ABSTRACT:

Moral philosophers of late have been examining the implications of experimental social psychology for ethics. The focus of attention has been on situationism — the thesis that we routinely underestimate the extent to which minor situational variables influence morally significant behavior. This has been cause for alarm in some quarters of moral philosophy, where situationism has been seen as a threat to prevailing lay and philosophical theories of character, personhood, and agency. In this presentation, the philosopher Hagop Sarkissian outlines the situationist perspective and critiques one of its upshots — the admonition to carefully select one’s situational contexts. Sarkissian argues that this strategy, while prudent, only accentuates an untenable person/situation dichotomy. The deeper lesson of situationism, he contends, lies in highlighting the interconnectedness of all behavior — how all people are inextricably involved in the actions of others, and how minor and subtle tweaks in one's behavior can lead to major changes in the trajectories of our moral encounters.
Sarkissian finds an ally in the philosopher Confucius (6th century BCE). In the Analects, he argues, Confucius was preoccupied with the very minor details of one’s mannerisms and their impact on others. For him, the goal of a virtuous individual was not to develop character traits as a bulwark against external influence, but instead to find efficacy and harmonious expression within the web of influences that constitute social life. This led Confucius to motivate norms of conduct aimed at structuring social exchanges in ways conducive to achieving interpersonal agreement or accommodation.
JONATHAN GOLD

We have a very nice line-up of speakers for this year. Today in particular, we have a very exciting speaker, a new member and a new immigrant to our neighborhood. Hagop Sarkissian has just begun teaching at Baruch College, and he comes from Duke University, where his PhD was on Confucius and moral psychology, so the topic of today's lecture. And we also have the great fortune, I think, of having Warren Frisina from Hofstra here as our commentator. I can't imagine a more appropriate commentator for this paper, someone who really has a depth of understanding of not just Confucian thought, and not just the western traditions with which Hagop is interested, but also someone who has theorized and thought a great deal about comparative philosophy as a topic of investigation, as an approach to the world, and the significance of comparative philosophy. And so I think that in today's discussion, I hope we will be able to draw out some of the larger issues that are connected with the particulars. As much as we have said in the past that this is one of the things that we are doing, I hope that we really will do that today. I'm sure that we will.

In any event, the theme for this year, if you look at the top of our little handout, is "Ethics across Traditions." Not all of our lectures are explicitly engaging with ethics, but today's talk certainly is. And so I'm very excited to welcome both of our speakers. I'm imagining that Hagop will speak for around an hour or so.

HAGOP SARKISSIAN

Yeah.

JONATHAN GOLD
And then Warren will take an opportunity to respond for however long he would like, I don't know, about 10 or 15 minutes, or five.

(Laughter)

MALE SPEAKER

That hour seems really intimidating.

(Laughter)

JONATHAN GOLD

And then five to 15 minutes, anywhere in that range. And then we'll open up to questions.

A couple of quick announcements before we begin. Everyone should please put your name on the sign-up sheet if you haven't already done that. It's good for us to know who is here and to get you on our e-mail list if you're not there. And part of the sign-up sheet is you should know that the attendance and minutes of this meeting will be eventually put into the university archives. So if you want to be completely incognito, then you have to keep silent. The historical record should never say that you were here. But – and we also are recording this. It's not impossible that a transcript or a portion of the audio of today's talk will make it up on the web. So let us know again if that is unacceptable to you. But just be aware that that is happening as well.

MALE SPEAKER

[Unintelligible] question and answer then.

JONATHAN GOLD
No, we don't put the question – we don't generally put the questions and answers. We might have – right, that's true, we want to though. Certainly not without asking you explicitly for permission.

So I feel like there is something else I'm supposed to be saying, but I think I'll just pretend that's not the case, and say thank you in advance, and let's give a warm welcome to Hagop Sarkissian.

(Appause)

HAGOP SARKISSIAN

Thank you, Jonathan. Thanks very much for inviting me. It's a wonderful opportunity. I look forward to our discussion. Maybe I'll say a couple of things before we begin. I'll be using PowerPoint for the presentation, so maybe I'll just skip forward to – so that's about as small as the writing will get. So for those of you who might have trouble seeing – if you don't have trouble seeing, well, you're just dandy. If you do have trouble seeing, you might want to move closer or something like that. It's not necessary. Of course, I'll be talking through, but if you do want to make – see the writing, then you might want to move up. There we go.

All right, great. Thanks. So as Jonathan mentioned, I'm – well, I'm from Toronto originally. I'm here by way of Duke University, where I did a PhD in the department of philosophy. And the content of my talk today is drawn from some of the research I did for that dissertation I wrote. And I thought I'd introduce sort of the lecture by drawing an example that has nothing to do with the talk but might sort of introduce you guys to the sorts of considerations that are central to – that were central to my dissertation research and that still sort of occupy me.
This example has to do with an ethical issue in medical ethics. Medical ethics is a research interest of mine; I love teaching it. So I'd like to begin with this case example from medical ethics, and this has to do with physicians and their relationship with the pharmaceutical industry.

Now, throughout the 1980s, that is, pharmaceutical companies began to bestow lavish gifts onto physicians, things like free air fare, free trips and vacations, lots of expensive medical equipment. And this led to concerns that the integrity of the medical profession was being compromised. So because of this, in 1991, the American Medical Association and the Pharmaceutical Researchers and Manufacturers of America introduced voluntary guidelines to limit the size of these gifts. And they suggested that these gifts should be limited to a value of no more than 100 dollars. And the thinking behind this is, I think, very commonsensical, right? Small gifts of minimal monetary value will not surely affect doctors' behavior, but large gifts like we just talked about would.

Unfortunately, this sort of thought process turned out to be false. It turns out that minor gifts, the kind of things you see here, free mugs, pens, clock radios, and so forth – these sorts of very minor gifts have major effects on doctors' behavior. This has been now confirmed through many studies. It leads to, for example, increased volumes of prescriptions, erratic prescribing patterns, preference for new drugs with unproven benefits, an overall increase in prescription spending. What's more, physicians routinely deny that these little gifts do in fact influence their behavior. And if it wasn't for the work of a lot of social scientists, we'd probably agree. After all, how could these sort of, you know, rational, highly trained, intelligent individuals be swayed by such minor trinkets?
Well, as commonsensical as that thought would have been, it would have been false. These minor trinkets lead to major payoffs for the pharmaceutical companies, okay? That's just an example I thought I'd introduce my talk with. What I want to suggest in my talk is that the same thing holds true for interpersonal morality, okay? And what I want to suggest is that minor details about our comportment and our situations can have real impact on our moral behavior. And these can have real effects, just as they do in the case of physicians.

For example, how long we're willing to engage in dialogue with others, the creativity we have in solving mutual problems, the importance we attach to any moral differences we have with other individuals, and whether we find accommodation to other individuals acceptable or even as a live option – all of these important factors in moral life can be really affected by minor details of our situation, and we ought to mind them.

So my talk will break down roughly in half. In the first half, I want to sort of flesh out this picture, this idea that minor features of our situations can have real effects on our behavior. And I'm going to show that this – a fact about our psychology has not escaped the attention of recent moral philosophers. And I'm going to quickly summarize one of the reactions philosophers have had to this literature. And in the second part of my talk, what I want to do is suggest that Confucius – well, the early Confucians generally, but Confucius in particular – was very much aware of this. He was aware of the fact that minor details of our comportment, minor signals we give to one another, can greatly shape behavior. And I want to suggest we see in the Analects two broad themes that reflect this appreciation for the interconnectedness of our behavior. One of them has to do with minding manners, and the other one has to do with giving others the benefit of a doubt, okay?
So that's the broad trajectory, two halves – kind of the second half itself breaks down into two halves, but we'll get to that all in turn.

