer and doesn't see it there; then he closes it again, waits, and opens it once more to see if perhaps it isn't there now, and keeps on like that. He has not learned to look for things. And in the same way this pupil has not learned how to ask questions. He has not learned the game that we are trying to teach him.

316. And isn't it the same as if the pupil were to hold up his history lesson with doubts as to whether the earth really . . . ?

317. This doubt isn't one of the doubts in our game. (But not as if we chose this game!)<sup>38</sup>

At the level of bedrock learning, there is no room for creative projection of a concept onto novel items that the ordinary concept does not include. Indeed, bedrock teaching that tolerated such free-wheeling application of a concept would be irresponsible. Williams's account sounds strikingly Confucian:

For the novice . . . as part of the process of training itself, an indispensable courtesy is extended to his behavior and utterances. They are accorded the status of actions and judgments before they really are such.<sup>39</sup>

This makes the novice doubly dependent on the community. Like the master, his action is what it is only against the background of its historical and social setting; but unlike the master, this status is not ensured by his own competency, but by that of the master. For many performances of a novice, there is simply no fact of the matter as to whether he understands correctly or not. This is because it is not enough to go on correctly; the

correct performances must be the exercise of the right kind of disposition. Acting from one's competency, understanding, and acting correctly all go hand in hand.<sup>40</sup>

The novice, like his master, depends on the historical setting for the practices they eventually share in, but the novice's competency as someone who "understands" is dependent on the competency of his master. Without having the proper disposition to go on correctly, that is, to do as the master does or would do, the novice cannot understand what the master is teaching. His novice-level understanding is dependent on the full understanding of his master. And those "gray-area" performances of the novice, not yet clearly arising from the right disposition, are called instances of understanding only because of their derivation from his learning from a master, who has that settled disposition.

Although Confucius does not address the question of the constitutive relation between learning and concepts or the relation between that constitutive relation and the dependence of the novice's understanding on the master's understanding, he does show a profound sense of the need for bedrock learning of ritual, as this learning forms a person's moral sensibility. Confucius's disciple, Master You (Youzi) shows an understanding of the importance of children learning filial obedience and other simple virtues as constituents of more comprehensive virtues.<sup>41</sup> The *Analects*, then, makes, among others, two important claims about 仁 (*ren*), moral goodness.<sup>42</sup> Youzi claims that the basis of being morally good is *xiao*, being filial, and the route to being morally good is through practicing ritual. Consider the following passage:

有子曰。其為人也孝弟。而好犯上者鮮矣。不好犯。而好作亂者。未之有也。君子務本。本立而道生。孝弟也者。其為仁之本與。

Youzi said, "There seldom is one as a man who, being filial and fraternal, is strongly inclined to go against superiors. There has never been one [who was] not inclined to go against his superiors [who] is strongly inclined to foment rebellion. The ruler should undertake the fundamentals. After fundamentals have been undertaken, the Way (the standard for appropriate conduct in interpersonal relationships) is established. Being filial and fraternal, aren't they perhaps the root of being morally good (in respect of conduct in interpersonal relationships)?"<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, Confucius claims that the practice of ritual brings about 仁 (*ren*), moral goodness:

顏淵問仁。子曰。克己復禮為仁。一日克己復禮。天下歸仁焉。為仁由己。而由仁乎哉。顏淵曰。請問其目。子曰。非禮勿視。非禮勿聽。非禮勿言。非禮勿動。顏淵曰。回雖不敏。請事斯語矣。

Yan Yuan asked how to become morally good. Our Master said, “Controlling oneself and returning to ritual practice is the way to become morally good. On a single day, if a person has controlled himself and returned to practicing ritual, then the whole empire would categorize him as being morally good. Becoming morally good comes from oneself; how could it come from others? Yan Yuan said, “May I hear the details?” The Master said, “Don’t look if it does not comply with ritual action. Don’t speak if it does not comply with ritual action. Don’t act if it does not comply with ritual action.” Yan Yuan said, “Although I am not intelligent enough, please let me devote myself to these words [instructions].”<sup>44</sup>

Due to the fragmentary character of the *Analects* and Confucius’s tendency to make hints and suggestions about how to engage in self-cultivation, we are left wondering how these claims about *xiao* and *ren* might be related. I suggest the following relationship. Filial piety and ritual propriety have a fairly clear relationship. A child first learns forms of ritual propriety within the family. The successful transmission of ritual propriety requires that the child shows appropriate obedience to and so filial respect toward his parents and teachers in the course of learning bedrock ritual practices. At the same time, those ritual practices provide the child with ways to express his respect and love for his parents and elder brothers. These forms of expression also have appropriate correlates outside the family.

