ABSTRACT

Roles and the Ethical Life

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Role ethics, broadly speaking, is a normative ethical theory that has a prominent emphasis on roles. Although it was prominent in ancient cultures, such as in China and Greece, role ethics waned during the Enlightenment era. Not until very recently has role ethics been articulated in its own terms. Among current discussions on roles, the most systematic role ethics are Confucian role ethics (as interpreted by Roger Ames and some others), Epictetus' role ethics (as interpreted by Brian Johnson), Sarah Harper's role-centered morality and Jeremy Evans' role ethics. They are my primary interlocutors as I develop and defend an alternative approach to understanding, examining and guiding our ethical life. By arguing that our ethical life is pervasively structured by roles, and drawing on the lights that my primary interlocutors have shed, I propose a role-structured ethics or role ethics that addresses some central issues regarding the nature of roles, the self, role identification, role fulfillment, role conflicts, and changing roles. Importantly, I emphasize the place of traditions in constructing a complete normative role ethics. So throughout the dissertation, I outline and defend the basic structure of any plausible specific role ethics, which is neutral among various traditions. I call such a structure

"Role Ethics." In particular, I investigate the nature of roles and its relation to the self, role fulfillment and its relation to the concept of duties, virtues and skills, as well as the nature of role conflicts and how to approach them. Along these lines of exploration, I also argue that they have important implications on the dignity of persons, moral education, and the notion of practical wisdom. Last but not the least, due to the universality of roles in various traditions, I propose that Role Ethics can serve as a platform to bring various traditions into meaningful dialogue.

Roles and the Ethical Life

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DEDICATION

To the One who was, and is, and is to come

CHAPTER ONE

Introducing Role Ethics

Introduction

Role ethics, broadly speaking, is a normative ethical theory that has a prominent emphasis on roles. Consequently, to develop and defend a role ethics requires an ethical inquiry into the nature of roles, the connection between the concept of role and other more familiar ethical concepts such as duty and virtue, as well as other investigations regarding the normative status of various sorts of roles. To be sure, it is difficult to define role ethics precisely due to the many different interests and ambitions that role ethicists have. Roles, and the ethics of them, however, are not foreign to ordinary people at all. The questions philosophers ask about the nature and normative status of roles are highly practical as they profoundly influence our practical reasoning in daily life, our understanding of ourselves, our yearnings for role fulfillment, our plans for life, and our concerns about role conflicts.

Some ethics in ancient China and ancient Greece can be characterized as role ethics (as I will explain below), but the approach fell out of favor in the modern era and not until recent years has it started to regain philosophical attention. However, the current discussions of role ethics are inadequate and disconnected. Some philosophers focus merely on resolving practical conflicts regarding certain professional roles (e.g., in medicine, law, or education). Others do historical work to reconstruct role ethics in specific traditions. Some philosophers try to apply certain current ethical theories to

understand the moral significance of roles. A few who are more ambitious attempt to make roles the foundation of ethical theorizing, but they tend to stay on the meta-ethical level without developing normative theories.

In this dissertation I will integrate some of the central concerns in role ethics literature by outlining a systematic role ethics in its key meta-ethical, normative, and practical dimensions. The version of role ethics that I advocate (hereafter RE)[1] might be called "radical" because it interprets the whole ethical life as structured by roles. Nevertheless, it is a general and not a specific role ethics, because it is neutral among a wide range of significant metaphysical, theological, and ethical traditions. In other words, RE is not specific to any certain tradition such as Confucianism, Stoicism, or Christianity, which I will be discussing at points in this project.

I develop RE in relation to three major problems that I will address in the following chapters. In Chapter Two, I explore the nature of a role and its relation to the notion of the self. Chapter Three will address the normative status of role fulfillment through inquiring into the relations between roles and skills, virtues, and duties. In Chapter Four, I investigate the problem of role conflicts by clarifying two types of role conflicts and then providing accounts of role priority and proper action as solutions to these conflicts. My exploration will make important contributions to the understanding about who we are, how we should live, and how we should act in particular situations. In addition, it will have very significant implications regarding the dignity of persons, character formation, and practical wisdom.

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[1] I use RE to refer to the role ethics I propose in this dissertation. I use "role ethics" to refer to general ethics of roles.

The above is a brief overview of my project. In the current chapter I will do three things. First, I will explain why role ethics is worth studying. Second, I will briefly explain the history of role ethics. After that, I will introduce my primary interlocutors: two ancient ones—Confucian role ethics and Epictetus' role ethics—and two contemporary ones—Sarah Harper's role-centered morality and Jeremy Evans' role ethics. I will draw heavily on these resources when I defend my own positions in the following chapters.

Why Role Ethics Matters

As I mentioned earlier, role ethics has been in the margin of modern ethical inquiries in the West. Its revival in the recent years seems to be based on three kinds of reasons.

An empirical reason:

1. Increasingly, moral and social psychological studies support the claim that our social roles play a critical part in our moral deliberation that occurs beneath our conscious awareness.[2] An ethical theory that coheres with these empirical findings is definitely attractive.

Theoretical reasons:

2. There is increasing recognition that roles are ethically significant. They are part of a flourishing life not only for the role-occupier but also for the role-respondent.[3] Through roles one has opportunities for "self-expression,

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[2] Jeremy Aaron Evans, "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective" 2014, 1–5, https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/26050.

[3] Cf. Anne Baril, "The Ethical Importance of Roles," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (December 1, 2016): 721–34.

practical reasoning, self-knowledge and personal growth."[4] The ethical

importance of roles can also be derived from the fact about our

dependency.[5]

3. Roles have numerous relationships with the categories prominent in

mainstream ethical discussions. Specifically, roles are closely related to

the good, to virtues, and to duties or obligations. Jorge L. A. Garcia argues

"[r]oles are a natural fit for the virtues."[6] On the one hand, virtues are tied

to roles in our ordinary moral thinking; on the other hand, virtues make

something good in the sense that they facilitate the fulfillment of a role,

either constitutive or instrumental manner. Likewise, many duties are role-

related.[7] A stronger view on this issue could be that roles are sources of

obligations.[8]

4. Role fulfillment poses a challenge for ordinary morality: the proper

fulfillment of roles, as determined by standard role norms, sometimes may

permit or even require role occupiers to act immorally.[9] How to deal with

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[4] Anne Baril. "The Ethical Importance of Roles," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (December 1, 2016): 734.

[5] Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Open Court, 1999).

[6] Garcia, J. L. A.. "Roles and Virtues," in *Routlege Companion of Virtue Ethics*, edited by Lorraine Besser and Michael Slote. (Taylor and Fancis, 2015)

[7] See for example, Michael O. Hardimon, "Role Obligations," *The Journal of Philosophy* 91, no. 7 (July 1, 1994): 333–63. Judith Andre, "Role Morality as a Complex Instance of Ordinary Morality," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 73–80.

[8] A relatively moderate view is that roles are one source among many others of obligations. See Evans' dissertation for this version. A strong view is that roles are the foundation of all obligations. See Sarah Harper for this strong version.

[9] Cf. Christine Swanton "A Virtue Ethical Theory of Role Ethics", Journal of Value Inquiry 2016 (50) 687-702

such a tension between role morality and ordinary morality is critical for moral theory.

5. Some philosophers argue that the notion of role helps to remedy the problem that our normative life has been divided into a "moral life" and an "ethical life" that are concerned with different categories which have been interpreted as opposing one another, such as the right versus the good, or duties versus virtues. Put simply, the notion of role can help to restore a singular, unified and coherent moral life.[10]

6. Role ethics seems to account well (and much better than Enlightenment moral theories) for the special responsibilities persons have in special relationships.[11]

7. Role ethics modeled on human psychology can provide a compelling explanation of moral motivation.[12]

8. Moral conflicts can be better understood through role ethics.[13]

A practical reason:

9. Some pressing practical issues in certain professional roles require philosophers to clarify the normative status of these particular roles.[14]

All these reasons demonstrate the promise of role ethics. I agree with these

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[10] Sarah J. Harper, "Role-Centered Morality" (Boston College, 2007), 1–20.

[11] See, for example, Sarah Harper's dissertation (2007): 37-61.

[12] See, Evans, 37

[13] Ibid.

[14] See, for example, Arthur Isak Applbaum, *Ethics for Adversaries: The Morality of Roles in Public and Professional Life* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999). And Justin Oakley, *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

observations but I contend that there are additional reasons to care about role ethics. The weight of some of these reasons might not be obvious at this point, but will become clear after I develop my own account of role ethics (RE).

The first reason comes from an ordinary observation: our lives are pervaded and structured by our roles. Considering a person's whole life, we see each stage is characterized by certain roles; observing a single day of a person's life, we notice the person at each moment is actively engaging in at least one role.[15] Thinking of our ethical life through its basic role structure can help us grasp the big picture more easily, which in turn will be conducive to a better understanding of the specific morally-laden aspects of that life.

Secondly, roles are worth considering because the language and the concepts that we often use to describe, evaluate and prescribe actions are largely about roles. *You are a great mother. As a doctor, how can I do this? Students should work hard on their courses. I need to take care of my parents who have been very sick, sorry that I cannot attend your wedding (which requires much traveling and time being out of town). She is feeling guilty about neither being a good wife and mother nor a good student. He is such a great person because he can balance the obligations required of a father, a husband, a son, a church leader, and a CEO.* An ethical theory starting from the notion of roles will be more accessible to the ordinary audience than the highly abstract moral theories.

Thirdly, the notion of roles seems to be the key to deal with the tension between impartiality and partiality. This proposal will be discussed in Chapter Two when I suggest that the tension between impartiality and partiality can be explained by a

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[15] Even when one is solitary and separated from the society of others such that one seems to forsake all of one's social roles, one may still be in relationship with nature, the universe, or God, and thus carries the accompanying role. I will discuss this relationship and special kind of role later.

relational notion of the self in terms of roles. And in Chapter Four, I will show how some of the conflicts in practice generated by such a tension can be addressed in terms of roles.

To sum up, various thinkers have explored different aspects of role ethics. When taken together, their work suggests that developing role ethical theory is a potentially rich and worthwhile philosophical project. Now let me briefly introduce the history of role ethics before I present more of the details of role ethical theory.

Role Ethics in History

In the ancient cultures in China, Africa[16] and Greece, ethics was heavily associated with roles. Thus it is unsurprising that the two most notable works in systematic normative role ethics in recent years—Roger Ames' *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (2011) and Brian Johnson's *Role Ethics of Epictetus: Stoicism in Ordinary Life* (2013)—draw heavily from those ancient ethical traditions. Often these traditions are presented as focusing on virtues or rules or a combination of the two, but it is undeniable that each of them has a prominent emphasis on roles, as these contemporary philosophers have argued by drawing on the original texts.

Jeremy Evans argues that role ethics waned during the Enlightenment era due to secularization, a new model of rationality, and a movement toward egalitarianism. Secularization denies the divine source of morality and upholds human reason as the ultimate foundation of morality. Using modern physics as a model for rational inquiry, moral thinkers appealed to ontological simplicity, theoretical consistency and maximal power of prediction and, in moral theories, eliminated appeals to God. The complexity of

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[16] Cf. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Temple University Press, 1995). I will focus only on the Confucian and Stoic role ethics in the dissertation since they have been explicitly presented in a systematic way.

various social roles seems to hinder moral philosophy from achieving the latter objectives. Rather, impartiality and generality became the central features of morality as construed by post-enlightenment moral philosophy. Finally, the movement toward egalitarianism aimed at overturning the traditional hierarchies; it did not favor the idea of social roles because, historically, social hierarchies are established through social roles. Therefore, in order to abolish hierarchies, the normative value of social roles inevitably was undercut. Human beings were considered as equal regardless of their social status. The result of these movements was "the dominance of ethical traditions in which all the various roles were collapsed into just one relationship with all moral agents."[17]

Despite the fact that role ethics largely has been neglected by the post-enlightenment philosophers, there are some exceptions in the 20th century. While some of these figures do not have a clear idea of role ethics in mind, their theories support a direction of inquiry suggested by role ethics. Evans argues that Harold A. Prichard and W. D. Ross's intuitionism in the early 20th century foreshadows the plausibility of role ethics. In the 1970s, Dorothy Emmet and R. S. Downie have some discussion of roles in the context of social ethics. In addition, various special relationships or roles and their relation to morality have been explored by Lawrence Blum (1980), J. L. A. Garcia (1985, 1986, 2003, 2015), Judith Andre (1991), Michael Hardimon (1994, 2016), Hugh Lafollette (1996), Samuel Scheffler (1997) and Diane Jeske (1998). Jonathan Dancy's particularism also provides a place for roles. Meanwhile, the care ethics advocated by Nel Noddings (1984) and some others is consonant with some of the core assumptions of role ethics, such as the significance and centrality of human relationship in ethics and the relational approach to ethical inquiry. Charles Taylor (1988) advocates the concept of

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[17] Evans, "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective," 39.

roles or relations to others in his argument for a communitarian concept of self.[18] Similarly, Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) stresses the normative value of roles within the context of virtue ethics.[19] All the figures mentioned above are in the analytic tradition of philosophy, broadly construed. Others from the continental tradition might be added.[20]

These philosophers are never labeled as role ethicists, in part because role ethics has not been articulated in its own terms until very recently. The most full-fledged contemporary accounts of role ethics (in addition to the recoveries of Confucian and Stoic ethics mentioned above) are in two recent dissertations, Sarah Harper's "Role-centered Morality" (2007) and Jeremy Evans' "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective" (2014), which have gained little attention. Among virtue ethicists, Christine Swanton and others explicitly express a strong interest in roles,[21] but they do not advocate the radical form of role ethics that I pursue in this current project.

Since my primary interlocutors in the rest of the discussion will be the role ethics endorsed by the Confucian tradition, Epictetus, Harper, and Evans, I will summarize each of these role ethics in the following four sections.

Confucian Role Ethics

John Ramsey defines Confucian role ethics as "a constellation of views (including the prominent work of Roger Ames and his collaborators) that interprets Confucian literature and thought of the Warring States period as promoting a relational conception

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[18] Cf. Evans 2014, 39-40, Anne Baril 2016, footnote 4, 722

[19] Cf. Evans 2014, 40 as well as Anne Baril 2016, footnote 3, 722

[20] Sarah Harper lists F. H. Bradley and Emmanuel Levinas as precedents in role ethics. These are from the continental tradition of ethical theory, which pays considerable attention to relationality of persons. But in this dissertation I will limit my discussion of contemporary figures to the analytic tradition.

[21] See a whole issue on role ethics in *Journal of Value Inquiry*, Dec 2016.

of persons and employs this conception to emphasize how a person's roles and relationships are the source of her ethical obligations and ethical growth."[22] In recent years A. T. Nuyen, Mary Bockover, John Ramsey and (most prominently) Roger Ames have interpreted Confucian ethics as role ethics. To be sure, these philosophers disagree on some specific issues of interpretation, but for the current purpose I will put their disagreements aside. I will provide a general picture of Confucian role ethics primarily based on their ideas. I will briefly survey the notion of person/self in Confucian role ethics, the Confucian project in general, as well as how this project bears on the nature and normative status of roles.

Ramsey's critical survey of Confucian role ethics is very helpful in forming such a big picture of it. He identifies three major theses of Confucian role ethics:

> (i) the constitutive thesis: persons are constituted by their roles and relationships;
> (ii) the achievement thesis: full personhood is an achievement of *ren*[23] [and]
> (iii) the determinative thesis: obligations and duties encoded in one's roles and relationships determine *ren*.[24]

Theses (i) and (ii) support "a relational conception of personhood" that is in sharp contrast to the Western view of the person as rational, autonomous, independent, who freely chooses to follow certain rules, cultivates some virtues and forms relationships with others. Instead, the Confucian concept of person emphasizes the relationality, situatedness, and interdependence of persons. Specifically, Confucian role ethics has a weighty focus on familial roles. Theses (ii) and (iii) imply that in order to become a full person—to achieve *ren*—we ought to fulfill our roles and cultivate our relationships.

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[22] John Ramsey, "Confucian Role Ethics: A Critical Survey," *Philosophy Compass* 11, no. 5 (May 1, 2016): 235.

[23] *ren* is the goal of ethical development in Confucian ethics.

[24] Ramsey, "Confucian Role Ethics," 236.

Confucius taught that the way to achieve self-realization starts with properly playing one's social roles.[25] Consequently, roles can be seen as a pathway to moral growth.

By putting theses (i) through (iii) together, we get this claim: one becomes a full person, which is constituted by one's roles, through fulfilling the obligations and duties entailed by one's roles. The Confucian project is self-realization. The key to accomplishing this project is through identifying who we are. The underlying metaphysical assumption of the Confucian project is that who we are determines what we can become fully and how we can become fully. The Confucian answer to the questions regarding self-identity and personal development is wrapped around the notion of roles.

After grasping the general idea of Confucian role ethics, let us consider how Confucian role ethics answers the substantive questions of role ethics. Since (as we have already seen) Confucian role ethics rests on the notion of person or self,[26] it is a very rich resource to think about the issues regarding the self. Here I will summarize the ideas of Confucian role ethics on the issues regarding role fulfillment and role conflicts. I will explore the more specific details of the Confucian account of self in the next chapter.

Regarding role fulfillment, two levels of discussion are worth noting here. On the metaethical level, roles are naturally related to virtues and rules. But, Ames suggests, the Confucian tradition reverses the relation between roles and virtues/rules compared to the modern Western view: "it is our lived roles and relations that are primary as those composite activities from which we abstract, generalize, and indeed simplify their

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[25] In the *Classic of Family Reverence*, when Confucius explains filial piety/family reverence (*xiao*) to his disciples, he says that it "begins in service to your parents, continues in service to your lord, and culminates in distinguishing yourself in the world."[25] (Rosemont, Jr. and Ames 2009, 105)

[26] I will use "person" and "self" interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

otherwise complex content as principles, virtues, and values."[27] So, for Confucian ethics, the basic assumption is that moral rules and virtues are grounded in our life experience constituted by various social roles, while on the post-Enlightenment Western view, rules and virtues are grounded in reasons that are independent from our social roles.

On the normative level, the concept of *li* (礼) is very important. Each key role is encoded in *li,* which is usually understood as the primary system of social rites or rituals. For Confucius, *li* is a ritual system that is inherited from ancestors; it seeks to represent *dao* and aims at *he*.[28] It covers a wide range of human life situations and provides concrete instructions about how to properly play the central roles.[29] It is not a fixed set of rules, but is adjustable to specific circumstances.[30] Because it is the way to establish one's character, a person begins observance of *li* in the role of a child. Consequently, *li* is the resource that one can appeal to with regard to how to fulfill a certain role.

Furthermore, Confucian ethics provides very concrete guidelines about the norms of central roles, with a particular emphasis on how to be a son (or daughter) and how to be a younger brother (or sister). It holds that only through fulfilling such roles can one go

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[27] Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 162–63.

[28] See *Analects* 1.12 for a full explanation of the relation between *dao* and *he*. Simply speaking, the use of *li* is for the harmony of the world, which is *he*. *He*, though considered as the ultimate aim, must also be restricted by *Dao*, which in general, could be interpreted as the fundamental principle of the world. It is not good to seek for *he* without the constraints of *li*, which represents *dao*.

[29] Here is Confucius' definition of *li* from *Book of Rites*: *"Li is what the ancient kings sought to represent the way of Tian*, and to regulate *the relationships* among men. Therefore he who neglects or violates it may be (spoken of) as dead, and he who observes them, as alive. …Therefore *li is rooted in Tian, imitates (the way of) the earth, and is drawn from spiritual beings*. They extend to funeral rites, sacrifices, archery, chariot-driving, capping, *wedding*, audiences, and friendly missions. Thus the sages made known *li (to the people)*, and it became possible for the kingdom, with its states and clans, to reach its correct condition." (James Legge, with alteration emphasized)

[30] See *Analect* 3.4 and 9.3.

on to fulfill other roles that go beyond one's family and extend to one's community, such as being a friend, citizen, minister, or even king.

Confucian ethics is a hierarchical ethical system. So real role conflicts may seem rare if one adheres to the Confucian ethical codes. But this does not mean that one will never face a tension between two roles that seem to demand incompatible actions. Recent interpreters of Confucian role ethics have not paid much attention to this problem, with the exception of Ames and Cheryl Cottine.

Ames has a discussion of an often-cited passage in *Analects* that could be read as a case of conflict between the role of a son and the role of a citizen.[31] The son in the passage reported his father's stealing behavior to the local authority. Although the Governor of that state thought highly of this son's character, Confucius criticizes the son's action by recalling the importance of a relationship of trust between father and son. Ames comments on this case as follows: "[w]hat sheds light on this case while at the same time making the situation somewhat more complex, is the internal demand in Confucian role ethics to make the situation right by achieving optimal appropriateness in the particular situation (yi)."[32] So, *yi* (义) is a key concept in dealing with role conflicts. *Yi* is "optimal appropriateness"[33] in concrete situations, which is considered as the

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[31] *Analects* 13.18. "The Governor of She said to Confucius, 'In my village there is an upright (zhi 直) man who reported his father to the authorities for stealing a sheep.' Confucius said, 'In my village, those who are upright are quite different. Fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. That is one example of being upright.'" (Lin 2011, 233) "*Zhi*," translated "upright" here, means holding onto the right thing without surrendering to adverse pressure.

[32] Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, 164.

[33] Ames, 46.

supreme dictator of action by Confucius.[34] There is *yi* in every situation that requires

some action(s). For situations in which role conflicts occur, *yi* might be more difficult to

specify. As we have seen in the case where a son reported to the authorities his father's

moral failure, disagreement can occur about what *yi* is in a role-conflict situation. The son

(and Governor) in that story failed to recognize *yi* in that situation from Confucius' view.

According to Confucius, *li* requires children to exhibit remonstrance (*jian*), i.e., "the

obligation that a child has to protest against and to rectify the conduct of an erring

parent."[35] So, the reason that this son failed to recognize *yi* seems to be that he was not

acquainted enough with *li*. Thus, *li* is still the basic understanding that enables one to see

yi.

       Cottine articulates and defends a Confucian response to role conflicts. She cites

stories from Mengzi as well as from Han Shi Wai Zhuan to illustrate a Confucian way to

cope with genuine role conflicts. The solution, generally speaking, is to create "a value

hierarchy with particular attention to nearness."[36] Nearness is a concept she borrows from

Mary Midgley to refer to the degree of intimacy of relationships. For example, one's

relation to one's sibling is "nearer" than one's relationship to a fellow citizen. In

Cottine's view, various role-relations have differing values and importance. Yet she

emphasizes that such a hierarchy of values should serve only as a guide rather than an

absolute rule for decision-making. Sometimes, we may find a creative way to "solve"

role conflicts, but most of the time, she believes, a satisfying way for the agent to fulfill

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[34] *Analects*, 17:23 The Master said, "The man of honor (junzi) considers *the optimal appropriateness (yi)* as superior good."[34] (Lin 2010, 315 with alteration emphasized)

[35] Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, 164.

[36] Cheryl L. Cottine, "Roles, Relationships, and Chinese Ethics" (Indiana University, 2014), 265.

conflicting roles is unavailable. In the Confucian tradition, death is a viable option when fulfilling one role implies a significant failure regarding other conflicting roles or values that the agent could not bear.

Confucian role ethics has many insights on moral education. Thus, its strength lies not only in its ethical outlook, but also its systematic guidance of practice in the form of *li*. I will return to this point and develop it when I discuss the relation between roles and virtues in Chapter Three.

<center>*Epictetus' Role Ethics*</center>

In *Role Ethics of Epictetus: Stoicism in Ordinary Life*, Brian Johnson provides a refreshing interpretation of Epictetus' ethics as founded on the concept of role: while Stoics usually hold that ethical goodness is expressed in virtues, Epictetus thinks that ethical goodness is expressed in playing one's roles well. I will not be concerned about the historical accuracy and charity of Johnson's interpretation. What is especially interesting to me is that this contemporary reconstruction of Epictetus' ethics articulates another instance of role ethics, in addition to the Confucian one. Henceforth when I talk about Epictetus' ideas, I mean Epictetus' ethics as presented by Johnson. I will briefly survey Epictetus' accounts of roles, appropriate action and the self.

Epictetus explains the concept of an ethical role by connecting it to the mask used in ancient drama. On the cosmic stage, every person has one's own part or station in the drama of life assigned by God (or Nature), the divine General, and one should follow such an assignment and God's overall arrangement of the world.[37] Epictetus distinguishes

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[37] Brian E. Johnson, *Role Ethics of Epictetus : Stoicism in Ordinary Life* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA, USA: Lexington Books, 2013), 11, http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10818893.

between two types of role: the human/universal role and one's specific or local roles, such as father, mother, son, friend, Roman citizen, and so on. It is very important to identify a person's roles, specific as well as universal, because they determine the good for the person or how the person should live.[38]

The universal (or human) role requires that a person act as a human being rather than a beast. For Epictetus, to be a human being means to be rational, to be rational means to follow nature, and to follow nature means not to act "in a violent, careless, gluttonous, or passive manner."[39] It is worth noting that although Epictetus defines humanity in terms of rationality, and traditionally rationality is thought to be expressed in canonical virtues, Epictetus seems to "have pushed the traditional virtues into the background."[40] Instead, he thinks rationality is expressed in a variety of appropriate acts. Furthermore, rationality not only allows but also requires humans to think holistically— that is, to understand their station, not merely locally, but also in terms of the whole cosmos. Such a holistic approach means that submitting to God is prior to our following local interests or obeying local commands. Therefore, in terms of roles, the universal role has a higher priority than specific roles, and one should fulfill one's universal role before one fulfills any of the other roles.[41] Also a person should never choose an "evil role" because that choice would go against the universal role.[42]

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[38] Johnson, 13.

[39] Johnson, 46.

[40] Johnson, 17.

[41] Johnson, 18.

[42] Ibid.

Some other content of the universal role is spelled out in terms of certain appropriate acts that are in the line with the Stoic doctrine: namely, "to act as a citizen of the world," "to treat externals as a matter of indifference," "to prefer volition above all else," "to eliminate the passions," "to have fidelity," and "to have a sense of shame."[43] Johnson argues that the indifferent attitude to externals and the preference of our volition establish "the groundwork for proper fulfillment of our specific roles."[44] There are many cases in which people fight over externals (like money, reputation, or office) such that social relations are broken. If we treat the externals indifferently, and prefer what is under our own control (i.e., we prefer volition), we will preserve those social relations. Moreover, to fulfill the human role requires one to be civilized, which has two aspects. One is to eliminate passions because the passions prevent one from listening to reason. The other is to have fidelity. We would not trust a person to be in a relation to us if that person does not have fidelity. Lastly, in order to fulfill the role of human being, one must exercise the faculty for self-reflection. Epictetus thinks that shame is constituted by one's judgments about properness and improperness and comes from one's capacity of self-reflection. Shame is very important to be human because it helps one follow nature. "To play our human part we must therefore uphold our sense of shame."[45]

Although Epictetus appeals to the common standard of the universal role to evaluate human actions, he also believes that there is a specific standard for each person grounded in the person's specific roles. Epictetus divides these specific roles into three

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[43] Johnson, 17. Please see Johnson 16-21 for detailed discussion on these requirements of the human role.

[44] Johnson, 19.

[45] Johnson, 21.

types: professions, such as philosopher or physician; personal relations, such as mother; and political roles, such as Roman senator. These are class-types of roles that are shared by some, but not all people.

So as to identify one's specific roles, Epictetus provides four criteria: (1) particular capacities, (2) social relations, (3) choice and (4) divine sign. First, some specific roles are determined by one's natural capacities. Some people have certain extraordinary capacities and, therefore, should take certain roles in conformity with those capacities. As Epictetus prescribes, if one is able to lead the army, one should be a general; and if one is able to compete in the Olympics, one should be an athlete.[46] For ordinary people, Epictetus thinks that although they cannot make those extraordinary achievements, they still need to work hard to develop their capacities "with as much dignity as possible."[47]

Second, one's social relations determine some specific roles that are central in one's life.[48] Some of these social roles are natural and others are acquired. Natural relational roles, like child to parent, for example, are those "which we have from birth or which are naturally permanent."[49] Acquired relational roles, such as friend and spouse, are those "which we receive as we grow up where we are stationed"[50]; these roles may

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[46] Johnson, 26. Johnson does not explain why Epictetus thinks that natural capacities could have this prescriptive power. But it is very possible that given the authority of God that endows various capacities to different people, and the teleological picture of cosmos in Epictetus' philosophy, one should choose the role conforming to one's particularly extraordinary capacities because God gives one them, which means that God commands one to use them for certain purposes.

[47] Johnson, 26.

[48] Johnson, 29–33.

[49] Johnson, 30.

[50] Johnson, 30.

not be entered and exited at will, but should be fulfilled if they are given to one in certain situations. Johnson thinks this implies that we need to look into our circumstances to locate our roles. Likewise, designation and titles are also indicators of our roles. For example, if one has the title "President of the United States," then one has the role of President.

Some other specific roles, especially professional roles, are limited by our natural capacities, but they are not determined by those capacities; it is possible that the same capacity can lead to different professions. For example, a person who has athleticism may be capable of excelling in several sports. In such cases, choices are necessary to pick out one (or a few) roles among many.[51] Epictetus suggests that when choosing careers, we should also take the needs of one's community into account. Eventually, however, the choice may still need to be based on one's own wish.

Divine signs in special circumstances can also identify one's roles, especially extraordinary roles, according to Epictetus.[52] Socrates and Zeno assuming the role of philosopher are two examples. Johnson, however, points out that Epictetus leaves open the possibility that divine signs may also identify ordinary roles. His military analogy indicates that God, the General, gives each person a certain post. So, even for ordinary roles God may tell us by divine signs.

Although Epictetus does not have an explicit definition of roles, the method that he provides to identify one's roles suggests "they are functional memberships in some

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[51] Johnson, 33–34.

