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Western 'Sincerity' and Confucian '*Cheng*'

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In philology, both 'sincerity' and 'cheng' primarily mean, 'to be true to oneself'. As a philosophical term, 'sincerity' roots in Aristotle's 'aletheutikos'. In medieval Europe, it is regarded as a neutral value that may either serve or disserve for 'truth.' As for Romantics, it is a positive value, and an individualistic concept whose two elements 'true' and 'self' refer to a person's 'true feeling' and 'individuality'. In contrast, both 'self' and 'true' in Confucianism are universalistic concepts, meaning 'good nature' common to all humans, and 'true feeling' distinguishing them from beasts. Cheng *itself means to face one's universal self with universal true feeling.*

By nature, comparative philosophy has to move frequently between, at least, two sets of languages and cultures, dealing with issues at two levels: philological meaning and philosophical significance. In general, the two levels within the same culture are coherent: a term's major part, or its core meaning remains in its philosophical significance; the significance develops from the meaning. However, things become complicated when one culture encounters another: in many cases, two terms coming respectively from two cultures may be similar in philology, but divergent significantly in philosophy.

   This essay will approach this general issue through a comparison of two important terms in Western and Chinese cultures: the English 'sincerity' and Chinese '*cheng*'. It will argue that sincerity and *cheng* are similar in philology: they both refer to a state that may be phrased as 'to be true to oneself' and both have been regarded as a ground for the acquisition of other people's trust. Nonetheless, the Western philosophy and Chinese Confucianism differ in their interpretations of both 'true' and 'self' in sincerity and *cheng*. Mainly because of this reason, the two terms depart from each other philosophically.

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Similarity in Philology

The word 'sincerity', according to Lionel Trilling, entered the English language in the first third of the 16th century. It derived from the Latin word 'sincerus' meaning first 'clean', 'sound', or 'pure'. People can speak of sincere wine, not in the modern fashion of describing the taste of wine by attributing some moral quality to it, but simply to mean that it has not be adulterated, or sophisticated. Similarly, they can speak of sincere doctrine, religion, or Gospel, meaning that it has not been tampered with, or falsified, or corrupted. In the same vein, sincerity can be also used for person, 'it is largely metaphorical – a man's life is sincere in the sense of being sound, or pure, or whole; or consistent in its virtuousness' (Trilling, 1972, pp. 12–13).

However, it soon came to mean the absence of dissimulation, feigning, or pretence, denoting mainly 'congruence between avowal and actual feeling' (Trilling, 1972, p. 2). People believe that the criterion of sincerity, the calculation of the degree of congruence is not how excellent a person's work is, but how true he is to himself. The truer he is to himself, the higher the degree of congruence he attains. Hence, 'to be true to oneself', an inner-oriented action to unify the person as intentional agent with his original, natural 'self', becomes final ground for sincerity's presence and evaluation. Since a person being true to himself is likely to be sincere when dealing with others, people often equate 'to be true to oneself' to the congruence as such.

It is a widely accepted idea that sincerity will bring about positive or favorable consequences. A passage in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* exemplified this conviction. Polonius, a slippery minister in the Danish court advised his son Laertes who was leaving for Paris that, 'This above all: to thine own self be true, and it doth follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man'. On this passage Trilling (1972, p. 3) commented that, 'Our impulse to make its sense consistent with our general view of Polonius is defeated by the way the lines sound, by their lucid moral lyricism. This persuades us that Polonius has had a moment of self-transcendence, of grace and truth. He has conceived of sincerity as an essential condition of virtue and has discovered how it is to be attained'. In terms of Trilling's interpretation, sincerity will be attained through 'to thine own self be true', and it will assure a person being truthful to others. As a loving father, Polonius expected that Laertes' sincerity would win him the trust from other people, and therefore enable them to act in his favor. To emphasize the significance of his discovery of the relation between sincerity and its consequence, Polonius used a phrase 'this above all', reminding his son that it was the most important for his well-being in Paris.

'Sincerity' has its counterpart '*cheng*' in Chinese culture. About this word, Xu Shen (about 58–147 CE), the editor of first Chinese dictionary, *Shuowen jiezi* (Explanation of Script and Elucidation of Characters) defined, '*cheng* means "*xin*". It belongs to the category of speech' (Xu, 1963, p. 52). This definition shows that *cheng* is related to people's everyday conversation, and as a term, it is interchangeable with the word '*xin*'. Thus, it seems to me, the meaning of *cheng* can be fully revealed through examining of '*xin*'.