All right. So for the first part, I sort of, like I said, want to flesh out this model. Now, I'll begin by talking – giving a brief history about research into character and its effect on behavior in psychology departments. So ever since the sixties and seventies, the thought that character has great influence on behavior, that a person's character traits can really shape how people behave, can explain why people behave the way they do, has been on the decline in psychology departments. Research continues, but at an attenuated level, and with far less institutional support. And this trend began because there was a number of sort of really famous experiments in the sixties and seventies that suggested that character doesn't in fact have as great an impact on our behavior as we once thought, and that situations in fact shape our behavior to a greater extent than we previously believed.

So one famous example that many of you are probably aware of was Stanley Milgram's obedience studies. In these studies, he would put up fliers like this inviting people from the general public to take part in a study. Ostensibly the study was to look at the impact of certain feedback mechanisms on learning. This is what people thought they were going to take part in the experiment. And when they came, the individuals would play the role of teacher here, and they would sit in front of an instrument panel that would have a number of switches on them. And they were told that whenever the "learner," who was on the other side of the room – in fact, there was no learner; it was just an audio recording. But if a "learner" gave a wrong answer to a question that the teacher asked, he was meant to shock him. And with each wrong answer, the teacher was supposed to administer a shock of higher degree. And the thought was to see what this kind of feedback would affect people's learning patterns.
This is sort of the instrument panel that they were seated in front of as teachers. And as you can see, there are a number of switches here, varying from slight shock to – it increases to strong shock, extremely intensive shock, and the last one just has three Xs on them in red. And when the experiment began, right, the first wrong answer, they would get administered a shock of 15 volts. And as the experiment continues, the teacher would continue to flip switches in this fashion. At some point, the learner starts objecting and saying – complaining about heart problems, saying that they have no right to keep them in this experimental situation. This person is screaming in agony. And yet the person, because of the presence of the experimenter in the room, would just continue shocking. And once they would get to the levels of extreme intensity shock, the subject would really be screaming at this point, saying, "I told you I refuse to answer. I'm no longer part of this experiment. You have no right to keep me here."

What is remarkable is that at 360 volts, there is just dead silence. So as far as the teacher knows, the person has perhaps died or at least lost consciousness. All participants shocked up until 300 volts, and 64 percent shocked well past the point where the learner wasn't responding.

So what is the moral to be drawn from this? Well, you might think were all these people just really nasty, mean people and so forth? The explanation was no. It's rather that when they're in a particular situation, in the presence of certain individuals, these factors greatly shape our behavior.

Another famous study from the seventies was the Stanford prison experiments. This is where students were recruited to play the role of either mock guards or mock prisoners in a prison setting to see how the prison
setting might affect people's behavior. The experiment was meant to last two weeks. It was canceled after only a few days because the students – well, the guards' treatment of the prisoners rapidly devolved into extreme forms of sadism.

So these two experiments are sort of very famous. They're also sort of very contrived, and many people might think, well, of course people might act in very nasty ways in such conditions, but this doesn't affect you and I in real life. Well, the other experiments draw this into question. For example, Darley and Batson had a famous experiment they ran at the Princeton seminary where they asked seminary students to go and give a lecture. Some of them were to lecture on their vocational choice; others were told they should go and lecture on the parable of the Good Samaritan.

On the way to the lecture, they encountered a friend of the experimenter's who would be slumped over in obvious pain and needing of help. And they wanted to see what factors would influence whether or not these seminarians would actually stop and help the person who was slumped over, just as in the story of the Good Samaritan. It turns out what they were lecturing on had no effect. Even if they were going to go lecture on the Good Samaritan parable, it didn't seem to have any predictive value about whether they would stop. What did predict was whether they were in a hurry or not. If they were told that they were a little late for their lecture, only 10 percent of these seminarians stopped to help. If they were told that they had some spare time, 63 percent of them stopped to help. Again, the situational variable doesn't seem to tell us much about the person's character, but a situational variable greatly shapes their behavior. And I'll mention a couple more.
This is a very counter-intuitive experiment showing mood effects on behavior. Isen and Levin found that people who find, you know, dimes in the return slots of payphones were 14 times more likely to help somebody who had dropped a stack of papers outside the payphone than those who had not found a dime. It seems really odd, right?

And finally, more recently, experimental economists have been looking at names that we attach to certain practices and that effect on behavior. So, for example, in one experiment – it was sort of a public goods game, where there is a shared amount – there is a finite amount of resources, and each player is trying to maximize how much resources they get. In one of the same game, with the same rules attached, the same payouts, it makes a big difference on subjects' behavior whether or not you call the game a Wall Street game or a community game, okay? Subjects were independently rated by their peers on how cooperative they were before going into the game, but how cooperative they were generally had no predictive value on how they would perform in this game. What did predict their behavior was what the game was called. And the Wall Street – if it was called the Wall Street game, only one-third of the subjects cooperated. If it was called the community game, two-thirds of subjects cooperated, right? Exact same games, same conditions, same rules.

So all of this led to this theory in social psychology which is broadly called "situationism" or "situational sensitivity." And the idea here, for our purposes, should be the following, that morally significant behavior is affected by features of the immediate situation, which are not of themselves of moral significance, are not *prima facie* of great motivational significance, for example, that you found a dime and so forth, and are not known to laypeople. So this is the broad sort of psychological model that I will be exploring in the talk today, okay?
So the idea is that our behavior can be affected by our immediate situations in very, very subtle ways, and it can shape our behavior in profound ways, but we're sort of – we either underestimate or are wholly ignorant of these sort of variables impinging upon our behavior.

So think back to the physicians at the beginning. They routinely deny that these gifts were impinging upon their practices, it was affecting their behaviors, yet they were. Studies have confirmed it time and time again.

So why is this important to philosophy? So here is a bunch of stuff from psychology; why should philosophers care? Well, at the same time, during these decades when the talk of the efficacy of character traits on behavior was declining in psychology departments, it was expanding in philosophy departments as part of the revival of virtue ethics in philosophy departments, okay? Part of what motivated the revival of virtue ethics was the thought that, look, it's just implausible psychologically speaking that people act morally because they follow certain general-purpose rules or principles, like the principle of utility or the categorical imperative, right? If you or I sort of naturally try to explain why people act well or poorly, we would refer to their character traits. We would say it was because of the kind of people they are, the kind of values that they have, the kind of character they possess, right?

So virtue ethics reflect these ordinary conceptions of moral behavior. It reflects sort of these lay thoughts we have. And this was thought to be a big asset in virtue ethics' favor, and this led to a sort of revival of interest in virtue ethics. But these thoughts about the impact of character on behavior were already being debunked as fundamental errors in psychology departments. So there is a question here, what should we do about this? What should we do about these diverging trends?
Well, the first to sort of tackle this issue was Owen Flanagan, who some of you are familiar with. And in a book in 1991, called *The Varieties of Moral Personality*, he reviewed this literature from psychology, contrasted it with the depictions of character in virtue ethics and found the virtue ethic theory to be in need of some questioning. And here is a quote; he says, "The rhetoric in much contemporary virtue theory is of a decidedly, possibly excessively, confident and unqualified trait cast. Persons are courageous or just or temperate. She who possesses the virtue in question displays the right sort of response towards the right person at the right time and in the right way. The vagaries of actual human psychology can easily disappear from view once this rarified, unrealistic, and excessively flattering characterization is on center stage."

So since the time that Flanagan first broached this issue as a sort of a mild skeptic, there have been other philosophers who have joined the fray. For example, Gilbert Harman, who teaches at Princeton, has advocated a much stronger form of skepticism and claims that these experiments show that there is no reason for us to think anyone has the sorts of character traits we ordinarily think they do. There are other philosophers who maintain a middle position, such as John Doris and Stephen Stitch, who claim that, well, even though none of these experiments can show anything as decisive as there are no such things as character traits, perhaps virtue ethics is rested on sort of a really questionable premise; perhaps methods at inculcating virtue should be questioned, and the project of virtue ethics might be called into doubt because of this.