[52] Johnson, 34–36.

community, whether cosmic or local."[53] Each role has a particular function in a larger, teleological picture. In order to fulfill one's roles, one needs to explore what their functions are with respect to the teleologically ordered cosmos.[54]

Epictetus also identifies the appropriate acts to fulfill some of the common local roles. For the roles of son, brother, father and citizen, he prescribes the appropriate acts according to the traditional Roman values. Despite his conservativeness about the appropriate acts, he holds that these conventional roles must be in accordance with our specific natures; otherwise they should be denied.[55] The example he gives of a person reasonably denying conventional roles in order to conform to one's nature is the Cynic. He thinks that Cynics should avoid the customary family roles because they will "inhibit the Cynics' talent for the itinerant life of ethical reform."[56]

Although Epictetus believes that to fulfill a certain role demands appropriate acts, what counts an appropriate action is not clear in Epictetus. Based on the standard Stoic conception of appropriate action, two criteria seem to determine the appropriateness of an act. One is the act must be according with nature, and the other is it has a reasonable justification, which means that "so long as a rational agent could provide the defense, an action counts as appropriate."[57] Importantly, this justification is not infallible. And it does not need to be provided by the agent herself. The basis for a reasonable justification is

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[53] Johnson, 36.

[54] Johnson, 36–37.

[55] Johnson, 32.

[56] Johnson, 33.

[57] Johnson, 45.

our rational nature, which, for Stoics, is teleologically ordered toward some ends but not others. "Nature, therefore, is both factual and normative."[58]

Johnson discusses two sorts of appropriate actions for the Stoics, the intermediate and the perfect. Like a similar distinction made by Kant, this distinction involves the agent's motivation. Johnson explains,

> While perfect and intermediate appropriate acts can be the same in their outward expression (like aiding a friend), the two are distinguished by the mindset of the agent. It is only as performed by agents with a particular mindset that appropriate acts become either good or bad.[59]

Intermediate appropriate acts are those with a reasonable but not correct justification, while perfect acts are done with a correct reason—the correct motive. The former can be done by those who are not wise, whereas the latter can be done only by the wise. Intermediate appropriate acts can become perfect acts "when they take on the firmness of right reason itself."[60] Appropriate acts are neither good nor evil in themselves.[61] Agents who perform intermediate appropriate acts and perfect appropriate acts are concerned with the good. But intermediate appropriate acts are not yet good because they are not based on a right account, while perfect appropriate acts are good.

Johnson argues that Epictetus follows the Stoic tradition of appealing to appropriate actions, but further explains them in terms of roles. The concepts of "consequentiality" and "what is reasonable" both depend on the concept of roles according to Epictetus. On the one hand, appropriate actions are consequents of our roles, which means that appropriate actions are entailed by a given role just like a logical

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[58] Johnson, 45.

[59] Johnson, 45.

[60] Johnson, 46.

[61] Johnson, 46.

consequent follows a hypothesis in logic. On the other hand, what is reasonable can be determined by reference to our roles. Johnson believes that "the terms 'what is reasonable' and 'what is consequent' represent two different perspectives on the same appropriate action."[62] The difference involves who is evaluating an action: it is possible for *an observer* to determine what action is consequent to a role (third-person perspective), while what is reasonable is what is acceptable or comprehensible for *the agent* (first-person perspective).

I think that consequentiality and what is reasonable also correspond to the common standard and the particular standard that should be taken into account when deciding what the appropriate action is. Although the specific roles are class-types, Epictetus also rightly points out that the fulfillment of a certain role not only requires a common norm, but also demands particularities that can only be fully recognized from the first-person perspective. And I believe that this is one of the most important truths that Epictetus has taught us from his role ethics.

Brian Johnson does not explicitly offer an account of the self in his exploration of Epictetus' role ethics, but in a chapter titled "The Layers of Humanity" he tries to answer the self-identity question on behalf of Epictetus in terms of roles. According to Johnson, Epictetus argues that humanity has two distinct layers. One is rooted in our membership in a cosmic city composed of gods and humans, and the other is made by our membership of a specific microcosmic city, such as Athens. Epictetus thinks that the human city is a copy of the cosmos, and thus "a citizen ought to obey the sovereign just as a human being ought to obey nature, a citizen should benefit the whole just as a human ought to benefit

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[62] Johnson, 54.

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the world, and so on."[63] Moreover, our cosmic citizenship has a higher priority than our political citizenship because "it is our relation to nature that makes possible our civic communities."[64] Johnson, as we shall see below, thinks these two kinds of citizenship, though hierarchical, are distinct in the sense that the commitments required for the latter cannot be mere applications of the commitments demanded by the former.

According to this picture of humanity, the human self is composed of two aspects, one's cosmic citizenship and one's local citizenship. The former corresponds to one's cosmic role (that is, one's universal or human role), while the latter refers to one's specific or local roles. Epictetus speaks of a specific role as an instance of a type that is not filled by numerically one person.[65] So the self of a particular human being is an integrated unity of a human role and a set of local roles, with the former role taking a higher priority over the latter roles.

With regard to Epictetus's view of role conflicts, Johnson argues from the fact that there are role conflicts to the view that the specific roles are not merely applications of the universal role to particular circumstances. His argument is this. If the specific roles were only concrete applications of our universal roles, then they should not conflict with each other. But they do have conflicts. So they cannot be mere extensions of our universal roles.

Johnson admits that a limitation of Epictetus' role ethics is that he does not provide a clear resolution procedure for role conflicts. Nevertheless, he thinks that Epictetus provides some resources to think through the issue. First, Epictetus suggests

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[63] Johnson, 87.

[64] Johnson, 87.

[65] Johnson, 14.

that when a person inhabits two incompatible roles, she has to introspect and identify

what her self-worth is; that is, she must identify herself more with one of the two roles. It

is worth noting that Epictetus refuses to advise on self-worth identification because he

thinks that this requires a first-personal solution since "you are the one who knows

yourself."[66] This method works when two roles demand opposite acts: it requires the

agent to temporarily put down one of the two conflicting roles that is less identified with

her self-worth. Socrates is a central example in the mind of Epictetus on this issue.

Epictetus' discussion primarily focuses on the tension between Socrates' role as a father

and his role as a Cynic-like teacher. He argues these two roles are incompatible because

they are so demanding of one's time: if one role is fulfilled, the other role cannot be

fulfilled. Socrates chose to fulfill the role as a gadfly over his role as a father. So, there is

nothing wrong with Socrates acting like an irresponsible father.

Second, if the role conflicts are only contingent, they may be creatively resolved

on a case-by-case basis by "shuffling the contingent circumstances."[67] The example that

Epictetus gives here is a married Cynic. Johnson says that although Epictetus argues that

the Cynic role and the role of a family man are not compatible in many situations, he

provides a creative solution to enable them to coexist in a hypothetical situation by

rearranging the contingent circumstances. Epictetus conceives a scenario where a Cynic

marries another Cynic, all of their relatives are Cynics, and their children are brought up

as Cynics. He believes that by this rearrangement, a person will be able to live both as a

Cynic and a family man. What about the "irremediable conflicts between two specific

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[66] Johnson, 125.

[67] Johnson, 125.

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roles in which an individual identifies equally with each role"?[68] Epictetus fails to discuss

this case explicitly, concedes Johnson, yet he argues that some passages imply that when

it is impossible to resolve role conflicts by examining each role, we have to go beyond

the role theory and appeal to divine command. One example Epictetus gives involves two

roles for a soldier—a guard or a sapper. A soldier cannot take both of these roles at the

same time despite the fact that they are both necessary. When the soldier has no special

capacities for each of these roles, he should obey what the general has commanded him to

do.

Another point can also shed some light on the issue of balancing roles. That is, a

person with a specific role should avoid taking on other roles that are incompatible with

that role. According to Epictetus, since the conventional family roles are incompatible

with the role as a Cynic, a Cynic should avoid taking on the conventional family roles in

order to prevent the potential role conflicts.

As we have seen, Epictetus has much to say about the substantive questions for

role ethics. As a primary instance of systematic role ethics in western tradition, Epictetus'

role ethics is an important resource for ethical inquiry into roles.

Jeremy Evans' Contemporary Version of Role Ethics

Jeremy Evans defends the view that "our duties are determined by the social roles

we incur in the communities we inhabit"[69] by appealing to studies from social

psychology that show how human relationships play an important part in moral

reasoning. Relationship Regulation Theory (RRT), the social psychology that Evans' role

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[68] Johnson, 129.

[69] Evans, "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective," vi.

ethics is most closely modeled on, "conceives interpersonal moral reasoning as a process of maintaining (or regulating) a few universal types of human relationships."[70] These universal types are Hierarchy (parent/child, master/student, coach/player, etc.), Equality (friends), Proportionality (buyer/seller, employer/employee, attorney/client, and other transactional relationships), and Unity (regarding nationality, ethnicity, filial membership, team membership, and so on). The four fundamental role duties in Evans' role ethics are modeled on these four universal types of relationships.

I will briefly survey these elements of Evans's theory: the nature of roles, the relation between roles and moral motivation, and the theory of right action that is grounded in roles.

Evans stresses that roles are *sources* of duties, which, he claims, distinguishes his project from other projects that can be described as role-ethical, such as Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and Aristotle's *Polis*. His project is role-based in the sense that role is at least one of the foundations of morality,[71] while MacIntyre and Aristotle offer different foundations of morality, though they endorse the discussion of roles.

More precisely, Evans defines the scope of his role ethics as "a normative theory that describes how the duties of persisting human relationships constrain the pursuit of self-interest."[72] By "persisting relationships" he means a "subset of social relationships that follow individuals across social contexts."[73] The example Evans gives is the father-

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[70] Evans, 21.

[71] He admits that his role ethics does not necessarily cover all of aspects of morality. And he believes that this is a virtue for any moral theory, including his.

[72] Evans, "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective," 36, footnote.

[73] Evans, 36.

child relationship. Non-persisting relationships that are relative to social context, of which he does not provide any examples, are not the focus of his role ethics.[74]

The metaphysics of Evans' role ethics includes three parts. The first one is to specify the conditions for entering a persisting relationship or role. He claims that this occurs when the well-being of individuals becomes entangled, where "[e]ntanglement... is a bidirectional relationship in which a change in A facilitates a change in B and a change in B facilitates a change in A."[75] For instance, when two persons get married, their well-being becoming entangled is the condition for them to enter a persisting relationship of marriage. Specifically, he defines a moral entanglement as "a sufficiently strong interdependency between the interests of *relata*."[76] Marriage relationship, for example, is a moral entanglement because the interdependency between the well-being of the two spouses is sufficiently strong. An example of non-moral entanglement could be a casual friendship in which the friends are not much dependent on one another. When moral entanglement happens, role duties also arise. Evans bases this kind of duty on empathetic responses.[77]

Then he proposes to explain the normative force of our role-duties by appealing to an entanglement relationship. In short, the strength of a role-duty is determined by the strength of the entanglement, and the strength of the entanglement is determined by the

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[74] I think that some examples of non-persisting relationships in Evans' mind could be dealer-customer relationship, host-guest relationship, and so on.

[75] Evans, "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective," 45.

[76] Evans, 48.

[77] He admits that empathy is not necessary for entanglement to be incurred; the exceptional example he gives is conjoined twins or pregnant women.

degree of interdependency between the *relata*.[78] For example, the strength of role-duty

for a parent is generally considered very strong because a parent is strongly entangled

with his/her child, which is because the degree of interdependency between a parent and

his/her child is quite high.

Lastly, Evans considers the properties that individuate our various roles: the scope

of moral consideration, the relevant good(s) in the sphere of activity, and the mode of

interaction appropriate to the relationship type.[79] For example, being a parent is "a role

whose scope of moral consideration includes his/her children, and where the relevant

good across *all* spheres of activity involves the children's well-being;"[80] and the mode of

interaction appropriate to the relationship type is typically hierarchical, which would be

inappropriate to friendship. He concludes with a definition of moral role as follows:

> A moral role is a persisting relationship between entangled individuals, structured
> around a relevant good in the sphere of activity, which is to be pursued or
> distributed in accordance with one of four fundamental role-duties (equality,
> hierarchy, unity or proportionality).[81]
> Building on this account of a moral role and its correlated duties, Evans offers a

theory of right action: "In Role Ethics, the right action is the one that best accords with

all of one's role-duties."[82] For Evans, role-duties are not the obligatory actions

determined by roles in specific situations; they are the four *types* of duties regarding

hierarchy, equality, unity and proportionality. He argues, "the violation of a role-duty

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[78] Evans, "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective," 52–53.

[79] Evans, 54.

[80] Evans, 54.

[81] Evans, 56–57.

[82] Evans, 57.

typically happens over the course of many interactions."[83] Occasional actions that are not in accordance with role-duties do not necessarily count as violation of role-duties. "We do not fail to be a good friend for not reciprocating on some specific occasion," Evans notes as an example. "We violate the role-duty of equality when an asymmetry in the distribution or pursuit of goods characterizes the state of affairs in the relationship as a whole, and so we should fully expect some vagueness at the boundaries of a role-duty violation."[84] Evans believes that the demand to act in accordance with all of our role-duties is not very difficult because our role-duties are usually not in conflict. "For example, we do not fail to perform our role-duties as parents when we are fulfilling our professional role-obligations."[85] He believes there is a genuine conflict only when "a role-duty must require an action or, more likely, a set of actions whose performance would constitute a violation of another role-duty."[86] Since he specifies that role duties can be violated only over a course of many interactions, it is rare that we are in real role conflict. But if there is one, we are required to favor the strongest role-duty.[87]

Evans' contemporary role ethics contributes to our understanding of the nature of roles, the relation between roles and moral motivation, and how a theory of right action could be grounded in terms of roles. But it does not address the relation between roles and the self, which is the metaphysics of my RE. With regard to the problem of role fulfillment, he seems to assume that to fulfill a role is to obey the relevant role duty or

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[83] Evans, 58.

[84] Evans, 58.

[85] Evans, 59.

[86] Evans, 59.

[87] Evans, 59.

duties, or to exemplify the relevant role virtue(s).[88] For the reasons I summarized, Evans

does not think that role conflict is a pressing concern for role ethics because it is rare that

a genuine role conflict occurs in our life. But I will have an extensive discussion of role

conflict in Chapter Four.[89]

<center>*Sarah Harper's Role-Centered Morality*</center>

Sarah Harper defends "an interpretation or reconstitution of the moral realm that

is centered on roles."[90] Her "role-centered morality" is much stronger than Evans' and

most other versions of role ethics in the literature in the sense that "[w]hereas current role

morality aims simply to emphasize the existence and importance of the social dimension

of moral life, a role-centered morality would aim to establish the thoroughly social nature

of the moral life."[91] This is the most radical version of role ethics because it upholds the

view that all of the other moral features or concepts can be derived from roles.[92] A strong

theme in her project is an opposition to any kind of fragmented or compartmentalized

morality. Instead, she tries to reinterpret all of morality in terms of roles in the hope of

establishing a coherent and unified moral theory.

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[88] Although Evans talks only about duties throughout his dissertation, he, in a footnote, clarifies that when he says duty, it can also refer to virtue, but he uses duty for simplicity.

[89] Evans' dissertation also includes a part where role ethics extends to the political arena. I believe that a complete elaboration of role ethics must consist in the issues in a larger social context. But due to the limited space of my dissertation, I will not consider the application of role ethics in political philosophy.

[90] Sarah J. Harper, "Role-Centered Morality" (Boston College, 2007), 55.

[91] Harper, 60–61.

[92] Harper, 74.

Harper defines roles as relationships that consist of three components: a role-agent, a role-respondent and the relationship between them.[93] In role-centered morality, Harper argues, the role-agent is best characterized by her affective and desiderative capacities instead of her cognitive ability.[94] But what capacities are desirable in a specific role-agent depends on what the role-respondent is like and how the role-respondent stands in relation to the role-agent. For example, a person who is unusually anxious about his health might find a sort of empathetic capacity very desirable in his physician, but not so much in his auto mechanic. Or it is desirable for the care givers who take care of children with special needs to possess the capacities of being extra patient, compassionate and attentive.

Harper discusses two main points on the nature of a role-respondent. First of all, she claims the role-respondent might be, at the extremes, either one's self or a stranger: "there is a broad range of distance that might exist between a role-respondent and her respective role-agent, and, hence, a broad spectrum of intimacy along which our role-relationships stand."[95] At the one extreme of the spectrum is a self-to-self relationship while at the other extreme is a self-to-stranger relationship. Philosophers often do not consider these two extreme relationships as roles, but Harper notes little reason has been offered to justify this lacuna. She defends the view that they ought to be conceived as roles by arguing that the self and the stranger can be both considered as role-respondents. With regard to the self, we do think that we have duties to ourselves, and our decisions

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[93] Harper, 63.

[94] Harper, 64.

[95] Harper, 66.

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and actions regarding ourselves do affect our well-being. The case of the stranger seems more easily acceptable because in common morality we think that we have some binding relationship with every human being, as the morality of impartiality has insisted on. So, the role of self and the role of stranger fit the structure and the definition of a role. Besides, there is the great theoretical advantage of producing a logically compatible and a deeply unified theory by including the self-to-self relationship and self-to-stranger relationship into role morality. Second, Harper raises questions about who can be role-respondents. Human beings no doubt can be role-respondents. Her account is also open to living things, ecological systems, groups,[96] and past and future generations being role-respondents. So, she concludes that the notion of roles has such a very broad scope that it can encompass all of our morality.

Not all relationships are roles (for example, spatial and temporal relationships are not roles). And not all roles are moral roles. Although "the most moral of roles has a non-moral aspect, and even the least moral of roles can take on moral significance,"[97] Harper divides roles into two types, centrally moral roles (moral roles), such as "mother" and centrally non-moral roles (non-moral roles), such as "cleaner."[98] Harper uses "relationSHIPS" to refer to moral roles.

Harper also argues that moral roles can be seen as responses. Such responses have two features. One is that they are "responses of certain specific individuals to certain

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[96] Harper suggests reluctance to think of membership as a kind of role, but she does not intend to argue for her position. Rather, she just wants to illustrate that her account of roles have few restrictions.

[97] Harper, "Role-Centered Morality," 91.

[98] Harper, 93.

specific individuals."[99] Another is that they are "deep, stable, person-to-person responses to the deep, stable, person-to-person needs, desires, preferences and interests of role-respondents"[100] that "have been recognized for long periods of time, and over a wide range of different societies."[101] These two interpretations of moral roles, as relationSHIPs and as responses, are supplementary to each other rather than competitive options. So, in sum, a moral role is a

> system or complex of attitudinal responses that engages some particular individual in his/her sociality, where the attitudes in question are generally stable and widespread. The attitudes that fit this description are, most basically, attitudes of care or love. Hence, a moral role might also be understood as a way of actively caring about the well-being of some particular other.[102]

In addition to explicating the nature of roles, Harper surveys some of the reasons why we should value our special relationships. In particular she emphasizes that these relationships not only significantly affect our well-being, but also "our very selves are constituted in them."[103] Such a view of the self has been endorsed by Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel and J. W. Glaser, as Harper notes. I will further develop this notion of the self in the next chapter.

Harper draws the following implications from her account of moral roles. First, she argues that it is very difficult to specify what actions one ought to do in one's moral roles because moral role-agents are evaluated primarily on their feelings and attitudes towards the role-respondents. Second, she claims that the fulfillment of non-moral roles

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[99] Harper, 82.

[100] Harper, 83.

[101] Harper, 83.

[102] Harper, 111–12.

[103] Harper, 87.

is largely determined by the application of the relevant skills associated with the roles, though their moral significance should not be ignored. Harper admits that the distinction between moral and non-moral roles is not sharp. For example, professional roles seem to occupy some middle ground. Professional roles are distinguished from occupational roles by their higher ends associated with the welfare of the public. They have both a special technical part as well as a moral part, though they differ from moral roles in the sense that the occupants of the professional roles pursue part of one's good, while occupants of the moral roles regard one's good as a whole. To fulfill professional roles, accordingly, requires the relevant technical skills as well as the affective caring for the relevant good of role-respondents.

Third, Harper endorses the moral significance of biological connection between persons. She addresses two concerns arising from the view that a biological connection matters morally. One is that such a view will diminish the moral significance of non-biological relationships, as between adoptive parents and children, for example. The other is that such a view implies that adoptive children are bound with obligations to their biological parents who abandoned them when they were young simply because of the biological connection. Harper argues that the first concern is simply false because the moral significance of biological connection does not imply the moral insignificance of adoptive connection. They could be both moral significant but for different reasons. Harper addresses the second concern by employing her view that the role-respondent's perspective is the morally relevant one. She argues that the moral significance of biological connection and the privileged perspective of the children justifies the common moral view that biological parents who simply abandon their children are

contemptible.[104] Also the moral significance of biological connection helps to explain the desire of many adoptive children to search for their biological parents.

Similarly to Evans, Harper considers the conditions of "role entry with someone's becoming invested in another's caring about her well-being in some particular way and role exit with someone's ceasing to be so invested."[105] All kinds of events can influence when someone occupies a role. This account is especially helpful in evaluating short-lived roles. Specifically, she argues for the plausibility of seeing the "human fellow being" as a role, though someone's occupying this role in one's life often is short-lived in specific situations. She realizes, of course, that being a "human" and a "fellow being" are long-lived, but she is emphasizing that one's actual presence to the other as a human fellow being is often short-lived.

Lastly, Harper argues that there are varying degrees of success or failure of role occupancy. These modes can be affected by many factors, such as one's knowledge of one's being in a role, one's awareness of the details of what a role prescribes, one's physical or mental capacities, and one's moral upbringing. When assessing one's performance in fulfilling one's role, Harper suggests that we need to take these relevant factors into account.

Harper offers rich discussions of the nature of roles and of its implications for role fulfillment, identification and role evaluation. She also touches on the notion of the self, but does not consider it as a central part of her role-centered morality.

When she suggests topics for future inquiry, Harper briefly proposes that role conflicts can be resolved or at least illuminated through specifying role duties in terms of

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[104] Parents who put their children up for adoption for certain reasons could be less contemptible.

[105] Harper, "Role-Centered Morality," 106.

role virtues. Interestingly, she suggests that the final resolution of role conflicts may depend on some central, organizing role. I will develop a similar account of how to confront role conflicts in Chapter Four.

Also, she wonders how role ethics (role-centered morality) could account for human equality and special care for our special others, and the moral attitudes of respect and love. I think that these issues can be summarized in terms of the tension between impartiality and partiality. As I mentioned earlier, I will argue that my account of the self can explain such a tension, which in turn validates my account of Role Ethics that is grounded in this specific notion of the self.

Final Remarks

This completes the initial survey of my four major interlocutors in role ethics: Confucius (as interpreted primarily by John Ramsey and Roger Ames), Epictetus (as interpreted by Brian Johnson), Jeremy Evans, and Sarah Harper. Although they have many different motivations and concerns, and approach the moral significance of roles from distinct perspectives, they all address at least some of the common themes in role ethics—namely, the self, role identification, role fulfillment, role conflicts, and role changes. Confucian role ethics and Epictetus' role ethics offer accounts of almost all of these aspects; Evans and Harper address some of them from a modern perspective, but they are more interested in defending the thesis that roles are the foundation of morality.

Compared to the ancient traditions, the two contemporary versions of role ethics are quite thin: they address fewer aspects of role ethics and their concerns are primarily metaethical instead of normative. I suspect the contemporary theories can only stay on the metaethical level because they are not developed within traditions. By tradition, I

mean a systematic outlook about humanity, the natural world, the divinity (if applicable), and the relationship among them. Confucianism, Stoicism, Christianity, and Buddhism are examples of traditions. Traditions are conceptually different from cultures; a specific culture could be in a specific tradition, or it could be a blend of different traditions.

A tradition aims toward consistency and coherence, while a culture can be filled with various contradictions and conflicts. For instance, the Chinese culture I grew up in is a mixture of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Marxism, and modernism (the values and views that adopted by the western world).

When one is not embedded in a tradition, one lacks resources to fully answer questions like "What does it mean to be good mother?" or "How should one resolve role conflicts?" Different traditions offer different answers, and even if different traditions come to some agreement on such an issue, the justifications for their answer can be dramatically different. For example, although Confucianism and Christianity both prescribe that children should respect their parents, the Confucian justification is distinct from the Christian one at least in the aspect that the latter involves an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God with the supreme authority over human beings, while the former does not.

In the following chapters, I will investigate three themes that are central to any role ethics: the nature of the self, the meaning of role fulfillment and the response to role conflict. Like Evans and Harper, I will not assume a specific tradition, and thus will not provide a complete account of these issues as Confucianism and Epictetus do. Instead, the Role Ethics I will present is a structural account that, I will argue, any role ethics should embrace. In other words, I will consider some of the issues around role ethics that

can be addressed outside a tradition. My goal is to provide a structure that, when one adds a tradition's understanding of specific roles, will result in a specific account of role ethics. One advantage of this approach over Evans' and Harper's is that it recognizes the importance of tradition in constructing a full-fledged normative theory of role ethics, even as it uncovers the basic common structure of all possible specific role ethics across traditions.

Arguably, the dominating ethical concepts in western thought—such as rights and duties, or virtues in the ancient Greek sense—are not universal in all traditions.[106] But roles are. Roles, as the common ground among diverse traditions, have the promise of bringing these traditions into a meaningful dialogue. Role ethics, therefore, is not only a different paradigm of ethics compared to virtue ethics, utilitarianism and deontology, but also could serve as a platform for meaningful dialogue among various traditions, and perhaps will provide a fair test for the merits and limits of those traditions. My project, then, has important prospects. Let me begin.

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[106] Confucianism, for example, does not have the notion of rights and duties. Even for virtues, it is hard to say that the so-called Confucian virtues fall into the category of virtues defined by the western philosophy. The central virtues in Confucian ethics, such as *xiao* and *ti*, are defined in terms of excellences in dealing with certain relationships rather than dealing with certain desires or feelings. More discussion will appear in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO

Who Am I? The Self and the Nature of Roles

Introduction

Plato, and many philosophers who followed his lead through antiquity and late antiquity, took Socrates' philosophical dictum "know thyself" to include asking fundamental questions about ourselves, the world around us, and the relations between them. Although this aphorism does not specify the aspects of ourselves that we should strive to understand, it seems that aspect in view when we ask "*Who* am I?" is a critical one. In ordinary experience, this question may arise when one feels lost in one's life because one is unsure about one's origin, struggling with what abilities and opportunities one has been given, seeking to articulate what one vaguely aspires to be, having little idea about the purpose of one's life, losing oneself after trying to please the world, and so on. When someone seriously raises this question, it signals a crisis of identity, which may lead to a grueling journey of searching for one's self.

What aspect of oneself, then, does "self" refer to in this case? That is what I will explore in this chapter. The quest "Who am I?" is different from other quests such as "What am I?" or "What am I made of?" The self in my discussion is not the self that most intrigues the metaphysicians, which they might say is the form of an animal, a soul, or merely a bundle of conscious experiences, and so on. When asking "Who am I?", one seems to looking for 1) an identity that could distinguish one from other beings, including, other selves, 2) a particular purpose or point for one's existence, and 3)

guidance for the most significant actions and choices in life. These three elements closely relate to each other. The first element, a unique identity of oneself, helps to provide a powerful explanation of the second element, a purposeful meaning of one's life. Then the purpose of one's existence further explains and justifies how one ought to live. So "Who am I?" is more an ethical or practical question than a factual question. Accordingly, the self that this question asks about is not merely descriptive, but more importantly, prescriptive. The self in this sense, however, may help us evaluate proposed metaphysical accounts of the self, though it will not directly answer the metaphysical question of the self.

Besides its significance to our ordinary ethical conversations, this notion of the self is theoretically significant. Henry Rosemont Jr. argues that many of the arguments that the western moral philosophers have made assume a western view of the self as a rights-bearing person that is rational, autonomous and independent. But the futility of the western moral philosophy in resolving many contemporary issues, such as abortion, animal rights, euthanasia and our obligations to future generations seem to suggest that this fundamental view of the self is problematic and misleading. Instead, Rosemont suggests that the Confucian view of the self as a role-bearing person is able to provide a much more plausible framework for ethics.[1] I will have more detailed discussion on the Confucian self below. But his arguments about the two views of the self suggest that having a plausible account of the self has a critical place in an adequate ethical theory.

Let us consider the insights we can glean from role ethics on this important ethical notion of the self. Recall from the previous chapter that the two systematic role ethics

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[1] Henry Rosemont, Jr, "Rights-Bearing Individuals and Role-Bearing Persons," in *Rules, Rituals and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated to Herbert Fingarette*, edited by Mary Bockover (Open Court, 1999), 71–102.

drawn from the writings of Epictetus and Confucius explicitly endorse a concept of the self in terms of roles. Evans does not discuss the concept of the self, but it is reasonable to think that he will advocate a similar view of the self. Harper's discussion on the self is far less sophisticated.[2] For this reason, in this chapter I will focus primarily on the two ancient traditions.

"Who am I?" is the fundamental question in Epictetus' ethics, Brian Johnson claims,[3] and Epictetus answers it by looking into the roles that one occupies. Johnson does not offer an explicit reconstruction of Epictetus' account of the self, but we can draw a sketch of it from the details Johnson gives in a section titled "The Layers of Humanity." According to Johnson, Epictetus argues that humanity has two distinct layers. One is rooted in our membership of cosmic city that is composed of gods and humans, and the other derives from our membership of a specific microcosmic city such as Athens or Rome. Moreover, our cosmic citizenship, which is embedded in our relationship with nature, has a higher priority than our political citizenship because "it is our relation to nature that makes possible our civic communities."[4]

Though these two kinds of citizenship are hierarchical, the commitments required for the latter cannot be just applications of the commitments demanded by the former. If they were, then, argues Johnson, the conflicts among local roles would be impossible; but Epictetus believes that such role conflicts do exist. For example, for Socrates, being a

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[2] In Harper's arguments that all obligations derive from roles, the notion of the self seems to play little part. However, a notion of self is the foundation for her idea of well-being: "Your having these qualities (being a devoted, considerate, loyal friend, spouse, parent, and so on) with respect to me is partially constitutive of my well-being" (87) because my self is constituted, in part, through my roles. She goes on to ground her notion of role in the notion of well-being. We can conclude, then, that the self plays a foundational role in her theory, though she does not make this point explicitly.