Scholars of Chinese studies generally agree that the most authentic and reliable

texts before the Warring States era (403–221 BC) include five books: *Jinwen shangshu* (the New Text of the Book of History), *Shijing* (the Book of Poetry), *Lunyu* (the Confucius's Analects), *Chunqiu zuozhuan* (Zuo's Commentary on the 'Spring and Autumn Annals'), and *Guoyu* (the Conversations of the States). Generally speaking, '*Xin*' was used there in three ways. First, it is close to 'trust' or 'trustfulness', referring to a confidence in other people's conduct (deed and word) or in the presence of certain things. Second, it is similar to 'trustworthiness', denoting certain attributes, or qualities manifest in a person's conduct, because of which he may get trust from others. Third, like the English word 'faithfulness', it means a confidence in one's own conduct, or more exactly, in the congruence between what one really feels and what his conduct reveals. These three meanings constitute a chain with three interrelated links: trust, trustworthiness, and faithfulness, which not only represent the full meaning of *cheng*, but also, similar to the case of Shakespeare, underscore the connection between *cheng* and its consequence. Let's start with the first link: 'trust'.

The simple fact that we humans live a community life forces everyone to think about his relationship with other people, as well as his position and role in the community. He has to ask himself frequently: how can I trust in or get trust from other people? Concretely, this can be further divided into two sub-questions: how can I make others trust me, and why should I trust in another person? For the sake of convenience and simplicity, the following analysis will focus on the first one.

Usually, this is the answer: in order to get trust from others, I need to be trustworthy first. There must be a correspondence between my words and deeds. I should not talk about helping someone, and then break my promise for a relatively unconvincing reason. Moreover, there must be a consistency in my words or deeds. I should not teach one person to be filial in the morning, but argue with another in the night that filiality is not a virtue at all. The two terms '*correspondence*' and '*consistency*' collectively represent an ideal mode of conduct that represents the person's trustworthiness. They constitute the basic content of the second link in the chain. (Henceforth, the single term 'consistency' will be used to denote the mode.)

However, the question continues: how can I assure the presence of this mode in my conducts? Put differently, what is the guarantee for my consistent conduct? This ushers in the third link 'faithfulness'. It refers to a psychological state in which I am true to myself, and I act as my heart tells me. After all, a person can hardly expect other people's trust in his conduct if he himself doubts its trustworthiness first. In terms of this analysis, faithfulness is the necessary condition for the presence of consistency, and therefore the final assurance for the acquisition of others' trust.

By combining the three links of '*xin*', '*cheng*' covers the full meaning of English 'sincerity:' congruence between avowal and actual feelings, 'to be true to oneself' as the path for the attainment of sincerity, and that sincerity assures positive consequences coming with other people's trust. For this reason, James Legge first rendered *cheng* as 'sincerity' in 1893 (Legge, 1893), and his translation has been welcomed by many prominent scholars, such as Derk Bodde (Feng, 1952, p. 375), Wing-Tsit Chan, (1963, p. 107), and W. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (1999, p. 139).

However, after Legge's rendering, scholars continuously introduced other trans-

lated names, such as 'perfection' (Wieger, 1917), 'truth' (Bruce, 1923; Enkar, 1927) 'realness' Hughes, 1942), and 'integrity' (Graham, 1958, p. 67). Meanwhile, the scholars who were still stuck on 'sincerity' had to add more explanations to describe it as 'both an ethical and an ontological category' (Schwartz, 1985, p. 405). Last, to avoid the trouble caused by the various translations, Joseph Needham (1956, p. 468) suggested, 'The word [*cheng*] is so untranslatable and at the same time so important that it probably ought to be retained in mere transliteration, like *dao* and *li*. This we do.' These new names and explanations reflect the scholars' doubt on the correctness or sufficiency of 'sincerity' in rendering *cheng*. The following statement will show that this concern is justifiable at the level of philosophy.

Sincerity in Western Philosophy

Sincerity as philosophical concept seems to have its root in Aristotle's '*aletheutikos*'. Actually, J. A. K. Thomson, one of the translators of his *Nichomachean Ethics* simply rendered it as 'sincerity', or 'truthfulness' (Thomson, 1976, pp. 165–167). Aristotle grouped people into three types: 'boastful man', 'truthful (sincere) man', and 'mock-modest'. The truthful man is the person who occupies the mean – the middle position, and says just enough. In contrast, a person who is not in the middle position (and in either extreme) is *untruthful*. The boastful man goes too far and says too much, while the mock-modest does not go or say enough.

About the truthful man Aristotle wrote, 'we are not speaking of the man who keeps faith in his agreements, i.e. in the things that pertain to justice or injustice (for this would belong to another virtue), but the man who in the matters in which nothing of this sort is at stake is true both in word and in the life because his character is such'. This type of person is worthy of praise, 'for the man who loves truth, and is truthful where nothing is at stake, will still more be truthful where something is at stake; he will avoid falsehood as something base, seeing that he avoided it even for its own sake' (Aristotle, 1941, p. 999).