More recently, our great sensitivity to our situational context has been brought to be seen as problematic for viewing ourselves as reflective, deliberative agents, right? If we don't know what is causing our behaviors, then
it seems as though we have no ability to reflect upon these factors and act in a reflective, deliberate way. And moreover, situationism has been seen as a threat to viewing ourselves as autonomous agents.

So what is the general pattern here? The general pattern is there is this bunch of experimental evidence from social psychology, and it has been used to evaluate or rather to – it has been seen as a threat to prevailing substantive conceptions of character in agency in philosophy. So that has been the general – what is the word – dialectic so far.

So now what? Well, I think situationism is of concern beyond its implications for any particular substantive philosophical doctrine. I think it's genuinely troubling that for any of us that our own behavior might be interested by – might be affected by minor details of our situations. And what I want to turn to next is some practical advice given by philosophers about how we should sort of react to the fact of situationism.

Like I said, the tenor so far of many of the responses by philosophers has been one of seeing situationism as a threat that has to be dealt with, these new sort of findings about our behavior that we don't generally consider in many prevalent philosophical theories. And their one sort of advice has been for us to all be aware of situational influence, okay? And this strategy has advocates both from those who want to support a kind of virtue ethics and those who are skeptical of virtue. And I call this the "seek-avoid" strategy. And it is because these philosophers say that what we should do is seek situations that strengthen or support virtuous behavior, avoid situations that tend towards vice or moral failure. In choosing situations, one chooses to embrace the behavioral tendencies these situations elicit. Is that idea clear?
So, sure, situations affect our behavior, but this shouldn't be seen as a threat if we carefully choose the sorts of situations that we expose ourselves to. So, for example, Maria Merritt argues that, look, all this focus on character traits, whether they exist or not, how robust they are and so forth, has just been a big distraction, and it has taken our attention away from the real strength of virtue ethics, namely, its emphasis on leading a flourishing life, achieving eudaimonia. And she claims that motivational self-sufficiency of character, that is, the ability to act in ways wholly independent of external influences, is not necessary to flourish. Instead, what we should do is selectively choose situations that lead to flourishing, and so virtue ethics is saved, right? The important thing for virtue ethics is that we flourish; if we can flourish, hey, virtue ethics remains a plausible, normative theory.

Similarly, Stephen Samuels and William Casebeer have said that, look, situationism just highlights the issue of practice in moral education; of course, virtues require practicing in appropriate environments, right, habituation – this old idea from Aristotle. And so we remain responsible for choosing our environments, and perhaps by practicing, exposing ourselves to right environments, we can develop the right sorts of dispositions that will help to guide us in future situations.

So both of these examples I've just given have been from individuals who want to sort of defend a particular kind of virtue ethics. But virtue skeptics have also embraced the same strategy. So, for example, John Doris gives us the very nice bit of practical advice, which is underestimate yourself, right? Don't expose yourself to morally compromising situations; don't expect your behavior to confirm to your antecedent values; attend to your environment. He gives this very nice example; he says, well, imagine your spouse is out of town for a week, and a colleague who you've had sort of a subtle flirtation with for a long time invites you out to dinner to
keep you company while you're alone, and so forth – he says, "Do you accept the invitation?" He says, "Well, not if you take situationism seriously." He says, "If you do take the situation seriously, you won't trust that once you're in that situation, your behavior will be able to conform to your values that you hold," right? Once the candles are lit and the wine is poured, who knows what will happen?

So he claims what we should do is again be attentive to our environments. And Gil Harman at Princeton has come up with the situationist slogan, and he says if you are trying not to give into temptation, to drink alcohol, to smoke, or to eat caloric foods, the best advice is not to try to develop will power or self-control; instead it is best to heed the situationist slogan, "People, Places, Things." Don't go to places where people drink. Do not carry cigarettes or a lighter, and avoid people who smoke. Stay out of the kitchen. So here is a nice – you know, you never get this from philosophers. Here is some real sort of down-to-earth advice about what you should do in fact in the face of situationism.

**MALE SPEAKER**

Is he making fun of that view when he says that?

**HAGOP SARKISSIAN**

No. He's being serious.

**MALE SPEAKER**

He means it.
HAGOP SARKISSIAN

Yeah. He is very much a skeptic of character traits and their efficacy in shaping behavior, and he thinks if you want to be a good person, put yourself in the right situation, and don't trust yourself to be a good person if the situation is not one conducive to good behavior. At this point, I think there is something funny going on here. After all, he says, you know, we shouldn't try to develop will power or self-control. Then again, we're supposed to avoid these sort of very tempting situations, which seems to require self-control and so forth, but I won't get into that right now.

At this point, all I want to sort of do is highlight what is going on in this seek-avoid strategy. The seek-avoid strategy is sort of animated by the thought that situations have great influence on our behavior. In particular, the behavior of other people could impinge on how we act, right? So in Gil Harman's examples, other drinkers, other smokers, great chefs, for example, right? Being in the presence of these individuals can really affect how we behave, and so it emphasizes one path of influence from situations to persons, and it reminds us that, yes, we are subject to the influence of other people.

But if that's true, then I think a slight change of perspective should reveal to us that, well, we must also affect the behavior of other people who are in our presence, right? So from our point of view, sure, it is nice and good to be aware of how other individuals and the signals they give and so forth might be impinging on our own behavior, but if that's true, then we must be doing this all the time to other people as well.

So to highlight this, I've sort of got a little story here about somebody who takes this seek-avoid advice, and here is this person who has heard this seek-avoid advice, and he thinks so he is in a grumpy mood, so he is...
going to go find some people who are in a good mood, right, so that he'll behave well, or he'll feel better. And so he has taken this seek-avoid strategy to heart. Of course, once he shows up, unaware that he is really emoting these negative emotions and so forth, everybody gets very, very upset, right? And so the person thinks, wow, this is the wrong type of situation. This is not the situation I need; I need to find a situation that is a good situation, and the person goes very sort of skeptical, and then the person leaves. And of course, once the person leaves, everybody is happy again.

Another example here is a bunch of people who are very, very bored in an office, and another person who is taking this advice thinks, wow, these people are always really interesting folk to hang out with; they seem to be always in a pleasant mood. Why not go hang out with them? Once the person shows up, everybody is in a sort of a cheerful mood, and he thinks, yes, this is the sort of situation I need, right? But as soon as the person leaves, the people are once again bored.

So what I want to sort of emphasize is that it's not just – it's not as though situations are static entities that are there apart from us, that we are sort of inextricably involved in our situations. And emphasizing only one path of influence is giving us a very – well, it's giving us half the picture, right? In these examples I just gave, it is the person him or herself that is entering the situation and is changing the dynamics of the situation just by being there, as it were. So it's this bidirectionality I want to emphasize. And in fact, you know, psychologists early on noted that we should avoid this tendency to impart too much importance onto situations themselves. And here is a quote from Paul Wachtel; he says, "The understanding of any one person's behavior in an interpersonal situation solely in terms of the stimuli presented to him gives only a partial and misleading picture, for to a very large extent these stimuli are created by him; they are responses to his own behavior,
events he has played a role in bringing about rather than occurrences independent of who he is and over which he has no control."

So again, just to close this opening half of my talk, I want to point out one more time the seek-avoid strategy, and here is a telling quote. It says – this is from John Doris, and he says, "I'm urging a certain redirection of our ethical attention. Rather than striving to develop characters that will determine our behavior in ways substantially independent of circumstance, we should invest more of our energies in attending to the features of our environment that influence behavioral outcomes."

