

2 An Origins Myth for the *Analects*

In a sermon on gratitude, Ralph Waldo Emerson eloquently observes the force and import of the examples of others for our moral lives. He remarks:

[A] cause of lively gratitude is a blessing a little beyond home, the acquaintance we have, near or remote, with persons of great worth. A cultivated heart and mind, a finished character, is the most excellent gift of God, the most excellent thing out of us that we can form an idea of. It is the plainest revelation of God, the thing most like God, more plain and persuasive than any book can be. How far more exciting is this spectacle of living virtues than the dead letter which describes the same virtues. I look upon the persons of fine intellectual endowments and of magnanimous dispositions whom it is or has been my fortune to know, as my apostles and prophets. They perform to us the office of good angels; they show us to what height active virtue can be carried; the thought of them comes to us in the hour of despondency and of temptation, and holds us up from falling.¹

As Emerson suggests, for many of us moral guidance and sustenance are to be found in the examples of others. Such examples may be found in distant quarters where renowned moral heroes of past ages reside in cultural memory and they may be found near to hand in those who share our supper tables, but wherever they are found, they affect us with distinctive force. Whatever apparently profound truths we may gather from explicit moral instruction, other people are compelling with a directness and power rarely matched in abstract moral formulae or principles. We see, we admire, and we seek some measure of what we admire in our own lives and character.

It is difficult to overstate the role exemplars play in personal moral development. Much of moral learning, particularly for children, occurs through observation of others. Where we consider carefully what we receive through witnessing the conduct and character of others, we find much to appreciate. Despite how deeply woven into the fabric of moral experience such exemplars are, however, it is difficult to place such figures and their influence upon us in moral theory. That exemplars are practically important to us is a given, but in theory we seek a level of abstraction and generality in some ways out of keeping with the *way* exemplars function to inspire. As

Emerson implies, exemplars are in no small measure compelling precisely because they are in the mix, doing what they do or being who they are in the often messy and complex conditions of a life. Indeed, to obscure this fact about them in favor of generalizing any abstract moral truths they might indicate would seem to betray the nature of their influence upon us, rendering them the stuff of “dead letters.”

Despite the difficulty of capturing exemplars in theory, however, they undoubtedly do inform our theoretical efforts. In fact, in some important sense, they regulate theory. As Linda Zagzebski observes, no matter what moral theory we adopt, any satisfying and acceptable theory will have to answer to our exemplars. Moral theory arises in part out of a desire to explain moral practices and beliefs, and the identification of exemplars is “already embedded in our moral practices.”² Consequently, the capacity of a moral theory to confirm and justify our admiration of exemplars is one of the tests it must pass to be judged adequate.³ More fundamentally, “[i]f a theory has the consequence that neither Jesus Christ, nor Socrates, nor the Buddha is a good person, we should question whether the theory is a theory about what we call a good person. There is a breakdown at the conceptual level, not simply a disagreement about cases.”⁴ Exemplars, then, operate as a pre-theoretical standard for moral theory, our identification of them one of the bare facts about us moral theory must explain. Indeed, as Zagzebski suggests, where a moral theory fails to include a relevant company of them, we do not merely doubt its adequacy, we doubt whether it *qualifies as a moral theory at all*. Exemplars “demand of us therefore the most fervent acknowledgements.” Where we seek personal moral cultivation, they demand appreciation; where we seek moral theory, they demand inclusion.

The exemplarist moral theory proposed by Zagzebski, and the one I wish to adapt here, is inaugurated by recognizing the fixed nature of our identification of exemplars, the way in which they exercise a sort of prior restraint on where moral theory can go. We may occasionally discover that we have been wrong in considering someone an exemplar, but we more typically trust that those we admire are worthy of our admiration. Again, our trust is such that we would confidently dismiss any moral theory that appeared to undermine too many of these more immediate valuations. Exemplarism holds, most basically, that these inchoate, pre-theoretical identifications of exemplars are not merely a test of moral theory—they can be its foundation and structure. We can, that is, conceive moral theory to be a working out in abstract concepts and formal structure *how* exemplars come to command and summon our admiration. Our appreciation of the “spectacle of living virtues” is not a phenomenon derived from antecedently understood and internalized standards of moral judgment; it is the source of such judgments. Exemplars are, as Emerson would have it and in a quite precise sense, *prophets*. Their lives prefigure the value to which our theories can

attest and the theoretical charge resides in drawing them out of the mix and muddle of their specific circumstances to relate in abstract form what makes them good and why we have found them so.

AN EXEMPLARIST ORIGINS MYTH

Before addressing the formal elements of an exemplarist moral theory and discussing their potential for application to the *Analects*, let me simply anticipate the direction of my argument and sketch in brief the story about the *Analects* I aim to tell. Much of what I have to offer here functions like nothing so much as an origins myth, an account that purports to explain, as heuristic if not as fact, how the moral sensibility of the text comes about. This explanation, or myth, derives in no small measure from what the text is like.

The *Analects* most immediately presents itself as a record of the philosophical reflections of Confucius. It details the ethical claims Confucius made, presents his moral assessments of various issues and personae of the day, and illuminates some of the patterns of reasoning he employed. It would, however, miss the mark to consider the text as only doing this, for the *Analects* is also a biography of sorts. It is not merely about what Confucius claimed, but about what he did and who he was. And what he did and who he was constitute, so the *Analects*' authors clearly suggest, compelling reasons to take him as a model, an exemplary moral figure we would do well to emulate. Not unlike Plato's representation of Socrates, the presentation of Confucius in the *Analects* yields a doubling effect.⁵ Moral instruction is delivered through the philosopher's claims and through his life; we are at once enjoined to attend carefully to what the philosopher says and to attend carefully to him and his manner of life. Philosophy and biography here converge and it is difficult to imagine the abstract claims, be they those of Socrates or Confucius, assuming the same command on the moral imagination absent the man. However, unlike the case of Plato with his Socrates, the authors of the *Analects* appear to take their lead in offering instruction in this way from the teacher himself. They appear, that is, to proffer Confucius as a model just as Confucius himself proffers others as models.

Confucius' own counsel notably and markedly emphasizes the need to look to the examples offered by others for moral guidance. Confucius avers that the learner ought look to those in her acquaintance for her own cultivation: "When you meet persons of exceptional character think to stand shoulder to shoulder with them; meeting persons of little character, look inward and examine yourself" (4.17). The learner is enjoined to become a careful reader of others (2.10). Confucius also directs his students to specific others. He cites historical figures, including the Sage Kings and the

myth is, then, akin to one who, lacking a complete descriptive account, nonetheless can point, even energetically and decisively point, to what he means. For them, in some sense, all the text's abstract discussions reflect just *that*, Confucius.

In sum, what I suggest that early China does not have, and gains through the activity of Confucius and the *Analects*' authors, is the sort of careful and acute attention that a specialist can provide, a gathering in of data, a sorting and ordering of features, and the crafting of a general abstract account. The origins myth, as I have detailed it so far, is perhaps in some ways fanciful. It presents the text, and in particular Confucius and the authors, in ways that may not immediately well suit what we find there. There is, for example, something decidedly odd in seeing Confucius as chemist, as harboring an interest in precision. Likewise, there is something perhaps willfully romantic in seeing the *Analects*' authors as motivated by captivation with Confucius. While I concede such oddities, I think some of this strangeness dissipates where we couple direct reference with an account of imitation. I want now to move away from the rather technical language of direct reference and begin to assay how the pre-theoretical identification of exemplars coincides with emulation, the moral practice I believe core to the *Analects* account.

WANTING TO BE LIKE

I have so far largely focused on the chain of social communication that accounts for our capacity to speak meaningfully about the "good person" in the absence of a satisfying descriptive account. A core contention in a direct reference account is that we can identify good people pre-theoretically without an articulate set of abstract criteria for goodness. This claim, notably, finds supplement and support in the structure of human learning and development. Where direct reference to natural kinds can provide an analogue for how the pre-theoretical identification of exemplars occurs, human development can provide an analogue for the distinctively evaluative responses exemplars inspire.

Much of human learning, particularly the early learning of childhood, occurs through the observation of others. The child inhabits a world in which she sees much and understands little. And much of what she sees that most directly bears on her own development and conduct will be what she finds in the behavior and comportment of others. Long before the child understands or can apply moral precepts, she will have developed a sensibility about what it is to be a person, and to be a good person, by watching and imitating others. In other words, emulation in the absence of compelling conceptual structures is not only plausible, it is a practice at the heart of human development. As Zagzebski observes, children regularly demonstrate "the contrasting experiences of wanting to be like some persons and

wanting not to be like some others,” and they clearly do so in the absence of a “prior concept of the good upon which such desires rest.”³⁶ The primitive desire to imitate notably begins long before the child’s cognitive powers are developed and “no conceptual conditions are necessary for the operation of the imitation mechanism.”³⁷ As a child maps and tracks what she observes in others, she neither has nor requires working concepts such as “good” or “imitation.” Instead, she merely and often unconsciously wants to be like some of those she sees and wants not to be like others. With increasing cognitive maturity, the capacity to reflect on such desires develops and these experiences take on an increasing complex character, a character that in some measure tracks the exemplarist’s mode of inquiry.

