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Toward The Technological Suspension Of Ignorance: Ethics Of "Redemptive Knowledge~ From Confuscious To Kierkegaard

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Toward the Teleological Suspension of Ignorance:
Ethics of "Redemptive Knowledge" from Confucius to Kierkegaard

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the
Department of Asian Studies
Seton Hall University
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May, 2001
Toward the Teleological Suspension of Ignorance:
Ethics of Redemptive Knowledge from Confucius to Kierkegaard

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Abstract

The following work is a study of the role and treatment of ignorance in specific eastern and western “philosophies.” Historically, the underlying worldviews of philosophical development are compartmentalized in terms of: Humanism, Pantheism, and Theism. The philosophies of concern in this project all conform to one or more of these categories. This paper will present the treatment of ignorance in the Humanism of Confucius, the Pantheism of the Tiantai era “One Vehicle” teaching (Chinese Buddhism), the western “transcendental” Humanism of Socrates and Plato, and the modern Theism of the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard. At the outset, this diverse grouping of philosophical systems might seem difficult to combine in one avenue of research. However, these formidable philosophies share an implicit and an explicit treatment of the implications of human ignorance, and they all prescribe means to the synthesis of subjective and objective truth.

The Confucian interpretation of truth is based upon the Classics and finds resolution to the mental and the profound in the attainment of knowledge of the “Natural Law.” In the Chinese Buddhist tradition (specifically Tiantai), the notion of the “Wonderful Law,” mitigates the conceptually nihilistic notion of “Void.” In both philosophical traditions ignorance on the part of the individual has a causal effect that obfuscates one’s sense of self and extends deep into the fabric of society. An exegesis of the Confucian Analects and the Buddhist doctrine found in the Lotus Sutra frames the depth of the “Eastern treatment” of ignorance in relation to human nature and human potential.

The “Western treatment” of ignorance also offers profundities. This paper will include a limited exegesis of Socrates’ Apology, Plato’s Symposium and Republic, and Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments and other works. The Socratic, Platonic and Kierkegaardian treatments of ignorance are included as they depict western proscriptions of the role of ignorance in the enduring struggle of humanity to know. Kierkegaard’s sense of ignorance brings balance to this study since it is a Theistic treatment of the human malaise. Human nature and human potential are discussed in terms of the duality of finite and infinite knowledge and the role of Revelation.

These texts will serve to highlight the common strand of the treatment of ignorance that is an implicit and explicit necessity in each philosophy. Let the reader be forewarned, the exegesis of these texts is solely interpretational.
Acknowledgements

The personal interpretation that flows through this paper is a culmination of years of study under a diverse educational experience. This path of personal enrichment has been made possible with the unending support of family, friends, and the personal attention of several influential professors. My collegiate experience was characterized by a long winding road shaped by the influence of teachers who extended a great measure of faith in their student’s ability to sift through the ambiguities and the facts found in a broad variety of thought. Their willingness to present ideas in a manner conducive to learning, in the sense of latitude for personal synthesis, provided the grounding and the motivation to press on when misgivings arose regarding ultimate direction and relevance of topics of study. The value of education and the need for existential investigation was presented in such a way as to engender a deep personal desire for transcending ignorance.

The list of persons who have enriched this student’s long learning curve is too extensive to include here. But I would like to say a general whole-hearted “Thank You” to all those who have happily disseminated their personal knowledge, and shared a part of their lives, their experience, for the benefit of this student. In particular, I would like to thank the faculty of the Asian Studies department at Seton Hall University for their encouragement and insights into the Eastern world of intellectual thought. I feel that I have been aided in innumerable ways and given the means to live a life of unending exploration of thought and culture. Whether or not that entails transcending ignorance remains a teleological uncertainty.
Preface

This project stems from my studies begun several years ago of the tradition of western conceptions of "selfhood" and the theological notion in the Judeo-Christian tradition of self-renunciation. That study of the western treatment of ignorance contrasted the humanist and theist treatment of the problem of evil and the path to personal and social synthesis. This current undertaking will attempt a study of the treatment of ignorance in classical Chinese thought and will incorporate material regarding the western humanistic and theistic ethical treatments of ignorance to provide a base for the reader's personal philosophical comparison.

The treatment of ignorance is "implicit" in Confucian thought, in the sense that it is not a recurrent theme that is explicitly discussed. Rather, in Confucian philosophy, the emphasis is placed on the individual as a moral self under construction in the social context. The "Confucian Way" is an upward movement toward the incarnation of virtue that culminates upon the realization of the "dialectic of enlightenment." Through experiential learning, the individual can move toward and attain a level of understanding and awareness of their place and potential in their lifetime. Thus self-cultivation implies knowing that the individual is a self that is empowered to act as an agent to affect change in his or her own life and in their surroundings.

In order to illustrate the role that ignorance plays in Confucian and Buddhist ideology (Chinese Buddhist in this context) it is necessary to look at the underlying worldview of both Confucian and Buddhist thought. The following is in an attempt to show that ignorance for the Confucian and Buddhist alike, is a human construct and is therefore, \textit{vincible} ignorance.
Both distinct worldviews find a philosophical proscription and formulate a prescription to this pervasive “hindrance” to individuals and society. Actually to say hindrance is to grossly understate the cause and effect that it is deemed that ignorance plays in personal and societal woes. Indeed, though ignorance is deemed vincible, it plays a particularly important role in humanistic and pantheistic philosophies. The extirpation of ignorance is the impetus and essence of the call for enlightenment in Chinese Buddhism. Similarly, it defines the Confucian quest for the cultivation of personal and societal humaneness in Chinese intellectual history.

In the Western tradition, ignorance plays a similar role as found in the Socratic teaching of the limitations of human wisdom, and the need for “Philosopher Kings” in Plato. The humanism of the early Greek philosophical tradition is scrutinized by later theological development much like Confucianism is tempered by Buddhism. Ultimately this convergence between theology and philosophy becomes more pronounced in the psychological philosophy of nineteenth-century Existentialism. The western philosophical tradition may be more systematized, but the study of what constitutes real knowledge, the self, and morality, holds some distinct similarities to the eastern intellectual “existential” counterparts of Confucianism and Buddhism.
Note on Translations:

Translation of the *Lotus Sutra*: The main text employed for the exegesis in Chapter III is the Kosei Publishing Co. 1971 translation that was updated in 1998. This co-translation by Bunno Kato, Yoshiro Tamura, and Kojiro Miyasaka is based upon the Kato/Soothill version that was revised by Wilhelm Schiffer and Yoshiru Tamura. The Kato/Soothill translation of the *Lotus Sutra* was an important Chinese to English work from one of the earliest known and most reliable Sanskrit to Chinese translations done by Kumarajiva in the fifth-century CE.

All other texts used in this paper are the generally available sources listed in the Bibliography.
Table of Contents

Abstract ....................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iv
Preface ........................................................................................................................ v
Note on Translations .................................................................................................... vii

Chapters:

I. Introduction:

On Ignorance and Worldviews ................................................................................... 1

II. Confucius’ Treatment of Ignorance in the Analects

1. Defining Ignorance in Confucius’ thought ......................................................... 8
2. Confucius’ worldview: The foundation of the Classics ..................................... 13
3. Knowledge of Dao and Tian manifest in Sincerity ............................................. 18
4. Eradicating Evil: Find the “Mean” ................................................................. 27

III. Buddhist Treatment of Ignorance

1. Defining Ignorance in Buddhism (Mahayana) ................................................. 33
2. Context for Chinese Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra ......................................... 36
4. Buddhist Ethic: Law as Compassion ............................................................ 50
5. Surpassing Ignorance and the Problem of Evil .............................................. 55
IV. Western Treatments of Ignorance

1. Greek traditional views of Ignorance ........................................ 59
2. Socrates, Plato on Ignorance and Imagination .......................... 61
3. Modern treatment of Ignorance: Kierkegaard ......................... 70

V. Conclusion:

The Teleological Suspension of Ignorance ................................. 83

Glossary .................................................................................. 93

Bibliography ............................................................................. 104
I. Introduction: On Ignorance and Worldviews

There are certain fundamental concepts and paths of inquiry that are intrinsically centered in the study of anthropological philosophy. While variables in interest, research methods and subjective pretenses differ between individuals and cultural contexts, anthropological commonalties remain. Anthropological philosophy is defined by the attempt to formulate theories of human nature. Theories of human nature presuppose a basic worldview that is defined by cosmological assertions and the treatment of the problem of evil. This search for what constitutes human nature implicitly ascribes the quest for knowledge as the root of that which distinguishes humanity. Those who join this quest in earnest eventually move from conjecture and hypothesis to philosophical investigation. Ultimately, philosophical investigation leads to the formation of a system of ethics or dogma. This in turn is either validated by acceptance, application, and the test of time, or is retired for a newer plausible theory that assimilates some aspects of and replaces the previous dogma.