Here 'truthfulness' was listed as secondary to truth; and truth to the people then primarily meant 'certain axiomatic truths, adamantine, unbreakable, from which it is possible by severe logic to deduce certain absolutely infallible conclusions' (Berlin, 1999, p. 2) Aristotle's view on the relationship between 'truthfulness' and truth implies an important point: truthfulness and its equivalents, 'honesty', 'integrity', and 'sincerity' were valuable not for the sake of itself, but for, and only for its loyal service for truth. Later, this point was further developed to be a notion, which prevailed especially in the medieval ages, that 'truthfulness' or 'sincerity' has no independent value; it may either serve for 'truth' or for 'falsehood.'

In medieval Europe, people with Christian beliefs prized three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity because of their association with truth and their help for people to move toward truth. Using 'faith' as an example, Peter Geach expounded this idea. 'Faith that is known to God alone still has to be faith in something true: faith is the virtue by which a man can discern his genuine last end, from which he is disoriented by Original Sin, and can return to the true compass-bearing when

temptations swerve him from it. And faith is only by the gift of God, who is Truth, who cannot set his seal upon a lie' (Geach, 1977, p. 160). Similarly, other values, including the four ancient cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and courage could be judged as virtue or vice only through their relation with the truth of God, and their service or disservice for the truth. Geach explained this notion by referring to the case of courage. 'This is one particular aspects of a general truth about courage: there can be no virtue in courage, in the facing of sudden danger or the endurance of affliction, if the cause for which this is done is worthless or positively vicious' (Geach, 1977).

This also applied to sincerity. Within a religious community whose members share the same form of truth, the more sincere a person is, the more he is praised and admired by his fellow members. However, when two communities with different views on truth encounter, and when their disputations seem incompatible, a trouble occurs to sincerity. The general notion was that truth was one, and the one preached by my church and held by me. It was always right to be a martyr to truth, but only to truth. An enemy who sincerely cherished his own truth is both 'dangerous' and 'pitiful'. As for a decent Christian knight, 'the deeper the sincerity of such heretics or unbeliever – Muslims, Jews, atheists – the more dangerous they are, the more likely to lead souls to perdition, the more ruthlessly should they be eliminated, since heresy is surely a poison more dangerous to the health of society than even hypocrisy or dissimulation, which at least do not openly attack the true doctrine' (Berlin, 1997, p. 554). Nevertheless, the knight, after killing his brave enemy, would not spit upon his corpse, but rather, felt *pity* for his death because so much courage, so much ability, so much devotion had been expended on a cause so palpably absurd or dangerous. As a result of the conflict of truths, 'sincerity' turned to be a neutral, even negative value.

That 'sincerity becomes a virtue in itself', as Berlin observed, occurred only after the prevalence of Romanticism that Rousseau and German Romantics advocated since the mid-18th century (Berlin, 1997). The key for the change lay in two interrelated elements: the promotion of the concept of 'self' and the new interpretation of 'truth'. This new trend had its root in a psychological fact. We all experience, at certain moment, that we are yielding to some 'lower' impulse, acting from a motive that we dislike, or doing something that at the very moment of doing we may detest. We might reflect that we were untrue or disloyal to ourselves; and this feeling would certainly leave us in a state of frustration or depression, even in a mood of self-contempt. For instance, a warrior fostered in a Buddhist context must be deeply depressed and self-blamed after killing an enemy soldier, although he knows clearly that his killing is justifiable in terms of self-defense, even the only right thing he could do in the particular situation. Actually, his depression and self-blame is independent from his knowing of any factual or religious truth. Emphasizing similar experiences, Romantics contended that the most important thing was to preserve the well-being and integrity of 'self', and to act in accordance with the calling of one's 'self', heart or soul.

It should be noticed that this 'self' is an individualistic concept, not referring to an essential attribute common to all human beings, but to an individuality or

uniqueness possessed by a particular person and distinguishing this Peter from that John. Rousseau's *Confessions* provided the best example in this regard.

> I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kin a portrait in everything true to nature, and the man I portray will be myself. Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike anyone I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least, I am different. (Rousseau, 1953, p. 17)

Rousseau believed that he was fully true to himself, so that his portrait must exactly resemble his own 'self'. This 'self', as for him, was an entity with the highest value, which characterizes him as a person 'different' from, say, Voltaire or Diderot, and to which he must be loyal or truthful, even if at some cost to his property, reputation, health, and life itself.