[3] Johnson, *Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 11.

[4] Johnson, 87.

philosopher and being a father can be in conflict. Should he spend his weekend conducting philosophical dialogues with others or staying with his wife and children? If both the commitments required by being a philosopher and being a father are simply applications of those required by being a human, there should be no conflict for from one thing one cannot consistently derive two inconsistent things.

According to Epictetus's picture of humanity, then, the self of a human being is composed of two aspects, one's cosmic citizenship and one's local citizenship. The former corresponds to one's cosmic (or universal, or human) role, while the latter refers to one's specific or local roles. The human role has certain requirements, which conforms to the Stoic values, while the specific roles have certain requirements in accordance to the traditional Roman values. So, the self of a particular human being is an integrated unity of a human role and a set of local roles, with the former taking a higher priority over the latter.

When we turn to the Confucian tradition, we see that the notion of self serves as the starting point of its role ethics.[5] The focus is on self-cultivation through social practice according to the rituals. However, as many philosophers have argued, the notion of self in Confucian role ethics is very different from the one in dominant Western traditions.[6] Instead of being rational, independent and autonomous, the Confucian self is more affective, dependent and constrained by social context. In other words, at its core is a social dimension that strongly shapes one's social roles.

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[5] In fact, even in other interpretations of Confucian ethics, the notion of the self is still fundamental.

[6] See Ames 2011, Rosemont 1999, Nuyen 2007, Ramsey 2016

Although in Confucian role ethics, as conceived by Ames and others, a kind of cosmic dimension is rarely discussed, some interpreters argue that the Confucian self has that dimension. More specifically, they articulate a transcendental relationship between a human being and *tian* (天, often translated as 'the heaven') as an essential component of the self.[7] The heaven, in Confucianism, imparts human nature to a human. Through following the way, which is inherent in the human nature, the self of a human is fully realized in its union with the heaven. This interpretation is very interesting—for it parallels with the cosmic dimension in Epictetus' notion of the self—and promising—for some Confucian classic texts, such as *Zhongyong*, seem to support it.[8] But since my focus here is not to obtain an accurate interpretation of Confucian ethics in terms of roles, I will put this controversy aside and draw on what is available in the Confucian role ethics literature.

The social view of the self that we find in Epictetus and Confucian role ethics stands in sharp contrast to the individualist view of self that now dominates in Western culture. These two ancient traditions are worth studying again for insights and arguments that might support some current efforts to recover a social notion of the self. For example, as I briefly mentioned in the history of role ethics, Alasdair MacIntyre advocates a notion of self that is partly defined by its social roles. He writes,

> I am brother, cousin, and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe. These are not characteristics that belong to human beings accidentally, to be stripped away in order to discover 'the real me'. They are part of my

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[7] Most prominently, see Weiming Tu. *Centrality and Commonality : An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (1989) as well as *Confucian Thought: Selfhood As Creative Transformation* (1985)

[8] Thanks to Roger Ames' comments on this issue in a personal correspondence.

substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties.[9]

Given the importance of the notion of the self in an ethical theory, and the significance of roles in understanding the self, we must first have a thorough investigation of the nature of roles. After completing this task, I will offer my account of the self that is based on the notion of roles that I give. In the last section, I will argue that my notion of self provides a promising framework for articulating the dignity of individual persons.

The Nature of Roles

What are roles precisely, and which ones are important for Role Ethics? In this section, I will survey some definitions of "role" given by role ethicists in order to identify the key features of roles that are ethically interesting. After the survey, I will offer my account of roles and draw some useful distinctions among roles.

Let us start with the notions of "role" in the ancient traditions. There is no explicit definition of "role" within the Confucian tradition because what counts a role seems evident and needs no explication. Specifically, Confucian role ethics focuses on the paradigmatic roles entailed by the following types of relationships: familial relations (husband and wife, parents and children, and siblings), friendship, teacher-student relation, and ruler-subject relation.[10] Various rituals, recorded in the Confucian classics, clearly define the norms for these roles. While the absence of a clear account of roles may not be problematic for the practice of Confucian ethics, it does limit that tradition's

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[9] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 32.

[10] Cottine, "Roles, Relationships, and Chinese Ethics."

relevance to the concerns and issues in contemporary role ethics. After all, there are many more ethically significant roles in the contemporary world than in the ancient Chinese society. Thus, the structure of ethical life is much more complicated today than it was during the era when Confucianism was established. In order to accommodate the complexities of the contemporary world, any viable role ethics must have a proper account of roles.

Likewise, in Epictetus' writings, the notion of "role" is not clearly defined. But Johnson offers the following definition of roles on behalf of Epictetus: "they are functional memberships in some community, whether cosmic or local."[11] This definition has two important features. First, it is a teleological account of roles. By this definition, each role has a particular function in some community. The universal (or human) role has a function on cosmic stage, which is to follow God/Nature. The specific local roles have various functions in one's local community. Second, Johnson's definition has a cosmic dimension that the Confucian role ethics seems to lack. As we will see soon, contemporary accounts of roles also lack this dimension.

Among the diverse meanings of "role" today, only a few are relevant to our discussion. R. S. Downie's detailed analysis of the various common notions of "role," beyond its usage to describe a character in a theatrical play, is a helpful place to begin. He identifies three ordinary notions of "role" that are irrelevant for role ethics. The first of these is the most general and loose sense, which is usually just "a way of labeling a group of individuals in virtue of certain properties they have in common,"[12] such as the

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[11] Johnson, *Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 36.

[12] R. S. Downie, *Roles and Values: An Introduction to Social Ethics* (London: Methuen, 1971), 121.

role of a football fan or a woman. A second irrelevant use of "role" involves a cluster of

expectations we have for a person, similar to how we expect a certain character to act on

stage in, for instance, the role of the beggar. Downie says a third irrelevant use of "role"

is the sociological sense "concerned with the function of some activity in a social

system."[13] In this sense, we may view criminals as having a role in society, though they

as criminals are unaware of this sociological role. These notions of "role" are irrelevant

to role ethics because they are merely descriptive, and thus cannot establish normativity,

as Anne Baril has argued.[14]

What are the relevant notions of roles then? Contemporary role ethicists have

proposed a number of definitions of roles. The list below is not exhaustive, but it is

enough for us to capture the critical features of roles that interest role ethicists.

- "A moral role is a persisting relationship between entangled individuals, structured around a relevant good in the sphere of activity, which is to be pursued or distributed in accordance with one of four fundamental role-duties (equality, hierarchy, unity or proportionality)." *Jeremy Evans* (2014)[15]

- "A system or complex of attitudinal responses that engages some particular individual in his/her sociality, where the attitudes in question are generally stable and widespread. The attitudes that fit this description are, most basically, attitudes of care or love. Hence, a moral role might also be understood as a way of actively caring about the well-being of some particular other." *Sarah Harper* (2007)[16]

- "[Roles] are ways things stand, or are arranged, between people, assigning them claims and privileges and responsibilities, and fixing their status. Most of all, such roles are person-to-person relationships, where being in such a relationship involves, but is more than just being in some Humean relation to another. Rather, it engages each participant in her personhood, in her status's capacity (even if

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[13] Downie, 124.

[14] Baril, "The Ethical Importance of Roles."

[15] Evans, "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective," 56–57.

[16] Harper, "Role-Centered Morality," 111–12.

temporarily or permanently reduced or obstructed, as in children or the damaged) to think and feel, informed by her rationality." *J. L. A. Garcia* (2015)[17]

- "[A role is] a cluster of rights and duties with some sort of social function." *R. S. Downie* (1971)[18]

- "[A role is] a nameable position within a social network; those who hold the position are expected to act, and perhaps feel, in certain ways." *Judith Andre* (1991)[19]

- "I will reserve the term role for positions with some degree of regularity and durability, and where there are collective expectations, however informal or contested, about the content of the position's duties, values and virtues. . . . It is not fruitful to label every relationship a role." *Arthur Applbaum* (1999)[20]

- "I shall take a role to be a position in a social network constituted by a distinctive set of normative statuses—rights, duties, powers, permissions, and the like—that attach to a role-occupant by virtue of her occupation of that role." *Tim Dare* (2016)[21]

- "Roles carry with them certain expectations, rights and duties, norms, and/or ideals that are either implicit or explicit, even sometimes legally or contractually defined." *Patricia Werhane* (1998)[22]

- "Not every status is a role. . . . [Roles are] "constellations of institutionally specified rights and duties organized around an institutionally specified social function." *Michael Hardimon* (1994)[23] (Hardiman believes human "institutions," such as political, familial, and occupational organizations, define roles. He does not count a purely biological relation as a role and he denies there is a role as human being or person.)

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[17] J. L. A. García, "Roles and Virtues," in *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, 2015, 416.

[18] Downie, *Roles and Values*, 128.

[19] Andre, "Role Morality as a Complex Instance of Ordinary Morality," 73.

[20] Arthur Isak Applbaum, *Ethics for Adversaries: The Morality of Roles in Public and Professional Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 47.

[21] Tim Dare, "Robust Role-Obligation: How Do Roles Make a Moral Difference?" *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (December 1, 2016): 704.

[22] Patricia H. Werhane, "Self-Interests, Roles and Some Limits to Role Morality," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1998): 231.

[23] Michael O. Hardimon, "Role Obligations," *The Journal of Philosophy* 91, no. 7 (July 1, 1994): 334.

- Anne Baril suggests the paradigmatic roles that interest role ethicists have these five central features: *persistence* (the role-bearer normally occupies the role through a relatively long period of time); *breadth* (the role requires a broad range of behaviors of the role-bearer); *coherence* ("the duties, rights, etc. of the role are compatible with, or even mutually supportive of, each other"); *choice* (the role bearer is able to decide how to fulfill the role in its details in a coherent way, in contrast to someone who works under precise instructions about what to do), and *challenge* (the role presents the role-bearer with complex activities and tasks). *Anne Baril* (2016)[24]

Let me summarize in four key words or phrases from these various contemporary definitions the primary elements of roles: relationship, membership in a community, proper function/good, and expectation (in terms of rights and duties, obligations, norms, virtues, values, ideals, and so on). Meanwhile, we can sense a tension between a teleological in contrast to a deontological account of roles: the former defines roles as functional, aiming at some sort of good of the *relata* or the community, while the latter defines roles as a short hand for positions that ground certain rights and duties. Among the definitions with a teleological framework, we can discover another subtle disagreement: some hold that the good is within the relationship, while others suggest the good must be interpreted in terms of serving the community, and thus it is outside the relationship.

There is also disagreement about where roles come from. Are all roles merely social conventions, or do at least some of them come from a natural or objective source? This is a very important metaphysical question about roles, but to address it adequately is beyond the scope of my current project.

I will work from the following three assumptions about the roles that have moral import in any role ethics.

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[24] Baril, "The Ethical Importance of Roles," 728.

1. All roles are embedded in a person's relationships, either a person-to-person, person-to-non-person, or person-to-group relationship.

2. Duties associated with roles are often conditional. For example, the filial duty to take care of one's elderly parents is not binding on children who are physically or mentally unable to take care of their parents. This is a serious problem for a deontological account that defines roles as clusters of rights and duties that are general in nature. It is impossible to specify a role in terms of rights and duties without exceptions. Perhaps it is possible to specify rights and duties in different particular circumstances, but this makes the definition of a role extremely complicated.[25]

3. Some roles are natural, while others are social conventions. For example, being a birth mother is a natural role, though this role should not be understood in a merely biological sense. Professional roles are social conventions.

Based on these observations, I propose that a position is an ethically significant role if and only if 1) it is embedded in a relationship (or a set of relationships) that constitutes the *relata*'s well-being or 2) it has a function that aims at the well-being of a community as a whole[26]. Some ethically significant roles emerge only, or primarily, in the first way; for example, the mother-child relationship constitutes both the mother and the child's well-being, and it implies the pair of roles of mother and of child. Other ethically significant roles emerge only, or primarily, in the second way; professional roles

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[25] I will argue for this assumption in more details in the next chapter.

[26] The role-agent (and role-respondent) does not need to be aware of their role constituting their well-being or having such a communal function.

are the best examples. Although professional roles often involve person-to-person relationships, these relationships tend to be more instrumental rather than intrinsic to the *relata*'s well-being. For instance, a physician can have many person-to-person relationships with each of her patients. From the patient's perspective, these relationships are not by nature the constituents of their well-being, though they contribute to their well-being by virtue of the doctor helping them to care for the health of their physical bodies. From the physician's point of view, these relationships with patients are not by nature the constituents of her well-being either. Her well-being, regarding this matter, is partly constituted by her being a physician who achieves the function of this profession in her community through developing and exercising her talents, skills, passions, and so on, in this practice. Simply speaking, the well-being of this physician, in aspect of her profession, is more community-oriented than personally oriented. In cases where the physician-patient relationship goes beyond what I have described, and constitutes the well-being of both the physician and her patient, it is no longer a mere physician-patient relationship, but, rather, is a friendship.

This notion of roles is teleological rather than deontological. It accommodates our belief that some relationships, especially personal relationships, such as familial relationships, are important elements of our flourishing. In addition, it provides a place for institutional roles. Expectations in terms of rights, duties, virtues, values and ideals are not explicit in this definition of roles; however, given its teleological structure, the normative statuses of a role are derivable from its purpose or function. My definition is open to non-paradigmatic roles,[27] such as the role of human being, the role of steward

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[27] Paradigmatic roles include roles based on personal relationships, institutional roles, political roles, etc., or in one phrase, social roles.

regarding nature or the earth, the role of creature of God, the role of cosmic citizen, and so on. It is worth noting that my account of roles is structural and thus neutral among many competing views of the good. Although it affirms that personal relationships are one critical aspect of human well-being, it does not have a specific take on what exactly are the constituents of the well-being of an individual and the well-being of a community. For this reason, a complete account of role differentiation and specification will depend on the features of a particular tradition, by which I mean a systematic metaphysical and moral outlook held by a community.[28]

Here I anticipate an objection that my account of roles allows 'bad roles.' In Aristotle's day, for example, being a slaveowner was a social role with an important social function. An objector might think that my account of roles, given its neutrality regarding competing theories of the good, will have a culturally relativity that is open to endorsing the role of slaveowner. Here is my reply.[29] Although roles are contoured variously within traditions, this does not mean that those traditions are equally good. Different traditions have different takes on what constitutes an individual's or a community's well-being. Some of these takes are more plausible than other ones. I will say more about this in the concluding chapter when I can draw from the whole picture of my project, for a complete reply to this worry is only possible after that.

Now let me explain a few distinctions about roles.

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[28] This will leave room for culture and tradition in the notion of the self, which is a virtue of my account as well as a target of potential objections from relativism. I will address this issues later in this chapter.

[29] MacIntyre's account of virtue also evoked such a kind of objection when he argues that virtues must be understood in traditions. My reply to the above objection draws on his.

First, we must distinguish roles as types from roles as tokens. A role as a type can be filled by more than one person, while a role as a token can only be filled by numerically one person. For example, I have the role of mother, which can mean either that I am a mother just like other mothers (which is the role as a type), or that I am the mother of my daughter Rebekah and my son Caleb (which is the role as a token). In addition, a token role can be indexed spatially or temporally. For example, I was Yi's friend while we were in college in China. The notion of a token role is especially important for defining personhood.

Second, we must distinguish between permanent role tokens and temporary role tokens. A role (token) is permanent if and only if its occupants cannot dissolve it for certain undefeatable reasons. The roles of child and parent, in a certain way, are examples of permanent roles. We may understand the parent-child relation in biological, ethical and institutional/legal senses.[30] The roles of parent and child are permanent when the relation is the ethical sense, which supervenes on the merely biological sense. So, even when the parent-child relation in the institutional or legal sense is in a court of law, or upon mutual agreement, the biological relation ensures that the parent remains related to the child as a parent, and the child remains related to the parent as a child, in the ethical sense. This reasoning can apply to all roles supervening biological relations. They are not the only ones, however, in a tradition such as Christianity wherein a human is in the permanent role of being a creature of God, or in a tradition such as Stoicism wherein a human is in the permanent role of rational being. A role is temporary if and only if it can be exited if

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[30] Suppose that A is the biological parent of B but decides not to raise B merely because she does not want to take the responsibility; and later C adopts B and become B's legal parent. In this case, A may be ethically culpable as a parent though A may not be legally condemnable.

obtained. For example, people usually occupy some temporary roles such as being a friend or being a member of a profession.[31]

Third, there are persisting role tokens and non-persisting role tokens. A role token is persisting if and only if occupants occupy it for a relatively long time. A role token is non-persisting if and only if occupants occupy it for a relatively short time. A role that is normally persisting for most of the occupants of the role type might be non-persisting for certain other occupants. The distinction between persisting and non-persisting roles is not a sharp cutoff, but it will be useful in further discussions.

Fourth, there are (group) membership roles and non-membership roles. A membership role is a role embedded in a relationship between a person and a group. As I mentioned earlier, the human role is a membership role. A non-membership role usually is based on a relationship between two persons. Since membership emphasizes the common identity of persons within a group, there is a weaker sense in which a membership role can be seen is a token. Although it makes sense to say that my being a member of my family as a token, the emphasis here is clearly not that I am a distinct member of my family, but that I belong to my family as my other family members do. This kind of emphasis especially applies to the human role: its emphasis is not on one's uniqueness, but on one's being a member of humanity as other human beings are. Due to this characteristic, membership roles play a less essential part in one's personhood because the notion of personhood focuses on one's uniqueness rather than one's commonality with other persons. I will discuss this in more details in the last section.

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[31] While it is tricky to determine whether certain roles are permanent or temporary, this will not have much effect on my purpose here.

Fifth, and finally, we may distinguish among voluntary roles, involuntary roles and non-voluntary roles. Voluntary roles are the ones that an occupant chooses voluntarily. For instance, that one occupies the role of friend is paradigmatically, voluntary. Based on one's desires, passions, or intentions, one chooses to become someone's friend. Involuntary roles are roles an occupant chooses (or would choose, if she were able) not to occupy. They are antithetical to the occupant's desires and intentions. Imagine someone who is coerced to play a certain role, such as a woman who is kidnapped and sold to be a wife of some man. If she becomes his wife against her own desires or intentions, but only because she was kidnapped and sold to the man, then her being his wife is involuntary. Non-voluntary roles are roles that an occupant did not choose, but the occupant is not opposed to having. The role of child is a typical example of non-voluntary role. While it may seem that non-voluntary roles overlap with permanent roles, some roles can be non-voluntary but temporary. Being a student can be an example. It can be non-voluntary because a child may have no opinion, either for or against, about going to school: it is just something every child at her age in this society would do. Obviously, It is temporary. I do not think that these categories are mutually exclusive. Most of the roles that we find ourselves in are somewhere in between. The token role of parent can be an instance of voluntary role combining with non-voluntary role. A couple may voluntarily conceive a child, but it may not be their will that it is *this* child. However, this distinction is useful when we think through the issues regarding role conflicts. Therefore, for most roles types and tokens, we must decide on a case-by-case basis how to classify them.

The Structure of the Self

After exploring the nature of roles, I am going to investigate the structure of the self. I will start with the models that role ethicists have proposed, examining their merits and problems. Based on the analysis of these models and our common beliefs about the self, I will propose my account of the self that accommodates the virtues of the other models and our common beliefs, but withstands the objections that those models face.

Interpreters agree that selves are constituted by their social roles in the Confucian tradition.[32] The selves are "not defined in terms of what they are (essentially), e.g., rational animals or deliberators, but by what they become through interaction with others."[33] This Confucian self is a dynamic center of relationships that continuously opens up to others. It is not a closed, self-contained, static system.[34]

There are moderate and strong versions of this interpretation. The moderate version holds that roles are a significant part of the self, in addition to other constituents, while the strong version holds that selves are nothing but roles.[35] John Ramsey believes that the strong claim is extremely difficult to defend because this view runs counter to the commonsense observation that one's self seems to be constituted in part by one's biological features. For this reason, he does not think that the strong view of the self, which I shall call the "social-role-self thesis," is plausible. But, we need to cautious here because Ramsey's objection is misleading for my current purpose. As I explained earlier,

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[32] See a detailed survey in Ramsey, "Confucian Role Ethics," 237.

[33] Ramsey, 237.

[34] Wei-ming Tu, *Confucian Thought : Selfhood As Creative Transformation*, SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 114.

[35] Roger Ames and Mary Bockover hold the strong version. See Chapter II and III of Ames' *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary.* Also see Mary I. Bockover, "Confucian Ritual as Body Language of Self, Society, and Spirit," *Sophia* 51, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 177–94.

the quest regarding the self in this dissertation is not about "what I am," but "who I am."

For this reason, I will not discuss the existence and nature of a substantial self, but simply

assume it does exist and has the requisite nature. To briefly repeat what I said at the

beginning of this chapter, the self that is sought by the "Who am I?" question supervenes

on the substantial self.[36] One's substantial self, based in part on one's biological features,

certainly constrains who one could become. For example, my specific biological features

determine my gender and, thus, have an impact on whether I could occupy the role of

mother. So, I will bracket objections to the social-role-self like Ramsey's. Rather, I will

only consider those objections to the social-role-self when it is taken to be the self that

supervenes on the substantial self.

P. J. Ivanhoe pursues another line of objection to Confucian role ethics. Since the

notion of the self will have a normative implication about how one should live or what

counts a good person, Ivanhoe argues, "it would be unfortunate if being a good person

required someone to be a good father or mother."[37] After all, some people can never be a

father or a mother. "It would be unacceptable if an ethical theory were to insist that such

people could not lead good human lives."[38] This objection may highlight a limitation of

Confucian role ethics because the Confucian tradition stresses the importance of familial

roles with regard to one's character development. But a role ethics grounded in a certain

view of the self does not have to hold that one can become a good person only through

fulfilling these familial roles. Instead, it will imply that one is a good person if and only if

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[36] Thanks to Derek McAllister who made this proposal and Alina Beary who explained how this idea might serve the purpose of my project.

[37] P. J. Ivanhoe, "The Shade of Confucius: Soical Roles, Ethical Theories, and the Self," 2008, 38.

[38] Ivanhoe, 38.

one is doing well in each of one's roles, regardless of what specific roles these are. If one

is a mother, how one fulfills the role of mother is relevant for one to be a good person. If

one cannot be a mother, being a good mother has nothing to do with one leading a good

life or being a good person.

Another objection raised by Ivanhoe to the social-role-self view is that "[w]e are

not just what we do but also what we feel, believe, intend, and aspire to."[39] Ivanhoe's

objection works only when the roles are defined merely in terms of outward behaviors.

My account of roles is immune to this objection because it does emphasize the

importance of feelings, beliefs, intentions and aspirations.[40]

A more serious objection is that the social-role-self view leaves no room for a

person's own projects and personality. I will refer to this as "the personal feature

objection." Indeed, we often consider personality, gender, sexuality, physical and mental

capacity, ethnicity, tastes, desires, aspirations, and so on as constituents of the self, and

they seem to be irrelevant to social roles.[41] A related objection goes like this: the

Confucian self is like an onion without a core; it "evaporates up and condenses into the

matrix of one's social roles," Ivanhoe argues.[42] Likewise, A. T. Nuyen objects, "the self's

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[39] Ivanhoe, 42.

[40] The Confucian tradition arguably has enough resources to respond to this objection. For example, when Confucius explains familial piety, he emphasizes the attitude of respect to one's parents in addition to the behaviors of providing food and drinks to them when they are elderly. Cf. 为政篇 7

[41] However, these personal features alone do not seem to offer a meaningful or a sufficient answer to the question "Who am I?"

[42] Ivanhoe, "The Shade of Confucius: Social Roles, Ethical Theories, and the Self," 43.

identify is lost in the social field; it lacks a focus."[43] Hereafter I will refer to this as "the onion objection."

Another serious problem for the social-role-self view derives from the fact that social roles are culturally relative. If these social roles constitute the ethical self that tells one how one should live, then morality seems to be relative to one's culture to an inappropriate degree. That is, a role ethics based on the social-role-self view seems to encourage one to just follow the cultural norms unreflectively. Hereafter, I will call this "the relativism objection." Although she does not mean to criticize the above interpretation of Confucian self, Julia Annas's discussion on roles and morality is illuminating on this problem for the social-role-self thesis. Annas argues that morality is not exhausted by the requirements of social and family life because we keep discerning the imperfectness of our community, and morality seems to demand that we address these shortcomings. Consequently, she writes, "To do justice to morality we should recognize the importance of the actual conditions of people's lives, and also the importance of an internal aspiration towards the ideal."[44]

When taken together, the last three objections—the personal feature objection, the onion objection, and the relativism objection—make the social-role-self thesis very undesirable. If the notion of the self is the key to unlocking the ethical dimension of life, Annas's remarks suggest that the self must be more than its social roles. A certain non-

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[43] A. T. Nuyen, "Confucian Ethics as Role-Based Ethics," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2007): 317. Nuyen adopts Roger Ames and David Hall's interpretation, which uses the focal-field metaphor to illustrate the Confucian self as "a focal in that it both constitutes and is constituted by the field in which it resides." (Ames and Hall 1998, 43) Nuyen seems to worry that such a notion of self is entirely passive, and his remedy is to confirm the proactive feature of the self in a social network. But such a response does not resolve the onion objection.

[44] Julia Annas, "My Station and Its Duties: Ideals and the Social Embeddedness of Virtue," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 102 (2002): 121.

social ideal must be included in the self. Let us turn now to Epictetus to see how he responds to this objection by grounding this sort of ideal in a notion of human nature.

According to Epictetus, the self is composed of two aspects, one's cosmic citizenship and one's local citizenship. The former corresponds to one's cosmic role (that is, one's universal or human role), while the latter refers to one's specific or local roles. Epictetus talks about specific roles as types. Importantly, the local roles submit to the universal role, but the local roles are not mere extensions or applications of the universal role. What is very interesting here is that the self has a cosmic dimension because it includes one's universal humanity, in addition to the specific social dimensions introduced by local roles. The human role constrains what local roles an individual should take and how they should be fulfilled, and thus helps Epictetus' role ethics to withstand the relativism objection. The human role seems to fill in the place of the ideal that Annas has suggested by guiding, though not determining how one fulfills specific roles. The self in Epictetus is also immune to the onion objection because it has the residue of being a human after removing all its social role constituents. A separate but relevant point is worth noticing: Epictetus also builds personal features, such as capacities and personal aspiration into his role ethics when considering what roles one should enter. For example, he says, one with athletic talents should become an athlete. But these features are not expressed explicitly through the notion of the self, but only as one of the relevant factors that one should consider when identifying one's roles.

Compared to the Confucian view of the self, Epictetus' view of the self does not underscore the dynamic feature because he spends relatively little time considering the cases of changing one's roles. The human role is fixed, and he seems to simply group the

specific roles together in the picture of his notion of the self. As we have observed, a dynamic notion of the self is more consonant with our life experience in which we are constantly in a process of entering and exiting various roles, and being bound with and being released from the expectations associated with those roles. So, I propose to modify Epictetus' view to make it more dynamic: rather than being two-layered, the self I suggest will be multi-layered, some of which layers are changing over time. I will explain my proposal in more details after completing my survey of others' views.

Johnson points out a limitation of Epictetus' role ethics in regards to solving role conflicts. This limitation, I believe, results from his inadequate view of the self. The self is a simple two-layer self, where the human role lies in the center, 'supervising' the local roles so that one should not occupy roles that are contrary to human nature. But the local roles simply gather in a 'soup'. So, the limitation is this: while the priority of the human role over social roles helps to solve role conflicts that result when the demands of a local role prevent one from fulfilling one's human role, it gives no guidance when the demands of a local role prevent one from fulfilling another of one's local roles. In other words, it does not help to order the various local roles.

In this brief survey of the notion of the self in the Confucian and the Stoic traditions, we have identified several dimensions of the self. Again, I want to stress that the substantial dimension is not my focus. I am only interested in 'the self' that supervenes on the substantial (that is, the 'what I am') dimension. As far as an account of role ethics is concerned, the substantial self could be an animal, a soul, a bundle of consciousness experiences, or some combination of these. The most significant dimension of the self that intrigues role ethicists is the social one based on one's social

roles. Epictetus suggests another important dimension, which is being a human. In addition, one seems to have a 'real' self not necessarily tied to social roles; it is constituted by, possibly and not limited to, personality, sexual orientation, gender, taste, ethnicity, fundamental beliefs, values, desires, ideals, physical and mental capacities, talent, and so forth. Moreover, I want to introduce another possible dimension of the self that is based on a non-paradigmatic role, such as the role of being a creature of God. To be sure, Christians identity themselves as centrally defined by this role. Similarly, other traditions include some kind of non-paradigmatic role into their notion of the self.[45]

With these different dimensions of the self in mind, I turn to consider the role of self in Sarah Harper's role-centered morality. Although it sounds odd to think of the role of self, she argues that it will be advantageous if we adopt this role into role ethics. As I mentioned in the first chapter, Harper tries to ground all moral concepts in the notion of roles. Since we believe that we have moral obligations to ourselves, she finds it theoretically advantageous to defend the role of self that is implied by the self-to-self relationship. She argues that on a spectrum of relationships with different degrees of intimacy, at one extreme is one's relation to oneself, while the other extreme is one's relationship to the stranger. Harper argues that since every relationship between these two extremes defines a role, there is no reason for us to make exceptions for these two extreme cases. Moreover, she thinks that the self-to-self relationship is probably the most important relationship among all.[46]

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[45] In Confucian tradition, some philosophers argue that the self has a certain kind of relation to the Heaven. If so, that role implied by this relation will fall into this category in question.

[46] For Harper's argument for the role of self, see 66-68.