The history of philosophical investigation holds a variety of theories of human nature including arguments which state that reality is completely subjective, some form of pure consciousness, matter devoid of essence, or simply unknowable. As of yet there are no meta-narratives and no unifying philosophical theories that pass the "scientific" tests of falsifiability and verifiability. However, there is a rational philosophical tradition that recognizes limits of human knowledge while positing inferences to the best explanation, thus leaving more room for constructive philosophical investigation than agnostic positions can offer. Agnosticism cannot address, much less resolve, the innate human
drive to ask and need to answer the fundamental ontological and ethical questions, such as: Why do I exist, or at least perceive that I exist? And, why must I be moral?

Chinese philosophical thought relies heavily upon a Confucian approach in an attempt to answer these primary questions. Though Confucian thought is a product of cultural context, it is similar to other world philosophies in that fact and in the attempt to determine what constitutes knowledge and more importantly the knower. But this Confucian study of “self” is existence oriented rather than essence driven. A philosophical orientation that is existential is one where there is an emphasis on the moment, the finite, and the temporal world in relation to the implications of mortality. Thus existential investigation imbues an urgent sense of finding and implementing the means of self-cultivation, and whether and to what extent there is personal responsibility to oneself and others.

Whereas urgency is both a catalyst and an indicator of the pervasive ignorance that is manifest in personal and societal suffering, it is also the motivating aspect that can turn potential into actuality. Confucian and Buddhist ideologies advocate a focused form of self-cultivation that removes the oppressive sense of urgency while preserving the sense of self-dialectic. This is true even in Chinese Buddhism, where a proper sense of self is required to enable one to retreat inward to the extent necessary, to remedy the dis-relationship of self that is caused by human constructs born of ignorance.

Retreating inward for personal “clarification” has certain limits in human development. For Confucius, the sooner one assumes the moral code and follows the ethical blueprint found in the Classics, the sooner one can redirect the senseless, empty striving that accompanies ignorance of the Natural Law. In this way Confucianism is
itself a synthesis as it incorporates tradition, treats the fundamental human questions, and proscribes an ethic of development. Ultimately an optimistic if “secular” humanist philosophy, Confucianism’s strength is its central tenet: the cultivation of ren (humaneness). Ren is a powerful concept as it imbues the individual (as a self) with a natural moral disposition and an innate drive to seek knowledge.

There is also a history in China of philosophical development that posits the contra-anthropological philosophical answer of “non-self” to the question: “who am I?” (Daoism, and Buddhism). In terms of philosophical coherence, the notion of “non-self” seems irreconcilable with foundational humanism. However, the complementary and synthetic nature of classical Chinese philosophical development assimilates ancient pre-Confucian and Confucian notions of self-responsibility with aspects of Daoism and Buddhism. Whether or not these apparently dichotomous philosophical systems can merge (much less co-exist), is not of concern here. Rather, it is the question of the underlying worldview in each system of thought that shapes the sense of morality and ethical considerations of human interaction.

In fact, philosophical development inevitably runs headlong into the question of morality and ethics regardless of the underlying worldview even if one posits some form of solipsism. Similarly, Buddhism (not considered a form of solipsism) provides volumes of material to show the karmic implications of human actions. The notions of karma or the Daoist means of accordance with the Dao are fundamentally ethical principles. In this vein, the developed branches of Chinese Buddhism (such as the Tientai

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1 Solipsism defines reality as a product of “self” alone. Mind or self determines all phenomena. There is no verifiable external reality.
School for this context) employ ethics, which serve as a response to the ingrained humanism in Chinese culture. A sense of morality is intrinsic to all worldviews and is employed to affect change and thus validate teleological assertions by making “truth” claims manifest.

In Chinese intellectual history there are multitudes of philosophical works that seek to define ren, that is, what makes humans distinct from all things or at least what makes humans think themselves distinct from all things. For Confucianists the cultivation of ren is the natural progression and the basis for character development. While Daoists and Buddhists find a measure of enduring success in altering the philosophical debate regarding self-cultivation and societal roles, they are unable to overcome the altruistic ethic of ren on a lasting societal scale. However, Buddhism especially finds room to coexist in China because of Confucianism’s lack of a developed metaphysic. In other words, Buddhism is more focused on addressing the teleological questions that stem from supernatural and religious aspirations.

In western philosophical tradition, the ability to answer fundamental metaphysical questions has served as a kind of centrifuge. Generally, “tenable” philosophical and theological systems treat metaphysical questions concerning cosmological origins, ontological principles, and the issues surrounding the problem of evil. There are numerous theodicies that are similarly employed to explain the human condition and to address the enduring questions regarding the origin and the nature of evil in the world. Existential investigation is unique in that theodicy explication delves deeper into the anthropological and psychological underpinnings of human beings on an individual basis through an evolving discussion of the implications of mortality.
The following study of the role and treatment of ignorance in these specific eastern and western “philosophies” will hopefully provide a sense of the connectedness of worldviews and human endeavors. Historically, the underlying worldviews of philosophical development are compartmentalized and labeled via the broad terms: Humanism, Pantheism, and Theism. The philosophies of concern in this project all conform to one or more of these categories. This paper will present the treatment of ignorance in the Humanism of Confucius, the Pantheism of the Tiantai era “One Vehicle” teaching (Chinese Buddhism), the western Humanism of Socrates and Plato, and the modern Theism of the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard. At the outset, this diverse grouping of philosophical systems might seem difficult to combine in one avenue of research. However, these formidable philosophies share an implicit and an explicit treatment of the implications of human ignorance, and they all prescribe means to the synthesis of subjective and objective “truth.”

The Confucian interpretation of truth is based upon the Classics and finds resolution to the menial and the profound in the attainment of knowledge of the Natural Law. In the Chinese Buddhist tradition (specifically Tiantai), the notion of the “Wonderful Law,” mitigates the conceptually nihilistic notion of “Void.” In both philosophical traditions ignorance on the part of the individual has a causal effect that obfuscates one’s sense of self and extends deep into the fabric of society. An exegesis of the Confucian Analects and the Buddhist doctrine found in the Lotus Sutra frames the depth of the “Eastern treatment” of ignorance in relation to human nature and human potential.
The history of the “Western treatment” of ignorance also offers profundities. This paper will include a limited exegesis of Socrates’ *Apology*, Plato’s *Symposium* and *Republic*, and Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments* and other works. The Socratic, Platonic and Kierkegaardian treatments of ignorance are included as they depict western proscriptions of the nature and scale of the problem of ignorance in the enduring human struggle to know. Kierkegaard’s sense of ignorance brings balance to this study since it is a theistic treatment of the human malaise. Because Theists in general, and Kierkegaard specifically in this context, discuss human nature and human potential in terms of the duality of finite and infinite knowledge it is explicit that ignorance is only vincible through Revelation. Kierkegaard’s view of the pre-fallen state of man holds a unique treatment that calls the quest for knowledge rather than original ignorance into question.