First, it is important to note the scope of the imitative mechanism. Despite its early primitive character, imitation appears to derive from a quite comprehensive attention. For in formulating the desire to be like another, a child displays an interest in appropriating not merely the actions of others, but also the attitudes, emotions, and demeanor. In her brute admiration of others, she aims to do what she perceives others to do, believe as they believe, feel as they feel, and appear as they appear. Admiration registers as a complex experiential phenomenon, its object irreducible to any single element of how others appear to us, and imitation is correspondingly complex. The breadth of this early capacity to observe and imitate across a broad spectrum of features is mirrored in the breadth of the exemplarist theorist’s interest. In seeking to parse and understand the features of exemplars, the exemplarist moral theorist is as much child as chemist. Or, rather, the exemplarist finds in our early capacity to entertain complexity and appropriate it in our moral learning a promising root from which a more systematized but similarly holistic attention can grow. She too is focused on the full complement of qualities a model can display.

Second, the primitive desire upon which imitation rests for children, their “wanting to be like,” appears to develop naturally and rather seamlessly from a rather raw desire to a form of basic evaluative judgment. In Zagzebski’s idiom, “the move from ‘I want to be like R and not like S’ to ‘R is better than S’ is not only genetically primitive, but also basic to moral thinking.”³⁸ Increasing maturity and cognitive development inaugurates the potential for reflective comparison. Here again, however, as Zagzebski notes, this capacity seems to develop in advance of the sort of conceptual schemata that we take as adequate to explaining such claims. Young children are unacquainted with the moral vocabulary that could distinguish one potential model from another. Wanting to be like S but not like R transmutes into the “judgment” that S is better than R through some mechanism antecedently present. Whether we can explain this mechanism or not, and whether such primitive judgments prove reliable, “[w]hat is most important is just that we do have such an ability, and that we have it prior to the development of evaluative concepts.”³⁹ For in this we find a natural pattern in human development wherein it is clear that reasoning can and does

follow, rather than leading, raw evaluative responses. Like direct reference to exemplars, we see here a phenomenon in which the pre-theoretical begins rather organically to assume a complexity that foreshadows the theoretical attitude. Just as direct reference marks a path to the provisional identification of properties, so too the primitive desire to be like another appears to mark a path to evaluative claims.

Third, while the experience of wanting to be like another registers in small children with what we might consider an undistinguishing generality or holism, their capacity for imitation nonetheless evinces a certain native skill with extrapolating from context. They appear, that is, to display in brute form an ability to discern from a model what is contextually-dependent and what is in some fashion relevant to themselves. Where they imitate, they do not seek to re-create the experience or circumstance of another, but to apply in their own experience and circumstance *something* of what they see in the model. Even while yet unable to specify what constitutes the *something* they pick out as imitable, they nonetheless do pick it out, lifting it from one context and applying it in others. Such is to say that children are already, at very young ages, possessed of something like a narrative sensibility, an ability to apply the difference between wanting to be like another and mere replication. Where a child sees his mother drop and break a glass yet react with equanimity, he is unlikely to take from this that he also should drop a glass in order to achieve his own equanimity. Where he wants to be like her, he will instead await some new “challenging” circumstance in his own experience and then approximate her reaction in his own. He is, in this manner, engaged in a primitive sorting process in which a feature embedded in a narrative context is picked out and generalized for appropriation and use in a new context. This too constitutes a brute form of a capacity exemplarism seeks to develop, reflecting the movement from comprehensive attention to many particulars to a selective distillation and generalization that enables emulation across a variety of experience.

In sum, the developmental trajectory of childhood suggests important natural affinities with the exemplarist effort to root moral theory in persons. While exemplarism posits the moral theorist as possessed of an uncommon curiosity, it is to one of the most common of human experiences that she turns her attention. The exemplarist’s attention is, in some fashion, an extension and elaboration of brute desire, the impulse to admire *that*, to want to be like *that*. In this way, as Zagzebski observes, exemplarist “method, in spite of its high metaphysical tone, is consistent with a form of naturalism.”⁴⁰ Where direct reference renders intelligible our pre-theoretical identification of exemplars and accounts for the confidence we invest in them, the brute capacity to admire and imitate suggests primitive emotional factors of experience that can help structure a developed account of moral emulation of exemplars. Such is to say that the “expert” perspective that gathers in data and parses it to devise a satisfying abstract descriptive account functions in concert with quite basic capacities for feeling and

learning. In this way, exemplarism can ride on a phenomenon that shapes our earliest development and that persists throughout life, appearing each time we find ourselves admiring and drawn to emulate. To move beyond the merely given, the exemplarist seeks to lend order and form to the brute, and it is to the elements of this order I will now turn.

THE RANGE OF EXEMPLARS

To the extent that early and developmental facts about human beings point to an untutored sensibility of use in a more mature consciousness and an elaborated moral theory rooted in exemplars, they also indicate that both the way we follow models and the models themselves are complicated matters. I expect there are a number of ways an exemplarist theory might seek to sharpen and define these matters, but I here want only to sketch the account of exemplars I think best suited to what the *Analects* offers. While I shall later consider three specific figures in the text, here I simply outline briefly the more general range of exemplars and scope of imitation I think operating in the text.

As is evident in my brief treatment of early childhood, imitation can run along several tracks. We can, and generally do, imitate selectively. Children do this in ways difficult to assay. They may often imitate features of their exemplars based on desires an adult would find opaque or even arbitrary. Worse, they may find a mother's occasionally bursting into of a string of curses more enticing to imitate than her more typical equanimity. While the imitation capacities of children thus do not sketch any easy path to the moral practice of emulation, they may nonetheless indicate something of its complex structure. The notion of exemplars I wish to employ in discussion of the *Analects* is not confined to treating only the sagely as inspiring emulation. Instead, I judge the diversity of the narrative figures proposed by the *Analects* to mirror the selectivity of the human capacity for imitation and to recommend that we think of exemplars as presenting to us in a number of broadly defined types.

The most obvious species of exemplar is just the sort of figure who can "give [the] heart and mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries" (2.4). These are the exemplars who present themselves as worthy of emulation in most if not all respects, or who function as moral giants, looming largest where the moral imagination seeks to locate the best of what a human being can be. About these figures, and the singular Confucius in particular, I shall have much more to say, but here it is important merely to observe at the outset that, as I understand the *Analects*, while these figures are understood to have a uniquely comprehensive virtue, they are not taken as perfect.⁴¹ Indeed, as I shall argue, part of what renders this species of exemplar so compelling is that he is understood to have the same opportunities for moral failure and to have the same need

In sum, exemplars appear in various guises in the *Analects*. If something like the origins myth is taken as a plausible way to understand the *Analects*, then it is clear that the narrative elements of the text, the depictions of these exemplars, require a greater share of our attention. In particular, where we find specific individuals described or events recounted, we must, insofar as the text permits, read these as stories that may inspire and inform the text's conceptual work, its abstract claims about particular virtues, dispositions, and qualities of character. We cannot, in other words, treat the passages that depict people's behavior or recount events to provide mere supplement to or illustration of the text's conceptual claims. Nor should we too easily see a conceptual claim as decisively or exhaustively interpreting such passages. The more these passages seem to capture something of the complexity of people and the lives they lead, the more likely they are to root multiple abstract reflections on value and virtue. Moreover, we must resist the tendency to ignore depictions of apparently opaque or prosaic behavior. As Edward Slingerland observes, many of the passages describing Confucius' personal demeanor and behavior in particular are "often skipped over in embarrassment" by scholars who are "appalled by the seemingly pointless detail and apparent rigidity of behavior."²⁴⁶ An exemplarist reading of the *Analects* will not trust blindly that *every* detail is important, but will see all narrative detail as a target for close scrutiny.

THE EXEMPLARIST APPROACH

We can characterize more formally what an exemplarist reading of the *Analects* will entail by acknowledging, first, the expectation that the text's various moral concepts will be in some measure traceable to its dramatic personae. We do not of course have access to the presumably rich company of exemplars to which Confucius and the *Analects*' authors would have been privy. There are, we should assume, many who inspired Confucius and his students but are never recorded in the text and consequently lost to us. However, insofar as the text captures a sizeable company of exemplars composed of historical figures, Confucius' contemporaries, and Confucius himself, we should expect to find some of the virtues abstractly characterized in the text rooted in the text's personae.