There is a problem in Harper's account of obligations to oneself proper. The problem comes from her considering the self-to-self relationship as an identity relation while she maintains that selves are constituted in *social* roles. The latter view makes it difficult to explain obligations to oneself proper because one's self being constituted by social roles implies that obligations to oneself are no more than the obligations one has accumulated through those social roles. A better way to understand the self-to-self relationship is to conceive the first *relatum* 'self' as the whole unified self, while the latter *relatum* self is the original self. This interpretation of the role of self is more comprehensible; it leaves room for taking care of one's personal needs, projects and aspirations, and it makes self-denying or self-sacrifice more understandable. To deny one's self is not to deny one's whole unified self, but to deny one's original self in the way that one's personal desires, needs, or projects give way to others' needs or benefits. To put it another way, self-denying is to prioritize one's other roles over one's role of self.

Another possible element of the self to consider involves its biological relations. Bernard Williams denies that purely biological relations are roles.[47] He argues, for example, that it does not make any sense to evaluate a father as good or bad merely in terms of his biological connections to children. Put differently, being a father in the purely biological sense is not evaluable, which implies it cannot be a role because a role is obviously evaluable. Harper, on the other hand, defends the normative status of biological relations because she wants to hold biological parents who abandoned their

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[47] Williams, Bernard. *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 48–49.

children to be culpable.[48] I do not think that her argument succeeds because it is possible

that these parents are culpable due to other reasons, such as institutional norms.

Nevertheless, I agree with her conclusion that biological relations are ethically relevant,

and here is why: we consider it is a loss of value when the relationship, however tenuous,

that naturally accompanies a biological relation is broken. Moreover, adoptive children

often have the desire to search for their biological parents. Knowing their biological

parents seems critical for them to understand who they are.[49] Likewise, genealogy is very

important in many cultures, such as the Jewish-Christian tradition and the Confucian

tradition. How should we factor one's biological relations in one's self? I propose that

biological relations are among the constituents of the original self.

Having identified and sketched the relevant elements or dimensions of the self for

a role ethics, I turn to some final general observations about these characteristics. First,

some part or dimension of the self seems to be fixed, while other parts of the self are fluid

in their development through one's life. Second, some dimensions of the self are given,

while other dimensions of the self are co-created by the developing self and the

environment the self has been exposed to. This is not yet enough for our account of the

self. The self is not a bowl of soup. "Who am I?" is not only answered by the roles that I

occupy, but also by the way that they are ordered. So, the elements or dimensions of the

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[48] Harper, "Role-Centered Morality," 99–105.

[49] An example can be found in Dickens' novel Bleak House, where Esther Summerson begged her godmother to tell her about her biological mother even though her godmother told her that her mother was her shame. Thanks to Alina Beary for bringing up this case.

self are structured in a certain way that they contribute varying degrees of significance to the self.[50]

Here I offer the picture of the self that I endorse as the basis for an adequate role ethics. The self is a union of the original self and the relational self. The original self is the most primitive subject of experience, given at birth and developed over time into a more self-conscious form. Such things as personality, tastes, biological relations, gender, and sexual orientation constitute the original self. Admittedly, the postulation of an original self that has nothing to do with our social roles is controversial. Some constructivist psychologists argue that we are entirely relational beings.[51] If that is true, then we would still have a sufficiently strong (and, some would say, a stronger) account of the self in terms of roles since the original self as postulated here would merely be an illusion, and the self would be constituted entirely by roles.

The relational self is constituted by the roles that the self occupies, all of one's token roles and the human role. The human role is defined as membership in the human community. When two strangers encounter one another, although they have no direct social relations, they stand in a relationship of human fellows. The role embedded in that relationship is the human role.[52] As I explained in the previous section, the human role in this general sense is a type role, and it does not make much sense to see it as a token role.

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[50] A complete specification of the structure of the self in the prescriptive sense must be taken in a certain tradition or moral outlook because how the layers of the self are arranged depends on how this tradition views the relations among them based on its metaphysical assumptions.

[51] Cf. Kenneth J. Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, Reprint edition (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Roger Ames also holds the strong view of a relational self. His defense is based on the particular Confucian cosmology. The most recent fundamental physics also suggests that fundamentally there are only relations, not relata. These resources suggest the possibility of a notion of the self entirely in terms of roles. But to have a thorough investigation on this topic will take probably another few books.

[52] Modern moral theories tend to treat the human role as the only morally relevant role that we have, and reduce all human relationships down to this impartial relationship.

When I encounter a stranger, I do not recognize that person as a unique human being *in details*, though I know that the person is a unique human being. In order to be in a token role, the stranger and I must recognize each other as unique *in details*. But when that happens, this pure human relationship turns into a personal relationship, which could be a friendship, colleagueship, marital relationship, and so on.

We can picture the relational self as like a bull's eye target, with each concentric layer representing a role. The layers at or near the core of the target contribute more to "who I am" than those on the periphery. Of course, the self can change over time by entering new roles, exiting old ones, or reorganizing the current roles in terms of their relative importance to "who I am".[53]

This completes my brief sketch of the self in relation to its roles that Role Ethics requires. A few final remarks are in order. First, one's perception of one's self (that is, one's "perceived self") may be a distortion, in fact, from one's self. I will not address the difficult epistemological question of how to identity oneself in this dissertation. Second, one's self in fact may not be the self that one ought to be. Each tradition has a prescriptive sense of the self, which is coherent with the values, or goods, of the tradition. For example, the prescriptive self in the Confucian tradition arguably makes the role of child prior to any other role. Moreover, as Bernard Williams points out, in fact one can dissociate from, or refuse to identify with, certain of one's role(s).[54] This phenomenon has an important implication regarding the relation between the self and the roles: the

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[53] For instance, one might read Augustine's *Confessions* as the story of his "new self" that is formed by role transformations of all three sorts as the consequence of his assuming (or acknowledging) the role of child of the Triune God of Christianity. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to develop this suggestion.

[54] For detailed discussion on role dissociation, see Williams, *Morality*, 49–53.

human self is a unity, and when the normative demands of a certain actual role are incoherent with the demands of other roles, the self will reject that certain role. As I shall discuss in the following chapters, this drive toward coherence and unity in the self is very critical in RE and it has important normative implications.

The Dignity of Persons

In this section, I will explore an important implication for the dignity of persons of my accounts of roles and the self that I have sketched. Often ethicists use the notion of the self and the notion of person interchangeably. In this section, I will assume that they are at least overlapping in the sense that both notions try to capture the distinctiveness of an individual that can distinguish an individual from all others. I will also limit my scope of discussion to human persons or human selves. My discussion starts with Linda Zagzebski's account of dignity offered in her 2016 APA presidential address, "The Dignity of Persons and the Value of Uniqueness." After I summarize and critique her account, I will argue that my account of roles and the self can successfully explain the dignity of persons, especially the irreplaceable value of persons, while avoiding the main objections to her account.

Assuming that all human persons have dignity, Zagzebski tries to solve the question --"How can anything have dignity?" -- by analyzing the notions of dignity and personhood. She argues that a person is different from an individual human being: an individual human being is just an instance of human nature, while persons are unique or distinctive from one another. "Each human being is both a person and an instance of

human nature," she claims.[55] Inspired by Kant, Zagzebski argues that the notion of dignity involves two kinds of value: infinite value and irreplaceable value. Something has infinite value if it does not have a price and its value is immeasurable. Something with irreplaceable value cannot be exchanged for anything else, even for things with infinite value. She proposes that the distinction between a human individual and a person is the key in explaining the two kinds of value in regards to human dignity. She suggests an account of dignity as follows: rationality, an aspect of our human nature, accounts for our infinite value, and something about our personhood establishes our irreplaceable value. Zagzebski does not clarify the notion of rationality. Rather she focuses on what grounds one's personhood and thus one's irreplaceable value. What makes each person uniquely valuable, she argues, is quite puzzling: we seem to be unable to find a qualitative property to distinguish sufficiently one person from another because any qualitative property is shareable. She concludes that "an irreducibly first-personal consciousness" is the only candidate for the basis of our irreplaceable value.[56]

Zagzebski anticipates two objections. The first one is that a first-personal consciousness is possibly duplicable. She admits this is true, but replies it is still enough to establish irreplaceable value because the probability that a person's conscious history is duplicable is extremely low. She gives a reason for the high improbability of duplicating one's history of consciousness: each of us has people that we love in our life, and our love for them is closely associated with their uniqueness.[57] The second objection

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[55] Linda Zagzebski, "The Dignity of Persons and the Value of Uniqueness," *Proceedings and Addresses of The American Philosophical Association* 90 (November 2016): 63.

[56] Ibid., 62.

[57] Zagzebski, 62–63.

is that her account of personhood may fail to explain irreplaceable value because "being irreplaceable in some way or other does not give a person irreplaceable value unless what is irreplaceable is valuable in the respect in which the object is irreplaceable."[58] For example, despite the fact that the shape of our irises is unique for each person, this irreplaceable feature apparently does not ground our irreplaceable value. The thing that grounds our irreplaceable value has to be superlatively valuable itself. In reply, she argues, "rational consciousness is infinitely valuable, but it has infinitely many variations. The power is infinitely valuable, and the way the power is actualized in individuals is irreplaceable."[59] That is, the value of this irreplaceable subjectivity is based on the value of rationality.

Additionally, Zagzebski argues that a virtue of her account of dignity is that it provides an answer to the puzzle of the tension between partiality and impartiality. The puzzle is this: even though morality often is identified with impartiality toward others, we think that we should have a special attitude toward and give preferential treatment to those persons we love and are in close relationship with. Based on her account, the dignity of human persons inheres in both their common humanity and unique subjectivity. The former demands impartial treatment, and the latter calls for partial treatment. Therefore, the moral draw of both partiality and impartiality is not puzzling.

The first problem with Zagzebski' account of dignity is its vagueness about the concept of rationality, which exposes her whole account of dignity to serious objections from marginal cases, such as human fetuses, human beings in vegetative states, severely

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[58] Zagzebski, 64.

[59] Zagzebski, 65.

mentally impaired people, and so on. Meanwhile, she assumes that all human beings are persons.[60] Her views seem to contradict each other. She would affirm that a human being at the margins of rationality is a person. But she could hardly account for this person's dignity due to this person's very limited rationality. Yet conceptually, each person has dignity as Zagzebski assumes at the very beginning of her paper. Zagzebski does not explain why she does not offer an account of rationality. Perhaps she believes that being vague about rationality will not affect her account of irreplaceable value. Or, perhaps, since many philosophers traditionally have agreed rationality is the central characteristic of human nature, it seems to her safe to leave rationality unexplained in her account. I, however, argue that neither of these assumptions is true.

If rationality defines human nature, then those in a vegetative state or with severe mental impairment cannot count as humans because in these kind of cases their rationality is underdeveloped or severely compromised. Yet the claim that they are not human beings is counter–intuitive. Thus, rationality, at least in the typical sense, does not define human nature. If Zagzebski's account of infinite value is to succeed, it must adopt a notion of rationality that can account for the humanity and dignity of persons in such marginal cases.

Unfortunately, Zagzebski's account of irreplaceable value is subject to the same kind of objection. She claims, "Each human being is both a person and an instance of human nature."[61] Surely, human beings in a vegetative state are (still) human beings. Zagzebski's view, on the one hand, implies these humans are persons and thus have

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[60] Zagzebski, 63. She claims, "Each human being is both a person and an instance of human nature."

[61] Zagzebski, 63.

irreplaceable value. But, on the other hand, it implies they cannot have irreplaceable value because (apparently) they do not have first-person consciousness. Of course, she may respond that the humans in a vegetative state used to have that kind of subjectivity before they became vegetative; since they now (in vegetative state) are identical with their corresponding past individuals (before the vegetative state), their irreplaceable value remains. This reply, however, has to assume a non-psychological account of personal identity[62] to get around this objection. A psychological account of personal identity will not allow us to say that they now are identical with their corresponding past individuals in this case. It is most unfortunate that Zagzebski does not explicitly provide an appropriate account of personal identity.

My second critique targets the way in which she defends her account of irreplaceable value by explaining that the probability of a person's conscious history being duplicated is *extremely low*. Such a statement makes her account weaker than desired. If there were some sort of property in a person that is superlatively valuable itself and *could not* be duplicated, then it would suggest a stronger and better account of irreplaceable value than Zagzebski's. I understand that as far as she can see, an irreducibly first-person consciousness is the "only one candidate for the ground of the second aspect of dignity."[63] But I will propose a different and stronger account.

I agree with Zagzebski that our irreplaceable value comes from our personhood or selfhood. However, I suggest the thing in our selfhood that grounds our irreplaceable

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[62] The most popular non-psychological accounts of personal identity is animalism, but she has already committed herself to a very firm distinction between human beings and human persons, and so animalism (which collapses that distinction) does not fit well with her project. Thanks to Allison Thornton for her notes on this point.

[63] Zagzebski, "The Dignity of Persons and the Value of Uniqueness," 62.

value is not any form or stage of rationality, but rather is our relationality evidenced through our roles. Zagzebski gestures in this direction when she points out that because of the relationships we have in life, a person's history of consciousness is not likely to be duplicated. Yet she does not fully consider the option that our relationality alone can ground our irreplaceable value.

I propose that one's irreplaceable value is centrally defined by one's permanent non-membership *token* roles and is enriched by one's other *token* roles.[64] It is metaphysically impossible that a person's token roles be duplicated. Here is why in the form of a *reduction ad absurdum*. Suppose that person A has a set of token roles and that it is possible that another person B has the same token roles as A. Now the existence of B generates a relation R between A and B, and the relation R is supposed to be a relation other than identity. To specify the relation, let us suppose that R is friendship, such that A is a friend *to B*, and B is a friend *to A*.[65] However, in this case it follows that B has a different token role from A, which contradicts the assumption. Hence, it is impossible for a person's token roles to be duplicated. This implication gives my account an advantage over Zagzebski's, which merely holds that the probability of duplication of one's first-personal consciousness is extremely low. Furthermore, my proposal shows that first-person consciousness is not the only candidate for an account of irreplaceable value.

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[64] It is not uncommon that a person's temporary token role last for a very long time, and its corresponding relationship is fairly intimate. In such cases, the personhood of such people is dramatically enriched by such roles. But this should not overshadow the central determinants of personhood.

[65] It may be objected as this: suppose that A and B have only one role before their meeting together, that is, A is a friend to A, and B is a friend to B. After they meet together, A has two roles, a friend to A and a friend to B, also B has two roles, a friend to A and a friend to B. If so, A and B have the same roles as tokens. But notice that roles as tokens can be temporally relevant. Obviously, A's being a friend to A is a different token from B's being a friend to A, and A's being a friend to B is different from B's being friend to B.

The uniqueness of each person is guaranteed through the person's token roles.

Now I will argue for the superlative value of the set of the token roles a person occupies.

Of course, not every token role that a person occupies is superlatively valuable. The value

of a token role depends on the intimacy of the corresponding relationship or the degree of

entanglement of the two *relata*. From strangers, mere acquaintances, friends, to family

members, there is a spectrum of increasing intimacy. We commonly acknowledge that

the more intimate the relationship is (or should be), the more valuable it is. Our

permanent non-membership roles are among the most valuable roles[66] partly because we

have a lifetime (or a relatively long time) to develop the corresponding relationships.[67]

Such irreplaceability of value is more salient in permanent non-membership roles

than in other roles—primarily temporary roles[68]— but we should also fully appreciate the

layers of complexity that other token roles add to our uniqueness of value. They help

make us unique and even more valuable. They can be manifestations of the other possible

aspects of our human nature. A person's professional role, for example, ideally reflects

the person's specific human capacities and promotes (one's own or others') individual

human flourishing (for example, a doctor develops those capacities over time and heals a

patient) and/or human flourishing in general (for example, a politician makes policies for

the good of the people). Although a person in a professional role is replaceable by

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[66] This explains why we often consider family relations have a higher priority over others.

[67] A potential temptation to understand the supreme value of some roles, especially permanent roles, is that their value is merely relative to their *relata*. For me, my mother is irreplaceably valuable, and for her, I am irreplaceably valuable, for instance. Although this is definitely true, the supreme value of roles primarily is grounded in the supreme value of those relationships, which constitutes our flourishing. If a flourishing life is supremely valuable, so are the roles.

[68] There are only a few permanent membership roles, such as the human role, and a specific ethnic membership role.

someone else with the same or better expertise, occupying a professional role does affect one's own flourishing.[69] The role of friend also is temporary, but it adds at least some (and, perhaps, quite a bit of) complexity to the uniqueness of one's personhood as well.[70]

My account of irreplaceable value can avoid the objections from marginal cases that Zagzebski's account faces. I agree with her that each human being is a person. Since I ground a person's irreplaceable value not in consciousness or rationality, but in relationality, the unique value of human beings without any consciousness or rationality (or with compromised consciousness or rationality) can still be ensured.[71] They are infinitely valuable because they are human beings, and they are irreplaceably valuable because they are children of someone, siblings of someone, dear friends of someone, and so on. In addition, my account can also explain the tension between impartiality and partiality. My human role requires me to treat other human persons impartially, while my other roles require me to treat certain persons with partiality (for example, the role of mother requires me to treat my own children with partiality). The tension between impartiality and partiality arises from the fact that both our human role and other roles ground our dignity.

In this chapter, I have offered a teleological account of role that is based on the concept of well-being or flourishing. I also outlined a multilayered picture of the self,

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[69] This point offers some explanation for why we usually think that family means more than vocations to us, though we definitely acknowledge the importance of vocation for the well being of a person. Sometimes we say a person in a professional role is irreplaceable. There are two possibilities. One is because she and the people around her have developed a personal relationship, not merely professional relationship. In such a case, it is her role as a friend rather than her professional role that count her irreplaceability. The other possibility is much less common but entirely possible: a person's professional role is irreplaceable due to his extraordinary capacities and talents or due to a special need for a concrete situation in a specific time. Some historic figures and heroes in various areas are good examples of the former kind, some are of the latter kind, and some are of both.

[70] My account of personhood is open to non-human persons. As Zagzebski, the focus of my account of personhood is not to distinguish persons from non-persons, but to distinguish among persons.

which is significantly constituted by one's roles that are arranged in a certain order. My accounts of roles and the self are the foundation of my Role Ethics that I will further develop in the next two chapters. Due to the interesting feature of roles as both descriptive and prescriptive, "who I am" in terms of roles have significant implications about "how I should live." Importantly, these accounts are structural without assuming any specific notion of flourishing, or what roles one could possibly occupy. Any specific role ethics would be grounded in a specific account of roles and the self. The primary purpose of this chapter is to propose a perspective rather than a determinate answer for us to understand who we are. I also argued for a very important implication of my accounts of roles and self: the dignity of persons is grounded in relationality. This thesis is not only important for its own purpose, but also have normative implications. Particularly, it suggests how I, as human person, not only ought to live as a human being, but also as a *person* that is entirely unique in terms of my relations to certain important others. How well I handle these relations or roles is vital for conceiving or sustaining a coherent and unified view of my self. The next two chapters will focus on addressing two problems regarding how one should cope with one's roles.

CHAPTER THREE

Duties, Virtues, Skills and Role Fulfillment

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the important topic of role fulfillment: what does it mean to fulfill a certain role (as type or token)? This general issue has both theoretical and practical significance. Previously, I proposed a model of the self as a union of the original self and the relational self, the latter being constituted by all of one's token roles and the human role. If this model is accurate, it implies that the fulfillment of roles, especially those roles that are of central importance to the relational self, is vital for a person to maintain an intact self, which I assume as a necessary psychological condition for a person's flourishing or wellbeing.[1] In other words, theoretically, my account of the self demands an account of role fulfillment. On the practical dimension, people often raise questions about role fulfillment. Should a lawyer or a doctor do such and such things? What does it means to be a good mother or spouse? It shows that fulfilling roles is a very common ethical concern among ordinary people who are living an ordinary life. Due to these reasons, an adequate role ethics must consist of a normative account of role fulfillment.

Given the account of the self I proposed, role fulfillment includes two distinct categories: fulfilling the human role and fulfilling one's specific token roles. What it

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[1] This assumption needs more exploration, but this is not my focus here. I offer a sketchy argument here. Fulfilling these roles is often not evaluated within a single event, but within a series of events over a certain period of time. The failure to fulfill a role damages this person's self-identity by bringing up guilt and shame that is not occasional and beneficial for moral growth. Such a deep and long-term effecting guilt and shame hinders a person to flourish.

means to fulfill the human role depends on an account of human nature and broader metaphysical view of the reality, which is why fulfilling the human role is significantly different in the Stoic, Epicurean, Confucian, and Christian traditions, for example. Which specific or local type roles are most important to the relational self, and the general norms associated with those roles, are distinct in different traditions too. For instance, Epictetus identifies local type roles and discusses their fulfillment in the framework of Roman values, while Confucian tradition has an entirely different picture about how such roles should be fulfilled. So, just as the notion of the self needs to be specified under a certain tradition, so does the specific normative theory of role fulfillment (which involves, among other things, the general norms of type roles, the demands of token roles in particular situations, and the resources for adjudicating potential conflicts among those demands).

Since what I propose in this dissertation is not a specific role ethic, but rather the basic structure that is common to various role ethics, my goal in this chapter is not to specify general norms for a certain type role or what a token of that role demands in a particular situation. Instead, my discussion of role fulfillment is still structural. Specifically, I investigate the most general relations between role fulfillment and duties,[2] virtues, and skills, and the implication of these relations for moral education. I chose to explore these areas for two reasons. First, it seems that role fulfillment has obvious bearing on these mainstream ethical conceptions. Second, contemporary role ethicists are commonly interested in the relations between roles and duties, particularly, how roles

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[2] I will use duties and obligations interchangeably.

give rise to duties or obligations.[3] They have agreed that roles are (at least) one source of obligations. This way of thinking about roles and duties seems to provide a picture of role fulfillment, though they tend to be uninterested in this topic,[4] which suggests that role fulfillment equals fulfilling the relevant duties. My personal experience affirms that this picture is entirely misleading, which motivates me to argue against it. On the other hand, virtues (and skills) seem to me better suited to role fulfillment. As I will argue below, the relations among virtues, skills and roles will suggest a very promising approach for moral education or character formation.[5]

Although the Confucian and the Stoic traditions offer interesting but different accounts of type role fulfillment, the two contemporary versions of role ethics by Jeremy Evans and Sarah Harper are relatively lacking. Jeremy Evans has scarcely considered the issue of role fulfillment in its own terms; rather he focuses on a theory of right action given the role ethical framework he establishes. Sarah Harper provides more insights on the issue of role fulfillment, but compared to the two ancient traditions, her normative theory is far less systematic. So, in the following two sections, I will primarily sketch the views of Epictetus and the Confucian tradition on role fulfillment and character formation. After that, I will develop my own views on role fulfillment and character formation in the light of the wisdom that these two traditions have offered. Particularly, I will argue against the suitability of duties regarding role fulfillment, explore the mutual perfecting relations between roles and virtues, and the place of skills in role fulfillment.

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[3] For example, cf. Philip Pettit and Robert Goodin (1986), Michael O. Hardimon (1994), J. L. A. Garcia (2014), and Sarah Harper (2007), Jeremy Evans (2014)

[4] This is probably because their focus is meta-ethical and they have not considered the possibility that role ethics could be a paradigm for normative ethics.

[5] These concerns together may advance the revival of virtues in the recent decades from a very different perspective. But Role Ethics should not be seen as an instance of virtue ethics.

These relations, I argue, imply a virtue approach to role fulfillment and a role-centered account of character formation.

Appropriate Acts and Roles in Epictetus

Although virtues are prominent in Stoicism and would seem to be important to role fulfillment, Epictetus rarely discusses the canonical stoic virtues—wisdom, justice, courage and temperance—in his account of roles. Rather he proposes doing appropriate acts as the critical way to fulfill roles, universal and local. With regard to fulfilling the universal role, Epictetus lists a set of appropriate acts: "to act as a citizen of the world," "to treat externals as a matter of indifference," "to prefer volition above all else," "to eliminate the passions," "to have fidelity," and "to have a sense of shame."[6] Epictetus also identifies the appropriate acts to fulfill some of the common local roles according to the traditional Roman values. Again, how to fulfill particular roles in Epictetus' role ethics is not the focus of this section. Instead, I will investigate his account of appropriate acts and conclude with remarks about how it sheds light on the general question about role fulfillment.

Although Epictetus makes it obvious that the notion of appropriate action has a close relation with roles, he does not explicitly define appropriate action. Brian Johnson attempts to offer an account of appropriate action in terms of roles on behalf of Epictetus. Based on the standard Stoic conception of appropriate action, two criteria determine the appropriateness of an act. One is "consequentiality" and the other is a reasonable

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[6] Johnson, *Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 17.

justification.[7] Consequentiality captures the idea of acting according to nature, or action entailed by nature. For example, the consequentiality for being a human/rational being denotes the actions that are entailed by the human/rational nature. A reasonable justification is a defense offered by a rational agent, which is, however, not infallible. The basis for a reasonable justification is our rational nature, "a kind of universal reason which ordered the world."[8] So, nature in Stoicism is "both factual and normative."[9]

The concepts of consequentiality and a reasonable justification both depend on the concept of roles, according to Epictetus.[10] The above example in explaining the concept of consequentiality and a reasonable justification is a special case of the human role. This understanding of consequentiality and a reasonable justification also applies to all other roles. On the one hand, appropriate acts are consequents of our roles, which means that appropriate acts are entailed by a given role just like a logical consequent follows a hypothesis in logic. Appropriate acts for that given role must accord with the nature of that role. It is appropriate for a mother to discipline her child when the child's behavior is unacceptable. In contrast, it is often inappropriate for a sibling to discipline another sibling when the latter one's behavior is unacceptable. Although both cases involve correcting unacceptable behaviors, it is appropriate for one to do it while unreasonable for another due to the different nature of their roles. On the other hand, what is reasonable can also be determined by reference to our roles. Often, when we defend or justify our certain acts, we refer to roles. For example, a doctor who rejects

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[7] For a detailed discussion on the standard Stoic conception of appropriate action, see Johnson (2013): 44-46.

[8] Johnson, *Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 45.

[9] Johnson, 45.

[10] See Johnson (2013): 48-56 for detailed discussion.

euthanasia may defend her position by appealing to her role as a doctor, which, she understands, aims at saving life, rather than taking it.

Johnson also explains that although the two aspects of appropriate act, consequentiality and a reasonable justification, are supposed to capture the same appropriate action, they "represent two different perspectives on the same appropriate action."[11] The difference between the two aspects is this: it is possible for *an observer* to determine what is consequent to a role (third-person perspective), while what is reasonable is what is acceptable or comprehensible for *the agent* (first-person perspective).

Rituals, Virtues, and Roles in Confucianism

The Confucian account of role fulfillment relies on three critical notions, *li* (礼), *yi* (义) and virtue. In this section, I will sketch the place of these notions in the Confucian tradition and conclude with comments about what they teach us about role fulfillment.

As I summarized earlier, Confucian role ethics defines each key role in *li*, usually understood as a complex system of rituals, which are recorded and discussed in *Analects* and other Confucian classics, such as *xiao jing* (Classic of Family Reverence) and *li ji* (Book of Rites). Here is a concise description of *li* from Chichung Huang.

> The rituals (*li*) were a code of propriety, a set of rules and institutions by which people . . . were supposed to conduct themselves in their relations with the gods and spirits as well as with other human beings, hence, a code of propriety. This code of propriety encompassed all phases of human life, ranging from rituals governing state visits, organization of government institutions, state and family sacrifices, marriage, capping, mutual visits, banqueting, drinking parties, archery tournaments, learning, music, and mourning to etiquettes governing family and social relations and matters

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[11] Johnson, *Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 54.

of dress, utensils, food, and so forth, all designed strictly in accordance with position and rank.[12]

Although Huang's description of the rituals (*li*) gives an impression that *li* is a static artificial set of external rules within a certain culture or tradition, some Confucian scholars have argued against this interpretation.[13] A passage in a less-referenced Confucian classic sheds a lot of light on this issue. In the *Liyun* in Book of Rites (*Liji*), Confucius gives the following definition of *li*.[14]

> Confucius said, *"Li is what the ancient kings sought to represent the way of Tian*, and to regulate *the relationships* among men. Therefore he who neglects or violates it may be (spoken of) as dead, and he who observes them, as alive. …
> Therefore *li is rooted in Tian, imitates (the way of) the earth, and is drawn from spiritual beings*. They extend to funeral rites, sacrifices, archery, chariot-driving, capping, *wedding*, audiences, and friendly missions. Thus the sages made known *li (to the people)*, and it became possible for the kingdom, with its states and clans, to reach its correct condition."[15] (Legge, with alteration emphasized)

Confucius provides a two-dimensional perspective on *li*. From an external view, *li* is an artificial system of rules to regulate one's conduct about many aspects of life. In this sense, *li* is most similar to social rites, rituals, or customs. However, from an internal view, since the purpose of *li* is to represent the way of *Tian* (*dao* 道), which is the

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[12] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Chichung Huang, Lun Yu edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19–20.

[13] Kurtis Hagen argues that the rituals have both external and internal dimensions. The internal *li* refers to a "personal sense of ritual", "a virtue". (Hagen 2010) Nevertheless, his textual arguments are not very convincing. From the texts he cited, although the *li* in them can be interpreted as an internal sense of ritual , but there seems no reason to adopt such an interpretation. It makes a lot of sense as well even if *li* in those texts is interpreted as the external rituals.

[14] James Legge's translation seems to be the only English version of Liji. But some key places do not seem to me to be translated properly. After all, I am not a master of Chinese-English translation, so I translate this passage based on his with some places altered.