The philosophical texts used in this endeavor will serve to highlight the common strand of the treatment of ignorance that is an implicit and explicit necessity in each philosophy. Therefore, the balance of this project will hopefully provide a clearer understanding of the Confucian, Buddhist, and mainstream Greek and Judeo-Christian worldviews through a study of what constitutes “self” in each. The methodology employed will be a textual, contextual and linguistic study of the treatment of ignorance in the aforementioned “philosophies.” It is the author’s position that this study is valuable, as it will provide a direct way to ascertain the worldview that underlies each of the main paradigms of philosophical and anthropological development. The author believes that due to the language and cultural difficulties in this project, a certain amount of subjective or intuitive interpretation is required to perform an analysis of the fundamental worldviews of each philosophy under consideration here.
A glossary of relevant terms is included as a means of support for this interpretation whereas secondary sources remain secondary and are included for the reader's use should they desire other interpretations. The common strand of interpretation woven into this paper is the constant reference to what is perceived to be the implicit and explicit treatment of ignorance and the movement toward the teleological understanding of human nature and human capability in each of these philosophies. Let the reader be forewarned, the exegesis of these texts is solely interpretational.
II. Confucius' Treatment of Ignorance in the Analects

1. Defining Ignorance in Confucius' thought

"If one loves humaneness but does not love learning, the consequence of this is folly; if one loves understanding but does not love learning, the consequence of this is unorthodoxy; if one loves good faith but does not love learning, the consequence of this is damaging behavior; if one loves straightforwardness but does not love learning, the consequence of this is rebelliousness; if one loves strength but does not love learning, the consequence of this is violence." (Analects, 17:7)

Confucius' quest for individual and social rectification is grounded in the belief that humans are essentially good, but in this passage he recognizes the fundamental human need for character development. The passage above reveals Confucius' concern for personal coherence and in it he asserts that "one's" affinity for any given principle without devotion to learning or practice incurs consequences that amount to societal evils. Thus, "self" in Confucius' thought is characterized by the polarity between the innate desire and ability to love, learn, and serve humanity, and the innate need to cultivate virtue lest ignorance and vice shape the individual. The "learning" that Confucius identifies and prescribes is the tireless and ceaseless practice of virtuous behavior modeled in the preserved history of the Classics. Many scholars have expanded upon Confucius' ethic of learning but it is not often made clear that the fruits of virtuous behavior transcend the moment and are realized in the fabric of actual self-cultivation. In this way, the person who asserts love for the principles of humanity attests to their personal understanding through qualitative character transformation. This transformational process is not made manifest through prognostication, but in learning, which implies the repudiation of personal ignorance.
The terms *yu*, *wu zhi*, and *wu ming*, are the contextual Chinese equivalents to the English definition of ignorance. The *Miriam Webster's Dictionary* defines ignorance as “the state of being destitute of knowledge or education…. showing the lack of knowledge or intelligence.” Clearly the negative connotation that this term shoulders is adept as ignorance defined in this manner, similarly applied, defines an individual as of low level, low intelligence, or of weak mind and thereby maladroit of knowing “good.”

The notion that ignorance of right and wrong translates to vice and correspondingly perpetuates one’s inability to attain knowledge and live humanely is of significant importance to Confucius. When Confucius says: “the cultivation of the personal life depends on setting one’s heart right,” this is indicative that one must know what is right in order to dwell in accordance with the immanent *Natural Law* (*Tian li*). Confucius recognizes that one cannot remain static, as the natural process of life is development. Confucius states that one’s character will develop, but whether they develop the virtues of humanity or the vices of ignorance depends upon their willingness to learn:

The Master Said, “It is only those whose knowledge places them in the highest category or whose ignorance (*yu*) places them in the lowest category who do not change.” (17:4)

The transcribed term, *yu*, is defined by Fung Yu-Lan as “foolishness” and “no knowledge,” thus the translation in this passage describes those of low level knowledge with a similar negative connotation to the English definition. In fact, the meaning of *yu* in this passage goes deeper in that it speaks to the character of the ignorant individual as

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that of one who thinks without learning and is at minimum, ignorant of their ignorance. Further, the more troubling and complex problem is that of the individual who is aware of right and wrong (to the extent possible that they remain ignorant), and is content to depart from the sense of right that is inherent in the *Natural Law*.

Confucius states that deeds always correspond with knowledge and thus real knowledge naturally assumes corresponding action. Conversely, low level and weak-minded individuals will act to the level of their knowledge, in this case in a detrimental manner with consequences to themselves and others. Confucius finds that human action is indicative of true belief regardless of what assertions are made as to the level of personal understanding:

The Master said, “To learn without thinking is unavailing; to think without learning is dangerous.” (2:15)

While learning without thinking is empty, thinking without learning can elevate worries and passions. Thinking involves a self-view and if one’s self-view is grandiose or delusional then that will minimize the personal sense of the importance of learning. Cultivating *ren* must guard against this eventuality of congruency between ignorant self-view and ignorant damaging actions. Zhu Xi sheds some light on Confucius’ predicament of the human need to ground their self-view with learning lest their innate sense of striving lead them toward pseudo knowledge. This passage is useful here to frame Confucius’ sense of the necessity of cultivating *ren*:

…. In the school of the Sage [Confucius] the important task has been to search for humanity. The reason is that having understood the term to some extent, one has to strive to arrive at that state. People today have completely failed to understand. This being the case, what they are seeking eagerly is something of which they are
ignorant throughout life. How can they be expected to.... know where to devote their effort?  

Confucius sees people that are active in life and striving but their striving is circular in that they are learning and not thinking or thinking and not learning. Striving is an intractable aspect of humanity and therefore continues regardless of the goal or lack of one. Confucius’ answer to this circular human struggle is that partaking in daily personal and community rituals amounts to the openness to learning that is conducive to growth. But Confucius recognizes that people in this condition, mired in ignorance, need others to assist as they often cannot find their own way out.

Community provides the means of the important balance between community and individual empowerment When Confucius says “it is a man that can make the way great, and not the way that can make man great,” the onus is clearly on individuals to practice and grow personal virtue in order to serve others and rectify societies problems.

Confucius places responsibility squarely on individuals to revere their “self” first and then others in that order. Confucius’ version of the *Golden Rule,*

“Do not do unto others what you do not want done to you” (*Analects* 15:23)

utilizes this notion of self-reference and self-reverence as a corrective to the human struggle with selfish desires. Thus Confucius believes this method, when combined with ritual, makes the concept of *ren* possible to internalize and actualize. In this manner, “humaneness” is made real, as it is essential in humanistic terms to hold up the self first then one’s neighbor accordingly. In the case that the individual is so steeped in ignorance that they need personal assistance, *ren* begets *ren.* This comprises Confucius’ ethic in

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3 Original text: *Wen-chi, 33:15b.*
that those who are actively striving toward ren have a moral responsibility to assist others
in their development.4

Confucius' program of moral and social inculcation relies heavily upon this
fundamental human need to seek and strive, fully cognizant or not, for dignity and
purpose. Since Confucius recognizes human striving and the problem of human thinking
without learning, he emphasizes the development of self-awareness. The Analects
amount to a commentary of defining self-awareness by the negation of the causes of
ignorant self-perception. Confucius emphasizes the necessity of subjective openness by
promoting and modeling humility:

"The Master cut out four things. He never took anything for granted,
he never insisted on certainty, he was never inflexible and never
egotistical." (9:4)

This statement is akin to a prescriptive list of qualitative negation of the character faults
that plague human beings. Assumption, certitude, stubbornness and pride are all
characteristics of one who lacks the humility of true self-awareness. The proud
individual is not open to learning and demonstrates less-than an altruistic concern for
others however the humane individual is seen through selfless action and defined by their
deeper sense of the value of knowledge. Thus for the humane person, the move toward
self-awareness is both the precursor and the fruit of the actualized potential of knowing.
But if the deepest sense of humanity is reliant upon learned knowledge than learning is
not the utilitarian means to achieving ren, rather, the way of learning is ren. The end of
ignorance is found in humans learning to be human; learning to be oneself and in the

4 The true junzi, or man of ren, will be past the sense of responsibility they will know and embody the
natural sense of benevolence without consideration for reciprocity.
process becoming junzi or ren and through their qualitative transformation into human beings, the learned will model humility and thus humaneness. The next step is to understand Confucius' sense of the roots of humanity.

2. Confucius' worldview: The foundation of the Classics

Confucius said, "Man is born with uprightness. If one loses it he will be lucky if he escapes with his life." (Analects, 6:17)

The starting point for a philosophical system is found in the underlying worldview. This fundamental principle requires a posited belief on the basic or innate disposition of man. Therefore, questions regarding ethics or of a moral nature are derived from this primary question: Is man innately good, prone toward self-destruction, fundamentally bad, or a blank slate that will develop according to external influences?