In addition to reading carefully the narrative figures of the text, an exemplarist account will understand Confucius' many general remarks as efforts to devise conceptual schemata and a moral vocabulary that capture the force and effect of exemplars. We will, in short, treat the *Analects*' philosophical claims as a record of how Confucius, *qua* expert, assays and parses the exemplars of his experience. In this, to reiterate, Confucius simultaneously builds on an established moral vocabulary and refines it. He and the *Analects*' authors are linked to a semantic community but are unique in that they seek to lend order and explanation, as well

as precision, to the informal understanding already in play. Exemplarism thus requires that we look to the text's schemata and moral vocabulary with a view to how they operate to limn with abstract generality what exemplars offer and how they refine and sharpen established explanations that are judged inadequate.

Finally, my own sense of the text is that its conceptual work is in some manner unfinished. By this, I do not mean to suggest that the text itself is incomplete and, in any case, it is difficult to know what assessments such as "complete" or "incomplete" would signify for a text composed in the fashion of the *Analects*. I mean instead that, on an exemplarist paradigm, we should expect that the work of analyzing exemplars just is the sort of task that has no ready, and certainly no quick, end. Here then we encounter a significant disanalogy between "water" and "good person." While we can readily recognize a "species essence" of water, a "species essence" of the good person is far more elusive and inquiry is far less likely to yield an answer on the decisive order of H₂O. Instead of an "essence," I think the *Analects* pursues a more modest course and largely seeks to assay what makes the exemplar different from other people and what makes our experience of exemplars different from our experiences of other people.

Like other virtue ethical accounts of the *Analects*, an exemplarist account will understand moral cultivation to consist in the development of virtues, understood to be qualities of character expressed holistically in the virtuous person's actions, dispositions, and demeanor. What distinguishes an exemplarist account from other virtue ethical accounts is that the principal mechanism for the acquisition of virtue rests in exemplars, where acquisition is taken as *both* personal and theoretical. That is, moral learners acquire virtue by emulating exemplars and cultivating the virtues that exemplars limn and our *concepts* of the virtues are acquired from investigating the features of exemplars we identify in the pre-theoretical fashion I have described and the responses we have to them. What it means conceptually to be a good person is to be a person like *that*, and our abstract accounts of the virtues are conceptually rooted in *that*, in particular good people. While my contention throughout is that the people of the *Analects* are the "one corner" from which its shape emerges, I nonetheless begin with what is most apparently distant from them and with the metatheoretical issues that have, I believe, posed the greatest interpretive challenge for a moral theoretical account of the text.

4 Exemplarist Elements in the *Analects*

Exemplarism may operate to close perceived gaps in the structure of the *Analects*' moral reasoning, but much of what I have so far addressed reflects metatheoretical interests we cannot assume Confucius or the text's authors to have shared. They may not have worried in the same manner as we about theoretical foundations, general motivation, or the clarity of concepts. I thus now move toward an exemplarist analysis of what the text affirmatively offers. Exemplarism invites us to attend carefully to the narrative features of the text, to its depiction of its dramatic personae and the story it tells about them. In this chapter, I wish to draw closer to these figures and sketch the way this story is told, the conceptual features and commitments that I expect are drawn from the experience of exemplars, the moral vocabulary and priorities that I think sourced in exemplars. As before, I proceed in something of a reversal of exemplarist method, beginning with the conceptual features of the text and showing how these may issue from admiration and scrutiny of exemplars. I hope to show that just as we can explain some of the *Analects*' "silences" with an exemplarist rendering of the text, so too we can account for some of the text's most pronounced interests, commitments, and patterns of reasoning.

The features I include here are diverse but by no means exhaustive. Some concern quite specific commitments and priorities in evidence in the text—for example, the privileging of tradition in guiding moral reasoning. Some concern how the text appears to go about its business—for example, its free mixing of moral and aesthetic value. However, while I here pick out a select group of the text's features for close analysis and neglect or only briefly address others, my contention that exemplarism well fits what the *Analects* appears to offer ultimately rests neither on any one of these features nor on these features taken in sum. What more recommends an exemplarist reading, I believe, is what François Jullien describes as an "atmosphere" of the text rather than an idea, or series of ideas.¹ I understand this atmosphere to be best captured where, as Robert Eno suggests, we treat early Confucianism "more as a community of men than as a body of doctrine" and, in particular, treat the *Analects* as a record of Confucianism's first community.² The atmosphere of the *Analects* is permeated by the lived efforts of its

protagonists to craft and enact a way of life. Indeed, their philosophizing is itself, first and foremost, an element of the way they make. Put another way, the *Analects* is primarily about doing rather than thinking, and its thinking emerges from the struggles of doing, from efforts to discern the “what,” “why,” and “how” of a way of life. In addressing the various conceptual movements of the text I treat in this chapter, then, I seek less to establish exemplarism than to demonstrate its fit to the “what,” “why,” and “how.” While I do not assign priority to the “doctrine” over the “community of men,” I here seek to show how exemplarism will explain and conceptually frame the more doctrinal products of this community, its intellectual commitments and apparent patterns of reasoning. I begin with one of the *Analects*’ most pronounced intellectual commitments, its confidence in the authority and efficacy of tradition.

TRADITION AND NOVELTY

The way, or *dao* 道, the *Analects* proposes is, Confucius frequently suggests, a way well traveled, a path already established in long-standing and reliable traditions. Tradition figures in the *Analects*’ moral reasoning as a formidable force in ethical development. Indeed, Confucius avers that he does not “innovate,” but “transmits” established tradition (7.1). He even appears to suggest a kind of self regulation in moral learning that will treat traditional ritual as a psychological and behavioral boundary, telling his best student, Yan Hui, not to look at, listen to, or speak about anything that violates traditional ritual (12.1). Despite Confucius’ explicit avowals of fidelity to tradition, however, there is an abiding sense that the cumulative effect of the *Analects*’ moral instruction recommends the incorporation of *some* creative impulse into our interactions with the givens of tradition. Jiyuan Yu succinctly captures what many scholars have observed: Confucius professes adherence to tradition, but “to take seriously Confucius’ claim that he does nothing more than hand down the old, however, is as naïve as taking seriously Socrates’ claim that he knows nothing.”³ Adherence to tradition, the text suggests, is not a simple matter of programmatically applying rules. As Philip J. Ivanhoe explains, where we understand tradition, and traditional ritual in particular, to provide forms that function akin to rules, Confucius suggests “that one will run the rules and not be run by the rules.”⁴ Some “innovation” seems not only permissible, but necessary to what the *Analects* recommends. Nonetheless, the *Analects*’ most explicit claims suggest a role for tradition in some measure out of keeping with the impulse toward novelty and creativity so evident in the cumulative effect of the text and in the persona of Confucius. In consequence, any satisfying interpretation must find some way to explain this apparent tension.

Where we acknowledge that the *Analects* endorses both tradition and novelty, the challenge the *Analects* poses to the interpreter is just how to

account for an appropriate exchange between the two. While I believe the text does make clear that tradition, properly understood, cannot function in a manner akin to moral rules, neither does it provide a ready to hand way, much less an abstract formula, for distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate innovation. My own view is that the only scale the *Analects* provides for weighing such matters is to be found in the text's exemplars, that the appropriate balance is indicated in the lives of specific personae, principally Confucius himself. Such is to say that the dilemma is largely unresolved by the conceptual work of the text. We learn from its abstract claims, for example, that adherence to moral norms requires *shu* 恕, a leavening measure of human sympathy that will preclude mere rule following, but there remains some ambiguity about when and how to incorporate a flexible and responsive creativity. For there are also occasions during which it is clear that adherence to norms *in spite of* even potent sympathy is necessary.⁵ It may well be that the sort of balance necessary for genuinely moral conduct simply resists conceptual formulation, residing firmly in the territory of particular circumstance and thus requiring a practical judgment that cannot be abstractly formalized. Whatever the case, I here want to suggest that an exemplarist account allows us to contextualize the text's conceptual ambiguity on this score and resolves some of the apparent tension.

Where we apply something like the origins myth to the *Analects*, we understand Confucius' inquiry to begin in tradition. His efforts to develop an elaborated conceptual account of virtue rest firmly on a trust that tradition—here the inchoate ability to point to relevant models for emulation, as well as the moral culture they initiate—is substantially on target. He does not “innovate,” but seeks to give formal structure and sense to what cultural practice of direct reference and the semantic community already provide. While I think the effort to lend sense to existing practice effectively invites novelty, let me first describe how I understand Confucius' orientation toward tradition and the textual evidence I see for this.