[15]孔子曰：“夫礼，先王以承天之道，以治人之情。故失之者死，得之者生。《诗》曰：『相鼠有体，人而无礼；人而无礼，胡不遄死？』是故夫礼，必本于天，殽于地，列于鬼神，达于丧祭、射御、冠昏、朝聘。故圣人以礼示之，故天下国家可得而正也。”（礼运，礼记）

supreme principle of the universe, *li* is not the ultimate and thus not the absolute principle for conduct. *Dao* is supposed to be the essence or spirit of *li*. Hence, *li* may fail to capture *dao*, and therefore *li* must be adjusted in certain situations.[16]

In addition, some texts clearly show that Confucius considers claiming absolute certainty and being inflexible as character defects and that he considers *yi* as the supreme principle for action.[17] *Yi* is "the optimal appropriateness in one's relations."[18] With the concept of *yi*, we can gain a deeper understanding of *li*. Since *li* is not absolute, *yi* becomes central in handling a specific situation. "Clearly, when discrepancy between what is appropriate and what is ritual occurs, the appropriate comes before the ritual," Jiyuan Yu explains.[19] Sometimes *li* cannot prescribe the right thing to do, and the agent would need practical wisdom to specify *yi* in those situations. Relating *yi* to the two dimensions of *li*, there are two resources that one can appeal to in order to specify *yi*: one is the external rituals, and the other is fundamental principle that those external rituals try to imitate. In other words, the rituals are the handy instructions for achieving *yi*, but one should not entirely depend on them because they may fail to prescribe the act with the optimal appropriateness.[20]

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[16] Many passages from *Analects* support this interpretation. See, for example, 3.4 and 9.3.

[17] See for example, *Analects*, 4.10, 9.4, 15.18, 17.23

[18] Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, 201.

[19] Jiyuan Yu, "'Yi': Practical Wisdom in Confucius's 'Analects,'" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 338.

[20] It is worth clarifying that *yi* is not an attribute of person, but an attribute of action. Jiyuan Yu claims that some passage in Analects (15:18) makes it obvious that *yi* is an attribute of an agent. But this passage can also be well understood by interpreting *yi* as an attribute of action. Moreover, all the other appearance of *yi* in Analects denotes an attribute of an action, so we have little reason to understand it as an attribute of an agent in this single passage. I believe that *yi* has been explained in an unnecessarily complicated fashion. Ames' definition of *yi* catches the essence of *yi*, yet confuses it by saying that "*Yi*, then, is an achieved sense of appropriateness that enables one to act in a proper and fitting manner, given

Besides *li* (礼) and *yi* as critical concepts to understand the fulfillment of the key roles[21] in Confucian role ethics, Confucianism also identifies the virtue that represents the ideal fulfillment of each role. For example, *xiao* (孝)—often translated as filial piety—is the virtue of fulfilling the role of child, and *ti* (悌) is the virtue of fulfilling the role of younger brother.

It seems odd to define virtues in terms of roles from the perspective of the Western tradition, which defines virtues in terms of capacities and activities. But this difference between their two ways of defining virtues is due to the traditions' different metaphysical views of the self.

As I have noted in the previous chapter, the Confucian self is constituted by roles. Given that the self is the bearer of virtues, virtues seem to be naturally individuated by roles. A virtue is an excellent disposition to fulfill a certain role. In contrast, the Aristotelian self or soul is divided into several faculties, and virtues are individuated in terms of these faculties. A virtue is a trait necessary for the excellent functioning of those faculties, especially the faculty of reason and its guidance of the other faculties.

Although the Confucian virtues may appear to map onto a set of western virtues, the Confucian virtues are not reducible to the western virtues because the former are often contoured in a particular role, while the latter are not. For instance, *xiao* is a virtue of being a child, and *ti* is a virtue of being a younger sibling. It does not make sense to say that one exhibits *xiao* in roles other than a child, or *ti* in roles other than a younger

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the specifics of a situation." (Ames 2012, 205) There is no passage in Analects indicating that *yi* has the motivating power to make an agent do what *yi* requires. Basically, *yi* is what is appropriate to do given a specific situation. Although it is reasonable to think that there should be a virtue corresponding to *yi*, which enables the agent not only see *yi* but also act upon it, this virtue is not *yi*. *Yi* is not a virtue.

[21] The key roles in Confucian tradition are based on the relationships between the parents and children, among the siblings, between the subjects and the king, etc.

sibling. In contrast, a full western virtue is not restricted to a specific role; rather, it is a stable disposition expressing itself across all roles. A fully courageous person, for example, is expected to exhibit courage in various situations where her different roles are salient.

Such different accounts of virtues lead to different understandings of the relation between virtues and role fulfillment. From the Confucian point of view, fulfilling a certain role is identical with possessing the corresponding virtue; for example, fulfilling the role of child is being *xiao*. From the western perspective, virtues facilitate role fulfillment; for example, the virtues of love, respect, and obedience, among others, enable one to fulfill the role of child. Here I do not want to defend one of these two accounts of virtues as preferable to the other, for these two ways to characterize the excellent dispositions of the self are like two ways to cut a pizza: slice cutting and square cutting. I merely want to clarify the Confucian account of virtue and its implication for the relation of virtues to roles.

Role Fulfillment and Duties

Having completed a brief survey of the relations among roles, virtues, and duties in the two ancient traditions of role ethics that flow from Epictetus and Confucius, in the following sections I will investigate more systematically some relations between roles and duties, roles and virtues, and roles and skills as these are understood in the contemporary context, but always with reference to the two ancient traditions. In the current section I argue against the seemingly obvious claim that one fulfills a role if and only if one fulfills all the relevant duties. My objection consists of two theses: first, it is theoretically impossible to define a role norm in terms of a set of duties; and, second,

acting merely from duties represents a misplaced focus, which leads to undesirable consequences that hinder role fulfillment.

Neither Epictetus' nor the Confucian role ethics mention the notion of duty.[22] The concept of duty, of which contemporary ethicists are so fond, does not even occur to these ancient role ethicists. One may suggest that the Stoic notion of appropriate action is the same as the notion of duties in nature, but with a different name. However, a number of philosophers have argued against this interpretation because the Greek Stoic word for appropriate act does not have the strict and imperative sense that 'duty' implies.[23] Similarly, one may argue that the Confucian notion of rituals or *li* can be interpreted as duties: duties are those actions implied by rituals. But again, what I presented in the previous section clearly shows that rituals should not be understood as a system of fixed and unbreakable rules of behaviors. Therefore, the acts dictated by the rituals do not have the strictness and imperativeness of duties either.

This sharp contrast between the ancient and the contemporary role ethicists on the matter of role fulfillment is probably related to the changed pattern in moral thinking from the ancient to the modern, which many virtue ethicists have noted when they explain the waning of virtue in the modern moral philosophy.

Contemporary role ethicist Sarah Harper points out the reason why the concept of duty is ill suited for role fulfillment: "When considering the duties and actions required of a teacher or friend, for example, it is impossible (or least not natural) to come up with a

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[22] Although Johnson titles his third chapter as such, "Roles in Action: Appropriate Acts (or "Duties")", he discusses the mismatch between these two notions in his note. See the following footnote.

[23] Johnson has a brief discussion on this matter in note 1 on page 165.

list of things that every teacher or friend must do."[24] But she offers no argument for her claim. Whether we should consider the ancient role ethicists wise or limited for not having the concept of duty needs more clarification and argumentation. So, I will provide an argument to show the truth of Harper's claim and thereby the wisdom of the two ancient role ethics.

But, first, we need to be clear about what a duty is. On a common understanding, a duty is a requirement, based on a principle that is general and unbreakable (within certain constraints, as I will show below), that an agent performs (or refrains from performing) a type of act. The most familiar kind of duty is a moral duty, which obligates all human/rational beings to perform (or refrain from performing) a type of act. In this case, what constrains the duty is the condition of being a human/rational being: non-human animals/non-rational beings are not subject to moral duties. When the constraint on a duty is a role, the obligation to perform (or restrain from performing) a type of act applies to all the role occupiers: those who are not in that role are not subject to the role duty.

In "Virtue and Reason," John McDowell famously argues against the codifiability of right actions.[25] The notion of duty implies the codifiability of right actions because the duty-rules mean to codify the right actions. So, McDowell's argument can also be taken as an argument against the notion of duty as a proper theoretical vehicle to capture moral truth. If so, the notion of duty is not suitable for role fulfillment either, because fulfilling a role could be seen as consisting of doing a series of right actions over a time.

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[24] Harper, "Role-Centered Morality," 18.

[25] John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50.

Perhaps, despite McDowell's argument, the idea of defining the normative structure of a role in terms of duties still seems appealing. After all, some occupational roles, such as being a cashier, are clearly defined by the relevant duties, and fulfilling this role by resorting to the list of duties it demands seems easy and free of confusion. Nevertheless, for the most significant roles in our life, such as those embedded in personal relationships, the idea of defining their normative structure in terms of duties is theoretically questionable. I will focus on the fulfillment of personal roles in this section. Let me take the role of mother for example. Some mothers (including me) wish there would be an instruction manual for how to be a good mother such that whenever they do not know what to do, they could look up the right action in this book just as they look up a proper word in a dictionary; it would be full of clear guidance about what they ought to do and what they ought not to do to be a good mother. If this book existed, it should be neither under-demanding nor over-demanding.

But I argue that such a "Complete Manual for Mothers" is impossible. Let us start with some of the most plausible duties that mothers are often expected to fulfill:

S1: A mother ought to love and care for her children.

S2: A mother ought to feed her children nutritious foods (for example, a variety of grains, vegetables, protein, fruits, dairy, nuts, and so on).

S3: A mother ought to feed her children nutritious foods, as determined according to her best knowledge.

While S1 is true, it is not a duty (as defined above) because it is not about an act. Rather it is about a character trait: being loving and caring.[26] S2 may be considered as a duty to

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[26] Deontologists probably will not favor such virtue rules that have been suggested by virtue ethicists.

do certain types of actions that a loving and caring mother would endorse; in this sense, S2 is a duty that appears to instantiate the character traits mentioned in S1. However, S2 is clearly over-demanding in defining a duty for the role of mother. It is over-demanding when a mother and her children live in extreme poverty and they cannot change this circumstance on their own. Even the greatest mother in that case may only offer her children every bite of food she has, regardless of what nutrients that food contains. S2 is also over-demanding for a mother whose child has special needs such that eating some (or all) of these foods would make the child sicker. S3 is more refined, but it still has a problem. On the one hand, it is not very informative. After all, many mothers are constantly unsure about whether they have offered the best food they can to their children given the ever-increasing amount, ambiguity, and change of nutritional advice from various sources. If S3 is a true duty required by the role of mother, it is not very helpful in practice. On the other hand, S3 may become under-demanding in certain cases. Some mothers who are culpably ignorant of basic food facts, have the resources to provide better food for their children but feed them unhealthy food consistently. This example indicates that the duty either fails to capture the complexity of what token roles require when it prescribes norms for a role type, or the duty is ambiguous and thus impractical when it attempts to accommodate the particular complexity of token roles.

If you think this dilemma only occurs with obligations to perform certain actions, consider a representative list of (apparent) obligations to avoid certain actions, expressed in "ought not" statements:

S4: A mother ought not to kill her children.

S5: A mother ought not to spoil her children.

S6: A mother ought not to allow her children to go their own way when their way is not acceptable.

In the vast majority of cases, S4 is a useless and redundant guide for a woman who desires to be a good mother. The role of mother can generate hundreds of duties like this that will not provide anything helpful to a mother who strives to fulfill her role. Excluding those useless duties, we may come across duties like S5 (which assumes spoiling children is bad for them and a mother ought not to do anything bad to her children). However, again, "spoiling" in this statement does not name a type of act, but a disposition. S6 tries to define what it means to spoil one's child. Yet we still need to specify what exactly is acceptable. If we define this acceptability in general terms, it is not difficult to think of counterexamples. If we define it in personal terms for a particular mother's concrete circumstances, this duty statement ceases to express a duty *proper*. It becomes a personal "ought" entailed by this mother's situation.

The above examples illustrate several important points. Some "ought (not) to" statements are not authentic duty statements (that enjoin or prohibit types of actions); they are statements about character traits. When we try to move from such a statement to an authentic duty statement, which is about an action type, we inescapably face counterexamples to the statement. In order to be rid of those counterexamples, we have to add more restrictions to the duty statement, which inevitably involves resorting to ambiguous terms. To resolve such ambiguity, we need to define the terms in either a general way or a specific way. Unfortunately, this refinement only leads to further counterexamples or transforms the duty statement in question into a non-duty statement. The generality of duties dooms them to failure in capturing the particular good in a

particular relationship, and thus in enjoining the appropriate actions (or proscribing the inappropriate actions) for fulfilling a token role. I have discussed only a few examples, but the problems with them can be generalized to other "ought (not) to" statements about the role of mother. That is why a 'Complete Manual for Mothers' is theoretically impossible. And since this line of argument can apply to 'manuals' for other personal roles as well, I conclude that the attempt to describe the normative structure of a role norm through the notion of duty is doomed to fail.

My argument above shows the tension between type role norms and token role requirements, or between the common standard and the particular standard of a role. As I noted earlier, Epictetus' role ethics captures this tension: the two criteria of appropriate action, consequentiality and a reasonable justification, respectively correspond to the common role norm and the token role requirement. The common role norm is observable through a third personal perspective, while the token role requirement is only accessible through a first personal perspective. In Confucian role ethics, the notions of *li* and *yi* also capture the tension. *Li* defines type role norms through rituals; achieving *yi* is the ultimate goal for a token role occupier who must decide what to do in a particular situation. Therefore, it is the wisdom of both Epictetus' and Confucian role ethics to leave the notion of duty out of their thinking about role fulfillment.

Despite of the theoretical impossibility I have argued, the notion of duty is so deeply integrated into the contemporary mindset that we often think about fulfilling our token roles in terms of doing our duties, though in this case we are using the notion of duty in a much looser sense. For in the strict sense, duties only tie to type roles. But even if we broaden the scope of duty so that it can also capture the particular demands of token

roles, there is still a serious problem. In the remaining part of this section I will argue that another failing of the idea that role fulfillment is definable by fulfilling role duties is that it encourages a misplaced focus in fulfilling roles. Moreover, such a misplaced focus leads to two undesirable consequences that will in fact prevent one from fulfilling one's roles: deprivation of motivation and failure to meet the role-respondent's real needs.

A mother will not become a good mother merely by crossing off the tasks on a "to do" duty list—even supposing that she could have one. If duties become the primary focus in her role of mother, she is interacting with a task list rather than her child. What should be an intimate relationship between her and her child is encumbered by a set of duties. I used to be in that state in my early years of motherhood, and I am still cautious about not getting into that state again because, for some reason, it is so tempting. The set of duties had magical dictating power over me and made me lose sight of the true essence of being a good mother, which is a *direct* loving attitude.

One consequence of the misplaced focus is diminishing motivation. A task list does not have persisting motivating power. If it did, everyone could accomplish a lot of things as long as they had a task list in hand. But fulfilling roles requires a persisting motivation for several reasons. First of all, fulfilling a role is not a single action, and often requires perseverance over a long time. Second, fulfilling a role often requires self-sacrifice, which means that one must prioritize the needs of others over those of oneself. Lacking proper and persisting motivation will make fulfilling roles especially painful. As a psychological consequence, one will eventually lose motivation to keep doing what is on the list if one does not bring in other sources of motivation. Even if one can keep

going, this lack of proper motivation may cause resentment and other negative emotions that will surely hinder one fulfilling one's role.

The other problem of the misplaced focus is that it neglects the real needs of the role respondent. As Harper argues, the role-respondent's perspective is the morally relevant one, which implies that meeting the needs of role-respondents is critically necessary for role fulfillment. The need of a role respondent is not merely external, but is importantly internal. The real need of a child is not merely the nutritious food, adequate clothes, some toys, or vacations. Rather it is the intimate relationship with her caregivers, often her parents. Such an intimate relationship can be expressed through these external things, but can never be measured by them. As we often observe in ordinary life, some children from affluent families are not as flourishing as some others from relatively indigent but loving families. So, fostering a good relationship with one's role-respondent is necessary, and probably the most important, for one's role fulfillment.

But the misplaced focus resulting from acting from duties does not contribute to a fulfilled relationship. Since the person who acts from duties is not directly or primarily oriented to the role-respondent, fulfilling duties alone cannot meet the role-respondent's need for an intimate relationship, or the need for being loved and cared for by that person from her heart. Michael Stocker's famous example of visiting a sick friend merely out of sense of duty applies to the current issue.[27] Even if we do not talk about duty in the Kantian sense, but as role duty, it is still awkward for the visiting friend to say that "Well, this is my (role) duty as a friend" instead of simply saying, "You are my friend." As Harper points out, "our evaluations of agents in these roles are primarily evaluations of

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[27] Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *Journal of Philosophy* 73, no. 14 (1976): 453–466.

their affective and desiderative capacities as these are manifest in responses to various role-respondents."[28] The misplaced focus on duties makes the role-respondent secondary. An intimate relationship requires that the two *relata* interact with each other directly instead of via some mediators, such as duties.

For the two reasons I have argued, theoretical impossibility and the misplaced focus, I conclude that the duty approach is ill-suited for a proper account of role fulfillment, especially for personal roles.

Virtues and Roles

Since the notion of duty is a bad fit for an account of role fulfillment, and it has been claimed that "[r]oles are a natural fit for the virtues,"[29] I turn now to examine whether the concept of virtue is better suited to capture the normative structure of roles. After I explain the Aristotelian definition of virtue and how the concept of role fits with it, I will consider how virtues contribute to role fulfillment and how roles play a significant part in the perfection of virtues. Finally, I argue that the relation between roles and virtues through mutual perfection suggests both a proper account of role fulfillment and a plausible account of character formation.

According to Aristotle, virtues are "related to the notion of 'characteristic activity' (*ergon*): the virtue of something consists in its capacity to perform well its characteristic activity."[30] For example, sharpness is a virtue of a knife because it enables the knife to do well in its characteristic activity towards a certain good, which is cutting things

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[28] Harper, "Role-Centered Morality," 64.

[29] García, "Roles and Virtues," 415.

[30] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp, second edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 205.

efficiently and easily. Similarly, human virtues are the excellences for doing activities

that are characteristic for humans towards some human good. Within the framework of

the Aristotelian account of the soul, the characteristic human activities are the activities

of the rational part of the soul (1097b22-1098a20), either in itself or in its relations with

other parts of the soul. But the picture of the self that I proposed in the previous chapter

suggests a different angle to consider the characteristic human activities. The self is

significantly relational, which echoes Aristotle's claim that humans are social animals.[31]

Thus, the characteristic human activities are relational in nature. They are pervasively

structured by the various roles one has. Therefore, in terms of roles, human virtues are the

excellences of relational capacities to fulfill various roles that contribute to human good;

the virtues are expressed through the characteristic activities of those roles.[32] Hence, roles

and virtues are a natural fit for each other.

It is worth noting that the above account of virtue in terms of roles accommodates

both the Aristotelian (and other western traditional virtues) and the Confucian virtues. I

noted earlier how some of the Confucian virtues are individuated by roles rather than by

the target fields of activities that the western virtue ethics have generally assumed. For

example, in the western tradition, generosity is a virtue regarding giving one's own

possessions to others, courage is a virtue about handling fear, and compassion is a virtue

concerning one's response to others' suffering and pain, and so forth. In contrast, the

Confucian virtue of *xiao* is a virtue for a child to her parents, and *ti* is the virtue for a

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[31] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Revised ed. edition (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2000). 1253a

[32] Apparently, this role account of virtues is consistent with Aristotle's view of virtues. But arguably, my proposal about characteristic activities of humans is preferable to Aristotle's because his is based on the division of human soul, which is a controversial topic. Rather mine is drawn from our direct observation of our human life that is penetrated by roles.

younger sibling to her older siblings. Since Confucian virtues are defined in terms of roles, they are obviously excellences in regard to fulfilling those roles. Yet Aristotelian (and other traditional Western) virtues also relate in various ways to fulfilling roles. In the following, I will focus on exploring the relations between the Western virtues (hereafter, simply virtues, unless otherwise indicated) and roles.

By the role definition of virtues, it is obvious that virtues contribute to role fulfillment. Arguably, the virtue-approach to role fulfillment can withstand the problems that the duty-approach faces.[33] But this is not my focus. Rather, I want to illustrate how virtues serve roles or how roles demand virtues. Despite the fact that all roles demand a group of primary virtues, the primary virtues required by one role can be different from the ones required by another role in three senses. In the first sense, two role types may require two different sets of primary virtues. For instance, the virtues of a mother may be love, patience, diligence, attentiveness, and so on, while, the virtues of a soldier may be obedience, courage, alertness, and so on. Or, to take another example, some intellectual virtues that are required by being a philosopher are not required for the role of nurse. In the second sense, even if two roles require the same virtue, this virtue is differentiated in the role contexts.[34] For example, both a mother and a soldier require the virtue of courage, but these two roles require courage in different ways. In a peaceful society, a mother may need courage to fight for her child's rights or benefits, but not often encounter the possibility of death. But a soldier fighting on a battlefield needs courage to

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[33] First, it is quite plausible to define role norms in terms of virtues without being over-demanding or under-demanding. Second, a proper account of virtue can avoid the problem of misplaced focus if it defines virtues as toward otherness rather than merely proper functions of the soul.

[34] Christine Swanton argued for the same claim about stereotype virtues and role-differentiated virtues. See Christine Swanton, "A Virtue Ethical Theory of Role Ethics," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (December 1, 2016): 687–702.

face the high risk of death. In the third sense, even for the same type role, two tokens may require different virtues or the same virtue in different aspects. For example, a mother of multiple children needs the virtue(s) to handle the sibling issues while a mother of one does not.[35] Or a mother of a special-need child needs a much higher level of patience and perseverance than a mother of a developmentally normal child. Although it is true that some roles seem to require almost a complete list of virtues, it is worth noting that the virtues required by a role are usually imperfect virtues rather than perfect ones. Imperfect virtues are good character traits, which are, however, fragile under certain social contexts. Perfect or full virtues, compared to imperfect virtues, have a higher degree of excellence because these character traits are stable across most social contexts.[36] Although the role of mother requires courage, it does not require perfect courage to fulfill its purpose. A mother does not need to be courageous on the battlefield to be a good mother.

The above ways that our various roles demand virtues not only support a virtue approach to role fulfillment, but also seem to imply that fulfilling roles can dramatically shape one's character. While many role ethicists agree that virtues serve roles, I will argue that roles also serve virtues: namely, roles play a significant part in virtue perfection and character formation.

First, we can acquire an extended understanding about what virtues require through roles. Many people do not realize how limited their virtues are until they take on a new role. For example, I had not realized how limited my forgiveness is until I became

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[35] The virtue might be justice. A mother of one also needs justice regarding disciplining her own child according to his faults. But she will not need to deal with the fairness issue among several children that could be seen as another aspect of justice.

[36] Robert Adams suggests such a distinction in his 2006 book, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, especially in Part III.

a daughter-in-law, or how little humility I have until I became a wife. If the Aristotelian idea that we develop (or strengthen) virtues by practice is roughly correct, then one may continue to practice on a particular virtue in certain roles where one finds one's limitation on this virtue. I have made some progress in cultivating forgiveness in my role of daughter-in-law and humility in my role of wife. Furthermore, it seems a fact that for each person it is easier to perform certain virtuous actions in some roles, but harder to act in accordance with the same virtue in other roles. For example, I am more patient in my role of mother than in my role of daughter. I know that I am supposed to be much more patient toward my mother, and this is the area that I need to work on. Many decent people find themselves having more self-control over their anger toward their boss or friends than that toward their spouse and children. Also we hear stories about some generally timid women being very courageous in protecting their children from dangers. This suggests that the virtues of real people could be imperfect in the sense that the virtues that they exhibit are role-restricted to a certain degree. One with a perfect virtue X is expected to display X in one's various roles.[37] The roles that one carries provide a great opportunity for one to discover what virtues one lacks and, for those virtues one has imperfectly, what aspects of them one can further improve.

Second, roles can motivate us to perfect virtues. Since roles are significant components of the self, the natural desire for the intactness and the unity of the self plays a critical part in moral motivation regarding fulfilling one's roles. Such a desire further motivates one to perfect one's virtues that are demanded by one's roles.

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[37] But this does not mean that a perfectly generous person will act generally *as we understand* in every role. For real cases often involves role conflicts, even a perfectly generous person may not act generally as we expect her in certain cases. But such cases should not pose a challenge to her perfect generosity since perfect generosity is integrated in practical wisdom.

The two points above suggest that roles have both an epistemic hand and a motivational hand in the perfection of virtues. This relation between roles and virtues further suggests a picture of character cultivation. This picture seems to match some basic observations about how children are raised with ethical guidance. So let me talk about children first. Developing virtues starts from fulfilling roles, such as the role of child and the role of sibling at home. This is where the wisdom of Confucian role ethics lies. Young children are trained to be good children primarily through cultivating the virtue of obedience to their parents. At a very young age, they begin to learn what is right and what is wrong, though in very coarse form, through discovering the boundaries that good parents set for them.[38] If they are successfully trained to be obedient, they will be able to abide by the standards for right and wrong or good and bad from their parents. Based on obedience, parents will be able to train children to acquire other virtues in other roles of cousin, nephew or niece, student, friend, and so on. Certainly, the training regarding the virtue of obedience and other virtues is always intertwined. When a child disobeys her mother's command about an action in accordance with a virtue X, her mother can use a certain unpleasant consequence to teach this child to obey. In this situation, both of the virtue of obedience and the virtue X are trained—though in different degrees—through this practice. Obedience is the basis for a child to really practice virtuous habits. When disobedience occurs, the training of obedience becomes primary.

Let me turn now to some very practical implications of the connections I sketched above between roles and virtue cultivation. The point in considering these implications is

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[38] Let us assume the parents in question are not those who falsely teach their children about right and wrong.

to illustrate the theoretical power and practical usefulness of emphasizing role fulfillment in a program of moral education.

First, in the maturing child what I described as "the natural desire for the intactness and unity of the self" often expresses itself through a desire to identify with and fulfill one's roles. Given this desire for self-recognition and fulfillment, reminding children about their honored roles can play an important part in virtue cultivation. I have noticed this in my own children. When two neighbor girls, five and seven years old, came over to our house to play, they gravitated toward my four-year-old daughter and avoided my two-year-old son. The girls wanted to play together without my son because he was in that "terrible" age when he rambunctiously pestered them. I certainly understood the girls' feelings, but forcing the little boy out of the playroom was not a good behavior that I wanted to encourage. When my daughter urged my son to get out of the room, I first said, "That is not very kind, Rebekah." She didn't respond to my comment, and continued to shoo the poor boy out. Then I adjusted my strategy and said, "Rebekah, this is your brother!" With softened light in her eyes, she immediately changed her attitude: "All right, let him stay." My daughter apparently identified with her role as older sister (thankfully), and desired to fulfill it.

This episode, and others like it, suggest some general ways to incorporate roles into virtue cultivation at early ages. First, we must start with what a child can understand. Young children can hardly understand the virtue of generosity (even professional philosophers are struggling with its definition), but they can grasp the fact that they are a sister or a brother. Thus, generosity is cultivated through training children to share with their siblings: "Please share with your brother. You are a big sister." or

"You are good sister and brother, aren't you?" This practice helps children get the habit of sharing, which is a form of generosity, through emphasizing their identity in their role of sibling. This, however, does not mean that parents should avoid using virtue language when explaining a situation to children. In the above situation, a parent may also say, "Be generous, sweetie!" It is just harder for young children to understand the meaning of generosity. With much practice in using the vocabulary, they can and will understand virtue terms when they get older. My point is that compared to virtue language, the role language seems more natural and easier for young children to understand in an ethical situation so that it plays a vital role in developing children's character at an early age. As young children grow older, and start to acquire more roles, such as a friend, a student, a playmate, and so on, they practice their acquired "virtue seeds" in these new roles and gain a deeper understanding about what a certain virtue means. Meanwhile, they start to acquire new virtues that are not obviously required by their earlier roles. Diligence, for example, seems to be a primary virtue for the role of a student rather than of a child (at least at a young age) or a sibling. As children become more mature and experienced, they gradually form a more complete understanding of various virtues from the fragmented understanding of them in different roles. For example, to be generous to a stranger in need demands much more than to be generous to your favorite sister.

Mature people will consider roles more intentionally and thereby can cultivate their character deliberately through reflecting on what virtues are required by their roles. For example, after assuming the role of mother, one might focus on developing patience. Being a mother is such an important part of one's self that it motivates one to learn to be more patient in order to fulfill the role of mother. One might deliberately make plans

about what one can do to be more patient with one's children, and with intentional self-evaluation, learning from both one's successes and failures, one may gradually become more patient with them than before. Furthermore, this progress with patience in one's role of mother may contribute to the development of one's patience in other roles, such as friend, instructor, or daughter. I say "may" contribute to patience in these other roles, because sometimes learning a virtue does not carry over across roles perfectly. For instance, although my patience in my role of mother has improved, my patience in my role of daughter has not. Obviously, I do not possess the perfect virtue of patience, which should be quite stable across different roles. Rather, I have an imperfect (virtue of)[39] patience, which shows up more (or better) in some roles than in others. Nevertheless, it can be true that I am making progress towards perfect patience even though I have more room to make progress in patience in my role of daughter than in the others. My becoming patient in my role of daughter would not give me perfect virtue of patience, but I would be much nearer to the ideal. If I were to reach the ideal, I would not only have friendly patience, instructorly patience, motherly patience, daughterly patience, or so on, I would have the virtue of patience. In short, the traits that a person develops by seeking to fulfill a role may be generalized, so that the individual becomes generally just, self-controlled, persevering, generous, compassionate, and so forth.

To emphasize role perfection in character formation (what I will call "the indirect approach") has some other theoretical advantages over a mere stress on virtue perfection ("the direct approach"). First, perfecting a role is less open to the objection of 'self-

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[39] I am not sure if it can be called a virtue right now.

absorption' than to focus on perfecting a personal trait.[40] Roles are essentially embedded in relationships, and thus are other-oriented. It seems oddly self-focused to say I am perfecting my virtue, but not so much to say I am perfecting my role of teacher or mother. The former leads to an impression that I primarily care about myself, the health of my soul, while the latter indicates that I care about my students or my children rather than (or, at least, in addition to) myself. I have argued in the previous section that the proper focus in fulfilling a role is the role-respondent, not other outcomes or things.