Confucius' answer to this question lies in the important passage above taken from the Analects. He believes that man is born “upright” or good but subject to external influences. However, Confucius defers to Chinese tradition found in the Classics and so it is clear that the humanism of the Confucian Way is already intrinsic to Chinese social development. The Chinese word for the Classics is ching, which means constancy, and thus Confucius' reliance upon the Four Books and the Five Classics is revelatory of his underlying worldview. It is the constancy of truth and the virtue of learning that weather the impermanence and uncertainty of the future. Confucius' wisdom is found in his assessment of the character flaws, the limitation of knowledge, and the reticence of human beings to invest their energies in habits that conform to nature:

Confucius says: “Set your heart on the Way, base yourself on virtue, rely on humaneness, and take your relaxation in the arts.” (7:6)
Confucius recognizes that learning is not limited to times of activity but the
individual is also shaped through the enculturation provided in the arts, music and rituals
of aesthetic value. However, taking "relaxation in the arts" is not intended as a respite
from engaging in virtuous thinking:

The Master said: "The Songs number three hundred, but I will cover
their meaning with a single quotation: 'Let there be no depravity in
your thoughts.'" (2:2)

This statement is a testament to the treatment of depravity in pre-Confucian Chinese
culture. The sheer number of songs attests to the importance of rituals of habit, which
constitute the guidelines for virtuous thought and behavior. Again, here it is evident that
Confucius draws on the moral value of the Classics. Perhaps Confucius also recognizes
the general unlearned lack of interest in the truths embodied in the Songs and other
Classics. Given that consideration, he reveals his perspective of the central theme of the
Songs, namely, to use all means of learning toward ending selfish desires.

The realization that humanity hangs tenuously above the precipice of self-
destructive behavior, tempers the innate goodness that Confucius ascribes to human
beings. Thus Confucius places the classical teachings of early Chinese civilization as the
central pillar of the prevailing Chinese worldview. The Classics become the basis for
Confucius' sense of the Natural Law and become accepted as the highest standards for
human activity. This Natural Law that Confucius ascribes to the Classics is indicative of
his belief that the "truths" behind the practice of traditional rituals are essentially moral.5

5 This Confucian connection to the Classics is well-documented by thinkers such as Fung Yu Lan. The
hierarchy of moral authority linked to the Classics is clearly depicted therein in the direct connection to
Heaven and the Way. The Shijing (approx. 2300BCE) and the Annals (500BCE) are held to be of primary
importance in Confucius' thought formation regarding the model of moral authority and the relationship
between humanity and nature. The weight of the Yijing is more debated. However, to the extent that
In the Confucian worldview *Natural Law* holds authority over all events. This implies that *all* events, including actions of human agency and occurrences in nature, are *moral* in character. This new emphasis on *Moral or Natural Law* that Confucius finds in the *Classics* comes at an extremely important time in Chinese history. Confucius’ strong inclination to adhere to the “truths” upheld in recorded tradition stem from the degeneration of Chinese society prior to, and in, the early-Zhou period. ⁶ In the time immediately prior to Confucius, dissention and violence prevailed over morality and Confucius’ sought to put the *demoralizing* abstraction of the deferment to transcendence to rest and place responsibility back on individuals for their actions:

“Duke Ai asked Zai Wo about the alter to the earth god. Zai Wo replied saying: ‘The Xia used the pine, the men of Yin used the cypress, and the men of Zhou used the chestnut, saying that it would make most people tremble.’ When the Master heard this he said; ‘What is over and done with one does not discuss, what has taken its course one does not complain about, and what is already past one does not criticize.’” (3:21)

Thus, discernment or thinking about what one is learning is important as evidenced by Confucius’ comments regarding the failure of past “Mandates.” Rather than discussing or studying the supernatural aspects upheld in tradition, Confucius is more concerned with using the *Classics* to re-instill the sense of morality that resonates with the natural world. To say that Confucius seeks to re-instill morality in the languishing Chinese culture means that a digression is necessary as this begs the question: Upon what is the pre-

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Confucian worldview (behind the social sense of morality) in ancient China based, and why is it upheld even as it is still slowly failing in the era of Confucius?

"Heaven gave birth to the multitudinous people
but what it ordained is not to be relied on
There are none who do not have the beginnings (of virtue, de)
but few are capable of carrying it to an end." (17:20)

Before the messianic convergence of Confucius and the Classics, China has more than a millennium of recorded history. In the Shang period, the prevailing paradigm of ancestor worship in conjunction with the ruling class "religion" is the source and framework for the sociopolitical order. Chinese kingship and Chinese kinship defines human roles and the notion of Heaven grows in importance as it provides a basis for authority. But the prevailing sentiment, illustrated in the passage above, is that it is the king, not heaven that is defined as both the source of social order and the source of normative truth.\(^7\)

While the practice of divination implies the prevailing climate of uncertainty the action itself serves to dispel anxiety and create an environment where a measure of "control" is established. This is important as it fosters the empowering notion of the Mandate of Heaven found in the early-Zhou period and thus helps to solidify the ruler, their lineage, and validate the construct of societal roles. To clarify, divination, ancestral worship, and kingship implicitly create the sense of Natural Law that Confucius draws from the Classics. While there is a mystical and mythical connection to "Heaven" as a transcendent force, it is employed to empower the early form of Chinese humanism

\(^7\) Discussed in Wing-tsit Chan's introduction of Chinese Philosophy in "A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy" (10).
wherein man is the measure of all things except for the unknown disruptions and phenomena of nature.

In the late Shang there is a more pronounced move toward secularization, as divination lessens because decadence causes complacency and an inflated sense of human capability. However, the early Zhou period brings a renewed awe and an increased sense of religiosity after several consecutive years of turmoil. The decline and eventual fall of the last Shang king has much to do with this revitalization of ritual and attention to the “will” of Heaven. While the previous Shang kings are considered good leaders, the last Shang king is deemed evil. This sense of evil is associated with the ignorant authority wielded by the last Shang king. Thus, the failure and ultimate dynastic collapse of the Shang, works to solidify the notion of the Mandate of Heaven. As a result the early-Zhou kings seek validation and consensus through the successful rituals of the past. Of course none of this cultural history escapes Confucius and he seeks to promote Zhou social stability through developing those aspects of the Chinese worldview that support the glorious cultural periods of previous dynasties.8

So Confucius expands upon the concepts of Dao and Tian in order to ground his thought in tradition, but he also limits his prognostication to those things about which he can affirmatively address:

The Master said, “I would prefer not to speak.” Zigong said, “If the master did not speak, then what would we disciples have to record?”
The Master said, “Does Heaven speak? The four seasons follow their course, and the hundred creatures are born. What speaking does Heaven do?” (17:19)

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8 These historical details are widely disseminated and related here as found in deBary and Bloom, Sources of Chinese Tradition. 1999.
Here, to the extent that *Heaven* and the *Way* can be discussed, it is important to do so to reveal the foundation of empowerment behind Confucius' humanism.

3. **Knowledge of Dao and Tian manifest in Sincerity**

   "It is a long time since the *Way* prevailed in the world, but *Heaven* is about to use your Master as a wooden warning-bell." (3:25)

   The primary Confucian idea in relation to fundamental and ideal human self-disposition is that of *ren*. The notion of *ren* defines the cultivated individual in relation to other individuals thus assuming a self-existence and another to relate with. Before one can contemplate the action and effect that *ren* can have upon the agent of *ren* and their surroundings, it is imperative to understand the foundation of *ren*. Thus, in essence, one must understand if not precisely what constitutes the self, at least what the self that perceives itself must contend with to distinguish and retain a sense of self while developing itself through cultivating *ren*.

   The concepts of *Dao* and *Tian* are important to include here as it is to these comprehensive notions that Confucius attributes the basic sense of human self-constitution. The Confucian use of *Dao* indicates the belief and teaching of a true, knowable path that constitutes the "good" way. However the *Dao* of nature is not an externalized principle or the Daoist sense of an all-encompassing principle. Instead it can be subjugated or "prevailed" over by human actions. But because there is truth and a sense of justice in nature Confucius believes in fate. Eventually, *Heaven* will prevail over ignorant human behavior and clear the *Way* through engendering volitional humaneness. Thus *Dao* for Confucius is not merely the proverbial "yellow brick road" that the earnest
must travel. Confucius distinguishes his definition of Dao by connecting humanity to

Dao via man’s subjective nature:

The Master said, “Wealth and honor are what people desire, but one should not abide in them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. Poverty and lowliness are what people dislike, but one should not avoid them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. If the noble person rejects humaneness, how can he fulfill that name? The noble person does not abandon humaneness for so much as the space of a meal. Even when hard-pressed he is bound to it, bound to it even in time of danger.” (4:5)

Here Confucius envisions a self, distinct from all other selves and exemplified in the “noble person.” This person of character is one that has a developed sense of humanity and who has achieved synthesis of a rectified self-view and the subsequent virtue of self-control. This cultivated self, this noble person, has a subjective sense of Dao. It is this subjective capacity of humanity that responds in acknowledgment of the natural law of morality. Therein lies the sense that there is a right or good Way that will in turn manifest the truth of the goodness of human nature (all under Heaven). However, a subjective, self-regulating-self is not morally autonomous, and there is no room for a sense of individualism bordering on relativism in Confucius. In fact Confucius’ statement in the above passage brings the notion of Dao into the realm of subjective understanding. This sense of the Way is similarly existent in relation to man as the notion of li, or the rules of propriety. Thus Dao is not an amoral essence that pervades all things, but rather the underlying moral principle that binds the guiding principles of li, (propriety), xiao (filial piety), de (virtue), and yi (righteousness).