Well, I too am advocating a certain redirection of our ethical attention, but the sorts of attention I want to draw to is not features of situations that are independent of us, but rather features of ourselves that we introduce to our situations. The seek-avoid strategy extenuates how situations affect our own behavior, but we can affect our situations by minding our own behavior.

So I think the problem and the promise of situationalism lies in the very, very same fact. The problem of situation, as I take it philosophers have been reacting to, is that we are not immune from external influence, that is, we are much more affected by external environments than we think. I think this is the promise of situation, that we are not immune from external influence and that we have the ability to – small changes in our own behavior to affect our situational context. So it's this interconnectedness of behavior that I want to – I want us to sort of keep in mind for the second half of the talk. It's this sort of model that how we behave affects other people, and how they behave affects us. And none of us strictly speaking acts independently. So it's this
psychological model that will serve as the backdrop for the rest of the talk, where I'll be focusing on the 
Analects.

So in the second part, what I want to do is suggest first that Confucius I think was tacitly working with this psychological model. I want to suggest that Confucius really appreciated that human behavior is profoundly shaped by minor features of our environment, and for him the most important of these were features of ourselves. So on the one hand, I want to suggest that situationism helps us to understand the psychological model in the Analects, and I want to show that we see this reflected in two broad norms that I think run throughout the text of the Analects.

The first of these norms is to mind manners, mind the signals that we give to one another, and the second one is to give others the benefit of a doubt, mostly because people never act sort of in independent fashion. And both of these broad themes I think reflect this interconnectedness of behavior that I have been outlining so far.

Okay. So first, this idea – this theme in the Analects of social signaling and minding manners. So we find throughout the Analects that Confucius is really sort of preoccupied by minor details of comportment. He is a real stickler for details. Some people think he has almost got a fetish for ritual and right comportment and using the right gestures and so forth, using the right words, right, not using the vernacular to read the odes. We're using the classical language and so forth. So he is really interested in social signaling. And in particular, what I want to focus on is his talk about demeanor, countenance, and expression.
This to me signals that Confucius very much had in mind the aesthetic component of virtue, that is, the outward face of virtue. And we see this reflected in some of the core concepts in the *Analects*. The first one of this I want to talk about is sort of the main central concept of the text, which is the notion of *ren*, *ren* being something like humaneness, human kindness, benevolence, co-humanity – the central concept in the text, right? This concept actually had its roots in earlier usages in the earlier text. It referred to the nobleman's appearance. So *ren* sort of referred to the appearance of the nobleman, in for example the *Shi Jing* in the *Book of Odes*, and had roughly the connotation of someone who is handsome, manly, or virile. It had this like very aesthetic component to it that receded in Confucius' time, but I think still operates there in the text.

Another idea that is emphasized in the text is that the gentleman or the nobleman should always be upright. But in the text, this has two different connotations. Of course, the gentleman should have upright character, but also should also sort of be upright when he stands, to have the right sort of posture. Again, an aesthetic component of virtue we see reflected in this concept. And here, the central sort of term that refers to self-cultivation in the text, *xiu shen*, right – if we looked at the character *xiu*, it has a phonetic and a semantic element. The semantic element are these three strokes here, which is *shen*, and the [unintell] in the earlier sort of dictionary we're told that these sort of represent the hairs on a brush. And they connote the idea of adorning, brushing, sweeping, and cleaning. That is the semantic component of the character *xiu*. And again, there is a strong aesthetic element here.

So if we want to think about *xiu shen*, one thing we can't overlook I think is that self-cultivation in the *Analects* doesn't have to do with cultivating inward psychological states, or doesn't involve that merely, but rather means sweeping, cleaning, brushing, and adorning one's person, right, making sure that one's outer appearance, that is,
one's countenance, the way one is dressed, for example, reflect one's inward qualities. And I think this just runs throughout the text.

An attention to one's scrutable self is a very important theme in the text. I'll give some passages that reflect this. So, for example, Confucius said Zichan he had four aspects of the nobleman's dao, right? It's a great thing to have, right, four aspects of the gentleman's dao. In the way he conducted himself, he displayed reverence; in the way he served his superiors, he displayed respect; in the way he cared for the common people, he displayed benevolence; and in the way he employed the people, he displayed rightness.

Book 10 of the Analects is just filled with individual sort of instances of observations of Confucius' behavior, little sort of notes about how the master conducted himself. Here is just one example. When he, that is Confucius, saw someone in mourning dress, he invariably assumed a solemn expression, even if the person were well known to him. When he saw someone wearing a full ceremonial cap or someone blind, he would take on a reverential countenance, even if the person were an acquaintance, right? Little observations about Confucius' behavior. Now why this attention to scrutable aspects? Why do we have a whole book of the Analects devoted to these things? Why do we have many admonitions – I'll give some more later on in the talk – to devote oneself – one's attention, one's ethical attention, to one's appearance? I think it is because of its impact on other people.

Here is a rather direct statement of this. Zilu asks about the junzi, the nobleman, and Confucius says, "He cultivates himself in order to be respectful." "Is that all?" "Well, he cultivates himself in order to comfort others." "Is that all?" "Well, he cultivates himself in order to comfort all people." So the idea of self-
cultivation is intrinsically related to how it impacts other people. And again in 8.4, we're told that there are three things in the Confucian teaching that a nobleman values most, by altering his demeanor, he avoids violence and arrogance. By rectifying his countenance, he welcomes trustworthiness in others. And through his words and tone of voice, he avoids vulgarity and impropriety.

So I think this is sort of pretty straightforward. There are many other passages that reflect this theme. But the idea is that, well, why should you care about what you look like. Well, you might think it's a personal ideal you have, it's just sort of a goal that you have, that you think you should cultivate your appearance. I think it's much more than that. I think there is an appreciation here about how one's appearance can really affect how other people feel, how they behave, if they feel comfortable or uncomfortable, and so forth. And there is this great consideration given to these aesthetic elements.

And what's more, I think that these aesthetic components of virtue help us to understand a rather murky and mysterious virtue in the text, and that is the virtue of *de* or moral power. So in the text, cultivated individuals are said to have this *de*, this kind of moral power, a potency, a kind of charisma. And this – and having *de*, if a person has that, if a person has cultivated himself, means that when he is in the presence of other people, other people are just sort of magically transformed by the person's mere presence. And there are some very striking passages, some very famous passages, in the *Analects* that reflect this. So, for example, in *Analects* 12.19, we're told that the *de* of a nobleman is like wind; the *de* of a petty person is like grass. When wind blows, the grass is sure to bend, this very striking image of a person who has cultivated *de*, and when he is in the presence of other people, they become pliant and yielding, and they become accommodating in his presence. And there are some other passages that people I think are rightly skeptical of that reflect his faith that in minding one's person one
can affect how others behave. And this is *Analects* 9.14, when Confucius expresses to his students that he has a desire to go live among the Nine Yi barbarian tribes, and they sort of all freak out. And someone asks him, "How could you bear with their uncouthness?" And Confucius replies, "If a gentleman were to dwell among them, what uncouthness would there be?"

So this is – I mean, who knows what that means, right? But again, it sort of sharpens this idea that, well, the gentleman is very attentive to himself, very attentive to how he is affecting other people, and he just wouldn't cause the barbarians to be barbaric when he was in their presence, right? The idea that, well, the barbarians are barbaric maybe in certain circumstances, but in other circumstances, they might not be barbaric. They might just be very, very nice people to hang out with. And if Confucius wants to move there, he's not in any danger.