Confucius appears to acknowledge that moral practice, and emulation in particular, often does occur in the absence of any exacting understanding. Moreover, he seems to take this both as a given and as a desirable state of affairs. Parents function for children as models long before children can characterize and conceptualize the parent's qualities of character.⁶ The “common people” can be drawn to follow a way in the absence of understanding (8.9). The virtuous ruler inspires his subordinates to good conduct as wind moves the grass (12.19). The “whole empire” will defer to one who can achieve *ren* “for the space of a day” (12.1). Indeed, Confucius suggests that even uncultured “barbarians” will recognize and succumb to the good influence of a worthy person (9.14). These claims make evident that understanding is not a precondition for outcomes that conform to and foster virtue. While these outcomes may not exemplify virtue in its most robust form, where understanding will accompany emulation, they are nonetheless presented as consonant with virtue. Moreover, contrary to

any suspicion that Confucius here confesses pessimism about the capacities of ordinary people, on my view these remarks may be taken to express a confidence in them. That is, Confucius' observations that people can operate in this way, led by exemplary others, may be read to endorse trust in the inchoate ability to admire. "Expert" understanding is neither possible nor necessary for all, but rather than functioning as a disappointing truth, this signals the generally reliable success of ordinary understanding. As Confucius might say, the whole world inclines to it or, in Zagzebski's idiom, we may not know what qualities constitute a good person, but we do know "where to look," and this important fact about us yields an informal moral practice in which we can have some confidence.⁷

It is noteworthy that the pattern of movement here is evident in the text's more targeted consideration of various more specific moral practices. As I have argued elsewhere, the text's considerations of mourning and filiality both appear to accept and endorse common practice.⁸ In Confucius' remarks about ritual mourning and filiality, we find him not only recommending preservation or revitalization of established traditional norms, but on occasion defending these against challenge (e.g., 2.7, 17.18). In this, he seems to suggest that there ought be terribly compelling reasons if reconsideration of existing norms is to be warranted and he appears to worry that reasons often given are more likely to reveal a fault in the character of the one giving them. For example, when his student Zaiwo challenges the three year mourning period tradition would dictate for the deaths of parents, Confucius questions Zaiwo's lack of feeling (17.21). Perhaps more to the point for my purposes, when he criticizes Zaiwo, he also pointedly notes that the ritual mourning period is "observed throughout the empire." That is, he appears to identify hubris in Zaiwo's implicit doubt about, and desire to contravene, what is widely and popularly recognized as good practice. While this exchange with Zaiwo is quite explicit, the general view it suggests pervades the *Analects*. Confucius seems to operate on two joint assumptions: that common moral practices reflect a certain informal wisdom and that even those who do not apprehend the wisdom in them may yet benefit from them.⁹

In sum, the movement of reasoning in the *Analects*' discussion of moral practice often begins with some trust that what people *already do* well directs our moral attention and reasoning. The philosophical turn consists in enlivening these practices with careful reflection that elaborates, and gives sense to, what is already established as norm. On my reading, it is here, with the search for greater precision and refined understanding, that novelty enters in. Exemplarism invites us to re-frame the question of Confucius' posture toward tradition and to consider whether the confidence in which he begins remains unshaken and also whether the process of scrutinizing moral practice to lend it clarity and refinement alters it. I want to suggest that Confucius arrives at a qualified confidence but that his expert scrutiny must also be understood to alter tradition and introduce some novelty.

At a most basic level, the careful scrutiny Confucius brings to the phenomena of exemplars and the traditions associated with them does introduce a novel manner of understanding them. A deepened examination of exemplars will expand how informally recognized qualities of character are understood. To recall my previous example, where informal, “non-expert” attention may yield identification of a “property” such as “filial” (孝 *xiao*) as belonging to the exemplar, under Confucius’ analysis, “filial” thickens into a designation evoking a rich body of behavioral, emotional, and dispositional qualities. So too, closer scrutiny may disclose features of exemplars that are altogether less obvious or more difficult to discern. An exemplar who declines to do what adherence to norms would seem to demand yet nonetheless features *as* an exemplar initiates an enriched understanding of the role of sympathy and, more broadly, practical judgment in the development of virtue.¹⁰ In short, the process of querying exemplars will provide new detail to explanations already in currency, as well as reveal previously undiscerned aspects of exemplars. Insofar as Confucius is engaged in such a process, what he offers will indeed *register* as novel and creative to those who witness it. Whether it *is* novel and creative, I think, remains to be seen.

It is important to acknowledge that exemplarism cannot resolve whether Confucius’ deepened account constitutes genuine novelty on this score, whether the sense of his creativity is merely felt or actual. How we resolve this, I would argue, will largely track how we understand the activities of a chemist. That is, when the chemist announces for the first time that “water is H₂O,” do we understand that she has thereby introduced something new into the world or do we instead understand her merely to have revealed a long-standing truth, a truth that feels new to us only because we had not heretofore apprehended it? We informally refer to such announcements as “discoveries,” as though the scientist is but a lens through which we see more clearly what is, yet even a cursory study of the history of science complicates the case. While it is beyond the scope of my argument to address the intricacies of this discussion, it is enough here to observe that the whether and how scientific activity constitutes a form of creative activity is an open question. So too, on my exemplarist account, is the matter of Confucius’ creativity.¹¹ In both cases, we must minimally acknowledge the introduction of a new idiom and a new way of interacting with familiar phenomena. In these respects at least, exemplarism works against any easy identification of Confucius’ posture with a straightforward conservatism.

While the exemplarist process of scrutiny will produce at least a felt novelty, it also can provide what I think is unambiguously a genuine novelty. At a rather basic level, unlike the chemist who ostensibly merely describes her subject, when Confucius describes the features of exemplars, he also prescribes moral aspiration. His work aims at a normative end and, insofar as his new idiom introduces refinements of understanding, he refines understanding of that end. Thus, even if we merely see exemplars more

clearly, clarity may change moral practice by altering or enriching just what we seek to do in emulating them. A second and more elaborate species of novelty is to be found in how increasing clarity can shift the company of exemplars in new directions. Exemplarism begins with a data set composed of those exemplars we have identified pre-theoretically. Yet while our pre-theoretical admiration guides and constrains theory, it does not do so utterly. While an initial company of exemplars fix the reference for the “good person,” the membership of this company, the catalog of individuals who belong to it, is itself never fixed. Instead, the list of exemplars will, as understanding is refined and generations pass, undergo revision and expansion. This movement may introduce a genuine novelty in at least two ways, both of which I find featured in the *Analects*.

First, while our pre-theoretical identifications of exemplars carry a significant confidence, they are, as I have already noted, readily granted as defeasible. So too is our provisional specifying of properties we believe indicated by these exemplars. Direct reference allows us to pick out a generally trustworthy set of “good people” and to expand the set to include others, but it does not vouchsafe that all who are in our set will, upon closer scrutiny, belong there. This is evident if we shift to another of Kripke’s natural kind examples, gold.¹² The informal capacity to identify a group of objects as gold does not rule out that among those we identify may be some fool’s gold. So too for exemplars: among those we identify may be some “fool’s exemplars.” And like fool’s gold, the fool’s exemplar will likely only be exposed as such where informal examination becomes increasingly refined and expert. Such is to say that as the study of exemplars and the provisional properties identified in them develops into an increasingly clarified set of abstract criteria, we achieve the means to revise inchoate experiences of admiration into considered judgments, and those judgments may exclude some of our original set.

While it is clear that Confucius does not radically revisit the company of exemplars and the tradition to which they give rise, such is what we would expect. To adopt a thoroughgoing suspicion is out of keeping both with the pre-theoretical confidence we have in identifying exemplars and with the conceptual constraints it imposes. If we are to have a theory about the “good person,” it must address a sizeable number of *these* people, those who fix the reference. Nonetheless, *some* revision is both possible and likely. In Book 14 of the *Analects*, for example, we find several passages in which Confucius, in conversation with students, is engaged in revisiting common moral evaluations of various rulers and ministerial figures. He assesses both positive and negative exemplars, sometimes confirming the common judgment about them, sometimes refining it. In this process, I suggest, he and his student interlocutors can be seen as querying the common informal readings of these figures and tacitly granting that revised evaluations, *new* evaluations, may be in order. While less direct, I also suspect that Confucius’ terse remark about the village worthy (鄉原 *xiangyuan*)

grows from exemplarist soil, his claim that the village worthy is a “thief of *de*” the result of having seen fool’s exemplars summon from others an admiration that is, upon scrutiny, unearned and unwarranted (17.13). As Confucius seems to imply, the village worthy is so worrisome precisely because he appears convincing to the untutored and inexpert.¹³ While Confucius never in the *Analects* identifies any specific individual as a village worthy, he here appears to begin to formulate conceptually a way in which to frame revision of tradition, a way to divide fool’s exemplars from real exemplars, and to begin to assay why the difference is often difficult to discern. In sum, recognizing and excising fool’s exemplars, or village worthies, introduces a novelty into tradition not only by contracting the company of exemplars, but also by inviting creation of mechanisms for a more critical consciousness of exemplars in general. Knowing that fool’s gold may be in my treasury will not provoke a radical reevaluation of gold itself, but it will generate a more sophisticated care in identifying and handling my gold.