Additionally, it is likely for a decent person not to realize what virtues he has, but it is less likely for this person not to know what roles he has.[41] In this case, he may not have enough clues about perfecting his virtues if he only thinks of them alone, while he will acquire a clear direction about how to improve his virtues through looking into what his roles require.

Besides, the direct approach seems to suggest that one should strive to cultivate and perfect all virtues. But such a requirement is so general that it is too high and unrealistic for a particular human being. For example, artistic activity is a characteristic human activity, and the virtues associated with this activity are certainly valuable to possess. This is why art education is important, especially at the early stage of development. But for various reasons, the art education may fail, and it is also true that some human beings are naturally less gifted in art. There seems no point for a gifted engineer who does not have much sensitivity in art to strive to cultivate the virtues for art unless he discovers that some important role he occupies in his particular life demands the virtues that may grow out of the art virtues. My point here is that character formation

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[40] Many thanks to Dr. Robert Kruschwitz for this point.

[41] Many thanks to Dr. Alexander Pruss for this suggestion.

needs to be particularist too. No one is going to be able to regularly participate in all the characteristic human activities, given one's limited time and resources (including the inner resources of talent and the outer resources of education and social environment). One needs to consider one's particular life structure that is characterized by the token roles that one takes, and live the most from this particular life, not a human life in general. There is simply no general human life in existence.

To sum up, roles and virtues interact throughout daily life, and improvement of performance in either of them will assist one to have a better understanding and performance in the other. Particularly, roles provide a useful perspective for us to examine and characterize virtues in more specific ways. Since roles can dramatically shape one's character, we should expect a diversity of good character because each of us has a distinct set of token roles that require different characters to develop. Compared to the ideal that virtue ethics has for how we flourish, which is simply "being virtuous" for all human beings, a role ethics account of character formation allows for (and even requires) diverse excellent characters. But we should be aware that we are unlikely to have perfect virtues or character because the limited kinds of roles that we can actually occupy restrict the possibility that we develop any virtues fully. Each of us can have good character, and in different ways, but none of us can be perfect.

Skills and Roles

No one would doubt that occupational and professional roles demand skills. For example, the role of doctor requires one to attend medical school to gain the many complex skills that one needs to fulfill the role. In this section, I will explore the relation between skills and roles in general, including personal roles. First, I argue that skills

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serve roles only through virtues. Second, I argue that although there may not be a necessary link between fulfilling a token role and a related particular skill, the lack of such a skill may signal a failure of role fulfillment.

Skills contribute to role fulfillment through virtues. In order to defend this claim, I argue for three claims: 1) skills can serve virtues; 2) skills alone do not serve role fulfillment without virtues; and 3) some virtues can help acquire and keep the relevant skills required by a role.

First, skills can serve virtues. I have argued that virtues serve the fulfillment of roles. So, if skills can serve virtues, then skills can serve the fulfillment of roles. Many virtue ethicists have argued that virtues are not skills, though they present different reasons for this claim. Linda Zagzebski, for example, argues that virtues and skills are distinct because virtues "are strongly connected to motivational structure, whereas skills are more connected to effectiveness in action."[42] Although she rightly points out one distinction between the virtues and skills, she overstates it by claiming that it is possible for a person "to have a virtue and to lack the corresponding skills."[43] Given that "[s]kills serve virtues by allowing a person who is virtuously motivated to be effective in action,"[44] possessing a virtue while lacking the corresponding skills means that a virtuous person cannot carry out virtuous actions effectively. But this seems quite counter-intuitive. Our common understanding about what it means to be virtuous is Aristotelian: a virtuous person must not only be virtuously motivated, but also carry out the virtuous

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[42] Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 116.

[43] Zagzebski, 116.

[44] Zagzebski, 113.

action.[45] We do not consider a person as virtuous who always fails to do the virtuous action, even if this person is always virtuously motivated. We could attribute "good-heartedness" to this person, but "good-heartedness" is different from a virtue. Compared to those who are truly virtuous, this good-hearted person obviously misses something important to being virtuous. So, having skills is necessary for being virtuous.

But this conclusion is too general to be enlightening. After all, it is not the case that every virtue requires every skill. So how exactly can skills serve virtues? Skills can serve virtues in two distinct ways. Technical skills, on the one hand, are not necessary for being virtuous, but they can facilitate a virtuous person to carry out virtuous actions in a particular context. For example, medical skills are not necessary to be a loving person, but they enable physicians to carry out loving actions to people in medical contexts. Virtue skills, on the other hand, are necessary to some virtues. For example, the virtue of love requires (verbal and behavioral) communication skills, which enable a person to love others properly. Honesty, for instance, requires the verbal skill to express facts accurately; it is not uncommon that some people sometimes do not tell the truth due to their lack of skill in articulating the facts, and not because they intend to dissemble or lie.

How does this distinction of two kinds of skills help us understand the relation between skills and roles? For occupational or professional roles, technical skills are necessary for fulfilling them. For personal roles, technical skills are not necessary. Although it may seem desirable for a parent, for example, to possess certain technical skills, such as pediatrician skills or professional baking skills, these are definitely not required by the role of parent. Apparently, virtue skills are necessary for fulfilling both

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[45] This is where practical wisdom comes in. Also Hursthouse discusses the distinction between full virtue and natural virtue in her SEP entry on virtue ethics.

kinds of roles because the fulfillment of both requires virtues, which would be impossible without virtue skills.

Second, skills alone do not serve role fulfillment without virtues. Skills are primarily associated with effectiveness in action, and do not have ends other than the effective action itself. This feature of skills implies two possibilities: skills may be used for bad ends and skills may be used for lower-level good ends that fail to support any higher end. Because of these possibilities, skills need virtues to be rightly effective. Regarding role fulfillment, since roles have their specific end or function, skills serve role fulfillment only when they serve the ends or functions of roles. But they cannot target the ends or functions of roles without virtues. Consider the skill to quiet an upset child, for instance. This skill potentially serves the fulfillment of the role of mother or caregiver. But without the virtues required by the role of mother, a mother could miss the target when applying a skill to effectively quiet upset child. For example, one mother quieted her crying baby by locking her in a dark closet for hours. After a couple of weeks of 'training,' this skill is very effective in quieting her upset child, but is destructive for the child's mental health.[46]

Another interesting example is spanking, a skill often used for disciplining children. Discipline is one aspect of a mother's love for her children because it teaches them about safeness and danger, good and evil, appropriateness and inappropriateness, which is critically important for their good.[47] Some believe that spanking, when used

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[46] I owe this case to Scott Hundley, a professional counselor at Columbus, IN. I heard about this real case, which Scott dealt with years ago at a children's hospital, in a lay counseling class in 2016.

[47] Again, different outlooks have different ideas about what is good for a child. Here in order to illustrate the connection between skills and virtues, we have to assume that although parents are not perfect, they generally know better than the children about what is good for them.

properly, is effective in teaching children about these boundaries, and thus it can be good in certain situations for the children. Many parents who believe in spanking emphasize that such a disciplinary skill must be used with love. The virtue of love ensures that a mother only spanks her children for the purpose of giving them an unpleasant but harmless consequence from which they can learn to avoid their unacceptable behaviors.[48] When a mother spanks her child in love, she is unlikely to cause more pain for the child than needed. Also because of her love, this mother will express love in all kinds of scenarios and in various ways, not only in disciplinary situations. Consequently, her child can understand the spanking within this larger context, and thus will be able to understand that even spanking is one expression of her love. Out of love, the mother will affirm the child for her good behavior, with reassuring words or in some other ways, and this will reinforce the child's understanding that her mother does not really desire the spanking for its own sake, but desires the lesson that her mother tries to teach her. So, spanking may be safe, effective, and good for the children's sake when it is done in love. Without love, spanking risks harming children both physically and emotionally, and might only be a way to express the parents' anger, desperation, or even malevolent desires.

These (and other similar) examples suggest that skills themselves cannot contribute to role fulfillment because they alone cannot target on the right ends, or apply themselves in the right way. Instead, they must be applied with virtues.

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[48] This is especially true for young children because they are less likely to understand other kinds of unpleasant consequences—say, taking away a privilege since they may not really have a privilege that they really care about; my daughter is certainly a case—while the immediate pain on their bottom is what they can certainly understand.

Not only do skills serve virtues, and skills must rely on virtues in order to fulfill a role, my final thesis is that virtues can enable a person to acquire and keep the skills that are needed to fulfill her roles. For example, learning a difficult skill, such as managing a surgery, requires the virtues of perseverance and diligence.

Roles can motivate one to acquire the relevant skills needed to fulfill the roles in the same way that roles can motivate one to acquire the relevant virtues (as I have argued above). Zagzebski points out that "skills tend to be more subject specific, context specific, and role specific."[49] On the one hand, since roles can motivate one to acquire virtues, it can naturally motivate one to acquire the relevant virtue skills. For example, the role of wife may motivate a woman to cultivate a fuller virtue of love, which further motivates her to learn the communication skills that are needed for effectively loving her husband. On the other hand, roles can motivate one to acquire the technical skills. For instance, the role of philosopher can motivate a person to learn the reasoning and writing skills that are necessary for a professional philosopher. So, recognizing what roles a person carries can help her realize what skills are preferable or even necessary for her roles. Some of these skills will allow her to be more effective in virtuous actions that are required by her roles.

On the opposite side of this issue, a lack of relevant technical skill may signal a failure of role fulfillment. For professional roles, this is obviously the case. An engineer who does not continue renewing his technical skills may gradually fail his role as an engineer in a specific area. For personal roles, the lack of virtue skills definitely hinders role fulfillment because virtues are central to fulfill personal roles and virtue skills are necessary part of virtues. A husband who does not have love communication skills does

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[49] Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 115.

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not have the full virtue of love, though he could be motivated by love. And the lack of love as a virtue will prevent him from being a good husband. But since technical skills are not necessary for personal roles, how may a lack of technical skills be a signal of personal role failure? Take the technical skill of cooking for example. Although often this skill is tied to the role of mother as a type, it is not necessary for a token mother because it is possible for a mother who does not know how to cook or is unable to cook to be a good mother. But in some cases, poor cooking skills may reflect some motivational and desiderative problems. For example, a mother who never even thinks about improving her awful cooking skill a little bit, though her children, who are not picky eaters, complain about the food she cooks, indicates her indifference to her children's reasonable need for good-tasting food. In other words, in this context a lack of cooking skill indicates a deficiency of virtue in this mother. So the lack of relevant technical skills could signal a defect in personal role fulfillment, though this can only be evaluated on a token basis.

In this section, I explored various relations between skills and roles. My arguments show that skills are also important for role fulfillment, and such an importance is displayed through virtues.

Regarding the whole chapter, I have accomplished three major things. I argued that duties are ill suited for role fulfillment, showed that virtues and skills are well suited and significant for role fulfillment, and that roles can motivate one to acquire virtues and skills, which suggests a promising picture of character formation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Role Conflicts

Introduction

How we should understand role conflicts and, if they exist, what is the best way to

resolve them are significant questions for any role ethics. Unfortunately, although all of

my four primary interlocutors have considered the importance of role conflict in the

moral life, none of them has provided a clear account of the nature of role conflict. A role

conflict, generally speaking, is a tension that a role-occupant experiences among two or

more roles. But how could such a tension arise? How intense could such a tension be?

There is not a single answer to these questions. And this explains why different role

ethicists seem to assume distinct concepts of role conflicts in their discussion about how

to resolve a role conflict. But before thinking of the best way to resolve role conflicts, we

must understand the nature of role conflicts. So this will be one of the major tasks that I

will accomplish in this chapter.

Before diving into the nature and resolution of role conflicts, I want to briefly

explain why resolving role conflicts is especially important. In Chapter Two, I proposed

an account of the self, which is significantly constituted by the roles that the self

occupies. Also I discussed in Chapter Three that maintaining an intact, coherent and

unified self is a necessary psychological condition for individual flourishing. If the roles

that constitute the self are conflicting or in a tension, and this individual is unable to

properly cope with this conflict or tension, then the intactness, coherence and unity of the

self will be threatened. Therefore, properly dealing with role conflicts is crucial for individual's flourishing. Due to this reason, resolving role conflicts is an important topic for any role ethics.

Even from an ordinary perspective, understanding the nature of role conflicts and their solution is important because it will have very practical implications. Although for theoretical reasons, philosophers often explore moral dilemmas— a type of ethical conflict— that rarely happen in ordinary life, such as the trolley problem, I am more interested in discovering whether there are ordinary ethical conflicts implied by one occupying multiple roles and, if there are, exploring an approach to cope with these conflicts. If such an investigation is successful, it may shed some light as well on those rarer cases that interest moral philosophers. Even if it does not shed light on the rare cases, the investigation of ordinary ethical conflicts is an worthy objective; it will help ordinary people—and not just philosophers—better understand the challenges of the ethical life and will provide practical guidance on how they might resolve the real ethical conflicts they face.

In this chapter, I will first investigate the nature of role conflicts by distinguishing two types of them. After that I will reconstruct and evaluate my primary interlocutors' views on this issue. Then I will offer my account of role priority as an approach to deal with one type of role conflict, and my account of proper action as an approach to cope with the other type of role conflict. Finally, I argue that my discoveries in understanding and solving role conflicts can help specify some of the detailed knowledge content involved in the virtue of practical wisdom.

Two Types of Role Conflicts

It is important to recognize at least two types of role conflicts. Although these two types may not include all the possible cases that we label as "role conflict" in ordinary life, they seem to be the most ethically interesting to contemporary role ethicists. These two types of role conflict are easily confused with one another. Once they are clearly distinguished, I will identify different approaches to their solutions, for they concern different scales of life.

The first type of role conflict is a tension about fulfilling multiple roles one has. The tension arises due to the fact that all of one's roles, especially the important ones, demand attention, time, and resources, but our attention, time and resources are limited. In other words, an agent confronts the first type of role conflict when fulfilling one of her roles potentially or actually limits her ability to fulfill another. For example, there is a tension between my role of mother and my role of philosopher. On the one hand, my role as a mother requires that I spend a lot of time with my children who are before school age, bonding with them, caring for them, teaching them the values I take to be important for their good, and so on. But on the other hand, my role as a philosopher requires me to spend quite a bit of time researching and writing. On the assumption that both roles are important to who I am, the failure to fulfill either of them will threaten the intactness of my self. These roles come into a conflict or a tension because they will compete for my limited attention, time, and resources.

Since the fulfillment of each role requires one to invest attention, time and resources in the form of doing a whole series of more or less significant actions over a period of time, generally a single action or decision could not determine whether one

fulfills a role or not. For example, now I am spending two weeks away from my children for the sake of finishing my dissertation, but this does not mean that I fail to fulfill the role of mother because of my absence in these two weeks. However, if I chose to let someone else to take care of my children for years in order to freely seek my dreams in philosophy, I would surely be failing to fulfill my role as a mother.

The above important feature of role fulfillment makes the first type of role conflict "chronic." It is an on-going tension on a larger scale of one's life and is not primarily about a particular situation at a particular moment. Numerous studies on family-work balance, for example, affirm the great impact of this type of role conflict on our ordinary life.[1] Studies on productivity echo the pressure that we experience today with balancing our various roles.[2]

Several factors contribute to the first type of role conflicts. The first is the demandingness of a role. Some extraordinary roles, like being the President of the United States, are exceptionally demanding of one's attention, time and resources, and taking on such a demanding role can easily lead to the first type of conflict. The second factor is the number of roles one occupies. For many people, the first type of conflict arises from taking on too many ordinary roles at the same time; the more roles that one occupies at the same time, the more likely it is that one of the roles will compete with another role for attention, time and resources. The third factor is the capacity of the role-occupant to juggle her various roles: some people are less capable than others in harmonizing or balancing their roles so that the first type role conflict or tension can be minimalized.

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[1] Search "work-home" in Google scholar. That will provide one a sense about how abundant the related studies are from various perspectives.

[2] Search "productivity" in Amazon. That will offer one a sense about how many such books are on self-help, time management, leadership and so on.

If role conflicts of the first type are not handled properly, they may lead to a second type of role conflict, though not all instances of the second type of role conflict are due to this cause. The second type of role conflict involves instances where one role of the role-occupant demands a particular action A as a proper response to a specific situation, while another role of the role-occupant demands another particular action B as a proper response to the same situation, where it is impossible to perform both A and B. For example, a person who did not make good arrangements for the responsibilities required by his role as a father and his role as a leader of a civic group can face a situation where he has only one particular evening this week to either go to his son's baseball game as he promised or hold a meeting for the civic group on an emergent and important issue. Theoretically, it is possible to avoid such role conflicts if one plans better. But in reality such scenarios just happen from time to time.

In order to clarify the distinction between the two types of role conflicts, let me develop this example of being a father and civic leader. Presumably, being a father is a demanding role; and let us assume that being the leader of the civic group is also a demanding role. So for this man, his role as a father and his role as a civic leader are in the first type of role conflict because they compete for this man's time and attention. It is be possible for him to harmonize these two roles by planning well and being more efficient in completing the most important actions required by each role. Of course, it is also possible for him to plan poorly. One scenario could be that he is so dedicated to his leader role that he neglects the needs of his son and thus gradually fails to fulfill his role as a father. However, when it comes to a particular point that he has to decide whether to devote a Tuesday evening to watching his son's baseball game as a loving father would

do, or to holding a meeting for the civic group as a responsible leader would do, this man faces a second type of role conflict. Compared to the chronic nature of the first type of role conflict, the second type of role conflict is emergent and episodic: it requires a particular action as a response to a particular situation. A role conflict of the second type could pose an ethical dilemma for the agent: regardless of which action the agent chooses, the agent fails to do something that is demanded by the other role.

Given the different natures of these two types of role conflicts, we must take different approaches to cope with them. Generally speaking, to deal with the first kind of role conflict requires one to consider one's life as a whole, which suggests that one should assign different priorities to one's roles according to the good, the end or the purpose of one's life, and make plans to distribute one's attention, time and resources to these roles according to their priorities. On the other hand, the second kind of role conflict requires a particularist approach. We need an account of practical reasoning in a particular case of role conflict. But these two approaches are not unrelated: one's practical reasoning in a particular situation is tailored by the big vision of one's life. In the light of general claims about role priorities, one deliberates in a specific situation about the ethical weight of relevant roles in combination with other particular circumstances of that situation. In this manner one could eventually come to a decision about what ought to be done in regard to that conflict.

Resolving Role Conflicts: the Ancient and the Contemporary Approaches

Recall that there were a variety of views on the nature and resolution of role conflicts among the interlocutors I introduced in the first chapter, namely the ancient traditions of Confucian ethics (interpreted primarily by John Ramsey and Roger Ames)

and Epictetus (interpreted by Brian Johnson), and the contemporary theorists Jeremy Evans and Sarah Harper. As I recap now those views on role conflicts, I will consider how they approach the two types of role conflicts I identified above. After that, I will evaluate their approaches.

Among the four interlocutors, Jeremy Evans seems to have the most counter-intuitive view about role conflicts. He believes that genuine role conflicts are rare in reality because they occur only if role duties are violated repeatedly and over a long time of period. Given Evans' claim, his concept of role conflict seems to be this: an agent confronts a role conflict only if fulfilling one of her roles will prevent her fulfilling another role. Although what Evans describes is certainly a role conflict, it departs from the common usage of "role conflict." After all, people seem to experience role conflicts in everyday life: for example, many people find it is difficult to juggle family and work roles, lots of people struggle with multiple family relationships that come into conflict, professionals face conflicts between their professional roles and their human role,[3] and religious people experience conflicts between their religious role and their secular roles. These examples indicate that people also use "role conflict" to refer to the situations where fulfilling one role could *potentially* prevent the agent from fulfilling another role. In order to better respond to ordinary people's concerns about how to harmonize their various roles, I will comply with the ordinary usage of role conflict that I have defined in the previous section.

But it is still worth considering Jeremy Evans' approach to role conflicts. He claims, "When role-duties conflict, either because certain obligations exclude the

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[3] The requirements of the human role are characterized by ordinary morality. See Christine Swanton for a discussion on this very issue. Swanton, "A Virtue Ethical Theory of Role Ethics."

fulfillment of other duties, or resources limit the duties that can be fulfilled, Role Ethics requires that individuals favor the strongest role-duty."[4] Interestingly, at this point Evans seems to recognize the two types of role conflicts. But given that he believes such conflicts are very rare, he leaves it unclear how to apply this approach to resolve role conflicts.

The Confucian role ethics, if specified in enough details according to *li* (the rituals), provides a clear hierarchical picture of role priority. Specifically, the familial roles have a relatively high priority among all the other roles. Cheryl Cottine argues that this is the Confucian solution to role conflicts.[5] More particularly, this is the Confucian response to the first type of role conflicts. Of course, the Confucian hierarchy of roles provides guidance to solve the second-type role conflicts. In the often-cited story of the son who reported his father to the authorities because his father stole a sheep, there appears to be a conflict between the roles of child and fellow citizen; Confucius' response to this case coheres with the special emphasis to the role of child in Confucian tradition.[6] But as I have explained, Confucian ethics should not be interpreted as a rigid ethical system that is characterized in *li* (the rites/rituals). Indeed, *li* is not intended to be the ethical reality itself, but is only an attempt to represent it. Although *li* provides a lot of concrete action-guidance in regard to fulfilling individual roles and to properly balancing the demands of different roles, *yi* (the optimal appropriateness) calls for a higher

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[4] Evans, "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective," 59.

[5] Cottine, "Roles, Relationships, and Chinese Ethics."254-266.

[6] It is too hasty to conclude from this passage, even with other texts, that Confucius gives the role of child overriding place in any situation. It would be an open question whether Confucius would suggest this son do the same act if this son were in the Euthyphro case, where the father committed murder rather than stealing sheep. (cf. Plato, *Euthyphro*)

requirement regarding how to act well in a *particular* situation. So, specifying *yi* in a conflicting circumstance is the key to resolve a second-type role conflict. Confucianism does not provide a procedure to specify *yi*.[7] Yet, Confucian role ethics offers a few possible options to attain *yi*. One is to creatively resolve role conflicts without compromising the demands of the roles in conflict.[8] Sometimes one is to embrace death when the role conflict is a moral tragedy for the agent—namely, when compromising a role is necessary, but doing so would bring guilt that the agent could not bear.[9]

What counts as a role conflict is much less clear in Epictetus. This is partly because Epictetus uses the notion of roles in a very loose way.[10] Moreover, Epictetus (as Johnson interprets him) considers cases where a single role generates two incompatible obligations as role conflicts too. Here I will only focus on what Epictetus says about resolving the two types of role conflicts I have described. Although Epictetus has a different notion of role than I do, some of his treatment for role conflicts can also apply to the role conflicts I want to focus on. Epictetus offers several specific approaches that are quite illuminating. The first approach is entirely preventive. It suggests that one should avoid entering roles that are likely to conflict with the roles one already has. The second approach appeals to the concept of "self-worth." For Epictetus, only the agent knows through the first-person perspective which role, among the conflicting ones, the agent most identifies with and thus is most important to the agent's self-worth. The third

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[7] This should not be attributed to Confucian role ethics as a failure. If it can offer an account for specifying *yi*, such an account will be recorded in *li*, and if this is true, then *yi* will have no special place in Confucianism any more.

[8] See Ames 2011, 163-168

[9] See Cottine 2014, 262-263

[10] See a discussion about the conflict between being Agmennon and being Thersites from Johnson, *Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 123. Also see the extraordinary slave case, 124-125.

approach resorts to creativity: Epictetus suggests that by creatively arranging contingent factors of potentially conflicting roles, role conflicts can be resolved or even prevented. The example he provides is that although a Cynic should avoid entering familial roles since they are very likely to prevent one from fulfilling the role of a Cynic, this Cynic could marry another Cynic whose relatives are also Cynics and agree to bring up their children as Cynics. Epictetus claims that by doing so, this Cynic will be able to resolve the conflicts between being a Cynic and occupying various familial roles. The last approach appeals to divine command, which Johnson believes goes beyond role ethics.

Sarah Harper suggests a virtue-approach in a case of role conflict, where role A requires one to do act A*, but role B requires one to do act B*, and it is not practically possible to do both A* and B*. Suppose that act A* is more required by virtue A' than act B* by virtue B', and virtue A' is more central to role A than virtue B' to role B. In this case, the failure to do act A* *may* constitute a bigger moral failure than the failure to do act B*. But whether this is so, in fact, relies on how role A and role B are related to "some central, organizing role like, for example, the role 'creature of God' in Christian ethics."[11]

I think that all these perspectives on handling role conflicts are enlightening in some respects. Both the Confucian tradition and Harper see the agent's development of appropriate virtues as critical to resolving role conflicts. It is natural to name the virtue that enables one to see the optimal appropriateness in a particular situation "practical wisdom." It is also very intuitive to think that through cultivating practical wisdom an agent would be able to see the best possible resolution in a case of role conflict. The

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[11] Harper, "Role-Centered Morality," 173.

creativity that Roger Ames (in interpreting the Confucian tradition) and Epictetus recommend for solving role conflicts is one important aspect of practical wisdom. Significantly, all four interlocutors endorse a priority-approach to role conflicts. This is most obvious in Confucian role ethics. Epictetus' notes on "self-worth" indicate that to solve a role conflict might require one to hold onto the role that is prior to the other role(s) regarding one's self-worth. Evans' suggestion about the strongest role-duty also implies that the role that has the highest priority should direct action in cases of conflict. Harper's idea of an organizing role[12] is simply that this role can organize one's roles in a proper order regarding their priority status. Last but not the least, both Epictetus and Harper refer to the possibility of divine assistance in solving role conflicts. It is worth noting that although Johnson believes that the appeal to divine command goes beyond role ethics, Harper has suggested a possible way to avoid this problem by incorporating into her theory the roles embedded in relationships between humans and divine beings. Since my account of roles also embraces such human-divine relationships, divine assistance is completely coherent with the account of solving role conflicts that I will develop in the next two sections.

Nonetheless, all of these accounts have their limitations. The most prominent one is that although all of them indicate that the idea of role priorities is central to solve role conflicts, none of them offers a sophisticated account of role priorities.[13] Likewise, they

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[12] It is unclear that in Harper's account, what makes a role an organizing role. But I will give my account in the next section.

[13] Although Confucian ethics is well-known for its hierarchical structure of various social roles, and Cottine argues that this is a Confucian response to role conflicts, the roles that interest Confucian ethics are very limited to that specific period of time, and thus have limited relevance to the contemporary life. If Confucian role ethics is to revive, more work needs to be done to expand its scope to be more relevant to our life today.

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confuse the two types of role conflicts, and this ambiguity seriously limits their ability to provide an adequate account for resolving role conflicts.

An Account of Role Priorities

What does it mean that one role has priority over another? What gives one role priority over another? These are the two primary questions that I will address in this section.

The distinction above between the two kinds of role conflict offers us a helpful mindset to understand the meaning of role priorities. The first type of role conflict is large-scale, which means, it is a problem for one's life as a whole, or at least for a significant period of one's life. In contrast, the second kind is small-scale, that is, it is an issue of conflict in a particular situation. On the one hand, we tend to believe that some roles are more important to us than other roles, when considering life as a whole or a significant period of life. But on the other hand, we do not think that those important roles are always overriding or weightier when compared to, or in competition with those relatively unimportant roles in a particular situation. For example, many people tend to attribute a higher priority to family roles than to professional roles and they consider this priority relation when dealing with a particular case of role conflict of the second type, but this does not mean that whenever there is a conflict between their family responsibility and their professional responsibility the latter always should give way to the former. This ethical phenomenon indicates that the concept of role priority is decisive in resolving the first kind of role conflict, but not the second type of role conflict, though it does play a significant part in deliberating about what ought to be done in those particular cases.

I define role priority in this way: Role X is prior to role Y if and only if X requires prior consideration of being fulfilled than Y in the process of decision-making about life planning.

I argued in the previous chapter that virtues are essential for role fulfillment. Cultivating the virtues that are specifically tailored to a specific role needs attention, time and resources. So in order to ensure that a role with higher priority will receive the proper consideration before fulfilling other roles, one needs to distribute sufficient attention, time and resources that are necessary for cultivating the relevant virtues in the context of that specific role.

What grounds role priority? What makes a role prior to another? Is there a possible common ground among various traditions that can explain the diverse views of role priority? I will briefly list some possible answers to these questions.

The Confucian account of role priority suggests two possible answers. One is that role priority results from a brute fact about degrees of values: the role of child has more value than the role of friend, for example. The other possible answer is to ground role priority in practical or psychological necessity about character development: in moral practice, the role of child is the first role that one enters, and in most cases, one of the most persisting roles that one can have. These facts make the role of child the best context for one to cultivate character; or, to put it psychological terms, it is simply impossible to for one to develop virtues without first learning how to be a good child of one's parents.[14]

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[14] The parents do not need to be biological parents. They could be adoptive parents in any form, such as grandparents, uncles and aunts, and those with no biological relations. One who is raised up by adoptive parents also carries the role of child, and is supposed to fulfill it.

Although Epictetus' suggestion about "self-worth" as the ultimate determinant to measure the weight of conflicting roles is intended for the second type of role conflict, it seems also to suggest another possible account of role priority. Namely, role priority is grounded in self-worth: a role is prior to another if this role is identified with higher self-worth than the other. Notice that this view is different from the first Confucian answer because self-worth is judged from the first-personal perspective, while the values of roles in the Confucian tradition are judged from the third-personal perspective. In other words, the Confucian approach seems objective, while Epictetus' approach seems subjective.

Jeremy Evans suggests that we should go with the strongest role-duty when there is a conflict. For Evans, the strength of role-duties depends on the strength of entanglement. So this fourth suggestion could be that an account of role priority based on the strength of entanglement. Evans defines a moral entanglement as "a sufficiently strong interdependency between the interests of *relata*."[15] The strength of a role-duty is determined by the strength of the entanglement, and the strength of the entanglement is determined by the degree of interdependency between the relata,[16] "which is the extent to which individuals are poised to impact each other's well-being."[17] Evans claims that entanglement typically involves empathetic responses, though he admits that empathy is not necessary for entanglement to be incurred; the exceptional examples he gives are conjoined twins or a pregnant woman to the child in her womb.[18]

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[15] Evans, "Role Ethics and the Moral Institutions of a Flourishing Collective," 48.