In fact, I think something like *de* has been tested in the psychological literature. There was this test developed in the early eighties by Friedman and colleagues called, "The Overall Expressiveness Test." And this is a test anyone of us can take, and there is a series of questions you are presented with, and you rate yourself on a scale of one to nine, one being whether you disagree with the statement, nine being whether you strongly agree with the statement. And the questions are like the following: "When I hear good dance music, I can hardly keep skill," or, "I can easily express emotion over the telephone," or, "I often touch friends during conversations," "I'm shy among strangers," and a number of these statements, and you're supposed to rate whether or not you think these statements are indicative of yourself, and this gives you an overall score of expressiveness, that is, a score about how strongly you signal to other people. And so what Friedman and his colleagues did was first they administered this test to a whole bunch of subjects and separated them up into piles, right? They took a pile of people who scored really, really high on this, totally agreed with all of these statements, right? They
took one of these individuals, and they put them in a room with two people who scored low on this test, okay? So that is the person who is here colored sort of green. And somebody who scored really high on this test of expressiveness, has answered very strongly to these questions, the two other people scored very, very low – and I think this is an example of bending to the wind, where people just sort of change in the presence of other people. They were told that, well, we have this experiment that we want you guys to do; wait in this room for a few minutes, and then we're going to proceed with the experiment. In fact, the experiment just was them waiting in this room. They were told, please don't speak to one another. We just want you guys to sort of sit here quietly.

Before they went in the room, they said, "Oh, it's important for us to know how are you feeling right now because that might affect how we interpret the results." And so the subjects were asked, you know, "How do you feel right now?" and their answers were recorded. And then they were put into this room. And a funny thing happened. The two low scoring people, after the three minute wait time, had the exact same feelings as the high scoring person, even though no words were exchanged amongst them and they were just sort of sitting quietly in the room. It's I think a very de-like quality, where just the presence of a person who naturally sort of expresses and signals can really affect the mood of other people, right? And this was tested by asking them again when they left the room, like, oh one more time, how do you feel right now? The person who rates high on expressiveness, no real change. The other two people report that – well, their answers were exactly the same as the person who sort of expresses themselves really, and signals.

Okay. So this is – oh, we're getting to the end. That's good. So this is sort of the first part of the text that I think reflects this appreciation for the interconnectedness of human behavior. It's this idea that none of us is an
island. When we're in each other's presence, how we feel and how we behave greatly impacts one another. And I think that we can sum it up if we want to in a very, very simple fashion, and it's just a basic conditional prediction.

So I don't think the Analects tells us that we can every straightforwardly predict what other people will do. It is not as though by learning the Confucian teachings we can ever come to some knowledge that P will do X. But rather the Analects I think wants to remind us of something different, which is that we can predict with pretty good confidence that P will do X if I do Y. The idea is that if the junxi really takes care in attending to himself, devotes himself to Confucius' teachings, he should expect that the probabilities of him coming across people who won't be recalcitrant, will be pliable, who will be agreeable will go up. That is, if the person undertakes certain practices, they can expect that others' behavior will be shaped accordingly.

So I guess that I think this is reflected in the notion of de or sort of this moral power, and helps us to understand why Confucius seems to have this fetish for overt appearance, demeanor, expressiveness, and so forth.

All right. So for this last part of my talk – I'm just going to wet my mouth again. In this last part of my talk, I want to – well, I think actually this is probably, to my mind, the greatest contribution that the Analects makes to contemporary moral psychology, and it's that again I think we see this psychological model at work in another broad theme in the text, and this theme has to do with giving other people the benefit of a doubt. And in fact – we can talk about this during the Q and A – I think you can kind of reduce the whole Analects to just two norms, mind your manners and give others the benefit of a doubt. It is reductionistic; I just said it was. So
obviously, of course, you're free to sort of rail against that idea. But I do think that it does capture much of what the text is after.

I just sort of gave a case about why social signaling and minding manners is a central feature of the text and tried to argue that it's sort of got something really right about it, and now I want to flesh out this other theme about moral epistemology and the benefit of a doubt. So again, we're working with this model that all of our behavior is interconnected.

If we have this model, if this our implicit understanding of people's behavior, then it seems as though whenever we're trying to explain somebody's behavior, as Confucius and his disciples often did, right – they discussed why was so-and-so virtuous in this one case or why was this person xiao or filial, why was this person not xiao and so forth – for explaining behavior. Well, we can either just sort of talk about that person and what kind of character traits they have and so forth, or we can ask a series of other questions, namely, who else was present when this person did what they did, what was said, how were the individuals there related to one another, what roles were they occupying, who had seniority. And we can ask a whole bunch of questions that help us to understand any particular person's behavior because of course that person's behaviors is influenced by all of these sort of situational factors that they find themselves in, right? So why is that person really nice? Well, maybe they were occupying an important role in that setting, or maybe in the presence of this person that person is always agreeable. Why was that person nasty? Oh, because maybe in the presence of this person, they're kind of disagreeable and so forth, right?
Of course, we could avoid these questions and just say, oh, he's just a nasty person, or he's just a nice person. But that explanation would only give us part of the picture. Most importantly, if the idea is that how I behave is partly responsible how people around me behave, then I should scrutinize myself on this view when I'm trying to explain how other people behave. So if the question is why did X do P – well, if I was there, then I have to look at what I did to cause X to do P. Normally it is reversed; P does X in philosophy, but whatever. You get the picture.

All right. So here we see in 1.4 I think a very pithy statement of this self-scrutiny. Master Zeng says, "Every day I examine myself on three counts: in my dealings with others, have I in any way failed to be dutiful; in my interactions with friends and associates, have I in any way failed to be trustworthy; finally, have I in any way failed to repeatedly put into practice what I myself teach."

I think this is a nice pithy statement of this theme in the text, but it comes up – this theme really, really shines forth when Confucius is advising his students what to do when they are dealing with people who act badly.

So this is a general thing about how you explain to other that you should look at yourself. But this theme is really heightened in the text whenever you're trying to understand why is it that somebody is disagreeable or doesn't seem to understand you or doesn't appreciate you. So, for example – so this theme is, "Problems with others? Examine yourself." That's the first move you should do. If somebody is not being nice, if somebody is being disagreeable, if somebody is acting in ethically bad ways – I think it's a striking thing the text tells, that look at yourself first.
So the nobleman is distressed by his own inability rather than the failure of others to recognize him. The master says, "Do not be concerned that you lack an official position but rather concern yourself with the means by which you might become established. Do not be concerned that no one has heard of you, but rather strive to become a person worthy of being known." And again and again, we see this broad theme. He says, "When you see someone who is worthy, concentrate upon becoming his equal. When you see somebody who is unworthy, use this as an opportunity to look within."

Zigong asks does the nobleman despise anyone. Well, that's a pretty bad thing to do in the – he says, yeah, they do. They despise those who pronounce the bad points of others. Zigong was given to criticizing others, and the Master says, I believe sarcastically, "Oh, how worthy Zigong is. As for myself, I hardly devote enough time to criticizing others." And finally, I think here is the most direct statement, attacking your own bad qualities, not those of others, is this not the way to redress badness, right?

The strategy here is if things aren't going well, what do you have the most power to do, change yourself – and if you change yourself, other people will change in turn, this idea of having influence, de, or moral power. The idea is, well, yeah, sure you can attack that person and criticize them, but that's just not the right way to go about things. That person is not acting wholly independently of how you're acting. So the first thing you should do is ask how your behavior might have caused that person to act the way they do.

So I said earlier that I think this is the most distinctive contribution of the Analects to contemporary moral psychology. And now I'm going to try to explain why. Well, before I do that, I had this other thing. This is sort of from a commentary I think from the fourth century A.D., where the commentator reflecting on the
Analects says, "Criticism and praise are the source of hatred and love and the turning point of disaster and prosperity." Therefore, the sage is very careful about them. Even with the de of a sage, Confucius was reluctant to criticize others. Even with so much charisma, Confucius refused to criticize other people. How reluctant should someone of moderate de be to carelessly criticize and praise?