More prominent in the *Analects* is the second way in which novelty may be introduced, the expansion of the company of exemplars to include new models. While exemplars fix the reference for the “good person,” we should expect that the company of those who summon our admiration will rather organically grow and swell. To employ David Keightley’s idiom, each generation will produce its heroes as emulation of past heroes yields new heroes who will, in their own turn, inspire emulation.¹⁴ An organic growth such as this will naturally contribute some novelty and while I think the *Analects* certainly allows for this, its expansion of the company of exemplars strikes me as more ambitious and more aggressively novel. Put simply, I think the *Analects* more generously expands the set of exemplars than simple organic growth would by itself provide. Before addressing this, however, let me generally characterize the process by which a more radical expansion might occur.

There are at least two conceptually distinct but perhaps practically overlapping ways in which we may discover a new exemplar. First, as we refine and clarify our understanding of previously identified exemplars, we may come to recognize that heretofore unrecognized individuals meet our criteria and thus well fit in the set. Second, we may simply find ourselves experiencing what initially features as a puzzling admiration, an admiration not immediately well explained or captured in our existing understanding of admiration’s sources, the concepts we have so far developed to characterize our exemplars. In either case, we have the potential for novelty and revision of understanding. In the first case, our new exemplar may, in addition to well-fitting among his fellows, exhibit qualities they do not, qualities that may expand our conceptual understanding in new directions. In the second case, assuming that we find our novel experience of admiration in some way trustworthy rather than misguided, we will be obliged to find some account for it, an effort that will need to discover affinity between the new and old and that may consequently necessitate a revision in our previous understanding.

Expansion of the company of exemplars of this more abrupt rather than organic sort is, to emphasize, more likely to occur the more expert one is. The expert will be more conversant with the abstract refined criteria to which exemplars give rise and thus will be able to apply them with the facility requisite to identifying new cases that might otherwise escape notice. So too the expert's capacity for admiration will be more finely attuned, more thoroughly shaped into a skill borne of unusually close acquaintance with her subject. Consequently, her admiration in a seemingly puzzling case is more likely to be trustworthy, more likely to be revelatory rather than merely mistaken. In the *Analects*, I think we see a movement to expand the company of exemplars more aggressively than mere organic growth would provide.

While the *Analects*, and its late passages in particular, can of course be read to recommend a number of Confucius' students as models for emulation, more generally, we see throughout the text a thrust toward modifying conventional measures of worth and success. As many commentators have observed, the *Analects* expresses a greater commitment to meritocracy than the norms of its day would seem to endorse. While this may mark a more general cultural thrust toward divorcing hereditary and social status from assumptions of worthiness, an effort for which the *Analects* is but one modest contribution, I suspect that the *Analects* arrives at its more meritocratic sensibility in part owing to an exemplarist process. Such is to say that the *Analects*' budding interest in promoting individuals of demonstrated worth derives less from any principled meritocratic stance than from a more direct and simple experience: Both Confucius and the authors of the *Analects* inhabit a shared intellectual community in which they encounter persons of great worth and skill, peers and friends they find exemplary, but these companions are not, in a bluntly status-based hierarchical system, accorded recognition suited to their worth and skill. In short, Confucius and the *Analects*' authors *admire* but their admiration finds insufficient answer in the calculus of worth in currency. In consequence, a new calculus is devised, a calculus that can accommodate inclusion of exemplars who in some measure fail to satisfy established expectations. Thus the disadvantaged and comparably low status young man, Yan Hui, is reconceived as heroically ennobled by his perseverance (e.g., 6.3, 6.7, 9.11, 11.19) and Confucius himself, with his serial failures to succeed in conventionally measured ways, becomes an unmatched moral hero. While such narratives of moral success despite long odds or "failure" are not of course utterly new, the *Analects* devises an explicit scheme for a new measure of success. This scheme is evident in the text's many injunctions to seek a morally grounded, rather than socially recognized, sense of life satisfaction.¹⁵ It is evident in the text's lauding of the joys of more intimate species of recognition and approbation, such as those found among family and friends (e.g., 1.1, 11.26, 9.12). And it is evident in the moral vocabulary the text develops and employs. Let me now turn to this vocabulary.

THE MORAL VOCABULARY

Closely related to the *Analects*' endorsement of tradition and subtle incorporation of novelty is its apparent revision of the existing moral vocabulary of its time. The *Analects* does not merely suggest a more egalitarian model for estimating moral worth and identifying exemplars, it renders the moral vocabulary it employs responsive to this sensibility, revising existing terms in accord with what the exemplars it proposes suggest. This is most evident in the text's use of the term "*junzi*" 君子.

The evolution of meaning we see in the *Analects*' treatment of "*junzi*" can, in brief, be seen as corresponding to the way in which the English term "gentleman" has evolved over time. Like "gentleman," "*junzi*" referred to those belonging to an aristocratic class, privileged men who would be, by dint of social station and hereditary rank, presumed to operate as natural leaders for others. Such *junzi* would, it was expected, have command of the relevant aristocratic arts and possess the political acumen to govern, but it was inherited privilege, wealth, and status rather than talent that defined them. In the *Analects*, however, we see a pronounced revision of this term. As Donald Munro observes, status as a *junzi* here becomes a status one may win: "The original criterion for achieving that status was hereditary position; the subsequent Confucian criterion was moral excellence."¹⁶ The *Analects*' use of "*junzi*," Ivanhoe similarly observes, shifts such that what "earlier had described a particular role or social station" becomes a way "to describe an ideal *way of being*," a way "anyone can achieve."¹⁷ While the *Analects* may not wholly abandon the class sensibility historically attached to the *junzi*, it reconceives the *junzi* as one who can lead and who is a fitting model for emulation because of his moral excellence, an excellence that, notably, can be acquired through learning, training, and self-cultivation.¹⁸ Like more contemporary uses of the term "gentleman," "*junzi*" becomes a term of approbation keyed to a meritocratic sensibility, assigned to those who behave and comport themselves in ways that recommend them as models for others.

The more meritocratic conception of the *junzi* we see developing in the *Analects*, I suggest, can be understood as a refinement responsive to growing expertise in considering exemplars. Most basically, such would entail that the criteria associated with being a *junzi* are altered to accommodate an increasing precision in understanding. A *junzi* was and remains someone who is fit to rule or, more informally, to lead and serve as an example to others. However, the understanding of "fitness" is adapted in recognition that the capacity to lead and inspire emulation defies ready correspondence with privileged hereditary status. Some traditionally defined "*junzi*" do not, upon scrutiny, have this capacity; some who are not traditionally defined "*junzi*" do. The term consequently shifts to accommodate what closer examination of people reveals, the criteria sharpened to better indicate what Confucius, *qua* expert, discerns as the qualities most relevant for making an individual capable of leading and inspiring others.

While the *Analects'* treatment of “*junzi*” may reinforce the sense of a novelty inspired by an expanding company of exemplars, I want to suggest more generally that much of the moral lexicon we find in the *Analects* can be understood to emerge from an exemplarist sensibility and method. The text’s moral vocabulary often appears to reflect an effort to capture conceptually what exemplars offer and to revise existing usage to better suit what closer, more expert scrutiny of them reveals. In applying an exemplarist understanding to the *Analects'* moral vocabulary, I hasten to emphasize, I do not propose any novel variations on how scholars have understood particular concepts. Rather, I suggest that much of what we have long observed about these concepts achieves a force and coherence where we understand them as sourced in close scrutiny of exemplars. We have in exemplarism a development narrative, or origins myth, that can draw together under a common pattern both the sorts of concepts the text emphasizes and the ways in which at least some of these concepts evolve. While it is beyond the scope of this study to assay the *Analects'* many individual moral concepts in close detail, I here want to look more generally at the distinctive portrait of the good person the moral concepts of the text serve to sketch.