In whatever ways we clarify the relationship between parents as teachers and their children, it is clear that Confucius considers the learning of ritual practices as the basis for his self-cultivation project. Indeed, he emphasizes devotion to learning 好學 (*haoxue*) as the key to self-cultivation. And although reflection, that is, thinking and questioning, is important, reflection cannot make headway—and, in fact, will get us into trouble—if it is disconnected from bedrock learning:

子曰。學而不思，則罔。思而不學，則殆。

If one learns something but does not successfully reflect on its meaning, he will learn in vain. If one merely thinks about something in the abstract but does not first learn it, he will face trouble.<sup>45</sup>

This slogan, reminiscent of Kant's "concepts without intuitions are empty, intuitions without concepts blind," also captures a key commitment of Wittgenstein in his two methodological dicta: "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about.' And, the philosopher's aim "is to shew the fly the way out of the fly bottle."<sup>46</sup> In both dicta, Wittgenstein is concerned to combat a form of reflection that proceeds disconnected from concrete linguistic usage and practice, embedded in specific forms of life (or language-games). Yet he is also at pains to acknowledge that our forms of language can give rise to misleading philosophical pictures, which tend to bewitch us into thinking about our concepts as detached from their role in the commerce of ordinary life and language. Philosophical reflection that is guided by misleading pictures and detached from concrete linguistic usage leads to irresolvable conceptual puzzlement. Mastery of language-games by itself does not protect us from becoming bewitched by pictures. And reflection that is not guided by concrete linguistic usage embedded in specific language-games and forms of life will encourage rather than resolve this sort of bewitchment. The resolution of philosophical torment and the results of philosophical peace come from reflection guided by concrete linguistic usage. Linguistic usage protected by such reflection prevents philosophical confusion or resolves it if we fall into it. But this sort of limitation on reflection is central to *Analects* 2.15. Our reflections about *dao* must arise out of and be limited by prior learning, primarily, but not exclusively, out of ritual.

A question, however, arises about whether this comparison can be made between Wittgenstein's master-novice relationship, which, for the most part, concerns learning contexts in which the novice lacks the concepts that he is being taught by the master, and Confucius's Master-novice relationship, which concerns an adult novice who understands the concepts he is being taught if only at an elementary level. In discussing a child's learning, Wittgenstein distinguishes between ostensive definition and ostensive teaching. The former requires some level of understanding of the concepts being used and the ability to ask the meanings of the words that express them. So, a question such as, "What is four?" when asked by someone who already knows what numbers are, asks for a definition. Pointing to four objects would offer an ostensive definition of "four." Ostensive teaching occurs when



the novice has not yet learned basic mathematics and does not yet have a concept of number. A parent or teacher saying, “This is four,” while pointing to four objects, is part of the training. Under normal circumstances, this type of instruction leads the pupil to an understanding of the concept of number, including the number four. Until that level of mastery occurs, the novice can be said to be counting, adding, and knowing what four and other numbers mean only because of the context of the learning and his relationship to the master of counting.

In contrast, the *Analects*' Master-novice relationships occur primarily between adults and young adults who have already, presumably, mastered the basics of ordinary language, including the moral language of the rituals and virtues. As helpful as this comparison might be between a child learning numbers and an adult learning how to practice moral goodness, it is not exact. Moreover, if bedrock beliefs and practices are understood only as the beliefs and practices taught to child-novices who are being initiated for the first time into a conceptual terrain and related language-games, this simplistic understanding does not represent the situation of Confucius's novices, who are mostly young adults and are already trained in the basic language and concepts of living morally good lives.<sup>47</sup>

My response to this concern is multifaceted. There is nothing in the *Analects* to suggest that Confucius would be hostile to the claim that moral understanding starts at a young age and that the training he offers adults is secondary to that. In fact, in *Analects* 19.12, Zixia makes this very argument:

子游曰。子夏之門人小子。當洒掃，應對，進退則可矣。抑末也。本之則無。如之何。子夏聞之，曰。噫。言游過矣。君子之道。孰先傳焉。孰後倦焉。譬諸草木。區以別矣。君子之道。焉可誣也。有始有卒者。其惟聖人乎。

Youzi said, “The young disciples of Zixia serve as sprinklers, sweepers, dealing with guests, their coming and going, and these they are worthy to do. But these are merely minor subjects; as for regulation of the basics, they have none. How can I deal with them?” Zixia heard this, saying, “Alas, Youzi's words are excessive. As for the way of the well-cultivated man, what first is transmitted? Afterward what should last be transmitted? We can think of it as similar to groups of plants and trees. We classify them according to their differences. The way of the gentleman, how could it be so falsely distorted? As for one who grasps both the beginning and the end, won't he alone be a wise man?”

Although not Confucius's argument, this passage shows an early appreciation of the need to begin in childhood with very basic practices. To this passage, we might also add the famous passage in which Confucius offers his spiritual autobiography, *Analects* 2.4, in which he says that he set his mind on cultivation since he was fifteen years old. Presumably, his serious level of commitment did not arise from nothing, but rather, from his own appreciation at that early age of the benefits of learning he had gained prior to this.<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, it is true that moral cultivation of children is not the core focus of the *Analects*. I would venture to say that because his project concerned moral cultivation of adults, it was not a topic Confucius felt a strong need to discuss. It is also noteworthy that despite emphasizing the importance of filiality, Youzi himself does not discuss filiality in children. The demands of filiality that he and Confucius discuss are demands of adult children toward parents. Children might seem to be on a moral holiday.