Along with the promotion of individualistic 'self', Rousseau and his Romantic friends reinterpreted the concept of 'truth'. Berlin (2000, p. 17) wrote, 'There run through their writings a common notion, held with varying degrees of consciousness and depth, that truth is not an objective structure, independent of those who seeks it, the hidden treasure waiting to be found, but is itself in all its guises created by the seeker'. In fact, it primarily means a faithful or truthful attitude toward oneself and to others; it depends on a person's motive, intention, or willing, and having nothing to do with his knowledge of objective fact or religious doctrine.

Trilling (1972, p. 17) explained the relation of this new concept of truth and sincerity with the following example: 'In French literature sincerity consists in telling the truth about oneself to oneself and to others; by truth is meant a recognition of such of one's own traits or actions as are morally or socially discreditable and, in conventional course, concealed'. With this conception of truth in mind, Rousseau proudly claimed: at the last trumpet, he would present his *Confessions* before his Sovereign Judge, asking all the other people who groaned at his depravities, and blushed for his misdeed. 'But let each one of them reveal his heart at the foot of thy throne with equal sincerity, and may any man who dares say, "I was a better man than he" ' (Rousseau, 1953, p. 17)

Here we should pay particular attention to his phrase 'equal sincerity'. On the one hand, this sincerity means to be true to one's (individual) self; on the other hand, it should be 'equally' held by everyone. Accordingly, the truer a person is to himself, the more sincere he should be regarded; and the more sincere he is, the closer he is to the ideal image of humankind. The conclusion is that 'sincerity', which signifies one's loyalty to his own self, should be taken as a general criterion to evaluate and judge persons and their conduct. Rousseau was confident that God's judgement would be in his favor, not because he is more praiseworthy than others in terms of social norms, but because he dared to face his own self, and reveal it as it is. In a broad sense, according to the criterion of sincerity, the crucial thing is not what a person has done (consequence), but how he does – with or without wholeheartedness (intention); not what he believes (content), but how he carries out his belief – with or without a true dedication (willing). Due to the influence of this intellectual trend, as Berlin indicated, ' "integrity" and "sincerity" become admirable indepen-

dently of the [traditional] truth or validity of the beliefs or principles involved' (Berlin, 1997, p. 553). Paradoxically, in my point of view, this value of sincerity starts with elevating the individualistic 'self', but ends being a universal criterion for evaluation and judgment, especially in the domains of ethics and aesthetics.

The tension of individuality and universality associated with sincerity may cause two kinds of social consequences, which depend on what psychological structure a sincere person possesses. Negatively, a person may stress the side of individuality, and therefore intensify his efforts to realize, even universalize his 'self' in various social forms. Berlin mentioned that, 'If it goes too far, if someone is a Hitler, then we do not think that his sincerity is necessarily a saving quality' (Berlin, 1999, p. 141). As for this fact, the medieval warning is still legitimate: people can sincerely do something against the well-being of humankind as a whole; and, in that case, the more sincere they are, the more dangerous to humans.

In contrast, if the emphasis is put on the side of universality, a feeling of 'respect' between two parties, who differ in their understanding of social issues, might ideally replace the medieval feeling of 'pity'. The reasoning would be that, no matter what you believe in, correct or incorrect in my view, you still have my respect and admiration so long as your attitude toward your belief itself is honest, and you have truly sacrificed for your belief. Here the point is not that I accept the *content* of the truth in which you believe, but that I respect your *attitude* towards the truth. The content differentiates you from me, while the attitude underscores the commonality of us. As history already proved that the confrontation among major cultures and religions will finally attain a situation in which no party can continue to press his truth on the other parties by killing, a situation in which continuous conflicts on truth will lead nowhere, but total peril of humankind as a whole. The significance of Romantic sincerity lies in that it provided a common ground for the dialogue among all parties, as well as for their tolerance and compromise to each other, a common ground on which a genuine religious or cultural diversity may stand: various parties discuss peacefully with each other for the sake of the interest of entire humankind, while continuing to hold their own view of truth.

Cheng in Confucianism

Despite its similarity to the English 'sincerity' at the philological level, *cheng* as a philosophical concept possesses several attributes that are absent in the Western tradition. In what follows, I will limit my discussion to the Confucian circle, so as to highlight its difference with the sincerity on three topics.

Cheng as a Universalistic Concept

Mencius (371–289 B.C.?) first used *cheng* as a philosophical concept. In a long passage concerning a gentleman's fulfillment of his official duty, he listed six phases toward its success. They are: 'govern the people', 'win the confidence of superiors', 'win the trust of friends', 'please the parents', 'to be true to oneself (*chengshen*)', and 'understand goodness (*zhishan*)' (Zhu, 1983; Lau, 1970). It is a chain reasoning from

the far to the near, from large scale to the small, and from a person's external exercise to his inner heart. In this process, each succeeding phase functions as a necessary condition for the realization of the preceding one, and each success signifies the person's new achievement in realizing his social ideal. Although the completion of the entire six phases is expected only for a social elite, the chain is also relevant to those who will never assume any office. Everyone, no matter how ordinary, must have a family and needs to build up certain types of friendship, so he should attain, at least, the last four phases.