In this manner, the Confucian use of Dao and Tian elucidate the moral quality of nature and man’s natural subjective moral disposition. Thus Confucius’ sense of Dao is dissimilar to Laozi’s belief that all of nature, including man in his natural state, is above
and beyond the need for a moral structure. Laozi’s thought on the matter is revealed most succinctly where it is written:

“Therefore when Dao is lost, only then does the doctrine of virtue arise. When virtue is lost, only then does the doctrine of humanity arise.”

For Daoists, everything is viewed in totality and morality and knowledge are purely relative. In this perspective of totality, the need to describe things from the vantage of right and wrong disappears. But Laozi, just as Confucius, recognizes the decay of societal order and the loss of the sense of Dao and virtue among those in governance and the common folk. However, the Daoist move, as evident in the digression from accordance with Dao, is to show that the real or original state of nature is above and beyond human ethical constructs.

Confucius also witnesses the same societal and personal moral decline but he advocates the return to the notion of de and ren through the disciplined application of li (propriety) and xiao (filial piety). Therefore virtue and the sense of humanity are not merely human conventions created in the wake of the loss of knowledge of Dao and the ways of Tian. Tian, defined as the principle of Heaven, is frequently referred to in the Four Books and serves as the principle that ascribes a transcendent basis for morality. However, in Confucius’ synthesis, Tian is generally not employed as a transcendent or spiritual principle. Rather, Confucius derives from Tian a finite ontological principle of being that relegates Heaven to the status of a temporal existential directive. In other words, Heaven may be viewed as synonymous with the Natural Law.

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9 DaoDeJing, (38).
Confucius’ asseveration in the Analects about the auspices of Heaven is revelatory:

The Master said, “Heaven gave birth to the virtue (de) that is in me...” (7:23)

“I transmit but do not create. In believing in and loving the ancients...” (7:1)

Thus it appears that virtue is directly linked to Tian through reverence, reverence for the ancients, reverence for the Classics, and reverence for the Mandate of Heaven (Tianming). To reiterate, personal genuflection is necessary to initiate this chain of reverence and thus the seed of human dignity is found in personalizing the sense of Tianming. If this is the case, then Confucius’ use of Heaven expands the sense of Tianming to broad accessibility. No longer solely existent in relation to kings, the Mandate of Heaven must be individually internalized. This means that individuals should personalize the “Mandate” thus partaking in the elevated sense of dignity and purpose that is imparted from this empowering realization. However, Confucius warns that human virtue and self-cultivation does not equate to the availability of Heaven or the Way as “possessions:”

“If someone grasps hold of virtue but does not hold it firmly and believes in the Way but is not convinced, how can he be regarded as possessing them and how can he be regarded as not possessing them?” (19:2)

If virtue, is synonymous with Tian li, or the principle of nature (Being), than the immanence of Heaven’s virtue is as inseparable to “Being” as existence. If this interpretation is correct regarding Confucius’ sense of the seeds of virtue, then “humanity” is present or a product of the natural environment conjoined with Dao. This understanding and use of Tian, is another way to illustrate man’s connection to the
immanent Natural Law. Thus, both of the conjunctions, Dao li and Tian li, are connected with the notion of ming insofar as there is a natural dialectic or ordained progression of things. In this way ming serves as the end to the means of Dao and Tian.\textsuperscript{10} However, in ming there is not a sense of finality that would ascribe an omniscient intelligent agency regulating this natural progression. In that case ming would transcend and usurp the agency potential of human beings.\textsuperscript{11}

If there were ultimately some sort of imminent omnipotent agent at work in Tian li, that would amount to determinism or fatalism and in effect render humans incapable of self-cultivation.\textsuperscript{12} Tian and Dao cannot be thought of as an “Otherness” because that would amount to a philosophical duality and would circumvent the empowerment that the Confucian notions of li, xiao, de, and yi attribute to human beings. In this way Tian serves as the foundation for the ethics of study, ritual, and filial submission, but it cannot be viewed as the means to the ultimate transcendent end to the conventions of morality. At the risk of redundancy it is important to restate that the goal of the Confucian Way is not realized in recognizing transcendence to the condition of human beings, but in cultivating the innate goodness of humanity; it is realized in cultivating “humaneness.”

Here the notions of xing (found in all Confucian works usually denoting human nature or the nature of things), and ming (translated here as knowledge of the natural

\textsuperscript{10} Ming in this context is the natural disposition, but to say natural requires subjective individual knowledge, and thus volitional harmony between the principles of nature.

\textsuperscript{11} However, Confucius did speak to the reality of “fate” in life and death. Thus defining the parameters to life —namely, birth and death.

\textsuperscript{12} In fact, Confucius’ speaks of “fate” often, but not in the “fatalist” sense, rather it illuminates the immanence of the Natural Law and provides assurance that things will develop in accordance with nature —toward the teleology of “humaneness.”
order), become important in that self-cultivation requires an awareness of self-disposition. The means and the end of cultivating ren are realized in the cognizance that xing and Tian li are mutually inclusive when in natural accordance, but that discord rises in self and society when ignorance of this connection prevails. Therefore when individuals recognize the unity of the ordinances of nature with their own natural disposition, the necessity of the sense of following laws falls away. In this way the individual can exercise and fulfill their potential to know and serve as the sovereign agent or transmitter of the principle of ren.

In the Analects, Confucius speaks about the natural state of man in terms of man's innate capacity for virtuous actions. However, Confucius only speaks directly to the quality of human nature in one significant passage:

Confucius says: "by nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart." (17:2)

If this statement were taken out of context, one could interpret that the original state of man is inferior to that of cultivation or practice. But it is not the original state of man that is faulty other than the fact that humans lack awareness of the qualitative beauty of their original state (xing).

In the Zhongyong (the Doctrine of the Mean), the importance of sincerity is revealed:

"It is due to our nature that enlightenment results from sincerity. It is due to education that sincerity results from enlightenment. Given sincerity, there will be enlightenment, and given enlightenment there will be sincerity."\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Original text: Zhongyong, (21).
The content of this passage could be interpreted in a manner to show human weakness in sincere determination to know and engage in right action. This passage, taken in context with the emphasis on human capability to engage in disciplined or sincere learning, has a much more optimistic bent and would seem to be more in keeping with Confucius' view of human nature.

*Cheng* (sincerity) is discussed further in the next passage when it is said:

“Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature.” *(Zhongyong, 22)*.

Thus Confucius believes that sincerity is required to gain understanding (*ming*) of the natural order and man's capabilities and duty within that order. The innate goodness in human nature requires sincere and diligent nurturing in order to transform the potential into the ideal—to become a *Junzi* (a noble or wise person). In the *Analects* alone, there are numerous references that show Confucius' primary concern with the development of humanity. In the body of Confucian works there is a constant view of man's potential for good but goodness is never a certain result of one's existence without diligent self-control:

Confucius says: “Man, as a being brought forth from nature, partakes essentially of its character; this implies that he is originally endowed with all elements peculiar to his species.” *(11:4)*

Of all the elements or faculties that are ascribed to man, understanding of what is right and wrong is the most rudimentary in order to live in accordance with *Dao* and *Tian*. There is no room for an agnostic stance with regard to Confucian thought, due to this innate moral sense directly attributed to man’s natural disposition. Though any and all transcendent aspects of *Heaven* defy discussion, Confucius' emphasis on the pursuit of
zhi and ming implicitly engenders an understanding of the holistic essence of the comprehensive Natural Law. Conversely, ignorance (wu zhi, or wu ming) serves as the divisive characteristic that separates the masses from natural harmony. Thus sincerity is a necessary practice in the short term as it is focused harmonious action. That said, in the long term, real learning reestablishes harmony and frees individuals (and society) from thinking in terms of “necessary action.” Thus sincerity in learning is Dao and diligence brings the synthesis between human beings and Tian to fruition.

There is a progression to becoming a self that lives in harmony with the Way and the path is self-revealing with a proper understanding of the morality found in nature:

“The ancients who wished to preserve the fresh or clear character of the people of the world would first set about ordering their national life.... Those who wished to cultivate their personal lives would first set about setting their hearts right. Those who wished to set their hearts right would first set about making their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first set about achieving true knowledge...”