As I note in my discussion of *ren*, if a moral concept is to be viable in describing both our moral practices and our moral aspirations, it must clearly and recognizably reference some aspect of experience. To reiterate, no matter what theoretical model we adopt, when we survey the moral concepts of the *Analects*, we want to find their hooks, the parts of experience in which they are anchored and thus rendered viable as apt descriptions of moral life and aspiration. It has become common in scholarship on the *Analects* to observe that whatever theoretical framework we might think suited to the text, it almost surely does incline away from a morality of principle- or rule-following. The moral vocabulary of the *Analects*, the concepts it proposes, instead collectively registers as portraiture, depicting a holistic image of the good person that includes not only his actions, but also something of the character, emotions, dispositions, and temperament that belong to him. The exemplarist thesis is that this portrait is drawn rather directly from life. It is not, in other words, an idealized portrait that draws features imaginatively sourced in abstractly formulated values, but instead depicts what those who made it discerned in admired others; it is not drawn from ideas, but from people. Put simply, if the exemplarist thesis holds, we should find that the text’s moral lexicon hooks into exemplars and our experience of them.

While I think much of the *Analects'* moral vocabulary can plausibly be seen as emerging from scrutiny of exemplars, I shall here focus on two features of this vocabulary that I judge most difficult to understand otherwise, features that would seem *implausible* if derived from some source other than experience of exemplars. The first of these concerns the power ascribed to the good person and, more specifically, the power he has with others; the second concerns the ease and facility with which the good person

comports himself. In both cases, I argue, where we understand the moral concepts that reference this power and ease to be sourced in experience of exemplars, the concepts rather naturally and cleanly map experience. Absent this sourcing, however, they risk seeming the stuff of *mere* ideals, too detached from moral experience to achieve any potency as explanation or aspiration. I begin with the good person's power.

The good person is, in the *Analects*, described as one who possesses the power to influence and inspire others, as well as to effectively read and respond to others. Global terms for the good person, both “*ren*” 仁 and “*junzi*,” are partially defined with reference to this power. The person who is *ren* influences his wider society and environment with such potency that others are drawn to seek proximity to him.¹⁹ The *junzi* subtly moves others with his influence as the wind bends the grass (12.19). Comparably narrower terms that describe particular features of the good person apparently aim to describe with even greater specificity just how the good person affects others. “*Shu*” 恕 is the receptive and reflective capacity to achieve sympathy with the particular circumstance of another, to imaginatively identify with her and respond accordingly (4.15, 5.12). Confucius apparently links this capacity to the *ren* person's transformative effect on others: One who can discern the affinities between himself and others will, in seeking his own self-cultivating aims, aid others in the realization of theirs (6.30).²⁰ Like “*shu*,” “*de*” 德 functions as a more targeted concept and, more than any other term in the *Analects*' lexicon, pinpoints the sense of a special power. While interpretations of “*de*” vary, its use as a moral term in the *Analects* unambiguously suggests the charismatic power of the good person to attract and inspire others, to influence them without coercion to follow the model the good person offers (2.1, 4.25, 12.19).²¹ Indeed, as Donald Munro observes, the suggested potency of “*de*” has led some scholars to conclude, Munro suggests erroneously, that *de* is a special “inner” force that registers for others as a “magical magnetic attraction.”²²

While “*de*” most directly articulates a distinctive power found in the good person, for my purposes it important to note that references to this power are a commanding thematic constant in the text's more total portrait. Multiple moral concepts of the text incorporate this power, suggesting that the good person will be compelling to others and the deferential responses of others to him will be almost inevitable or seamless. Multiple claims about how the world works—ranging from the efficacy of the genuinely benevolent monarch to the efficacy of master teachers and moral neighbors—ride on the effect ascribed to this power. In short, the *Analects* suggests that where we encounter a good person, we encounter this power.

Even where we reject what Munro terms the “*mana* thesis”—the view that Confucius and the *Analects*' authors subscribe to a belief in genuinely magical power or charisma—there is, I suspect, much in the *Analects*' portrait of the good person's power that we might count dubious. One need not be cynically minded to recognize real world failures of the power of good

people to sway others or the indifference to moral influence individuals and indeed whole communities can achieve. Where one is cynically minded, Confucius' claim that the good will effortlessly influence and orient others will seem hopelessly romantic or dangerously naïve. These doubts will only find increase where we seek to explain such claims with reference to the conceptual apparatus that standard virtue ethical accounts offer. If, for example, we ascribe the text's claims about the good person's power to embedded convictions about human nature, we shall court again a trouble with explicating this nature, as well as be burdened to explain, in defiance of much experience, an attraction to the good rooted in such a nature. If, more generally, we judge the text's depiction of the good person to offer an ideal and thus stop short of committing to any "real world" or factual claim about the good person's power, it is difficult to understand how this idealized notion of power originates, much less achieves the prominence it enjoys in the text. That is, if we register these claims about power as *merely* a desired ideal, then the text appears to imaginatively construct a world neither its authors nor we are likely ever to experience. Where we seek to anchor the *Analects'* claims about the good person's power to the world of our experience, we want something more indubitably and reliably part of that world than these explanatory strategies can offer.

Where we understand terms such as "*ren*," "*junzi*," "*shu*," and "*de*" to be rooted in exemplars and in experience of exemplars, we have a way to frame the power these terms reference in a way that more firmly anchors them in experience and thus is immediately more plausible. The "power" to which the *Analects* alludes with these terms, I hypothesize, is the force of admiration that in part accounts for *how* we directly identify exemplars. Such is to say that descriptions of the good person's power are *post hoc* explanations of more brute and immediate experiences. Good people are identified as such, both in the "baptismal" moment and in some measure throughout any human life, because they summon our admiration. We admire and want to be like *that*, and this commanding inchoate experience of admiring and desiring registers as a power *that* has, a power to effect such feeling. Put another way, the experience of exemplars rarely transpires in ways that register as an admiration to which we are conceptually persuaded. Instead, we first and more simply do admire, responding to the exemplar as if there is indeed a power that has independently worked upon us. These experiences assure us such "power" exists and, moreover, they have analogues in many species of experience.

In many domains in which we might identify a more local or particular sort of value, we are often obliged to incorporate our more immediate responses into any explanation we devise. The value we locate in Shakespeare's language or in Beethoven's compositions must reside in part in their power to move us. We may of course characterize the work of such artists with respect to the formal qualities of their work and subject that work to analytical scrutiny that, in effect, takes it apart into its most notable

constituent elements. Nonetheless, a vital element in our identifying these works as having value in the first instance is our responses to them. Indeed, we only seek to know more and to characterize their qualities more precisely because our initial responses to their apparent power awaken such an interest; absent the power we perceive them to exercise in commanding immediate and inchoate appreciation, we would, I expect, have little incentive to press further and understand them better. Such, I suggest, largely parallels the way in which Confucius and the *Analects*' authors speak of the good person's power. The more immediate or brute experience of exemplars' power precedes and indeed provokes the impetus to understanding.

When we treat the *Analects*' moral concepts that reference the power of the good person as anchored in the experience and identification of exemplars, the text's claims about this power appear far less fanciful and more plausible. On this reading, the text merely observes a phenomenon with secure empirical credentials. Both individuals and whole societies do find inspiration and sometimes succumb to the influence of moral heroes. In Confucius' idiom, the Sage Kings and the early Zhou rulers swayed their societies through noble example and continue to do so for those who, like Confucius, study their cultural legacies. In the idiom of the *Analects*' authors, Confucius manifested this power, influencing his students in ways not well captured by any summary of his explicit teaching but registering instead as a charismatic power to move them.²³ More generally, both early childhood experience with imitation and adult responses to exemplars provide a commonplace experiential touchstone for the power the *Analects* references. To recall Emerson's language, there is "no man so poor but his memory is enriched with the names of some persons to whom he looks up as signal examples of virtue."²⁴

In sum, I suggest that where we trace the origins of the *Analects*' discussions of power to the immediate experience of exemplars, we achieve an account of this power that both maps familiar moral territory and is sufficiently thin to be credible. The *Analects*' assertions that people will be swayed under the influence of the good person are, in an exemplarist iteration, not claims indicating an inevitable, much less magically potent, relation, but instead observe that, in fact, this has sometimes been so, is sometimes so. Human beings have moral heroes and are inspired by them. As is the case with the works of Shakespeare and Beethoven, receptivity to "power" will vary and, notably, can be cultivated. Indeed, I suspect that rather than treating the influence of the good as a power to which all inevitably respond, the normative thrust of the *Analects* is toward understanding those instances when such power does work on us in order to expand their force and reach. Most basically, however, where the *Analects* describes the power of the good person, it refers us not to an abstract or distant ideal, but to a rather basic feature of human experience.