Regarding the concept of *cheng*, what interests us the most is the relationship among the last three phases. In terms of Mencius' reasoning, 'to be true to oneself' is motivated by the need to 'please the parents.' This connection implies an important, but often-ignored point: *cheng* as a moral effort originates from family life, and its first beneficiaries are one's parents. Unlike other human relationships, such as friend and friend, superior and inferior, teacher and students, that between parents and their children is principally a natural, rather than societal one. Normally, for a man, seeking to 'please parents' does not come from some utilitarian or pragmatic concerns; it is an intuitive action as natural as needing to eat and drink. Meanwhile, to 'please parents' is also a perennial need; it will last as long as he still lives. The need pushes people to search for its satisfaction; and the naturalness accounts for the intensity and durability that feature the search. Mencius assumed 'to be true to oneself' as the most reliable way for satisfying the need, because it can ensure a man to be consistent when dealing with his parents, and to be constantly good towards them.

However, according to Mencius, the attainment of 'to be true to oneself' is conditioned by 'understand goodness' – 'If one does not understand goodness, he can not be true to himself' (Zhu, 1983; Lau, 1970). Following the interpretation of Kang Youwei (1858–1927), I would hold that this 'goodness' means human's 'good nature' (*shanxing*) endowed by Heaven (Kang, 1987, p. 137); it is simply another name of 'self' to which one should be true. Concretely, it consists of the 'four minds' (*siduan*): 'mind of compassion' (*ceyin zhi xin*), 'mind of shame' (*cirang zhi xin*), 'mind of courtesy and modesty' (*xiuwu zhi xin*) and 'mind of right and wrong' (*shifei zhi xin*) (Lau, 1970, 6A/6). In contrast to the 'self' in the Western Romanticism, this nature or 'self' is a universalistic concept that characterizes humankind as a particular species, differentiating them from animals. So, 'understand goodness' actually refers to a clear knowledge about this nature and its worthiness, which will encourage people to treasure their nature or to be loyal to their 'self'. In accordance, 'to be true to oneself' should be properly read as 'to abide by the nature' and 'to maintain the self'.

The universality of *cheng* is revealed also in the term of 'true' or truth. Similar to the Romantics, the Confucian 'true' means primarily a true feeling, or an honest attitude toward one's self, rather than a true cognition or knowledge of objective facts. At the same time, this 'true feeling' has a special connotation that needs to be clarified.

In the Confucian lexicon, as Thomas Metzger phrased, there are two kinds of feeling: the 'selfish feeling' and unselfish or 'empathetic feeling' (Metzger, 1977,

p. 31). The first is close to 'desire' in Western language, denoting an emotion toward what simply benefits an agent himself, an impulse to pursue for some sensual pleasure. It comes with some personal or individualistic qualities, and may cause a conflict with other individuals who possess also their own 'selfish feeling'. The second refers to a sentiment that enables a person to act for the well-being of entire humankind. It is not unique to this or that person, but possessed by all humans; it will never cause any conflict among people, but rather unite them together. One example of this kind of feeling is being 'sensitive to the suffering of others' (*bu renren zhi xin*) (Lau, 1970, 2A/6), which Mencius illustrated with the following tale.

> Suppose a man were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good grace of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child. (Lau, 1970, 2A6)

Mencius believed that this unselfish feeling is human's 'true feeling'. It was not something out of human nature/self, or something for human nature/self; instead, it was a necessary and central part of the nature/self, and an undeniable evidence for his thesis that 'human nature is good'.

In light of this analysis, 'to be true to oneself' or *cheng* primarily means to face one's universal self/nature with a universal true feeling. Different from 'sincerity' in the medieval ages, this *cheng* is an independent value; its validity has nothing to do with factual or religious 'truth'. Meanwhile, in contrast to Romantic sincerity, *cheng* contains no individualistic element, and it is, as Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) phrased, 'pure and perfectly good' (Chan, 1963, p. 465). The idea that 'someone may sincerely do something bad' will never apply in the case of *cheng*, because the universality in both 'true' and 'self' have already ensured that it is a value beneficial to people anytime and anywhere. It is true that this is a circular argument, which only works by assuming the universality of 'good nature'. People may point out that there actually exist those who are born violent and cruel. However, as for Mencius, this so-called fact will not upset the correctness of his basic idea. We can ignore those people as exceptional when characterizing human nature, just as we need not particularly attend to anomalies when studying the physical features of humankind.