[16] Evans, 52–53.

[17] Evans, 48.

[18] Evans, 50–51.

Although her primary focus is the second-type role conflict, Sarah Harper seems to suggest a fifth account of role priority in terms of the relationships among various roles and some central, organizing role. Harper mentions the role of creature of God in Christianity as an example of such a central role, and seems to suggest, without much elaboration, that this central, organizing role has supreme priority over all other roles and it determines the priority relations among other roles. How exactly the central role can determine the priorities of other roles cannot be specified without telling a bigger story. But in Christianity, for example, the priorities of roles depend on how relevant they are to being a good child of God, or to fulfilling one's special calling from God.

Now I am going to assess these possible accounts. The first possibility—that role priority results from a brute fact about degrees of values—is hardly convincing because intuitively we tend to think that role priority is not obvious. Different traditions have different views of role priority. To claim that role priority is a brute fact does not help us understand the diversity of such views. It is more likely that people disagree on role priority because they have distinct assumptions about what grounds role priority.

The second possibility grounded in practical and psychological necessity has its limitation too. Although I am highly sympathetic with this argument and believe it is worth further exploration, practical and psychological necessity seems to have a very limited explanatory power for role priority among the many roles other than the role of child. Furthermore, presumably, human beings have quite similar psychological structure and the structure of their practical life is similar too. If practical and psychological necessity is sufficient to ground role priority, then different traditions should have a similar view of role priority. But that is simply not the case.

Epictetus' self-worth account seems subjective because role priority ultimately relies on a subjective perception of the self and a subjective decision about which role is prior. But remember that Epictetus argues that the human role is prior to the local roles. The requirements of the human role are objective and universal to all human beings. No one should or even could prioritize one's local roles over the human role. In other words, the human role provides an objective constraint for what one could do with regard to one's local roles. Although Epictetus' suggestion about deciding (local) role priority is subjective, it seems to provide a welcome and reasonable room for personal pursuits and projects. But there are two problems. One is that we tend to think that even within the realm of local roles, it is not the case that one could just prioritize one role over another merely based on one's personal values. We often criticize workaholics for *wrongly* prioritizing their occupational roles over their family roles and other social roles. The other problem is that mere subjective choices of an agent can be arbitrary and incoherent with one another. For example, one might choose to identify oneself with some role just according to one's mood at that moment. Or perhaps, one makes incoherent choices based on incoherent reasons. Arguably, it is more desirable that one's perception of self-worth is coherent in different cases. But such coherence of perceptions is possible only if one's self-worth aligns with a coherent self-image.

The problems with Epictetus' subjective approach seem to point to Harper's suggestion about a central, organizing role, which is supposed to arrange various roles in a coherent order. This approach is desirable in several ways. First, it does not go beyond roles to arbitrate role priority, though the nature of this central, organizing role probably

can only be articulated in non-role terms[19]. This central-role approach, therefore, strengthens the prospect that Role Ethics is theoretically adequate as a paradigm of ethical theory. Second, if this central role is embedded in a relationship with a being with an objective nature, then the central role in its organizing capacity can guarantee the priority order of other roles will not be arbitrary. Third, with a central, organizing role, a self-reflective agent is much more likely to order roles in a coherent way in different contexts and situations, though the agent could still be muddled about the meaning and significance of the central role in certain aspects of life.

Since Harper's idea of an overarching role is quite under-developed, I will develop a similar conception in the remaining part of this section. My account of role priority is built upon my account of the relational self. As I have argued, the relational self is like a bull's eye target, with each concentric layer representing a role. The layers at or near the core of the target contribute more to "who I am" than those on the periphery. The core of this target is the central role that not only most defines "who I am" but also has the organizing function. The central role has the supreme priority over all the other roles. Other roles are ordered according to their priority: the nearer a role is to the center, the more it defines "who I am" and thus the higher priority it has.

The concept of self has both descriptive and prescriptive senses, and so has the concept of role priority. If we use role the concept of priority purely to describe a person's attitudes towards her various roles, we could say that she attributes role A the

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[19] These non-role terms could be ontological terms about the nature of this role, or the nature of the *relata*. Take Christianity for example. The central and organizing role, as a creature of God, must be articulated in terms of God's nature. The nature of God has the fundamental explanation for the organizing function of that central role. More importantly, I am not defending a role-based ethics, which claims that morality is grounded in roles, as Harper and Evans have defended. Rather, I am defending a role-structured ethics, which only holds that since our ethical life is role-structured, an ethical theory is preferably to be role-structured too. It does not assume any tradition, and thus does not assume any metaphysical or ontological views about what roles we have and what exact nature of our roles is.

highest priority, and then role B, role C, and so on. Such an attribution reflects her perception about her self. Of course, within a certain tradition, we could also judge that she is mistaken about "who she is," and thus wrongly attributes priorities to her various roles. Since a particular tradition implies an ideal of the self, it also implies an account of ideal role priority. Take, for example, a person who identifies as a Christian. Being a special creature of God is the most central part of her self, and she *should* recognize this role has the highest priority among all her roles. Of course, she may fail to fully understand the central, organizing role, or fail to see its import in relation to certain other of her roles, or fail to grant the role its due in organizing the roles in some part of her life, and so on. But these would count as failures of her understanding or will. In this sense, role priority is prescriptive or normative.

An account of role priority is the key to handle the first kind of role conflicts. One will first need to understand who one is in terms of the roles that one occupies with varying degrees of significance. These varying degrees of significance correspond to the varying role priorities. In one's life planning, one ought to distribute time, attention and resources according to one's role priorities. In the ideal case, one achieves a balance when juggling roles. By doing so, one lives rationally, and the self remains coherent. But in ordinary life, people often cannot find a balance. The sign of serious imbalance is the failure to fulfill one (or more) significant role while fulfilling some other role(s). When this happens, one may choose to exit one or more roles that have less priority than the significant role(s) that one fails to fulfill. (There are other normative questions regarding how and when one should exit or enter roles, but I will not discuss them in this dissertation.) Also, as Evans suggests, it often takes a course of actions over a period of

time, rather than a single significant action, to fail a role; consequently, as these actions unfold one may perceive that one cannot find a balance among one's roles or that it is too challenging for one to have a try, and thereby decide to exit some relatively unimportant roles before one fails to fulfill the important ones. Moreover, Epictetus advises that one ought not enter a role that will compete too much with one's current roles for one's time and energy, unless one can find a creative way to accommodate the new role.

Although my account of role priority is structural, based on the arguments I offered in Chapter Two about the dignity of persons, I can draw an implication about the high priority of some of our permanent roles. I argued that one's uniqueness or irreplaceable value is grounded in one's unique relationality. More specifically, it is centrally defined in one's permanent non-membership token roles, and enriched by one's other roles. In other words, permanent non-membership roles *as a group* contribute more to one's irreplaceable value than other roles. But this does not mean that each of one's permanent non-membership roles contributes more to who one (and thus has a higher priority) than a temporary role. A's being a distant cousin to B may contribute less to who A is than A's being a life-time close friend to C, for example.

Nonetheless, the most typical permanent roles, such as being a parent and being a child, seem to deserve high priority. The degree of priority of a role for one depends on how much it contributes to who one is. I argued that permanent roles like parent or child contribute significantly to who one is because these roles centrally define one's irreplaceable value and uniqueness. I also argued that who one is or the self is defined in terms of one's roles. A full description of who one is could be complex, and thus a succinct description often serves well. A succinct description of who one is must be in

terms of one's roles that can most represent one's irreplaceable value. The roles of parent and child, for example, are such roles, though one may fail to recognize the value of such roles. I have argued for the superlative value of these roles and showed how they could ensure one's uniqueness in Chapter Two. Hence, I conclude that some permanent roles have high or even the highest priority.

The corelation between role priority and one's irreplaceable value can also imply that in some rare cases, certain temporary roles could also have a high priority. For example, for extraordinary people with exceptional talents and capacities who make historical contributions, some of their professional or political roles might have a higher priority over their permanent roles. However, the current discussion has reached its limit because without assuming any tradition it is impossible to have a thorough specification of role priority. So let me stop here.

With regard to the second type of role conflict, the consideration about role priority can be helpful, but not always adequate. On the one hand, in many cases, the role with a higher priority triumphs over the one with lower priority in giving reasons to act. A mother may break the promise to go shopping with a dear friend if her child is sick and needs her care. On the other hand, role priority cannot be an absolute guidance in coping with the second type of role conflicts. This is the wisdom of Confucian tradition. Although Confucian role ethics promotes a certain account of role priority, it also sets the optimal appropriateness[20] as the highest goal in dealing with a specific situation. Our ordinary experience also tells us that sometimes our human role (the membership of human community) triumphs over our family roles in some particular situations. For

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[20] It is the best possible action, all things considered, in a specific situation.

example, if Jane is on her way back home from work, planning to prepare dinner for her family—which is typically an appropriate act for being a wife and a mother—but suddenly sees an old man having a heart attack on the side wall, she should stop, call 911, and stay with the old man until the medical help arrives, even though this may prevent her doing what her family roles require her to do typically at this time of a day, and in general her family roles have a higher priority over her human role.[21]

In this section, I have offered a conceptual analysis of role priority. I have argued that an account of role priority can help deal with the first kind of role conflict, but it is not sufficient to deal with the second type of role conflict. The next section will focus on developing an account of proper actions to cope with the second type of role conflict.

An Account of Proper Actions

An account of role priority is not sufficient to handle role conflict of the second type, which is a small-scale conflict in a particular case. In a specific situation of conflict between role X and role Y, even if X has a higher priority over Y in general, X does not necessarily triumph over Y in giving reasons to act. In this section, I will develop an account to tackle this second type of role conflict.

As I mentioned earlier, Jeremy Evans proposes that in a genuine role conflict[22] we should favor the strongest role-duties, and the strength of role-duty depends on the strength of entanglement. Evans resorts to empathy as a primary explanation for the strength of entanglement. Empathy, however, is arguably as unreliable as conscience to

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[21] This is why we spend more time with family, caring, supporting and loving them than we do with strangers.

[22] The most charitable reading of Evans' view seems to be this: a genuine role conflict for him is just what I have called the second-type role conflict.

be a standard for ethical decisions. In order to avoid the objections from ethical subjectivism, Evans needs to provide a much more sophisticated account of empathy that could justify its epistemic status as a way to attain ethical truth in role conflict.

Sarah Harper's virtue approach suggests that in a case of role conflict we ought to do the action entailed by a role, when the failure to do the action would constitute a bigger moral failure. Harper measures the failure of not doing an action in three aspects. One is how intensely the action is required by the relevant virtue, the second is how central the relevant virtue is to the relevant role, and the third is how closely the relevant role is related to the central organizing role. Theoretically, this approach may look attractive, but practically the three variables complicate the deliberation. Balancing these parameters seems to involve a lot of ambiguities and difficulties.

Compared to Harper's virtue approach, Evans' suggestion is more plausible: for practical reasons, we ought to favor the act required by the role that involves the strongest interdependency of the well-being of the *relata*, even though grounding the strength of interdependence in mere empathy is problematic. Even if Jane cannot feel any empathy to the old man having heart attack, she still ought to stop and offer to help because the old man's life is much more dependent on her actions than her family's hunger being sated, assuming that her family can somehow fix the dinner or survive without it. Even if her family's dinner entirely depends on her, what is at stake for this old man (preserving life) is more valuable than what is at stake than for her family (satiation of temporary hunger). So the strength of interdependence of well-being of the *relata* should include two aspects: how heavily the *relata*'s well-being depends on one another and what aspect of the *relata*'s well-being is at stake. This can explain why role priority sometimes can

prescribe the proper action in a particular situation, though at other times it cannot. Often roles with higher priority imply that the *relata*'s well-being is more interdependent than it is in the roles with lower priority, and that many important aspects of the *relata*'s well-being are at stake. For example, the role of mother implies a highly interdependent relationship, especially when either the child is very young or the mother is very old or sick. No doubt, when the child is very young, the child is entirely or largely dependent on her mother for meeting physical, psychological, emotional and other needs that are essential for well-being. Likewise, at this stage the mother is dependent on the child psychologically and emotionally. When the mother gets very old or sick and cannot take care of herself, the interdependent relationship will reverse, but the interdependence is still very strong. In contrast, in the typical cases of friendship, the interdependence is not as strong as that in the typical mother-child relationship. On the one hand, the two friends are not dependent on each other in the same degree that a mother and her child depend on each other. On the other hand, while almost every essential aspect of a child's well-being is arguably at stake in the mother-child relationship, the aspects of well-being at stake in typical cases of friendship are more limited.

Before offering my account of proper action, I want to distinguish between primary action and secondary action for a particular situation. A primary action is a first response to a situation, which is often immediate and foremost. A secondary action is also a response to a situation, but it is often subsequent to a primary action and after the emergency of this situation has ended. The emergency of a situation is ended when some of its demands have been met. Let us still take Jane's case for example. Her stopping to help this old man is a primary action to this situation. After this old man is taken away by

the ambulance, this woman heads home. Her explaining to her family about why she is late, apologizing for that the dinner is not ready, and so on, could be secondary actions to the situation in which she finds herself in a role conflict.

A complete account of proper action in response to a role conflict includes proper primary actions and proper secondary actions. A primary action[23] is proper in a situation of role conflict if it is the best means[24] to achieve the end of the role that involves stronger interdependence between the *relata* in that situation. A secondary action is proper if it counts as retribution to the failure to attend to the end of the role that involves weaker interdependence between the *relata* in that situation. Imagine that an agent confronts a situation where her role A is in conflict with role B. Role A involves stronger interdependence than role B does if the well-being of role-A-respondent is more tightly dependent on the role-agent than the well-being of role-B-respondent, and the aspect of the well-being of role-A-respondent at stake is more valuable than that of role-B-respondent.

Since the above account of proper action involves two variables and sometimes it is unclear which role involves stronger interdependency, the account may not offer a straightforward prescription in a specific situation. I will first explain why this should not pose an objection to the account. On the one hand, it is a *fact* that it is difficult to discern the proper action in some role conflicts, and this two-variable account can explain why it is difficult. It is because in these cases the well-being of one role-respondent is *more* tightly dependent on role-agent than the well-being of the other role-respondent, but the

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[23] An immediate action could also be a series of actions that are conducted around the same end.

[24] I will leave the concept of "the best means" unexplained. On the one hand, it is hard, if possible, to formulate. On the other hand, it is not the focus of my discussion. I will focus only on the concept of "stronger interdependency".

aspect of the well-being of former at stake is *less* valuable than that of the latter. Given the complexity of the reality of role conflicts, we should expect an account of proper action having such "limitations." For ethical predicaments we should first of all seek explanations rather than resolutions because a quick solution tends to simplify the complexity of the ethical reality. On the other hand, compared to Harpers' three-variable account or other more-than-two-variable accounts, the two-variable account is a simpler mode of deliberation.

Further, for these ambiguous cases I suggest that we adopt a holistic approach that has two dimensions. First, the propriety of actions in a role conflict should be evaluated based on the combination of primary and secondary actions, depending on how well the ends of the conflicting roles are attended to as a whole. Second, more considerations should be taken into account than just the strength of interdependency in the current situation. These considerations could include the larger context of the conflicting roles, the possibilities of effective actions, the benefit or severity of certain consequences, and so on. It is also worth noting that the holistic approach may allow more than one way to handle the cases. Let me use a few examples to illustrate the above two points.

Suppose instead of passing by an old man suffering a heart attack, Jane encounters a close friend who asks for her help to do some moderately important things. This is a more ambiguous case in which Jane may have a hard time deciding what she should do: helping the friend out of trouble or going home to prepare dinner for her hungry family. If we do not know more details of the situation in this scenario, there is no way to make a practical decision. So let us suppose several more concrete versions of the scenario to see how we might properly handle such cases.

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1) Suppose that Jane has not been on warm terms with her husband recently, and she thinks that getting dinner ready when he gets home from work, hungry and tired, can help resolve their problem or at least not exacerbate it. In this case, Jane may choose to turn down her friend's request and head home. This is the primary action. But she also should conduct some secondary actions, such as referring her friend to another person who is likely to help, explaining to her friend why she is reluctant to stop and help, asking for her friend's understanding, and so on.

2) Suppose that this friend lost her husband recently and Jane has been looking for an opportunity to show extra kindness to her. In this case, Jane's primary action may be to help her friend. But she should also perform certain secondary actions as a response to her failure to meet the requirements of her family roles. Instead of simply coming home late and explaining the situation to her family, Jane should do something to show that she values her family's needs as well by apologizing to them and helping her husband complete the cooking that he has started.

3) Suppose that her friend believes, due to the specific nature of her trouble, that Jane is the best person to help her out, but in fact Jane is not able to help much and is not sure who can help her friend. This suggests that Jane probably will not act effectively to release her friend from the trouble. Jane could choose to turn down the friend's request and head home. But if she does, she ought to conduct secondary actions to show that she cares about her friend. Perhaps, Jane could help make some calls to possible resources and tell the friend her findings. Or she could call this friend back later to check whether and how her problem has been solved.

4) Suppose that Jane takes all the circumstances she knows into account, but still cannot decide with which role she should comply in this situation. Such cases could have at least two options of response: helping the friend and some secondary actions or turning down the friend's request and some other secondary actions.

Of course, we could consider many more variations of this case. But they would make the same points clear. First, it is Jane's primary and secondary actions as a whole that count as proper response to this role conflict situation. Jane's action would not be proper if she had omitted the secondary actions. Second, in considering what the primary and secondary actions could be, Jane may need to take other particulars of the situation into account.

In sum, my account of proper actions in terms of primary and secondary actions provides a mode of practical reasoning in the second type of role conflict. This account could be extended to cases where more than two roles are in conflict.

Let me reiterate that my purpose is not to offer a specific normative account of role priority and proper action. The Role Ethics I am outlining in this dissertation is only structural and conceptual with minimal assumption about values. Thus, in this chapter I continue to leave several key concepts—such as interdependency and well-being—open to various interpretations.[25] One should not expect my account of proper actions to be able to cope with every difficult case of role conflict. It is inadequate to do that. This is why I use mundane examples. A more complete account of proper actions would necessarily include many metaphysical and normative ethical assumptions. In other

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[25] For example, in what sense to say that an individual is dependent on another is quite different from the perspective of Christianity than from a secular perspective. Or what counts elements of an individual's well-being, and how these elements differ in their value or importance to an individual's well-being can be dramatically different from different traditions.

words, one would need to situate my structural account of proper actions into a specific tradition to have it fleshed out completely. Of course, I am not claiming that each of the tradition-situated accounts of proper actions will do an equally good job in prescribing proper actions. In fact, I suspect that some have better resources than the others to provide a satisfying account of proper actions. But showing that would go well beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Nevertheless, let me mention two features that would make a specific tradition-situated role ethics more successful. A specific role ethics with either one of the features would be theoretically preferable to a role ethics with neither of these features, but a role ethics with both features would be better still.

The first feature is creativity. Roger Ames interprets the father-son example as a case calling for creative solution, and he argues that Confucian role ethics can provide sufficient resources to properly cope with this role conflict. The details of Ames' defense of Confucian role ethics are not the focus of my discussion here. Rather, I am interested in the central idea that creativity is helpful for dealing with role conflict. Ideally, one could find a creative way to meet the requirements of both roles. Of course, such a creative way is unlikely to be a single action. Instead, a creative way probably consists of a series of actions, some of which are done directly towards the fulfillment of each of the roles, while the others are done for the sake of mediation. Ames suggests that the son in the father-son example should have *jian* (谏) his father first, which means that he should have pointed out his father's wrongdoing to his father rather than to others first. This is actually an element of *xiao* (filial piety, 孝) or being a good son. Then Ames suggests that the son might go to the one whose sheep was stolen to make an apology and

restitution.[26] By doing these actions, required by his roles as the son and the citizen[27] respectively, he can fulfill both roles without compromising either one. If a specific role ethics encourages such creativity in solving the second type of role conflict and has the resources to accommodate it, then it is more desirable than a role ethics that does not.

The second feature is the capacity to confront role conflicts in the most dramatic form. Regardless of what specific account of proper action is in hand, we may on a rare occasion encounter a very difficult situation in which the conflicting roles have comparably significant weight and there is no way to creatively solve the conflict. If so, especially in an emergency situation, it might be permissible for one to choose to act in accordance with either of these roles. The only other two options are taking no action or (on the Confucian view) ending one's life. But neither is desirable in ordinary contexts, since taking no action or ending one's life imply the failure to meet the demands of both roles.[28] Here is a true story that occurred in an area of China that was flooded badly in 2016. Forced to choose between saving his mother and saving his wife and child, a man chose to save his mother. When the wife was fortunate enough to survive the flood, she was so disappointed by her husband's choice that she abandoned him. This man was sad at her leaving but he could not do anything about it. Such an unfortunate role conflict presented no satisfying option to the man. The ending of the story could be a satisfying one if the wife could understand and forgive her husband for his failure to rescue her and their child. However, this happy ending does not depend on the man's choice, but relies

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[26] Ames 2011, 164

[27] Depending on the details of that situation, the conflicting role might be friend, or neighbor or maybe the human role. Let us simply assume that it is the role of citizen here.

[28] Death seems understandable in extremely dramatic cases, where the failure to meet the demands of either of the roles devastates the image of one's self. But that it is understandable does not mean that it is a proper action.

on his wife's response to his choice. This case reveals that some role conflicts cannot have a satisfactory solution only on the action of the role-agent. Of course, this man could explain to his wife and do something good for her thereafter to show that she is very important to him too. But it is not within his power to ensure a solution to this conflict. If his wife were still determined to leave him, he would have done nothing blameworthy even if he seems to fail to fulfill his roles of husband and father.

Such tragic cases pose a challenge for any specific account of role ethics because it is not enough to prescribe or permit a proper action in such situations; the account must also prescribe a post-tragedy therapy for the role-agent to properly confront the tragic consequence. For example, it seems irrational for the man to think that he should have saved his wife and child first instead of his mother; extra feelings of guilt do not seem rational either. If a specific role ethics could provide a profound perspective to evaluate the dilemmatic nature of such situations and offer the resources to discourage such irrational thoughts and emotions, it would be theoretically preferable to those accounts that cannot.

In this section I have examined Evans' and Harper's views on resolving second-type role conflicts and pointed out their limitations. Then I offered a structural account of proper actions. I also argued that a specific role ethics encouraging creativity in resolving role conflicts and capable of coping with tragic role conflict would be more desirable than those without these two features.

Implication: Practical Wisdom

In this section I am going to show how Role Ethics, particularly in regard to its solutions for role conflicts, can help us gain a deeper understanding about practical

wisdom. First, I will distinguish three levels of practical wisdom. Then I briefly will review what aspects of practical wisdom have interested ethicists and what aspects have been missing in the literature. Finally I will show that how my accounts of role priority and of proper action help contour the specific content of practical wisdom.

There are three levels of practical wisdom, but the differences among which seem barely noticed. The first level is very general. Aristotle defines practical wisdom as "the excellence of practical reasoning whereby one specifies the contents of one's ends well—and not just any ends, but the ends of the various virtues, the ends that are ends not just for this or that person, but without qualification (NE VI.9, 1142b28–33)."[29] The notable feature of this interpretation is located at the end of the definition: practical wisdom is about the human life in general, not about a specific individual's life. But this definition fails to emphasize that a practically wise person should also know how to live her *own* life well. So, we must consider a second level of practical wisdom.

Robert C. Roberts defines practical wisdom as "the knowledge of what it means to live well and the disposition to use this knowledge in the service of actually living well."[30] This definition seems to capture the second level by emphasizing the use of the general knowledge in actual living. After all, there is no life that is 'generally' human. A practically wise person is a particular individual living in a complexity of particularities of time, location, culture, various capacities, relationships, and so on. She must have not only a general understanding about human life, but also an understanding of the complex features of her own life so that she may actually live it well.

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[29] Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, Oxford Scholarship Online. Philosophy. (Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.

[30] Roberts, Robert C. 2017. Emotions and Practical Wisdom. Manuscript. 2.

However, this level of wisdom is still not enough. A practically wise person is supposed to not only have an understanding of how to live her life in general, but also of how to act in particular situations consistent with her understanding of her own life. This is the third level of practical wisdom.

Think of how a wise man navigates to a certain destination. First, he needs to choose the right direction. If he decides to go to Australia, he should not travel towards the North Pole. Second, he may choose one of the many routes that best fit his particular circumstance. Then during that journey along that route, he has to be able to negotiate many specific situations and deal with many specific problems so that he can actually get to Australia. A practically wise man living his life is analogous to a wise man navigating to his destination. A person with practical wisdom can know what a meaningful human life in general is like. Further, she could decide the best way to live her own life in such a meaningful way. On the most concrete level, she could wisely decide how to act in a particular situation.

In sum, a complete concept of practical wisdom has three levels of insight: about the human life in general, about one's life in general, and about the episodes of one's life. Now I will discuss briefly the relations among the three levels. The first level involving an understanding about human life in general must be situated in a tradition. After all, what a meaningful/good/worthwhile human life is like is dramatically different in different traditions, such as Confucianism, Stoicism or Christianity. The first level will profoundly shape the second level of practical wisdom involving a general understanding about one's own life, though it cannot provide a full account of how one should live one's own life without referring to the particularities of this specific life. The second level

further serves as a guideline for one to confront various specific situations, though how this actually works is subject to particular features of those situations.

Before offering my own account of practical wisdom in terms of roles, it will be helpful to survey Daniel Russell's view of practical wisdom. It is one of the most influential accounts among contemporary ethicists. On the relation between practical wisdom and other virtues, Russell argues, following Aristotle, that practical wisdom is necessary for all virtues, and without practical wisdom all virtues can fail.[31] Furthermore, practical wisdom seems to be the key to an account of right action.[32] When used in this sense, "practical wisdom" refers to a package of capacities that are necessary for one to act rightly, or using Aristotle's terminology, to "hit the mean." Regarding the capacities or powers involved in practical wisdom, Russell again follows Aristotle in proposing that practical wisdom is an excellence of deliberation.[33] The content of deliberation consists of two aspects: specifying the determinate end and identifying the best means to that end.[34]

Besides Russell's rich discussion of the above aspects of practical wisdom, other inquiries about practical wisdom include how the effectiveness of actions is essential to practical wisdom,[35] arguments for and against a universalist conception of practical

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[31] See Aristotle, Daniel Russell (2009)

[32] See Russell 2009, 18-20.

[33] Russell 2009, 9–10.

[34] Aristotle's claim that deliberation is about the means but not the end is very puzzling, as Russell notes. Russell tries to reconcile Aristotle's account of practical wisdom to his own by arguing that deliberating on the means often leads to specifying secondary ends, and therefore, deliberation should be about both means and ends. See Russell 2009, 4-11.

[35] Cf. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006): 285–309.

wisdom that interprets the process of deliberation as checking morally relevant particularities and finally applying a universal moral principle,[36] and practical wisdom as a skill or a virtue.[37]

Nevertheless, it is disappointing that "[t]he detailed specification of what is involved in such knowledge or understanding has not yet appeared in the literature,"[38] as Rosaline Hursthouse correctly summarized. She examines two further aspects of practical wisdom: that practical wisdom comes with life experience and that practical wisdom involves the capacity to recognize and perhaps organize morally relevant features of a situation. But these aspects, even in combination with the ones listed above, are still far from what we really want to know about practical wisdom: "a detailed specification of what is involved in such knowledge or understanding."

In the remainder of this section, I will show that my accounts of role priority and of proper actions can fill some gaps that Hursthouse identifies in the literature of practical wisdom.

My account of role priority specifies some content of the knowledge or understanding involved in both the first and second levels of practical wisdom. As I argued in Chapter One, our particular lives are pervasively structured by the roles we occupy. The human life in general is structured by some roles too, though at this level of generality we can say more about how the roles are related than we can about what specific roles there are. For instance, a good human life in general must be characterized

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[36] Cf. Uri D Leibowitz, "Explaining Moral Knowledge," *Journal of Moral Philosophy: An International Journal of Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 35–56.

[37] Cf. Jason D Swartwood, "Wisdom as an Expert Skill," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice: An International Forum* 16, no. 3 (June 1, 2013): 511–28.

[38] Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2016, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/ethics-virtue/.

by the roles being well organized in their priorities and the most important roles being fulfilled. This implies that the concept of a good human life is closely associated with an account of role priority and an account of role fulfillment. Here I will pay particular attention to the conceptual connection between a good human life and role priority. The identity of the most important roles and the nature of their priority over other roles is tradition dependent. In the Stoic tradition, for example, the human or universal role is priori to the local roles. If one gives an account of the first-level practical wisdom in the Stoic tradition, one will need to explain its content in terms of the priority of the human or universal role.

The second level of practical wisdom can also be specified in terms of roles. While role types have a generic character, they are occupied by individuals with a particular history, set of desires, and ends. So role tokens capture some of the ethical particularities of the occupants. For example, the ethical condition of me as a wife, a mother, a daughter, a graduate student, and so on is different from a young man as a son, a brother, a CEO of a company, an unmarried person, and so on. My particular roles, as a mother, for example, demand my particular obligations to my own children, not to others' children. His particular role of CEO of a company, for instance, requires his specific responsibilities to that company, not to other companies. His role of brother requires a certain kind of virtue that I do not need in the same way in my life because I have no brothers or sisters. The answers to the question "How should *I* live?" are probably quite different for me and him. Suppose that the young man is living a wonderful life, ethically speaking, which means that he is flourishing as a human being at this stage. If particularities of my ethical conditions did not matter and the good life for me were

thoroughly definable through general descriptions about a good human life, I should be able to follow his example in its details in order to live a good life. But I cannot. I can at most be inspired or encouraged by the way he lives. His life has an entirely different configuration from mine because we are in distinct roles. I will be able to get much more practical inspiration about how to live my life wisely if I observe some exemplars whose lives have a similar structure as mine. Since the second level of practical wisdom is about how to live a particular life wisely, and such a particular life is structured by a particular person's distinct set of roles, the second-level practical wisdom could be specified in terms of roles. Specifically, the understanding about how to live a particular life could be described in terms of role priority: which roles matter more, and which matter less for a particular individual. Such practical wisdom regarding the role priorities within their own constellation of roles would be invaluable for one who experiences the first kind of role conflict.