To illustrate this progression, one could think of Confucius’ thought as the composite parts of a bicycle. This ‘chain’ of becoming a person and society of ren places knowledge as the chains’ master-link, sincerity as the wheels, humanity as the motivating agent, and the vitality of personal and national life as the direction of travel. The bicycle, in proper working condition, will end up serving as the transportation or means for personal redemption and clear character.

Confucius is an irrepressible optimist and states often that this level of personal integration is possible to achieve for human beings. However, he is also realistic and knows that not all individuals can experience such a complete synthesis between self and nature and the fruit of that synthesis. While not everyone can be king, the practice of
ritual and cultivation of ren can qualitatively change one into a sage or at least to one whose desires are directed toward renunciation of ignorant actions. Following the path to “sageliness” is the highest endeavor for humanity, and history bears the truth that the potential exists and can be actualized if one’s knowledge and words are congruent with their actions, and vise-versa.

Confucius said: “There are those who act without knowing [what is right]. But I am not one of them. To hear much and select what is good and follow it, to see much and remember it, is the second type of knowledge (next to innate knowledge).” (Analects, 7:27)

In this statement, much like the preceding quote from The Great Learning, Confucius allows for the possibility of evil or wrong behavior, but it is a product of not knowing or not correctly filtering information. The element of innate knowledge, while it may not be the western conception of conscience, along with experience, helps to define and actualize good intentions.

The adherence to li, which Confucius characterizes as “properly doing all the rituals that govern day to day life,” is an essential element in aiding the filtering process. Rituals performed as a matter of habit will reshape the individual’s thinking, and ultimately, one’s rectified beliefs will naturally govern one’s actions. But Confucius knows that habit alone sans respect for ritual will eventually fail. Knowledge, really known by the individual, must be internalized and the practices found in li, and yi, would culminate in xin, where one’s words conform to one’s deeds.

The importance of xin was not only in the model or transference from the ruling class down to the people, but that it could percolate throughout the population. In fact

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individual people who practiced and developed the characteristics of ren could have a
direct impact on society no matter what their social status:

Someone said to Confucius, “Why does the Master not take part in
government?” The Master said, “What do the Documents say about
being filial? ‘Be filial. Just being filial and friendly toward one’s
brothers has its effect on government.’” (2:21)

It is interesting that although Confucius does not speak explicitly about conscience, there
is a sense of grooming a personal and collective conscience. The behavioral qualities of
sincerity, diligence and conscientiousness, are qualities that reflect the clear character, or
in this sense, clear conscience. That said, those in government still hold the ultimate
responsibility to model shu (altruism) and cheng (sincerity), thus modeling the benevolent
caracter of a junzi. Shu, defines reciprocity as “self-analogy” meaning that one should
use oneself as an analogy to determine what is beneficial to others. This is the essence of
the Golden Rule. Sincerity and diligence in practicing ren, will remove the sense of
burden that is the usual connotation of the notion of conscience, and sagacity, the product
of real knowledge, will lead to edification.

4. Eradicating Evil: Find the “Mean”

Confucius says: “The Superior man [exemplifies] the Mean. The inferior
man acts contrary to the Mean. The superior man [exemplifies] the Mean
because... he can maintain the Mean at any time. The inferior man [acts
contrary to] the Mean because....he has no caution.” (6:27)

There is much in this brief passage that is indicative of the difficulties that face
one who would seek right knowledge and action. But there is optimism that the “Mean”
can be realized, and found again even when failures would take one away from
experiencing the restorative power of the principle. And there is real empowerment for
the “superior” individual to learn, to change, and to teach by example. Of course, there is also recognition of the folly of man, in that desire and imprudence can reign, and for that individual there will be a high degree of suffering. Suffering, because in Confucian terms, the “Mean” is the principle of Heaven and thus the Way.

Those who would act in discord or “contrary to the Mean” would essentially be acting against Heaven. This discord constitutes the sense of evil in the humanism of Confucius. The “Mean,” of conduct is an abiding social spirit that will exist as long as people respect themselves and others, as long as human beings are human. This is a fascinating attribute of Confucian thought, that the commonality amongst humans—or their humanity—in and of itself seeds, germinates, and sustains a hope that transcends the perimeters of the philosophy itself.

While hope is a concept or feeling that transcends immediacy, the problem of evil is similarly enduring. In traditional Chinese thought, there is a certain amount of ambiguity in addressing the “whence evil” question, but it is always linked with improper human action resulting from the lack of knowledge of what is real, right, or good. Defined in this sense, evil is more or less the result of non-volitional action, a product of ignorance. Of course in a purely humanistic philosophy the problem of evil cannot be circumvented and so it must be attributed to humanity in some manner, just as goodness stems from human agency. In this way ignorance provides an out from the problem of evil when there can be no other explanation. Heaven cannot be blamed for the volitional or non-volitional acts of human beings. Without a theology or some sense of an omnipotent agent, the secular humanist is left without the metaphysical and ontological transcendence that could bear the burden as the source for evil behavior and
consequences. Thus ignorance of propriety of virtue must account for evil and the value of knowledge and virtue is correspondingly elevated to a redemptive level.

Confucius recognizes that morality is so lacking in society as here he laments the impoverished spirit of disenfranchised human beings:

The Master said, “Virtue not being cultivated, learning not being discussed, hearing of rightness without being able to follow it, or of what is not good without being able to change it—these are my sorrows.” (7:3)

However, Confucius deals with this issue by emphasizing the propensity of human beings to rectify “evil” behavior via ritual engagement such as practicing, performing, and listening to music. Music has the power to qualitatively chasten the individual who might otherwise lack the motivation to “hear of rightness” and change. Here Confucius discusses his belief in the trans-formative relationship that music has upon the listener:

“It is said: With music, if one hears its sound, one will know what kind of customs there were, and if one sees the customs, one will know how the people were transformed.”¹⁵

In this way, music can teach through its connecting power to the innate sense of beauty and goodness. Whereas aesthetic consideration plays an important instructional role in the rectification of self and community, it is but one aspect of overcoming the existing disunion of self or the personal lack of humanity.

While Confucius believes that morality is not in itself a human construct, the aesthetics found in cultural tradition provide the means to see the goodness of the principle of Heaven. Clearly innate knowledge is insufficient sans diligent practice of virtue. But Confucius is an optimist and he espouses his fundamental belief in the innate goodness of humanity. Those with the ears to hear and the eyes to see can recognize truth

¹⁵ Confucius utilized the wisdom of the ancients such as this quote in: Sima Qian’s Shiji.
and know goodness. The annals of history reveal this glorious truth, that humanity is capable of benevolence and that benevolence can positively impact the masses. Virtue and dignity will overtake baseness and humanity can raise the bar with ren as the measure of man’s potential.

Confucius said: “A resolute scholar and a man of humanity would never seek to live at the expense of humanity. He would rather sacrifice his life in order to realize humanity.” (15:8)

This motivation for sacrifice, belief in goodness and a higher purpose, and the altruistic belief in benevolence, are founded in actions that are in accord with the sense of unity that is validated in the sense of possessing Tian Ming.

Satisfaction and happiness are found in cultivating one’s humanity through a degree of sacrifice. The right way of human action is not that of satisfying personal likes and avoiding dislikes, but acting in accord with the principle of ren; that at the same time defines and transcends the realm of aesthetic activity. There is a degree of difficulty here because Confucius leaves a measure of relativism to the individual, and as he acknowledges, very few can walk the high road of combining li, yi, and xin. A measure of discernment is still bestowed upon the lower individual even though ignorance and basic knowledge are not enough to ensure that they can escape subjugation to either base desires or a governing body in the event that it is deemed necessary.

A question that rises here is how is it that an individual can make the transition from the lower minded, and thus necessarily controlled masses, to one who has the correct balance of self-reverence and reverence toward others. This inherent difficulty of relativism and governance is a large part of the rise of legalism in ancient China.

Whereas the Shang kings are able to mandate consensus by the “Heavenly” authority
bestowed upon them, Confucius removes the more transcendent aspects of Heaven and replaces them with the human practice of ritual.