So why is this such a striking theme for me? Why do I think that it is so important? Well, it turns out that for decades social psychologists have been examining the ways we explain other people's bad behavior. And the general finding is when we have impressions of other people, when we see them doing bad things, what is our first move? Our first move is to think that whatever bad thing they did tells us something about that person him or herself. We take that bad behavior as being diagnostic. Importantly, we take bad behavior as being way more diagnostic of a person than any good things they do. That is, if somebody does good things, we'll give a whole bunch of explanations why they do good things; but if they do something bad, it's because of the kind of person they are. That's our first move.

Negative behavior is taken as indicative of a person's character. Negative impressions – studies have shown that we're quicker to form and recall negative impressions we get of other people. We're more likely to form negative impressions of other people than positive impressions. This is all embarrassing, but we do it all the time. We're more confident about our negative assessments of other people. We take less time to arrive at our negative assessments of other people. And we require far less information to deem a person bad than to deem a person good.
There is this pronounced asymmetry between how we weight positive information versus negative information. Worsening this case is that once we've made such an impression, we tend to seal it away from disconfirming evidence. And we stop searching for alternative explanations of a person's miscues or their bad behavior, and importantly any situational explanations, once we've arrived at character explanations. There is a whole body of literature that shows this. The typical – well, to give you an idea of what kinds of studies show this effect, it's when you read a vignette, for example, of a person who does something that is either bad or good. And then you're invited back to the experimenter's room in a couple of weeks, and he says, "Do you remember anything about that vignette we read about a person?" Well, if it was about somebody who did something nasty, you'll remember it really quickly, and you'll remember something about that person, whereas if it was something good, you'll take a lot longer, you'll search your memory to try to remember any details about that person that you read about. And there are all sorts of these sorts of studies. It is either through observing videotape or reading certain things. We remember bad stuff. Good stuff, not so much. What is more, like I said, we take bad stuff as indicative of a person's behavior – I'm sorry, of a person's character, that is.

What I'm suggesting is that there are two modes of explanation going on here. When we explain a person's behavior, we can either refer to personal or internal characteristics. We can ask questions like what kind of person he or she is, what were their goals, their motives, their intentions, things internal to their psychology when we try to explain behavior. Or we can talk about situational or external characteristics, the context they were in, environmental influences, social pressures, just dumb luck – things external to the person. These are two broad types of explanation we can put forth to explain any person's behavior. As it happens, like I said, there is a big asymmetry in how we weight negative and positive information, and there is a very self-serving asymmetry as well about what sorts of explanations we use to explain whose behavior.
When we're trying to explain why we did something that was good, we will refer to personal or internal characteristics. "Well, I really wanted to do that, or it's just important to me. That's the kind of person I am."

When somebody else does something positive, we revert to situational or external circumstances. "Oh, that was his job. He had to do that thing, you know. It was his position, you know. Of course, he's the kid's father. Of course, he's going to do it. It's his job," and so forth. We refer to situational or external characteristics.

But we flip this mode of explanation when it comes to bad behavior. When we do something bad, we automatically revert to external or situational explanations. "Well, I was under time constraints. I didn't know. I had forgotten that detail," and so forth. But when other people do bad things, like I said, we take this as heavily diagnostic of the kind of people they are. This is just a very, very robust finding.

In fact, psychologists once thought that this was a general way of explaining behavior. But a recent meta-analysis shows this is not a general way of explaining behavior, but it shows up a lot when the behavior is [unintell]. That is, we don't generally use these disparate ways of explaining behavior unless the behavior is good or bad. Then we show this asymmetry, this self-serving asymmetry in our explanations of behavior.

So why dwell on this? Well, it tells us something interesting about how we are. But I think that this should cause us to doubt our negative assessments of other people. This I think just gives us prima facie evidence for us to doubt our negative evaluations of other people. If we do have these tendencies that we weight negative impressions more, that they persevere longer, we're quicker to recall them, then we should doubt whether or not these are really truly indicative of how a person is.
The doubt has two related components. One is this greater weighting of negative evidence that I first talked about. The second is our tendency just not to look for other explanations where there could just be really compelling explanations that we just didn't bother to look for because we're just somehow wired not to look for them. You can give an evolutionary story about why this is the case. We can tell a just-so story that it's really important for us to keep track of nasty individuals and so forth. I won't speculate why this is, but it just is. And because of that, I think this theme in the Analects is really, really striking, because what the Analects is telling us to do is the Analects is telling us when somebody does something bad, look to yourself. That's not what we do. We tend to explain bad behavior by recourse of the individual. And for the one non-Analects quote – I couldn't help but quote this passage from the Mencius, who I think just really captures this theme of a benefit of a doubt in the most direct form – and Mencius says, "Suppose someone were to be harsh in their treatment of me, doing something obviously bad. A nobleman would in such a case invariably examine himself thinking, 'I wasn't benevolent. I lacked propriety. How could such a thing have come about?' But if after examining himself, he discovers he had been benevolent, he had acted with propriety, and yet the person still treats him harshly, then the nobleman will again invariably examine himself and think, 'Well, I must have lacked commitment. Maybe I just didn't persevere long enough.' But if he discovers that he was in fact committed, and the person still treats him harshly, only then would the nobleman say, 'I suppose he is the incorrigible one.' This is why the great man has concerns throughout his lifetime, but never a morning's worth of anxiety."

And I think here we find the nicest treatment of this theme of benefit of a doubt. And again, I think this is really, really striking, given the experimental evidence I just sort of outlined, that Confucius is telling – I mean,
I'm almost tempted to say that all this advice is meant to redress this standing tendency that we have to explain behavior in the way that I just suggested.

Of course, it's not easy to do this, and Confucius was well aware of this. The Master says, "It doesn't matter if the multitude hates someone," right, good evidence that a person is loathable. "You must still examine the person and judge for yourself. It doesn't matter if the multitude loves someone. You must still examine the person and judge for yourself."

I had – oh, we'll get to it in the Q and A. I should probably wrap up. I'm getting tired.

So in conclusion, what is the sort of big lesson to draw? So I think that whereas one sort of dominant reaction by western philosophers, that is, philosophers steeped in the western tradition, to the facts of situationism and interconnectedness of behavior has been – well, it is characterized by I would say a bit of paranoia and a bit of sort of self-interestedness, how situations affect me. I think that we shouldn't be paranoid. In fact, this should be seen as a moral boon, that gives us real insight into moral psychology. And in fact, we should be happy that people are not trapped by aspects of their personality. We should be glad that we're not all recalcitrant individuals that are doomed to behave in character-consistent ways come what may.

Instead, I think what the Analects tells us and what the psychological research tells us is that individuals are highly malleable, that their behavior is very, very interconnected, and with the right prompts, even the most recalcitrant individual can be moved. And I think the thought that's animating a lot of these themes in the Analects is that, look, you and I might be engaged in some small situation where there is a potential conflict of
interest, and what might happen is we might sort of polarize and generally distrust one another and not reach an
agreement, or we can sort of come to some agreement and accommodation with one another. What makes one
or the other more likely?

I think the *Analects* says you can have all of the right intentions in the world, but what you should be aware
about is the way you signal, the way you present yourself, the words you use, your tone of voice. All of these
things will buy us one outcome or the other. And I think that has to do with this first broad norm that I said,
minding manners.

Secondly, if it is just the case that people don't act independently, that no person is wholly uninfluenced by the
behavior of others, there is this other injunction to give others the benefit of a doubt. If we start by not – by
resisting our impulse to blame one another, and instead we sort of look for other explanations, we leave open
the possibility for there to be disconfirming evidence and so forth, we can allow for fruitful moral relationships
to develop.