Finally, I will consider contribution of Role Ethics to the third-level practical wisdom that an individual needs for a particular situation. One or several roles that the individual occupies will be salient in a particular ethical situation. For example, at this moment of writing, I am fulfilling my role as a graduate student; but about two hours later, when I am at home with my husband, my children and my mother, I am attentive to three of my roles: a wife, a mother and a daughter. Sometimes, one needs practical wisdom to resolve a problem or a tension within one role. For example, in a particular situation where my daughter disobeys a command from me, I may feel that I need practical wisdom in disciplining her: being too harsh might discourage her, while being too soft may be ineffective for her to get the lesson. So, I may wonder what is the wise

way to discipline her in this specific situation. Practical wisdom in such cases can be specified through a detailed account of how to fulfill the role of parent. But that is not my focus here since such an account has to assume a specific tradition, as I mentioned in the previous chapter. I am more interested in specifying the practical wisdom needed in cases of the second type of role conflict.

I will argue that Role Ethics, particularly my account of proper actions, contributes to our understanding about the third-level practical wisdom in at least two ways. First, it specifies the concept of "ethically relevant particulars." Second, it offers a very promising mode of practical reasoning or deliberation.

A practically wise person must be sensitive to the particulars that are ethically relevant in a specific situation. Such a sensibility must involve understanding about not only what "ethically relevant particulars" are present, but also what their relations are. Role Ethics advocates that the roles the agent occupies are among the most central ethically relevant particulars of the situation and the issues we noted around role conflicts are a large part of the relations among those roles.

Let me re-capitulate some of the ethical significance of roles. First, how one plays a role could affect the well-being of the role-respondent and likely one's own well-being as well. For example, how I am doing as a mother has a critical impact on my children's well-being. Moreover, since being a mother is an important part of who I am, my performance in being a mother has a dramatic impact on my self-identity too. To fail my role as a mother could be psychologically devastating to the self as I incur confusion, guilt, low self-esteem, and so on. If it were not, if I were to feel nothing in my failure to be a mother, then given my normal cognitive and mental abilities I would be ethically

flawed. And a seriously ethically flawed person is by no means flourishing. So how successful I am at being a mother affects my own well-being as well. Second, how one plays a role could affect the well-being of a community. The playing of some roles, like being the leader of the community, can have a more direct and significant influence on the well-being of the community, but many roles will have some influence.

Although these points are commonsense, roles as ethically relevant particulars have not gained enough attention among virtue ethicists. They often claim that a practically wise person will take into account the particulars of a situation, but they rarely articulate what these particulars could be and how they are connected. So, Role Ethics fills in the gap in understanding practical wisdom that virtue ethics has left out by offering a strong case for roles as ethically relevant particulars and an account of how roles are related to one another.

Recall that Daniel Russell, following Aristotle, considers practical wisdom to be an excellence in making the end of one's action determinate and in deciding the best means to that end. In a situation of moral conflict, different ends compete with one another for the agent's endorsement.[39] Therefore, a practically wise person will first correctly specify the end. But making determinate the end is not enough because practical wisdom is concerned with *action*. The practically wise person will then need to correctly decide the best means to achieve the end.

Given the pervasiveness of roles in our life, many difficult ethical situations, if not all, can be specified as cases of second-type role conflict. Therefore, the content of

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[39] Even when the conflict is interpreted as conflicts among duties, it is still possible to view the conflicting duties in terms of ends. Say, complying the duty A is one end, and complying the duty B is another end, and they are simply in conflict.

deliberation in a practically wise person who confronts a difficult ethical situation can be specified in terms of roles. A practically wise role-agent, confronting a specific case of role conflict, will first determine which role has a triumphant status over the other by considering their ends and relations among them in this particular case, and then decide the best means to achieve the end of that triumphant role in this situation.[40] If possible, this practically wise role-agent will also do something afterwards to make up her failure to do what the other role demands. My account of proper actions, including primary and secondary actions, specifies the phase of practical reasoning in which the role-agent considers the relations of the conflicting roles.

In sum, my discussion of role conflicts has important implications about practical wisdom. It specifies the content of the knowledge or understanding that a practically wise person should possess in order to live well in general; it also describes the deliberating process a practically wise person could have in particular situations of conflict. These implications are quite coherent with our common understanding about practical wisdom: a practically wise person can wisely handle his or her various relationships or roles. It is worth noting again that my specification of practical wisdom is still structural. It emphasizes the structure of practical reasoning in a practically wise person. The more detailed content regarding, for example, what roles *in fact* one occupies and the relations among those roles can only be specified in a tradition. For example, both Confucius and Gandhi are considered wise men, and their wisdom may have a similar structure—which is what I have suggested—but the detailed content of their wisdom must be dramatically different, which is obviously due to their different metaphysical assumptions.

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[40] These phases of deliberation in practical wisdom are not necessarily linear. It might take a few rounds to get the final decision about what ought to be done in this situation.

In this chapter, I have investigated the issue of role conflicts. I identified two types of role conflict: large-scale and small-scale. Then I provided resolutions respectively for these two types of role conflict. I offered an account of role priority and an account of proper actions. Finally, I argued that my investigation on role conflicts contributes to our understanding of practical wisdom by specifying the kind of knowledge or understanding it involves.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I will summarize the major points that I argued in the previous chapters. Then I will suggest some lines of future research that will complement, support, or advance my current project.

In Chapter One I introduced the general idea of role ethics and sketched its history and significance. In the broadest sense, role ethics is any ethical inquiry about roles. It could be an investigation about the nature of roles, the normative status of certain roles, the relations between roles and other ethical concepts such as duties and virtues, and so on. Role ethics was prominent in ancient times in both the western and eastern traditions, but it was gradually marginalized later, especially during and after the Enlightenment period. In just the last decade role ethics has enjoyed a slow but steady revival, though some earlier projects of virtue ethics and particularism might have foreshadowed the prospect of role ethics. Role ethicists have given various reasons why role ethics is worth pursuing, though the specific projects they defend differ from one researcher to another. I agreed with those reasons, but I also argued for two other reasons that are critical to my Role Ethics project as distinguished from theirs. One is that our ordinary ethical life is structured by our various roles. The other is that role ethics covers a significant part—and possibly the whole, depending on the definition of roles—of our ordinary morality. Given these two reasons, a different paradigm of ethics seems quite plausible, an ethics that is structured by roles.

In order to illustrate what a role-structured ethics is like, I briefly introduced Confucian role ethics and Epictetus' role ethics. Both traditions have insights on the following philosophical issues: the notion of the self and its relation to roles, role identification, role fulfillment, role conflict, and changing roles. I take these five concerns to be the 'bones' of those role ethics. (Due to limitations of space, I chose to discuss only three of the five concerns in this dissertation.) I outlined the different opinions these two traditions have on these issues, which could be seen as the 'flesh' of their role ethics.

I also introduced two contemporary interlocutors, Jeremy Evan's role ethics, and Sarah Harper's role-centered morality. As I summarized their projects, I pointed out that they had said very little about some of the 'bone' issues.

Role-structured ethics, which I simply call "Role Ethics" in this dissertation, is an outline or framework for developing various specific role ethics, not only in the Confucian and Stoic role ethics traditions but also in other traditions, such as Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Indian, certain African, and various other traditions.[1]

In the concluding remarks of the first chapter, I argued that the thinness of Evans' and Harpers' role ethics is due to their neglect of the place of traditions in role ethics. I distinguished a tradition from a culture in this way: a tradition is a system of views about reality that aims towards coherence and consistency, while a culture usually is a mixture of fragmented views from various traditions and, thus, it could be filled with intellectual contradictions and practical conflicts. When it is not embedded in a tradition, a role ethics does not have the resources to fully address the 'bone' issues. In the following three

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[1] Evans and Harper's theories cannot fit into my RE. They have no interest in traditions. They attempted to construct tradition-free theories of role ethics. Although my RE in this dissertation is also neutral among traditions, I have insisted that a complete role ethics is impossible without assuming a certain tradition. But their works are trying to offer a complete role ethics without assuming any tradition. In sum, we are carrying out entirely different projects.

chapters where I discuss three 'bone' topics, I stayed neutral on the tradition. That is, I did not discuss those issues in the detail that could only be addressed within a tradition. Instead, I tried to investigate those questions on the most general level, which is outside the various traditions of role ethics but is still applicable to them.

This discussion of the import of traditions led me to argue for a valuable theoretical advantage of Role Ethics. Most mainstream moral concepts, such as duties and virtues, are not universal across traditions east and west, ancient and modern. But roles are. So Role Ethics could serve as a platform to bring various traditions into meaningful dialogue, which may allow us to evaluate fairly the merits and limits of those traditions.

The big picture of Role Ethics I sketched in Chapter One suggests a number of important areas for future research beyond this dissertation. The first one is epistemological research into how we identify our roles. Although this process might seem clear in the cases where we gain our roles through social relationships, it is not so obvious in other cases. For example, when one tries to decide what profession or occupation that one should enter, one would need to know 'who one really is' in regard to, for example, one's innate capacities, learned interests, developing abilities, social relations, divine calling, and so on. Epictetus has a detailed discussion on this issue, but I left this topic out of my dissertation because it is futile to think about it outside a specific tradition.

Another topic for further research is the important normative issues that arise in changing roles. Since some roles are occupied voluntarily, there are situations where we have to consider entering or exiting these roles. Of course, it may be permissible to enter

or exit some of these roles as one wishes, but it is not so for others of them. For example, although in many traditions one might become a spouse (of this or that particular person) voluntarily, it is ethically significant and controversial whether one should exit the role of spouse as one wishes. Moreover, with regard to certain roles that one enters non-voluntarily or even involuntarily, it is unclear whether it is permissible to exit them as one wishes. For example, despite the fact that one may legally exit the role of parent and allow one's child to be adopted by another family, it is unclear how to evaluate this action ethically in different cases. The debate on abortion also bears on this question of changing roles since a decision about abortion can be considered as a choice to exit the role of mother by forcibly ending the life of one's child. Not much progress can be made on this line of inquiry outside a specific tradition, so I decided to leave it for a future project. Also changing roles often results from role conflict; thus, investigating the latter may shed light on the former. This is another reason I chose to leave changing roles aside and to investigate role conflict first, given the limited space of my dissertation.

My proposal that Role Ethics may serve as a platform for dialogue among and a fair comparison and evaluation of different traditions suggests many interesting projects that are similar to Roger Ames' reconstruction of Confucian role ethics and Brian Johnson's revival of Epictetus' role ethics. It should be possible to reconstruct the ethics of each major tradition into a role ethics according to some practically significant 'bone' framework like the one I have provided in this dissertation. (Of course, my framework may not be the best possible. It is open to further development.) Then one could take a look at whether and how well each tradition fleshes out the 'bone' issues. Does it provide sufficient resources to resolve them in a coherent and helpful way?

In Chapter Two, I investigated two concepts that are central to Role Ethics—roles and the self—and this led to an important implication about dignity of persons based on the conceptions I developed. First, I distinguished two questions, "Who am I?" and "What am I?" The former (which I tried to answer) is a request about the self that will have significant practical implications, while the latter is primarily a descriptive account that interests metaphysicians. I discussed why an adequate ethical theory must have a plausible general account of the self in the first sense of "who I am." Then I briefly discussed the notion of the self in the Confucian tradition and Epictetus' ethics. In both cases, the self is defined in terms of roles.

Given the significance of roles in the definition of the self, I made a detailed survey of the notion of roles in which role ethicists have been interested. I discovered some key features of roles as well as some tensions among the various definitions of roles. Viewing these discoveries in light of relevant common beliefs, I proposed that a position is an ethically significant role if and only if 1) it is embedded in a relationship (or a set of relationships) that constitutes the *relata*'s well-being or 2) it has a function that aims at the well-being of a community as a whole. I explained why I chose to define roles as positions aiming at either the *relatum* or the community's well-being rather than as positions with certain rights and duties attached as some role ethicist have done. There are primarily two reasons. One is that deontological terms seem to be ill-suited to capture the content of roles. The other reason is that teleological terms can better accommodate our common belief that some relationships are constitutive of one's well-being. This definition as a whole, I argued, is broad enough to accommodate all the ethically interesting roles.

I made a few distinctions about roles, roles as types and tokens, permanent and temporary roles, persisting and non-persisting roles, membership and non-membership roles, as well as voluntary, involuntary and non-voluntary roles. These distinctions can help us understand the notion of the self.

After discussing the nature of roles, I investigated the structure of the self. I first scrutinized the models of the self that role ethicists have provided. Simply speaking, the Confucian self is constituted by social roles, but it is supposed to be a dynamic center that is constantly open to various relationships. This is what I called the "social-role-self thesis." Among the more serious objections to this view are the personal feature objection, the onion objection, and the relativism objection. These objections all suggest that the self must have some non-social aspects.

I then discussed the model of the self in Epictetus' role ethics, which has a dimension that was missing from the Confucian conception. That dimension is the human role. Epictetus' self has two layers: one is filled with the human role, while the other is filled with various specific roles. I argued that Epictetus' model is promising because it can withstand the objections to the "social-role-self" model. But Epictetus' conception of the self has its own problems. First, it does not underscore and explain the dynamic nature of the self. Second, because the second layer (the one where the specific roles are located) is oversimplified in the sense that the component roles are not ordered, this model is not able to support the most helpful way to handle role conflicts.

Next, when I considered Sarah Harper's view that the role of being a self is an identity relation, I argued that this view makes one's obligations to oneself incomprehensible. Instead, I proposed that we should understand the self-to-self

relationship this way: the first *relatum* 'self' is the whole unified self, while the latter *relatum* self is the original self. This not only makes one's obligations to oneself comprehensible, but also makes self-sacrifice more comprehensible.

Given the virtues and vices of these two models as well as other common beliefs about the self, I proposed that the self is a union of the original self and the relational self. The original self is the most primitive subject of experience, given at birth and developed over time into a more self-conscious form. Such things as personality, tastes, biological relations, gender, and sexual orientation constitute the original self. The relational self is constituted by all the roles that the self occupies, including all the token roles one has as well as the human role. Since my account of roles is open to non-paradigmatic roles, my account of relational self could also be constituted by some non-paradigmatic roles, such as the role of a special creature of God. I also suggested picturing the relational self as like a bull's eye target, with each concentric layer representing a role. The layers at or near the core of the target contribute more to "who I am" than those on the periphery. Also the self can change over time by entering new roles, exiting old ones, or reorganizing the current roles in terms of their relative importance to "who I am".

I concluded my account of the self by noting that one's perception of one's self can be different from one's actual self. Further, there is a descriptive sense of the self and a prescriptive sense of the self, and sometimes the self could and should reject a role. An explanation of the latter phenomenon is that the self has a natural desire for coherence and unity.

My accounts of roles and the self, I argued, help us explain the dignity of persons. Linda Zagzebski's recent account of dignity of person, I noted, seems to be inconsistent

with her assumption that every human being is a person. This weakness of her account suggests that a stronger account may exist. I offered an account of dignity of persons in terms of roles, suggesting that the infinite value of our dignity is grounded in our human role, while the irreplaceable value of our dignity is grounded in our relationality, which is specified in terms of roles. I proposed that one's irreplaceable value is centrally defined by one's permanent non-membership *token* roles and is enriched by one's other *token* roles. Then I offered two arguments for my proposal. In one argument I defended the claim that the set of token roles one occupies is irreplaceable: that set must be unique to the self because it is metaphysically impossible that two persons have the same set of token roles. In the other argument I defended the superlative value of the set of token roles that one has. Finally I showed how my account of dignity can avoid the problems that Zagzebski's account faces, yet also keep the merit of her account. So I concluded that my account of roles and the self provided a better framework to articulate the dignity of persons.

The arguments of the second chapter bear a lot on psychology. My construction of the self is purely philosophical; it needs empirical studies for support. I mentioned that some constructivist psychologists have argued for the relational nature of the self. It would be illuminating to see what empirical information psychology provides regarding the following questions: What are the conditions for human selves to be formed? Is the self possible without being related to other selves? How do multiple personalities arise in one human being? How many selves dwell in a human being with multiple personalities? What are the constituents of the self? How do roles affect our conception about who we are? By what processes do we come to know who we are? How do our conceptions of the

self influence our moral deliberations? How do roles play a part in our moral deliberation? What is the relation between the self and flourishing? I believe that empirical research on these and other relevant questions will tremendously advance our understanding of the self. The details of the model of the self I proposed will be tested by the empirical findings, though I am confident about the basic assumption in my model, which is that the self is significantly relational. Of course, philosophers must continue to examine the concept of the self as it relates to how we construe the ethical life.

Chapter Three on role fulfillment and Chapter Four on role conflict build upon the account of the self I defended in Chapter Two. These topics, role fulfillment and role conflict, are two of the bone issues that I mentioned earlier. Given that the relational self is a significant component of the self, and that the relational self is constituted by one's various roles, fulfilling the roles one occupies is vital for the self to remain intact, which I assume is a necessary psychological condition for our well-being. Indeed, the failure to fulfill the roles that centrally define ourselves is destructive to who we are. These considerations provide the framework to think through the problem of role fulfillment and role conflict.

My discussion of role fulfillment in Chapter Three was structural and metaethical. Without assuming a tradition, it is impossible to advance the investigation to a normative level. But it is still worth exploring the relevant issues outside traditions because by doing so we can gain a deeper understanding of the nature of role fulfillment. Particularly, I examined how three mainstream concepts in ethical theorizing—duty, virtue, and skill— are related to role fulfillment. I argued for three theses: 1) the concept of duty is ill-suited

for defining role norms; 2) roles and virtues can be mutually perfecting; and 3) skills contribute to role fulfillment only through virtues.

A duty is a requirement, based on a principle that is general and unbreakable, that an agent perform (or refrain from performing) a type of act. I noted the concept of duty is not even present in the two ancient accounts of role ethics, the Confucian tradition and Epictetus' role ethics. I argued that this is the wisdom of these traditions because the concept of duty is unable to capture well the essence of fulfilling a role. I employed the example of attempting to define what it means to fulfill the role of mother through duties to illustrate that it is theoretically impossible to define such a significant role norm in terms of duties. I argued that some of the duty statements that we often consider to be part of fulfilling a role are in fact pseudo duty statements: when we specify their content, they are either ambiguous or refutable with counterexamples.

Second, I argued that even if the duty approach to role fulfillment is theoretically possible, it encourages a misplaced focus that could lead to undesirable consequences. This misplaced focus is that the role-agent would focus on fulfilling the duties rather than on attending to the role-respondent and her well-being. This can have two problems. One is that the role-agent will gradually lose the motivation to perform the relevant duties because duties themselves cannot sustain a long-term motivation. Rather, for role fulfillment, especially in regard to personal roles, role-agents need long-term motivation to perform well in their roles. Another implication of the misplaced focus is that the relationship would not be intimate and direct as it is supposed to be, especially for personal roles. For the role-respondents, the externals that the role-agents bring to them through performing the duties cannot meet their real needs. They need an intimate

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relationship in which the role-agent's focus is toward the role-respondent directly. For the above reasons, the concept of duty is not suitable for an account of role fulfillment.

Regarding virtues, I primarily developed two points. My first point was that virtues are quite role-specific in the following ways. First, different roles (both different type roles and different token roles) require different sets of virtues. Second, virtues exhibited in roles are often imperfect, which means that one could easily exhibit a certain virtue in one role that requires (a version) of it, but tend to not exhibit that virtue in other roles that require (some versions of) it. Third, to fulfill a role, one does not need to have perfect virtues, which is to say one does not need to be virtuous in the traditional meaning of exhibiting one's virtues across various contexts. This role-specific interpretation of virtues seems to conform better to our common observations about character traits. Whether it also forms a reasonable reply to a situationist objection to virtues is a research project for virtue ethicists.

Another point that I mentioned in the discussion about virtues and roles but did not develop is worth pursuing in future research. I briefly discussed the difference between an Aristotelian conception of virtue and Confucian conception of virtue,[2] and how this difference bears on the distinct views of the self in these two traditions. This raises again the issue of how the notion of the self impacts our understanding of ethical reality and our ideas of what ethical theory should be like.

I argued that not only can virtues serve roles, but also roles can shape character by helping to cultivate virtues. I provided two reasons. One is that taking on different roles can help us epistemically: we realize the limitations and fragility of our character in

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[2] Aristotelian virtues are excellences of capacities of different soul faculties, while at least some of the most central virtues in Confucian ethics are excellences of performance in the corresponding roles.

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general or of certain virtues in particular. The other is that roles, especially those that centrally define who we are, can motivate us to perfect our character or certain virtues in particular in order to fulfill those roles. These connections, I argued, suggest a picture of moral education that emphasizes the roles that one occupies. This role-centered approach is very promising for early-age moral education because children can easily understand the roles that they take. In contrast, virtue vocabulary is often beyond young children's understanding. In more mature people, emphasizing their roles helps them value their roles and cultivate their character accordingly. I also illustrated how (comparably) full or perfect virtues could be eventually formed through the role-centered approach.

Comparing the role-centered approach with (what I called) a direct approach to cultivate character by simply emphasizing the virtues, I argued for some advantages of the former: it is less open to the objection of "self-absorption"; and it suggests a particularist view of being virtuous, which means that different people should focus on cultivating the (versions of the) virtues required by their specific roles rather than cultivating every possible virtue.

With regard to skills and roles, I defended the claim that skills serve roles only through virtues by arguing for three sub-theses. First, I argued that skills can serve virtues. Since virtues serve roles, skills can serve roles by way of the virtues the skills support. I distinguished two kinds of skills based on how they serve virtues: technical skills and virtue skills. Technical skills, though necessary for fulfilling professional roles, are not necessary for fulfilling person roles. However, one could exhibit one's virtues in any role through employing one's technical skills. Virtue skills are skills that enable a virtuously motivated person to act in a virtuous way. I follow Aristotle's view that a virtuous person

must not only have virtuous motivations, but also be able to conduct virtuous actions. So virtue skills are necessary components of virtues. Second, I argued that skills alone cannot contribute to role fulfillment because skills are only concerned with the effectiveness of actions, and not with setting ends. I used an example to illustrate how skills without virtues can stray from the end of a role. Third, I argued that virtues could help one obtain and maintain certain skills that are required by a role. I briefly illustrated how lacking a certain skill might signal a failure to fulfill a role, even when such a skill is not necessary for fulfilling that role.

These interesting relations among virtues, skills and roles suggest a model of moral education through character formation that is worth further study. In particular, I am curious about whether this model will be supported by empirical studies. What is required is close collaboration between philosophy and psychology regarding the topic of cultivating virtues.

In Chapter Four, I scrutinized the nature of role conflicts and offered a structural solution to handle them. After distinguishing two types of role conflicts that require different approaches, I proposed an account of role priority to cope with the first type and an account of proper actions to deal with the second type. There followed an important implication for practical wisdom: the content of the understanding involved in practical wisdom can be specified in terms of role priority and proper actions.

The first type of role conflict is large-scale and chronic. It is an recurring tension that a role-agent experiences due to occupying multiple roles that compete for the agent's limited time, attention and resources. In other words, an agent in a first-type role conflict finds it is difficult to fulfill all the demands of her roles; fulfilling one of her roles

potentially or actually limits her ability to fulfill one or more of her other roles. Since an important feature of role fulfillment is that it requires performing a series of actions over a period of time, a first-type role conflict is not about a particular situation at a specific moment. Rather, it concerns the general structure of a role-agent's life and how the parts get into some tension. I identified three factors that can contribute to the first-type role conflict: the demandingness of a role, the number of roles that an agent occupies, and an agent's ability to juggle multiple roles.

The first type of role conflict, when it is not handled properly, often leads to the second type of role conflict (though there are other causes for the second type of role conflict). The second type of role conflict is a specific situation in which one of an agent's roles requires her to perform one action, while another of her roles demands that she perform another action, but circumstances prevent her from performing both actions. Compared to the first type of role conflict, the second type is small-scale and emergency. It is no wonder that these two types of role conflict require different approaches to cope with them.

I surveyed the two ancient traditions and the two contemporary versions of role ethics for their definitions of role conflict and their insights and limitations on resolving those role conflicts. None of them provides a clear account of role conflicts; in particular, they do not mention the distinction between the two types of role conflict that I described. This failure significantly limits their ability to provide a sufficient answer to the problem of role conflict. The most prominent and helpful feature of their strategies to handle role conflict can be summed up as the idea of role priority.

Consequently, I offered my definition of role priority: Role X is prior to role Y if and only if X requires prior consideration of being fulfilled to Y in the process of decision-making about life planning. After examining and critiquing the various ways to ground role priority that are implied by my four primary interlocutors, I developed an account of role priority based on the model of the self that I offered in Chapter Two. The basic idea is that the more a role contributes to "who one is," the higher the priority that role deserves. I also explained how this account of role priority helps resolve role conflicts of the first type. Furthermore, I argued that the permanence of some roles tends to promote their high priority.

I turned to my account of proper actions as the key to resolve role conflicts of the second type, since role priority is not sufficient to deal with conflicts of the second type, though it may illuminate them. After identifying the merits and limits of Jeremy Evans and Sarah Harper's approaches to handling the second type of role conflict, I developed Evans' suggestion that an agent should favor the act required by the role that involves the strongest interdependency of the well-being of the *relata.* I specified two aspects of the relationship that determine the strength of interdependency: how heavily the *relata*'s well-being depends on one another and what aspect of the *relata*'s well-being is at stake. This explains why, at many times, roles with higher priority can prescribe the proper action in a second-type role conflict: generally, the well-being of the *relata* in these roles is more interdependent than it is in the roles with lower priority.

Then I introduced a distinction that is important for my account of proper actions: primary action versus secondary action. The former is a first, immediate and foremost response to a situation, while the latter is a subsequent response to a situation which

occurs after the primary action has been performed and some of demands of this situation have been met.

I proposed that a complete account of proper actions in response to a second-type role conflict must include proper primary actions and proper secondary actions. A primary action is proper in a situation of role conflict if it is the best means to achieve the end of the role that involves stronger interdependence between *relata* in that situation. A secondary action is proper if it counts as restitution for the failure to attend to the end of the role that involves weaker interdependence between *relata* in that situation.

Since the strength of interdependence is determined by two variables, it is obvious that this account of proper action is unable to provide a straightforward prescription in some cases. But I argued that such a limitation is acceptable and even desirable because it explains the complexity of our ethical reality. For the ambiguous cases, I suggested a holistic approach to handle them, which means that 1) the properness of actions in a role conflict should be evaluated based on the combination of primary and secondary actions, depending on how well the ends of the conflicting roles are attended to as a whole, and 2) more particularities of this situation should be taken into consideration. Then I used a few examples to illustrate how the holistic approach works.

These accounts of role priority and proper actions are only structural. Fleshed-out accounts must assume certain traditions in order to specify in more detail the concepts of interdependence and well-being. To deal with more difficult cases of role conflict than the generic examples I used, one must have more specific, tradition-dependent conceptions of interdependence and well-being. I suggested that some traditions probably have more resources than others to supply a better solution to role conflict.

I mentioned two features that can make a specific tradition-situated role ethics even better: creativity to resolve a role conflict without compromising either of the roles and the ability to provide post-tragedy therapy in a role conflict that necessitates the significant non-fulfillment of one or more roles.

In the final section, I argued that my accounts of role priority and proper actions specify some of the content of the understanding involved in practical wisdom, thereby filling some of a gap in the literature which Rosaline Hursthouse has pointed out. I first distinguished three levels of practical wisdom: about human life in general, about a particular life in general, and about the episodes of a particular life. Then I explained the relations among these three levels of practical wisdom by showing how the first level illuminates the second and how the second illuminates the third.

I argued that since human life is pervasively structured by roles, the first level of practical wisdom could be specified in terms of role types and the general relations among them, the second level of practical wisdom could be specified by virtue of role tokens and their relations, and the third level of practical wisdom could be specified in terms of token roles in that specific situation as well as in a larger context, when these are considered together with the actions those roles require, the relations among the roles and the relevant particulars of that situation, and so on. I also argued that my account of role priority contributes to our understanding about the first two levels of practical wisdom, and my account of proper actions contributes to our understanding about the third level of practical wisdom.

Generally speaking, then, Role Ethics provides a strong analysis of the "ethically relevant particulars" that practically wise persons must be sensitive to, according to moral philosophers, especially virtue ethicists and moral particularists.

Let me now return to the objection, which I mentioned in Chapter Two, that my account of roles allows 'bad roles.' I promised then that I would reply to this worry after readers had gained the whole picture of Role Ethics. The "bad roles" objection claims that since on my account a specific role ethics is tradition-situated, Role Ethics promotes ethical relativism. Here is my response. Role Ethics does not advocate relativism. Rather, it advocates meaningful and productive dialogue among traditions that can be conducted on a common ground. To emphasize the place of traditions in ethical thinking does not open the door to a malicious form of ethical relativism. As I have outlined in this dissertation, Role Ethics provides a sophisticated enough framework that is structured by its central topics: the nature of the self and how one comes to know one's self, and the normative questions about fulfilling, changing and balancing roles. These topics are universal in all tradition-situated role ethics. So here is what I hope: by honestly comparing various tradition-situated role ethics, we will eventually come to understand each tradition better, to evaluate their coherence and to weigh their capacities to offer satisfying answers to these central questions. Since these questions are so practical, should not a rational individual favor the tradition(s) that one can actually live with? And by doing so, perhaps we can get a little closer to mapping our ethical reality.

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