One criticism of Confucius' program of moral rectification follows in that, while history reveals the good in humanity, it also reveals that humans are largely motivated by self-concern. Fear of the unknown gives rise to the quest for knowledge as well as despairing actions. Confucius works to remove this fear of the unknown and thus presents a way to inhibit ignorant actions, but in some ways this may impede the quest for understanding the unfolding dialectic of knowledge. Of course, Confucius stresses education, but his prescription is a form of education that is limited in scope. Perhaps this is where Mencius, who further develops the sense of innate goodness, has a more salient reason for the practice of virtue, and Sunzi, who purports the practice of virtue necessary to combat the innate evil in humanity, has the advantage of hindsight. While they have different presuppositions in their basic worldview, they both see that more development is necessary in terms of moral theory.

The “Mean” that is the balance between thought and action, is attainable according to Confucius. To surpass the problem of evil, without the introduction of transcendence means that “evil” is not a metaphysical occurrence. Thus “evil” must have a temporal or ontological origin. Then in Confucius' thought, the notions of good and evil and virtue and vice are constructs of human desire and attempts at assuaging the struggle with personal angst. Therefore, the “Mean” is simply found in one’s rectified self-view. Confucius sees the rituals of the Classics as the foundation for virtuous habits and thus the means for self-rectification. Engaging in filial piety is of eminent importance as pious behavior is an outgrowth of transcending absolute selfishness. One's
ability to love oneself is directly linked with one's ability to embrace family and authority above self-concern. In this way rectified self-concern begets the humility that is the precursor to humaneness. The individual is personally empowered to overcome desires by deferring to another, even though the other is not necessarily more or less perfect.

One problem with this circle of rectification is that Confucius' notion of ren, which amounts to benevolence for the sake of benevolence, is not enough to motivate those who perceive the moment as cause for personal fulfillment. Further, the perception of the required personal "sacrifice" contradicts the emphasis and value placed on aesthetics. Regardless, because of the pervasive nature of ignorance, any measure of relativism gives rise to social evils that in turn seem to create questions as to whether the notion that a purely humanistic reason to be moral is sufficient. However, the Confucian Way ideally mitigates the problem of evil by inculcating the belief that real existence or the fullest sense of personal fulfillment comes from ren and that true benevolence edifies and annihilates base desires.
III. Buddhist Treatment of Ignorance

1. Defining Ignorance in Buddhism (Mahayana)

“What is this practice of Wisdom designed to accomplish? There are three classes of conditions that hinder one from advancing along the path to Enlightenment: first, the allurements arising from the senses and external conditions and the discriminating mind; second, the inner conditions of the mind, its thoughts, desires and moods.... The third class are the instinctive and fundamental, insidious and persistent, urgings, the will-to-live and enjoy, the will-to-protect one’s life and personality, the will-to-propagate, which give rise to greed and lust, fear and anger, infatuation and pride of egoism.”

This selection from the Shraddhotpada Shastra is said to have been written by Ashvagosha, the famous first century (CE) Indian theologian described as the “St. Paul of Buddhism.” This shastra was translated to Chinese from the now lost Sanskrit text in the sixth century and is known for its fundamental importance in the Mahayana tradition in northern India and China. It is relevant here as it frames the basic Buddhist conception of the barriers to realizing enlightenment. The “allurements of the discriminating mind,” and the “will-to-live” which indicates “pride of egoism” are of special import here as they manifest unenlightenment.

The main Sanskrit term that indicates unenlightenment appears in Indian Buddhist works as avidya. The term avidya is a conjunction of the terms a and vidyā. A is translated to Chinese as bu or wu, and English as no, not, none, or without. Vidyā in this context is translated as zhi or ming in Chinese, or “to know” in English. Thus, the terms wu ming and wu zhi are generally used to describe the condition of unenlightenment in various Chinese Buddhist works.

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16 English Translation by Wai Tao and Goddard, in A Buddhist Bible, 397. (Edited by Dwight Goddard Thetford, Vermont, 1938).

17 As discussed in Junjiro Takakusu, Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy, 1975.
In the Chinese translation of Buddhist works it is important to note that another term that denotes ignorance is not often used. As discussed earlier, Confucius uses the term *yu* in several places and it is found to describe the ignorant in numerous places in the Canon of Confucian works. However, the term *yu* is translated into English as foolishness and thus has a distinct meaning (in most contexts) from the Chinese Buddhist translation of *avidya*. The Indian Buddhist use of *avidya* and the Chinese Buddhist contextual translation of *wu zhi* or *wu ming* do not usually characterize the lack of knowledge specifically or pejoratively as foolishness.

In fact the connotation of the components of the term *a*, or *an* (*a-vidya*) and the subsequent translation in Chinese Buddhist texts is interesting in that *bu* and *wu* are negative in the quantitative but not necessarily the qualitative sense. The Chinese translated compounds of these terms are numerous, but a plethora of Buddhist terms deal with the negation of the commonly held perception of reality. There are many examples where the Chinese translation of *avidya* is not negative in the derogatory sense, but rather, in the sense of negation. An example of the use of *wu* applied in conjunction with *niān* (thought), when translated to English, literally means “without a thought” or “absence of thinking.” While the absence of thought when applied to action could infer foolishness, in Buddhist thought it is often related to the desired state of absence of false ideas or false thoughts. 18

However in saying that, the translation of *avidya* is not free from the negative connotation that the Chinese term *yu*, and the English term ignorance ascribe to thoughtlessness. *Avidya* is also indicated or represented in the use of the Sanskrit term,

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maya, which means illusion. Illusion is a sense of “darkness without illumination,” or “the ignorance that mistakes seeming for being.” Applied in this manner, avidya can effectively translate as stupid or fatuous. That said it is clear that interpretation of this oft-used term must be contextual as that will indicate the connotation – be it unenlightened, unillumined, or baseness.

In Buddhist thought, unenlightenment is considered a primal condition that is both a cause and an effect but is said to have no beginning. Now this seems logically contradictory in that ignorance appears to be deemed to have causative powers. Buddhist doctrine depicts ignorance as the root of the “Chain of Transmigration” or the “Wheel of Becoming.” But there is nothing that has an absolute beginning in Buddhist thought. If there were independent causation, then that would ultimately isolate some principle, idea, or effect to an independent origination. Thus we run into a problem of the concept of ignorance in Buddhist thought as it is caused…. but caused by what? The answer to that question will be addressed in the following examination of the Buddhist principles revealed as a totality in the Lotus Sutra. First however, it is important to digress to portray the underlying Buddhist worldview as it transferred from India to China and was assimilated to the indigenous philosophical and religious culture.

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19 Ibid.

20 See the Buddhist doctrine of “Dependent Origination.” Ignorance can adversely affect others causing them Karma. The connectedness of all living beings implies interdependence to the extent that actions necessarily resonate. There is an empathy in the age of Chinese Buddhism that is reliant upon the Lotus Sutra that translates to a chain of causation among all living beings.
2. Context for Chinese Buddhism and the *Lotus Sutra*

Buddhism entered China and gained a quick foothold in the first century CE. The philosophy espoused ideas that incorporated *Daoist* and Confucian terminology and the fundamental Chinese Buddhist tenets, prior to the *Zen* movement in the ninth century, were mostly complementary with the indigenous belief systems. Purity, tranquility, taking no action, and having no impure desires, were some of the basic doctrinal goals with the emphasis on the latter. The “Scripture in Forty-two Chapters,” believed compiled in the 2nd century CE utilizes the term *Dao* to describe the Buddhist Path and presents an ethic that is somewhat compatible with Confucianism.\(^\text{21}\) This translation is important in that it presents the basic Buddhist ideology to the Chinese cultural context.

This increased emphasis on Chinese translation requires a shared use of terminology and involves a number of translation problems between the native Chinese and the Sanskrit based philosophy. Sanskrit, as opposed to Chinese, is a language that is highly inflected, alphabetic, polysyllabic, and utilizes a highly elaborated formal grammar. Because of the distinct linguistic and cultural differences the development of Chinese Buddhism is characterized by periods and phases of growth as Chinese translations become more readily available. The first period of preparation lasts from the beginning of the Common Era until about 317 (CE).\(^\text{22}\) Initially, there are deep philosophical and cultural divisions in need of resolution for ultimate cultural acceptance and assimilation. These conflicts are succinctly summarized in this 2nd century writing of

\(^{21}\) The “Scripture in Forty-two Chapters” is discussed as a primary early translation from Sanskrit to Chinese around 100CE in presenting the *Mahayana* fundamentals to the Chinese cultural and lingual context.
Mouzi, who therein states, that the problem of acceptance is as rudimentary and as complex as:

"the alien versus the native, familism versus monasticism; Sinocentricism versus Indocentricism; the ritual and behavioral prescriptions of the Chinese Classics versus those of the Buddhist Canon; [and] Chinese conceptions of a finite existence versus Buddhist ideas of transmigration..."\(^{23}\)

Thus, in the early stages of Buddhism's spread into China it is recognized by Chinese scholars and Buddhist promulgators alike, that these differences between culture, language, intellectual writings, and worldviews are potential divisive points that require a measure of reconciliation for Buddhism to fit in the Chinese cultural context.