Cheng as Central Conception

Related to its universality is *cheng*'s second trait. It is not only a cardinal virtue as what Romantics denotes with sincerity, but also a central conception that holds up all the other virtues together, and provides a ground for them being regarded as virtues. To specify its 'centrality', I would like to contrast it with the term 'good' that Aristotle elucidated in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

According to Aristotle, human beings have a specific nature; and that nature is such that they have certain aims and goals, such that they move by nature toward a specific *telos*. The 'good' is this 'telos', which stands as a core concept in virtue system, or as an 'overriding conception' of virtues (MacIntyre, 1984, pp. 186, 202). About the content of 'good' and its relation with other virtues, MacIntyre explained,

> Aristotle has cogent argument against identifying good with money, with honor or with pleasure. He gives to it the name of *eudaimonia* – as so often there is a difficulty in translation: blessedness, happiness, prosperity. It is the state of being well and doing well in being well, of a man's being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine … The virtues are precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement toward the *telos*. (McIntyre, 1984, p. 48)

We can roughly define the relation between virtues and good as that of means and end: the exercise of virtues is a means to the end of achieving the good for man, although, as MacIntyre (1984) warned, that description may be 'ambiguous'.

In contrast, *cheng* as central conception holds a different relation with other virtues. The *Doctrine of the Mean* read, 'There are five relationships that concern all humans, and three virtues by which they are fulfilled. The relationships of ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brothers, and of intercourse between friends – these five are the relationships pertaining to all humans. Knowledge (*zhi*), humanity (*ren*), and courage (*yong*) – these three are virtues that apply to all humans, and by which they are practiced is One.' The 'One', as Zhu Xi explained, refers to *cheng* (Zhu, 1983, pp. 28–29). This passage does not allow a conclusion, as Geach did to the relation between Truth and courage, that a brave action should not be properly named as 'courage', if there is no clear involvement of *cheng*. Instead, it simply emphasizes that if there is *cheng*, there must be 'courage', *cheng* is the root of a tree, while 'courage' is its branch. Later, the similar model of root and branch was more clearly illustrated by Zhou Dunyi: '*Cheng* is the root of the five cardinal virtues (humanity, rightness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness) and the source of all activities' (Chan, 1963, p. 466).

Zhu Xi introduced a new model of substance (*ti*) and functions (*yong*) to elucidate the relation between *cheng* and other virtues. 'Question: Zhou said, "*cheng* is the root of the five cardinal virtues." "Does this mean that *cheng* as real principle functions in these five ways?" Answer: "Yes"' (Zhu, 1986, 2393). Let me exemplify this relationship with a case of 'flame'. A flame as substance has a number of functions in reference to various contexts. People may use it for light to read in night, to start a fire for warming in the cold, and to frighten beasts away for a safe sleep in the woods. The point is similar to the model of root and branch: if there is *cheng*, there must be various virtues; for the well-being of a person or state, the most important is to focus on *cheng* and its preservation. Because of this reason, Xunzi (fl. 298–238 B.C) claimed, 'For a gentleman's mind cultivation, there is nothing better than being true to himself. He needs watch nothing, but only his *cheng*' (Wang, 1988). pp. 66.

Cheng as Self-Cultivation

In addition to being defined as a psychological state that ensures a person will be consistent in his conduct, *cheng* means self-cultivation, an inner-oriented action aiming to preserve the state. This usage signifies the third point that differentiates *cheng* from the English sincerity. Mencius said, '*cheng* is the way of Heaven, and thinking to be [a person with] *cheng* is the way of humans' (Lau, 1970, 4A/21).

Because of the identity of human nature/self/*cheng* and the heavenly way, we humans, potentially, are all perfectible. (Doubtless, this 'identity' is an 'absolute presupposition' in the sense of Collingwood (1940). It 'is independent of its being true. It is that the distinction between truth and falsehood does not apply to' it (Collinwood, 1940, p. 32). Traditionally, Confucian thinkers just accepted, and rarely sought for its verification.) However, in actuality, humans are doomed to be born into an imperfect environment that is often short of good moral education and adequate economic supplies. It forces us to be engaged in a struggle with all kinds of temptations and lower desires, and to vacillate between *cheng*'s preservation and its abandonment. Since the struggle is a life-long engagement, the self-cultivation must be also a constant process. The metaphorical words, such as 'ceaseless' (*buxi*), 'everlasting' (*buyi*), or 'non-doubleness (bu'er)', with which the *Doctrine of the Mean* described the trait of *cheng*, reflected clearly the author's concern on the 'constancy' of self-cultivation.