Other texts in the early Confucian canon also tend to ignore the problem of moral training in children. Two sections of *The Record of Rituals* (禮記 *Liji*) address these issues, albeit in limited ways. These texts probably postdate the *Analects* and reflect the efforts of authors to expound upon aspects of ritual that go beyond discussions in the *Analects*. Some suggest a very permissive approach toward children. Consider the seventh section of the "Inner Pattern" (內則 *neize*) chapter of the *Liji*, which contrasts early morning household requirements for children and adult family members:

孺子蚤寢晏起，唯所欲，食無時。

The children go earlier to bed, and get up later, according to their pleasure. There is no fixed time for their meals.<sup>49</sup>

However, sections 76–80 specify a curriculum from early childhood to adulthood:

子能食食，教以右手。能言，男唯女俞。男鞶革，女鞶絲。

When the child was able to take its own food, it was taught to use the right hand. When it was able to speak, a boy [was taught to] respond boldly and clearly; a girl, submissively and [in a] low [tone of voice]. The former was fitted with a girdle of leather; the latter, with one of silk.

六年教之數與方名.七年男女不同席，不共食.八年出入門戶及即席飲食，必後長者，始教之讓.九年教之數日.

At six years, they were taught the numbers and the names of the cardinal points; at the age of seven, boys and girls did not occupy the same mat nor eat together; at eight, when going out or coming in at a gate or door and going to their mats to eat and drink, they were required to follow their elders: the teaching of yielding to others was now begun; at nine, they were taught how to number the days.

十年出就外傅，居宿於外，學書計，衣不帛襦褲，禮帥初，朝夕學幼儀，請肄簡諒.

At ten, [the boy] went to a master outside and stayed with him (even) overnight. He learned the [different classes of] characters and calculation; he did not wear his jacket or trousers of silk; in his manners he followed his early lessons; morning and evening he learned the behavior of a youth; he would ask to be exercised in [reading] the tablets, and in the forms of polite conversation.

十有三年學樂，誦《詩》，舞《勺》，成童舞《象》，學射御.二十而冠，始學禮，可以衣裘帛，舞《大夏》，惇行孝弟，博學不教，內而不出.

At thirteen, he learned music, and to repeat the odes, and to dance the *ko* [of the duke of Zhou]. When a full-grown lad, he danced the *xiang* [of King Wu]. He learned archery and chariot driving. At twenty, he was capped, and first learned the [different classes of] ceremonies, and might wear furs and silk. He danced the *da xia* [of Yu] and attended sedulously to filial and fraternal duties. He might become very learned, but did not teach others—[his object being still] to receive and not to give out.

三十而有室，始理男事，博學無方，孫友視志.四十始仕，方物出謀發慮，道合則服從，不可則去.五十命為大夫，服官政.七十致事.凡男拜，尚左手.

At thirty, he had a wife and began to attend to the business proper to a man. He extended his learning without confining it

to particular subjects. He was deferential to his friends, having regard to the aims [which they displayed]. At forty, he was first appointed to office, and according to the business of it, brought out his plans and communicated his thoughts. If the ways [which he proposed] were suitable, he followed them out; if they were not, he abandoned them. At fifty, he was appointed a great officer, and labored in the administration of his department. At seventy, he retired from his duties. In all salutations of males, the upper place was given to his left hand.<sup>50</sup>

I suggest that this later text, from the early Han, represents a stage of institutionalization of moral cultivation beyond the sort of adult training Confucius gave to individuals. Although we cannot use these passages to argue that Confucius himself held these views of early childhood moral training, we can use these passages to show that early expositors of Confucius's teachings for adults did not see any tension between his accounts and related accounts of childhood training.

Perhaps the more difficult issue is how far we can understand Confucius's project as a training of adult novices by a master on the model of Wittgenstein's initial training of children into a conceptual terrain they have not yet encountered. I will now argue that there is no problem extending Wittgenstein's view of training in bedrock practices from children to adults. This argument requires two steps: First, I will argue that bedrock practices are not essentially connected to the training of novices whose learning requires equipping them with the most basic concepts and related linguistic behavior. Second, I will argue that, in some contexts, young adults function as novices, learning higher-level bedrock practices from a master of such practices.

Wittgenstein's discussions of master-novice relations are varied. We know from his discussions of puzzles about mathematics that he sought to understand how to resolve them by appealing to mathematical learning of children from ages six to fifteen:

Knowing our everyday language—this is one reason I can talk about them. Another reason is that all of the puzzles I will discuss can be exemplified by the most elementary mathematics—in calculations which we learn from ages six to fifteen, or what we might easily have learned, for example, Cantor's theorem.<sup>51</sup>

Wittgenstein is pointing out that the puzzles that concern him as a philosopher involve ordinary concepts, and the puzzles can be exhibited in elementary