The *Analects*' depictions of the ease and facility with which the good person comports himself offers, I suspect, a significantly parallel case. As

Slingerland has argued, the *Analects* employs a number of terms that evoke what we might globally characterize as “ease” or, following Joel Kupperman, “naturalness.” The good person, Slingerland explains, is marked by “unselfconsciousness” and her efforts convey a “lack of exertion.”²⁵ “Naturalness,” Kupperman explains, “implies a certain ease of behavior, an absence of strain: the agent is reasonably comfortable with her or his behavior, and there is no conflict between the behavior and what the agent is normally like.”²⁶ In short, the *Analects*’ portrait of the good person emphasizes her being “at home” or “at ease” and this manifests in a variety of ways. We might say that the good person is at home in the world, in her community, in her own skin, and, above all, in what is good.²⁷ She consistently displays an uncommon facility and confidence in her demeanor, actions, emotions, and attitudes. The global suggestion, as Slingerland succinctly frames it, is that where being good is concerned, “the genuinely cultivated person does not *have* to try.”²⁸

Slingerland observes that the *Analects* employs a rich and relatively extensive vocabulary of terms that appear pitched to capture features of the good person’s more global ease. Among the terms Slingerland identifies are “*an*” 安 (“at ease”), “*wang*” 忘 (“forgetting”), “*buzhi*” 不知 (“not knowing”), “*wuwei*” 無爲 (“effortless action”) and “*le*” 樂 (“joy”).²⁹ While many of the passages that reference the good person’s power simultaneously suggest that it is exercised easily and effortlessly, what is most striking in the text’s use of these terms evoking ease or naturalness is how frequently they occur in the depiction of Confucius himself. The clear thrust of the *Analects* is to suggest that the good person will achieve ease, but when we wish to trace and understand this more general claim, the text will point us, again and again, to Confucius. He says of himself, “Confucius is driven by such eagerness to teach and to learn that he forgets (*wang*) to eat, his joy (*le*) is such that he forgets (*wang*) to worry, and does not know (*buzhi*) the approach of old age” (7.19).³⁰ Where we see Confucius in effect summarizing that which sustains him, it is his capacity to be at ease in both what life affords him and his own development. He finds his joy and satisfaction in the prosaic routines of learning and practice in the company of friends (1.1). He characterizes his achievements as resulting in self-trust and unselfconsciousness such that he can “give [his] heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries” (2.4).

As is the case with the good person’s power, the apparent ease of the good person and the concepts that refer us to this ease are most intelligible and plausible where they are understood as issuing from experience of exemplars. Indeed, ease of the sort the *Analects* describes seems tightly tethered to the very particular experience of Confucius. A cumulative and more general sense of what “ease” or “naturalness” entails cannot but incorporate what we see in Confucius. Where we ask what it means to be at ease, the *Analects* seems to say that it means to *be like him*, like Confucius. The text’s explicit and many references to Confucius in its descriptions of

ease may alone incline us to an exemplarist understanding of this concept, but even more abstract characterizations of ease will, I believe, return us to consideration of exemplars. That is, the “ease” or “naturalness” of the good person seems to reference a phenomenon not unlike others we readily recognize in other domains of experience. Here again, the suggestion of the *Analects* can be illuminated in analogy to the arts.

Ease in the performance of music, a seeming naturalness in the handling and manipulation of an instrument, is perhaps an essential feature of any performer we would judge a virtuoso. The virtuoso will convey the impression that the instrument is but an extension of her own physical body and even her most casual interaction with the instrument will bespeak this achieved intimacy. While we can seek to characterize abstractly the ease of the performer, however, it is nonetheless the sort of quality that appears to have deeply and perhaps even intractably experiential roots. It is a quality about which we are more likely to say “I know it when I see it” than to think we can well represent it apart from particular examples of it. Where we seek to teach it or learn it, we will look to models rather than abstract formulae, recognizing the impotence of any commands that would urge us to “play naturally” or “play as if you are at ease.” Thus while we can conceptually incorporate ease into our notion of the virtuoso or of the good person and may even recognize ease as a necessary condition for either, it seems to emerge from, and even depend upon experience. Particular persons point us toward “ease” and our abstract characterizations of it indexically reference such people. Here again, I suspect that explaining this quality with reference to human nature or characterizing it as mere ideal will provoke unnecessary and ultimately insoluble explanatory difficulty.

Like the good person’s power, the good person’s ease achieves greater sense and plausibility where we understand it as issuing from exemplars and our experience of them. My suspicion is that here too it is the compelling experience of the exemplar that accounts for the *Analects*’ interest in ease or naturalness as a moral quality. The good people who command our admiration do so in part because we see them do “naturally” what we ourselves may only struggle to do.³¹ Like a virtuoso, they make what we know to be difficult look easy, as though it belongs to them or to human beings more generally. While we do not “forget to worry” or trust ourselves not to “overstep the mark,” the good person does. The *Analects*’ conceptual movement with reference to the good person’s ease is, I expect, an effort to capture our experience of such people.

In sum, power and ease are elements indispensable to the *Analects*’ portrait of the good person; any summary account of this portrait must include them. While these are of course but a part of the more total portrait the text offers, they are a formidable part. My contention is that these qualities are incorporated into the text’s account of the good person because they constitute prominent aspects of the experience of exemplars. An exemplarist account is well fitted to the power and ease of the good person, both

explaining how these concepts originate and, most importantly, securely anchoring them in recognizable domains of experience. My wider suspicion is that just as an exemplarist account of their origins can well accommodate and perhaps even enliven these concepts, so too it can inform our treatment of the *Analects*' moral lexicon more generally. Where we understand the *Analects*' representations of the good person as moral portraiture and find significant features of it drawn from life, we have cause to suspect that the rest is similarly inspired. While I will allude to additional elements of this portrait in what follows, I turn now to rendering more explicit the significance of the aesthetic for the moral sensibility of the *Analects*. As my analogies anticipate, consideration of the *Analects*' good person invites consideration of aesthetic value and this too, I suggest, is a movement that exemplarism renders more natural, if not seamless.

THE MORAL AND AESTHETIC

The *Analects* clearly assigns high significance to both aesthetic experiences and aesthetic activity. The perceived ease of the good person is but one element of a much wider commitment to what we might call a distinctively ethico-aesthetic sensibility. We find in the text an abundance of references to the arts and in particular, to classical poetry and music. Achieving a command of these arts, interpreting the *Odes* and performing or appreciating music, features as a prominent element in the instruction Confucius offers his students. Of greatest interest to me, however, is the way in which the refined aesthetic sensibility we see in the *Analects*' treatment of the arts themselves appears to inform its treatment of morality. Where it is commonplace in virtue theories to emphasize a union between the dispositions and actions of the virtuous person, the *Analects* appears to propose that in addition to disposition and action, the virtuous person also *looks good*. That is, it implicitly adds to the familiar elements of disposition and action a third: demeanor, or the manner in which one performs moral actions. What are often thought to be aesthetic features of human conduct, the grace with which we perform our moral obligations and shoulder our responsibilities, here register as an element in how we characterize and evaluate moral conduct. In this, the *Analects* seems to suggest that one must not only achieve appropriate dispositions and perform appropriate actions, one must also do so with an appropriate style. Grace, decorum, poise, and, as already noted, naturalness are part of virtuous activity at its best, serving to convey to others that in doing what one ought, one also does what one wishes, or what reaches to one's convictions and dispositions.

There are of course important disincentives to asserting a close union between aesthetic and moral value. Most basically, we find that the aesthetic and moral frequently come apart in our experience. What we admire for its aesthetic value may decidedly lack moral content. Worse, what is

undignified, or simply indifferent to how she appears to others.⁴¹ While it is of course possible that such a person could inspire admiration of a more limited sort, in the idiom of the *Analects*, she would decidedly not be treated as exemplary, as one whom we should generally seek to emulate. Whatever other morally important qualities she might point us toward, she misses too much that the text judges important.

The *Analects* makes the aesthetic a constitutive element in the moral and generally treats moral and aesthetic value holistically, but it also recognizes how they may come apart. The *Analects* is not insensible to the sorts of objections Mohists raise or the more general worry that an overweening interest in the aesthetic can overwhelm moral considerations. The text clearly grapples with such issues. We see in the *Analects* a struggle to distinguish morally laudatory appearance from that which is not, an appearance that denotes goodness from that which is mere simulacrum. The village worthy is but one example. Another is the text's marked and frequent criticism of "glib speech" (佞 *ning*).⁴² As Slingerland observes, where "ning" earlier meant "something like 'attractive or noble in speech,'" it comes in Confucius' usage to refer instead to a kind of "false, external counterfeit" of the good person's habits of speech and expression.⁴³ While the conceptual movement we see here again reinforces the sense of a vocabulary adjusting to a refined understanding of exemplars, we also see an effort to distinguish a morally important aesthetic aspect of demeanor from a form that will superficially resemble it. We see, in other words, a sensitivity to the perils of an emphasis on appearance and the corresponding need to guard against fool's exemplars who look good or, in this case, *sound* good, but are not.