And lastly, I think that the way I like to think about this idea is one of mutual ethical bootstrapping, that is,
pulling one another up by our bootstraps, right? So it's not always going to be possible for each of us to resolve
our moral conflicts with other people in any particular occasion. But if we heed these two norms, mind our
manners, give one another the benefit of a doubt, we can nudge one another in a way to change our trajectory
towards one that is agreeable and harmonious, as opposed to one that is disagreeable and disharmonious. And I
think in pluralistic societies of our own, where we expect classes of norms to occur all the time, it is particularly
important to heed these two norms. And that's all I have to say.
(Applause)

JONATHAN GOLD

Thank you very much, Hagop. So now responses from Warren Frisina of Hofstra.

WARREN FRISINA

Thanks. First of all, the [unintell] philosophy and your mother agree, right? Your mother said mind your manners and, you know, don’t be so pigheaded, you know. These are the things that they say.

I read the paper, and the thing I should say first is I am in substantial agreement with just about everything the paper tries to do, especially the reading of Confucius and the Confucian tradition. I don’t – I mean, I think it was accurate. I think it was attuned to some of the key issues in the Analects and Confucianism more broadly. That always sets up a problem for a commentator, right, because if you start out, and you think, "Well, that was pretty good and actually I agree," well, what is it that you're going to talk about?

So, you know, really actually in line with what Jon suggested at the beginning, I want to pick up a thread in the argument. I mean, there are a lot of things going on in the paper. I just want to pick up one particular thread and just kind of walk through some steps in the argument, and then ask two basic questions about what I think is going on sort of behind the scenes a bit, and that is the kind of thing that, you know, when you're doing comparative philosophy, it's useful to attend to, useful to attend to both in terms of the way it affects your arguments, but also in terms of the work that comparative philosophy can do for you. So let me get to that.
So, the thread I want to pick up – and forgive me, this is going to be a simplified version of what you just did in details. So, you know, the first step in Hagop's argument is simply that situationalism challenges character ethics, right? We've all seen how it challenges it, and character ethics resists that challenge, resists what I would describe as a reduction of the self to some other things, the situation or others or whatever. But basically, that's what at stake here. I mean, the character ethics folks want to say we have these substantial, essential selves that have characteristics that can be cultivated and changed over time. But they are what they are; independence and our autonomy rests on that distinction.

You conclude really towards the end of the first part of your paper that some kind of modified version of situationalism is what we need so that we can allow for there to be individual choices even while we acknowledge that our situations do play a significant role to play. I thought that was kind of what you were getting at with, you know, the weird paradoxes in the references to situationalists saying, "Change your behavior," like don't, you know – don't put yourself in a bar if you have trouble with alcohol. Well, I mean, the point that you made – that is how character gets formed. I mean, to be able to make that choice is the kind of thing that a character ethicist would – or a virtue ethicist would say you must do. You must make the willful choice not to do something so as to reform your character. So the actual difference in behavior was sort of striking how they gave the same advice.

**HAGOP SARKISSIAN**

Right.

**WARREN FRISINA**
So on the one hand, you want to acknowledge, you know – you want us, that is – want us to acknowledge what is truthful about the situationalist argument, which is that, yes, there are deep interconnections between ourselves and everybody else. And on the other hand, you want to retain, with the virtue ethicists, this notion that we can make choices, choices that change and reform who we are in the process of changing and reforming everything around us.

So that's what I'm saying. So you say we argue – you argue that we control small choices. You call them at one point "micro-ethical" behaviors. I want to come back to that word in a second. And I think this pushes you some because I think there is something interesting about the assumptions of what kind of social – what kind of ontology of the self is operating in these two extreme positions, the situationalist and the character ethicist or the virtue ethicist, and it pushes you towards more what I would describe as a transactional model of selfhood. And I'll come back to that in just a second. And in the end, what you do is you turn to the Confucian text to support this move, the move you want to make towards a modified understanding of the social situationist position, and you appeal to the manners and the benefit of the doubt as clear evidence from an ancient tradition of the reasonableness of the position you yourself want to hold, and I think with good reason.

So that's my little thread of the argument, right? There are lots of other things happening, but I've lifted up that thread. So here are some questions. I want to talk a bit about this notion of the ontology of the self that is built into the situationalists and virtue ethicist debate because – and this is – you know, again I'm simplifying just to be – just to get the thing in front of everybody. But there is a way in which the – you know, you could say that these folks are holding polar opposite positions on what a self is. On the one hand, the situationalist could be accused of, and in fact is accused by the virtue ethicist, of having a no-self model. I mean, there is not a self
there; there is just this whole structure that produces this thing that is you. And, you know, taken to its extreme, it becomes hard to understand how anybody controls anything.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are the virtue ethicists who do, like I said before, want to maintain this notion of an essential self with certain kinds of distinguishing characteristics or at least starting points which are building blocks for elsewhere. And, you know, my background, I'm a Dewian all the way back, and whenever you see a polar structure, your instinct instantly is to – well, that can't be right. It has got to be somewhere in the middle, so how am I going to pull these things back together? And Dewey's transactional model of selfhood is the kind of starting point that I have, where on the one hand, of course it's true that the self that we – you know, whatever our selfhood is, it is constituted by the relationships that we have. And on the other hand, of course it is true that these nodes of transformative energy have a kind of focus within the transactional scheme.

So for Dewey – I mean, that's just an example of someone in the middle. You can't go to either extreme. You've got to say that you can't pull the self out of the social, nor can you think about the social without selves. I mean, the two just have to be there intertwined as concepts.

So what I'm suggesting here is that isn't Hagop's answer really best seen – isn't the answer, the move you're trying to make, best seen as a shift in the ontology of selfhood, you know, characterized by these two extremes, towards this Dewian model. And this would make sense to me because, you know, my reading of the Confucian tradition is that they never have taken seriously either of those polar options. They have always operated from within something like a transactional model. It's just not their – and we could do the history of philosophy and why it is that the west could have come up with a strategy where it could make sense to some to
think about the self as that kind of independent, free-standing creature, and then a long way down the line, that thing dialectically producing this other notion of non-existence, no-self structure.

But the Confucians, they just never had that whole struggle to work through. They operate with a model which I've always thought was intuitively much closer to Dewey.

So that's my first sort of question to you. Is that a fair characterization of what is happening? You actually are, along with the other more explicit arguments, making some moves in your own sense of the ontology of selfhood that bring you in line with Confucianism and also probably bring you in line with someone like Dewey.

Then the second question, along similar lines, except arguing the opposite point, is to what extent is your solution to the situationist/virtue ethicist struggle still infected by the problematic ontology of selfhood that these polar things structure, or set up. And the place where I see this coming out – and this is where I said I was going to come back to this term – is your language around micro-ethical situations. It just sort of caught me up as I was reading it on the second reading. I didn't catch it the first time. But let me just read you this – you all didn't have the paper, right, so let me just read this one two-sentence section here on page – this is on page six of your document: "The idea that our behavior is highly interconnected with others is pervasive in the Analects of Confucius." That's true. "In the Analects, we find Confucius preoccupied by very minor details of one's mannerisms and their impact on others." Minor, of course, only from the perspective of, you know, the western tradition and the way that it has characterized such things, because for him nothing is minor all the way down. "For him, the goal of a virtuous individual was not to develop character traits as a bulwark against external
influence, but instead to find efficacy and harmonious expressions within the web of influences that constitute social life." All of this makes sense to me. And here is where the little tension comes: "Indeed, much of the Analects is focused on proper personal expression in micro-ethical situations which are frequently occurring and recurring situations in everyday life in which the stakes are seemingly low, but in which there are nonetheless potential conflicts of interest between the individuals involved."