Cheng, or constant self-cultivation represents the Confucian solution to a difficult problem that has troubled Chinese philosophers, as well as their Western counterparts. A comparison of relevant ideas among Western and Confucian thinkers may help to identify the universality of the problem, as well as the trait of Confucian solution.

St Augustine claimed that evil, immorality, wretchedness, and violence were wrong, and punishable by the law of God. However. 'I had known it, and acted as though, I know it not – winked at it, and forgot it' (St Augustine, 1943, 8/7/16, pp. 175–176). Herein he located a fundamental contradiction or conflict between our knowing and action: knowing good could not be necessarily translated into doing good, although the former might be helpful to the latter to certain extent. In many cases, people commit bad acts when being clearly aware that what they are doing is bad. Put differently, they know correctly, but refuse to act in accordance with what they know. It seems, what should be blamed is not knowing, but acting.

To resolve this contradiction, St. Augustine traced the bad acting to its root, which he named as 'carnal will' (or mind). 'My [carnal] will was the enemy master of, and thence had made a chain for me and bound me. Because of a perverse will was lust made; and lust indulged in became custom; and custom not resisted became necessity. By which links, as it were, joined together (whence I termed it as a "chain"), did a hard bondage hold me enthralled' (St Augustine, 1943, 8/5/10, p. 170). Because of the carnal will, humans are inescapably selfish and bad; they cannot love outside themselves, and thus they produced all the misery of the world.

Humans, as St Augustine mentioned, possess also 'spiritual will' as the contender with the carnal one. Nevertheless, it never triumphs over the latter unless God helps. Only when God chooses humans, which they cannot do on their own, can they escape their carnal will, and therefore escape their bad actions. 'There are two kinds of minds in us – one is good, the other evil. They themselves verily are evil when they hold these evil opinions; and they shall become good when they hold the truth, and shall consent unto the truth, that thy apostle may say unto them, "Ye were sometimes darkness, by now are ye light in the Lord" ' (St Augustine, 1943, 8/10/22,

p. 180). In brief, as to St Augustine, God can help humans to eliminate 'carnal will', and therefore to resolve the contradiction of knowing and acting.

Having noticed also the same contradiction, Immanuel Kant, in contrast to St Augustine, focused on the side of knowing for its resolution. According to him, humans possessed an 'ordinary practical reason', an intuitive ability 'to distinguish, in all cases that present themselves, what is good or evil, right or wrong'. It is the 'first principle' of moral knowledge, a principle common to 'every human, even the most ordinary'. Thus, 'There is no need of science or philosophy for knowing what man has to do in order to be honest and good, and indeed to be wise and virtuous' (Kant, 1964, pp. 71–72).

Because of its presence, Kant further argued, 'practical judgment' has a great advantage over 'theoretical judgment'. As for the latter, when ordinary reason ventures to depart from laws of experience and the perceptions of senses, it falls into sheer unintelligibility and self-contradiction, or at least into a chaos of uncertainty, obscurity, and vacillation. On the practical side, however, what occurs is simply the opposite when the ordinary mind excludes all sensuous motives. Now 'it can … have as good hope of hitting the mark as any that a philosopher can promise himself' (Kant, 1964, p. 72). This being so, as Kant inquired,

> Might it not then be more advisable in moral questions to abide by the judgment of ordinary reason and, at the most, to bring in philosophy only in order to set forth the system of morals more fully and intelligibly and to present its rules in a form more convenient for use – but not in order to lead ordinary human intelligence away from its happy simplicity in respect of action and to set it by means of philosophy on a new path of enquiry and instruction? (Kant, 1964, p. 72)

To this question Kant offered a negative answer: 'Innocence is a splendid thing, only it has the misfortune not to keep well and to be easily misled' (Kant, 1964, p. 72). From the human needs and inclinations, which stand as a powerful counter-weight to the command of reason, there arises a disposition that he termed as 'natural dialectic'. It is 'to quibble with these strict laws of duty, to throw doubt on their validity or at least on their purity and strictness, and to make them, where possible, more adapted to our wishes and inclinations; that is, to pervert their very foundations and destroy their whole dignity – a result which in the end even ordinary human reason is unable to approve' (Kant, 1964, p. 73). Kant concluded that 'ordinary practical reason' was not reliable for serving as the foundation of moral judgments, because it always entangled with the interference of 'natural dialectic', of which we humans, in principle, cannot completely get rid. So, the correct path is to conduct 'a full critique of our reason' to establish the 'categorical imperative' as the guidance of all moral actions.

Kant's 'ordinary practical reason' has a Confucian counterpart, 'good knowledge (*liangzhi*) and good ability (*liangneng*)'. According to Mencius, 'The ability possessed by humans without their having acquired it by learning is "good ability", and the knowledge possessed by them without deliberation is "good knowledge" ' (Lau, 1970, 15A/15). It leads people from knowing the good to do it. Wang Yangming (1472–1528), the Neo-Confucian philosopher, made the most elaborate explanation of this Mencian idea.