While I shall have much more to say about what I take to be the deeper mechanics of the exemplar's demeanor in the remaining chapters, here it is enough to observe that an exemplarist account can, in broad strokes, provide a credible explanatory model for the *Analects'* insistent attention to the aesthetic. The *Analects'* interest in the aesthetic features of human conduct will, on an exemplarist reading, confess its origins in the holistic experiences of admiration through which exemplars are identified. Its considered and formal inclusion of the aesthetic in its moral reasoning retains this element of our brute experiences, a strategy that both preserves and perhaps even enhances our capacity for admiration. The *li, qua* ethico-aesthetic code, abstract and generalize both what exemplars do and the ways in which they do it. They serve explicitly to structure and guide emulation.

SOCIALITY AND ROLES

There are of course many more conceptual features and movements in the *Analects* than I have here addressed. Among the more prominent are a commitment to the sociality of the person and an emphasis on how the roles we fulfill in relations with others describe both our personal possibilities and

moral obligations. These too, I believe, can be well explained and sustained in an exemplarist interpretation of the text and I shall allude to them in the remaining chapters. Rather than treat them in detail here, then, let me but briefly sketch how I place them on an exemplarist landscape.

Most basically, it is evident that a social account of the person and a corresponding emphasis on role fulfillment constitute elements of the world of moral practice prior to Confucius and the *Analects*. They are part of the tradition Confucius and the *Analects*' authors inherit. Indeed, these commitments appear to be well-established and long-standing features of early Chinese moral practice and thinking well before Confucius arrives on the scene.⁴⁴ I thus understand the *Analects*' engagement with these commitments to pattern along the lines I ascribe to its interactions with tradition more generally. Such is to say that the *Analects* treats these commitments as generally trustworthy but also defeasible givens. They constitute a part of the existing landscape of moral experience the text seeks to describe and conceptually map. Above and beyond their place in tradition, however, I think exemplarism provides a rather natural fit for these commitments. Let me sketch, in broadstrokes, how I suspect an exemplarist model can accommodate the sociality of the person and role fulfillment.

As a moral theoretical framework exemplarism can, in its simplest iteration, appear to focus on notable, striking, or special *individuals* and to seek moral insight from the way that an exemplary individual is distinctively and powerfully marked out from others. It can, that is, register as a philosophy of heroes. However, I think it more apt to characterize exemplarism's focus as relational, particularly in the *Analects*' presentation. Exemplarism is *about* our moral heroes certainly, but is also *about* our responses to them. The exemplar is identified as such because of her power with others, the admiration she inspires in others. The exemplar is always someone who has an effect on others and understanding the exemplar is in some measure a matter of understanding ourselves, our responses to her. In the early Chinese context, where emulation is well established as a robust moral practice, the exemplar functions as both inspiration for, and expression of, communally shared moral aspiration. Moreover, what an exemplar "means" in these respects is a matter of communal negotiation. The Sage Kings, for example, are marked out as heroic rulers, but sussing out just what makes them so and thus how best to follow their models is a matter for shared deliberation and even contentious disagreement. At base, however, the felt power of exemplars makes us as grass, driven by the wind in a common direction. The exemplar is who she is, an exemplar, in part because of who she is *to us*.

While communally shared admiration for exemplars may mitigate against a strongly individualistic model, exemplars themselves fix our attention on the relational nature of human lives. The *Analects*' emphasis on the sociality of the person and on social and familial roles may be understood to operate on the recognition that exemplars are, as I noted earlier, always someone

somewhere. Indeed, I would venture that in thinking about exemplars we cannot but think of them as they are for others. Because exemplars are real people rather than abstract ideals, they belong in definite and actual relations to others. To know anything about them is to know something about their relations to others. Minimally, every exemplar will be *someone's child*. More robustly, exemplars may also be mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents, friends, students, teachers, community elders, rulers, and so forth. And our responses to exemplars, even our immediate and inchoate responses, will include such relations as a contributing factor in the admiration we feel. Some of our exemplars will elicit our admiration for their particular power in fulfilling a role they inhabit; some of our exemplars, the more total models, will elicit our admiration for their power in fulfilling all of the roles they inhabit. However, I suspect that no exemplar can inspire admiration wholly independently of the roles she inhabits. Put another way, I think there can be no exemplar, properly understood, utterly free-standing of her relations to others. I judge it implausible if not impossible that we would, for example, admire an individual who is stubbornly estranged from her family, friendless, unable to lead or learn from others, and so forth. We may admire a person who fails or, more modestly, does not thrive in *some* of her roles, but a moral “exemplar” who has *no* healthy or thriving bonds with others is simply not an exemplar. When we identify an exemplar, we cannot but identify her as she stands with and among others. She is who she is, an exemplar, in part because of who she is *to others*.⁴⁵

The *Analects'* development of a decidedly social account of the person and emphasis on role fulfillment can thus be read as elaborating on a tradition steeped in emulation and deriving from the ways in which exemplars are embedded among others.⁴⁶ While the theoretical structure of exemplarism does not *require* the strongly social conception of the person we find in the *Analects*—we can of course imagine an exemplarist ethic with a more individualistic bent⁴⁷—exemplarism is nonetheless unusually congenial to a relational understanding of the person. This derives in part from its imperative to attend to the narratives in which our experiences and understanding of exemplars are formed, the ways in which their lives and character develop with and among others. It also derives from the practice of emulation, the key mechanism of moral learning that exemplarism identifies. Where we conceive emulation to extend the imitative capacities core to early childhood learning, we have a powerful incentive to attend carefully to moral dimensions of family and community, both as these necessarily feature as the site of early development and as these will likely feature in even the most mature and sophisticated efforts at moral cultivation. There is surely more we might find in aligning the *Analects'* social and relational conception of the person with an exemplarist account, but it is here sufficient to note more generally that exemplarism can well accommodate this piece of the text's wider commitments. Exemplarism attends to moral heroes, but it likewise emphasizes the many and several ways that heroes are people deeply embedded with others.

In conclusion, let me draw away from the particular features of the *Analects*' moral reasoning and survey the global theoretical logic I ascribe to the text. When we consider the *Analects*' silences and its explicit comments and commitments, an exemplarist origins myth provides a unifying narrative frame that stretches to incorporate much of what the *Analects* affirmatively offers while minimizing the need to reach beyond it. In assaying both the *Analects*' silences and its well adduced commitments, I have sought to show that treating exemplars as the text's theoretical "one corner" can obviate persistent interpretive difficulties and seam together many of the text's most pronounced features. Exemplars can explain both what is "missing" from the text and what we find there.

Like more standard virtue ethical accounts, exemplarism will understand the *Analects* to orient moral reasoning around a catalog of virtues and the dispositions that belong to them. It will understand the text to limn a program of cultivation in which the learner is enjoined to develop herself in accord with these virtues and dispositions. Where exemplarism will differ resides in the priority it assigns to moral exemplars. An exemplarist reading will posit something like the origins myth I have proposed, conceiving direct reference to exemplars as the foundation for moral reasoning and scrutiny of exemplars as the principal method by which the virtues and corresponding moral schemata are formulated and described. In this, an exemplarist account of the *Analects* may appear to demand as much or more than other virtue ethical accounts. It does, after all, propose a comparably thicker story about how Confucius and the *Analects*' authors arrive at the moral sensibility they recommend and applies an ethical analogue of an admittedly anachronistic theory of natural kind terms. However, I venture that this story and theory fit the text in ways other theories cannot.

While I have in this part emphasized the theoretical intricacies of exemplarism in an effort to show its promise for resolving the text into a pleasing whole with promise for application in contemporary moral theorizing, the elegant simplicity of this model should not be lost. Such is to say that while exemplarism can manage many of the theoretical issues we moderns find so compelling, it simultaneously endorses an appealing theoretical naïveté congenial to the pre-modern circumstance of the *Analects* and perhaps helpful to ourselves as well. It runs on the uncomplicated premise that Confucius and the *Analects*' authors know and can point to whom they admire. Whatever their difficulties, or ours, in theorizing a morality, there is a commendable simplicity in working from this most basic fact. Such is to say that an exemplarist account does not really demand more or, rather, what it demands is that we *make more* of what the text freely affords. The *Analects* is, I venture, uninhibited in its extolling of good people, clear in its interest in describing these people, and committed to encouraging others to emulate these people. With the theoretical structure of exemplarism in hand, let me now turn to an examination of some of the *Analects*' people.