Now, it is that characterization of the situation as to be understood through "potential conflicts of interest between individuals involved." And this term "micro-ethical situations" triggered in my mind sort of decisions using some sort of calculus whereby a self, you know, is competing with – for some limited goals with some other self and agrees to behave in certain ways so as to maximize the possible outcomes, a cost-benefit kind of analysis. And I sort of see in this paragraph and in the language of micro-ethical decisions these vaguely Hobbesian kinds of echoes in the background. And I want to contrast that with the Confucian term "ritual" alluded to – didn't spend a lot of time on. But I'd contend that for the Confucians, that term is rooted in this transactional model of the self that is deeply attuned to the conclusion that social institutions of any kind are remarkable achievements that are accomplished via reciprocal influences that need – they need a kind of constant tending in order to flourish. They are not contractual outcomes of negotiated individuals; rather, they are organic outcomes of harmonic relations cultivated in and through the gentle influences that you have been pointing us to with the paper.

So I guess the second question is just in the term "ritual," the Confucian understanding of "ritual," there is – you know, that's an extraordinarily rich concept. It is the thing that distinguishes us from animals in the same sense that it is true – you could say that the Hobbesians – well, how do we differ from animals? We negotiate some
kind of contract. But for the Confucians, the contract language would make no sense. It's much more the
organic, nurturing kinds of metaphors that are operative there. So I will stop there for the first two questions.

MALE SPEAKER

What is the question?

WARREN FRISINA

Well, you know, the first question that I asked was just whether or not his moves were in fact affecting under
the surface a change in his ontology of selfhood. That was the first question. And the second question would
be whether or not even as you try to make that move, there is still infected in your language some of the polar
categorizations of self that was embedded in the situationalist versus the virtue ethicist understanding. That
goes with —

HAGOP SARKISSIAN

Thanks.

(Laughter)

JONATHAN GOLD

Hagop, if you want to respond, you can immediately, or we can open it up to questions. Do you want to take a
moment? Whatever you like.

HAGOP SARKISSIAN
Yeah. I think – I mean, to answer those questions in any sense or fashion, I think we'd eat up a lot of the Q and A. But maybe I'll try to deal with some first off.

Yeah, this view of the self – I guess your question is what kind of view of the self am I operating with, and do I see myself as operating between two sort of very polarized views of the self. Yeah. So I don't have an ontology of self to give you, I'll tell you that. But I suppose what I am committed to is the idea that – well, kind of a conditional statement. If we do take selves as being rather autonomous sort of agents driven through internal psychologies or something like that, then – I don't mean to deny that. I do think that that's – certainly has to be true at some level. But I do think the situationist literature tells us we need a much richer picture of agency in order to explain any behavior whatsoever.

So what kind of self is that? Well, I think it's – like I say, it's a conditional. I mean, you're perfectly, I think, right to point out that the Confucians probably didn't even see these polar opposites as live options. They weren't sort of theorizing between different views of self. In fact, views of selfhood in the Confucian tradition, at least in the classical tradition, we oftentimes read into the text, and we try to sort of tease out. So there is this view put forward by Roger Ames, who also has Dewian influences, of this relational view of the self, which seems to be very close to this transactional view, which he sort of again reads out of the text the way I was sort of reading out situationist strands out of the text.

So I think you're right to point out that the Confucians didn't see this dichotomy. We operate with this dichotomy; psychologists operate with this dichotomy. And in fact, this sort of view of the autonomous self is found to be prevalent in western cultures. In fact, not even prevalent in western cultures, prevalent in some
western cultures. And it seems like everybody else has the Confucian view of the self. And then there are just some real outliers like we here in America and some parts of Europe that have this different view of the self, the self being this largely autonomous one with sort of properties internal to the person, and that when individuals interact, well, sort of whatever properties they have are coming into contact at that point, and there are no other properties of a person that exist apart from the person him or herself. And then there is this view that you find in cross-cultural psychology that, you know, people in southern Europe, in Africa, in Asia, and most other parts of the world – they have this relational view where everybody thinks, you know, when you ask a question to the virtue – you know, is a person brave or is a person shy or is a person loyal, then they won't respond with yes or no; they would say, "Well, in this situation type, this person is loyal." or, you know, "Do you enjoy – do you consider yourself an athletic person?" "Well, I play tennis on weekends." There is no – subjects in non-western cultures just naturally don't give answers like "I'm athletic," or "I'm a loyal person," or "I'm hardworking." They'll say, "Oh, I study very hard on weeknights." Is that hardworking? Well, it tells you something about a person's behavior in a situation.

I think that is a very sort of organic way of looking at things. I do think it causes problems for certain Aristotelian notions of virtues. I think, look, none of these studies rule out that somebody can't have very strong, robust virtues. None of these studies say that there can't be somebody who just is always just or always courageous. That's what I'm talking about.

But I think that, you know, these studies bring that into question and that – you know, I just don't think that other – if you're not an Aristotelian, you don't think people are like this. Like, we might say to – if somebody asks me, "What do you think of Jonathan?" I'll say, "Oh, Jonathan is a really agreeable guy," you know. And
then they'll say, "Oh really? So you really, really think this?" Then, you know, those further – they'd say, "Well, you know, I know the guy from some conferences and some seminars, and we've had dinner. He's very nice. He might be a jerk at home." I have no idea, right?

But when push comes to shove, we're happy to carve up individuals in this way. We're happy to say that, "Oh, so-and-so is – oh yeah, he would never cheat you in business, but he cheats on his wife." Or, you know, we can say that, "Oh, so-and-so is like completely scrupulous in his own behavior but has very lax standards for others." And I think we sort of naturally view the self as being sort of fragmented in this way, not in any bad way; it's just that we have this view – the transactional view, this relational view, where I am who I am in certain situation types, you know. Around my father, I'm shy. Around my friends, I'm boisterous. Around, you know, certain individuals, I have certain properties that do not exist unless I am in the presence of these individuals. And I think – does that come close to this sort of Dewian model? Yeah.

So I think that I just talked myself into an ontology of self.

**MALE SPEAKER**

You said you're on your way to an ontology of self.

**HAGOP SARKISSIAN**

Right, right. So maybe that's what I have to work out next. That wasn't as big a surprise to me because I think that that's still something I'm working out in my own thinking about these views of self. That's something I've thought about but haven't really worked through. But I did find surprising your comments about micro-ethical
situations. And quickly, I'll just say I borrow this terminology from a guy named Adam Morton, who wrote a book called *Folk Psychology as Ethics*, who I found to sort of be after a lot of the things I was after. He sort of emphasizes this idea that all transactions are strategic.

Now, I think that's true at some level. And I think your question is, well, if you think so, then are you assuming that we are sort of – we have this contract view of agency, that is, you and I, whenever we interact, we're sort of implicitly involved in some contractual – or some transactional – some transaction where we're trying to – I'm out to get stuff, you're out to get stuff, and that's where the conflict comes from.

Yeah, I think that – I think that's not how I view it, and I think that I – I'm glad you sort of brought this up because I think I need to rethink how to state this. For me, the potential conflict of interest is an emergent property. That is, it's not something – it's always something that can occur if we're not mindful. That is – I'm glad you brought this up. I don't have this view that because of a certain idea I have about how society works that conflicts of interest occur because we're always trying to maximize our own self-interest. I take it that conflicts of interest can emerge – there are emergent properties in certain situations when we have miscues. That is, whether or not you and I think that we have a conflict of interest will greatly hinge upon how our particular interaction is going at that time. It might be that we never noticed we had a conflict of interest, but all of a sudden today we have a conflict of interest because of something that happened.

But I don't know that I have much more informative to say about that. But I – yeah. Maybe I should just stop talking and open it up to other questions.
JONATHAN GOLD

Open it to questions?