> The sense of right and wrong requires no deliberation to know, nor does it depend on learning to function. This is why it is called 'good knowledge.' It is my nature endowed by Heaven, the original substance of my mind, naturally intelligent, shinning, clear, and understanding. Whenever a thought or a wish arises, my mind's faculty of good knowledge itself is always conscious of it. Whether it is good or evil, my mind's good knowing faculty itself also knows it. It has nothing to do with others. (Wang, 1986, p. 191).

However, departing from Kant at this point, he claimed that 'good knowledge' is reliable in any time, any circumstances; it cannot be clouded or distorted by 'natural dialects' in any form. As for the two sides in the contradiction of knowing and acting, the 'knowing' refers to 'good knowledge', belonging to the category of Heaven; while the acting belongs to that of 'human', involving a variety of artificial concerns and intentions. The former is always correct, and people can only blame the latter for the occurrence of immoral conducts.

The solution of the contradiction lies in *cheng*, or 'making one's will [in the state of] *cheng* (*chengyi*), as phrased by the *Great Learning*. It is a moral effort to distance people from the 'self-deception' (*ziqi*) that denies the warning from the 'good knowledge', and to tune people's acting to the rhythm of their 'good knowledge'. Ideally, it will habituate people's good acting, enabling them to respond spontaneously when facing moral choices, in a way consistent with 'good knowledge'.

Wang, with his doctrine of the 'unity of the knowledge and action' (*zhi xing heyi*) described an ideal state to which *cheng*/self-cultivation leads. 'The *Great Learning* points to true knowledge [meaning, "good knowledge"] and action for people to see, saying that they are "like loving beautiful colors and hating bad odors". Seeing beautiful colors appertains to knowledge, while loving beautiful colors appertains to action. However, as soon as one sees that beautiful color, he has already loved it. It is not that he sees it first and then make up his mind to love it' (Wang, 1986, p. 6). His statement revealed two traits of the unity, naturalness and simultaneity: 'seeing' and 'loving' are both natural response to the beautiful color, and occur at the same time. To underscore the route to the state and the validity of *cheng*/self-cultivation, I would add another example from our daily life.

Think of this case: driving on a highway and intending to change to left lane, you, all of a sudden, realize that another car just behind you has already occupied the lane. Without any thinking or reasoning, you spontaneously shift back to the original lane. This correct action is not a natural gift, but the result of long-time driving training; it is essentially consistent with what sound reasoning or thinking tells you, although the latter does not actually function as instructor at that moment. The ethical lesson derived from this case is that, a long-time training under the guidance of 'good knoweldge' can internalize people a psychological state that enables them to act as natural and correct as 'good knowledge' instructs. At this point, knowing and acting become the same, or as Wang termed, they are united together.

For Wang, as well as for Mencius, this unity is principally reachable. As proved by Confucius' reference to himself, 'At seventy, I could follow my heart's desires without transgressing the line' (Zhu, 1983, 2/4, p. 54). In this case, to move following

his "desires" means to act naturally and spontaneously, and not to transgress the "line" means to restrain one's action within the boundary of morality. They occur simultaneously, without consulting each other, but parallel to each other. That is the final result of *cheng*/self-cultivation and the Confucian solution to the contradiction of knowing and acting. I believe, comparing with Western thinkers represented by St Augustine and Kant, their approach is more reasonable and convincing, although its pursuit demands a life-long endeavor.

Conclusion

The fact that sincerity and *cheng* are similar in philology justifies the long-time and popular rendering of *cheng* as 'sincerity' in English translations and essays. However, these two terms are substantially different in philosophical significance. In the European medieval ages, as well as in ancient times, sincerity was a secondary value, dependent on or affiliated to factual or religious 'truth'. It could be either positive or negative in reference to its service or disservice for the truth. After the later trend of Romanticism, sincerity was released from its entanglement with factual or religious truth, and turned to be a value by itself. The renewed 'sincerity' contained a tension between individuality and universality, meaning 'to be true to one's (individualistic) self', and, in the meanwhile, standing as a general criterion to evaluate and judge people's thinking and conduct. This may lead to either negative or positive consequences in a society. In contrast, 'true' and 'self' in Confucian *cheng* respectively refer to the universal true feeling and the universal human nature. It is an independent value from the very beginning, the root or substance of all the other virtues, and the sole path to the solution of the contradiction between knowledge and action. In principle, it precludes any probability of 'doing bad sincerely', and therefore, in theory, will never lead to negative social consequences.

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