With these distinctions defined, the period of domestication ensues in the years between 317-589 CE and is the transitional era prior to broad-based acceptance of Buddhism in China (after 589 CE). It is during this time that Buddhist works such as the *Lotus Sutra* are translated and studied and become of increased doctrinal importance. Shortly after this time, Tiantai (founder of the Tiantai school) merges Jizang's contemporary idea of the "One True Emptiness" with the distinct Chinese Buddhist treatment of the notions of cause, "Void," and the "Middle Path." In so doing, he opens the door for Zhiyi's (531-597) compilation of the Tiantai doctrine with the emphasis placed squarely on the doctrinally rich Chinese translation of the *Lotus Sutra*.\(^{24}\)

Whereas the translation and application of the doctrine found within the *Lotus Sutra* delineates the evolution from the era of domestication to the era of assimilation in

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\(^{22}\) These categorizations of periods of the historical development of Buddhism in China are generally discussed and cited here from Takakusu, 1975.

\(^{23}\) Supported in Arthur Wright's translation of *Mouzi*.

\(^{24}\) Takakusu supports this statement.
China, this study must turn to perform an exegesis of this discourse. The doctrine taught by the Buddha in this sutra further expounds the notion of dependent origination and the corresponding interrelation of all principles, thus revealing that ignorance cannot be an independent principle or state.

The *Lotus Sutra* serves to define the developed Chinese Buddhist worldview and assist the establishment of an acceptable universal ethic for the Chinese precisely because of its concern for all of humanity. Here the Buddha makes it clear that it is necessary to carefully reach out to “all creatures:”

“Then I pondered within myself:
If I only extol the Buddha-vehicle,
All creatures, being sunk in suffering,
Will not be able to believe this Law,
And by breaking the Law through unbelief
Will fall into the three evil paths.
I had rather not preach the Law,
But instantly enter Nirvana.”

This excerpt from the *Lotus Sutra* is indicative of the depth of the problem of ignorance. Ignorance is made manifest in many ways, not least in the misguided persecution of the “Law.” Thus the evolving doctrines of Chinese *Mahayana* Buddhism centered the *Lotus Sutra* for its prescription of how to “tactfully” defeat ignorance. The didactic discourse of the Buddha in this sutra is directed toward overcoming ignorance through an inoffensive ethic of repentance. This form of repentance is dissimilar to the common notion of repentance in world theologies in that it is depicted as “the repentance

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25 *Lotus Sutra.* Sutra on “Tactfulness.”
of the non-sin aspect. In this way, blindness and ignorance are not viewed as sinful even though evil is made manifest through ignorant actions.

In fact, it is natural that one mired in ignorance would not be able to believe the truth. Especially the truth that tells them that everything for which they live and strive is not true reality. Thus the Buddha reveals to his audience in the Lotus Sutra, that in every case where the recipient of sudden knowledge misapprehends the truth of knowledge, it will feel palpably false to them. Their response will be one that is shaped by their blindness to the truth, and though they may respond antagonistically to their hearing of the truth, disbelief, in and of itself, breaks the Law. To assist the potential beneficiary a connection must be made to bring beneficiaries slowly into knowledge of the Law. Because ignorance is so pervasive and leads to such personal, relational, and societal suffering, sudden enlightenment must be limited to those who already have some basic sense of Buddhist doctrine.

According to the Buddha, the individual who truly seeks enlightenment will first have the correct view about the Six Fundamental Principles. The first of these principles, The Principle of Causation, is of most importance here because it depicts the inter-relationship of causation and defines the causal sequence of life. This aforementioned circle of causation, known by various names as the “Wheel of Life,” the “Cycle of Causation,” or the “Chain of Becoming,” places blindness, or ignorance as the catalyst of the process of transmigration. Thus the Buddhist treatment of ignorance is of fundamental importance to escaping the circle of “life.” In this vein, the Chinese

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26 Ibid. “Introductory Sutra.”

27 The Six Fundamental Principles are common to all schools.
(Mahayana) doctrine, developed by Jizang (540-623) indicates a more modern formula for the treatment of ignorance as it is instrumental to the "Cycle of Causation."^{28}

Jizang reasons that illusion is the culprit since the illusory world forms the basis for the sense of reality of those caught in the circle. Self-perception, perceptual discrimination and even the attempt to distinguish the aspects of causation are all part of the illusory misperception that gives rise to the sense of being and agency. Mahayana, by definition, holds the "complete" teachings of the Buddha and these teachings emphasize the annihilation of causation through the attainment of knowledge that there is no "thing" as causation.

Jizang speaks to fallacious thinking in his statement:

"The Treatise on Right Views says:
The Great Sage preached the Law of Emptiness
In order to separate [human beings] from all [positive] views.
If one still has the view that there "is" Emptiness,
Such a person even the Buddhas cannot transform...."^{29}

This passage highlights the notion that awareness of the "Law of Emptiness" is necessary to begin eroding the false sense of self that presumes agency and thus maintains the circle of causation. However, greater knowledge than this is needed to transcend ignorance and transform one into a bodhisattva.

As the principle sutra of the Tiantai School, the Lotus Sutra, expands upon the presently synthesized notion of the bodhisattva with the ethic of "expedient means." The doctrine of "expedient means" is necessary due to the pervasive ignorance that underlies the self-perception of agency or causation. An important stanza from the

^{28} de Bary and Bloom, Sources of Chinese Tradition (392).
^{29} Ibid. Translation from the Sanlung Xuanyi, particular translation in the compilation of de Bary and Bloom.
Mahprajnaparamita Sastra was influential in the Tiantai reading and translation of the Lotus Sutra as it fit these notions together to distinguish objective truth and subjective knowledge. The verse is as follows:

“What is produced by causes,
That I say is identical with void.
It is also identical with mere name.
It is again the purport of the Middle Path.”\(^{30}\)

With existence viewed as a circle broken down into past, present, and future, the causation theory is a fundamental explicative principal, which in turn defines Buddhism. In this theory, that which carries over beyond death is twofold. These two causes of the past are, avidya (ignorance) and the notion of Sanskara—the motive or will to live. Whereas Indian Buddhism (the original school of Hinayana and offshoot of Theraveda) emphasizes the annihilation of ignorance through the abrogation of the sense of self as “being,” the Mahayanas reinterpret the role of ignorance in terms of the necessity of maintaining a sense of corporeal self in order to affect others.\(^ {31}\) Though any sense of individual or corporeal self remains in the illusory realm that constitutes the circle of life, it can be understood as the means of proselytization rather than the affinity for ignorance. Thus the bodhisattva ethic is an ethic of self-renunciation.

3. **Lotus Sutra: “One Vehicle”—Innumerable Means**

“Then I pondered within myself:
‘If I only extol the Buddha-vehicle....I had rather not preach the Law,
But instantly enter Nirvana.’
Then, on remembering what former buddhas
Performed by their tactful powers,

\(^ {30}\) Translation from the “Buddhist Bible,” 134.

\(^ {31}\) This is discussed in Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book In Chinese Philosophy*. 395.
[I thought:] 'The Way which I have now attained
I must preach as the tripartite vehicle.'

The title of the introductory sutra, the *Sutra of Innumerable Meanings*, gives a strong clue as to the direction of the resolution. The diversity of the everyday world gives rise to countless ways of experiencing it and interpreting it, since experience makes accessible only a minute portion of the vast spatial and temporal diversity of the whole. Where human experience can and largely does overlap the subjective inclinations and proclivities of the two individuals sharing those similar experiences will result in distinctly different interpretations. Thus, for the Buddha as truth transmitter, and the practicing *bodhisattva* as truth receiver, the *Law* that constitutes the "One Vehicle" must be divided for the sake of understanding. This text is revelatory of the new direction of emphasis in Chinese Buddhism on the necessity of subjective teaching considerations and the subsequent diverse means of which to transmit the singular truth. It is a unique development that the practicing *bodhisattva* needs the truth presented to them in a diverse manner similar to laypersons (such as in parable form), because the singular truth is so awesome in its depth and simplicity:

"... not believing they can become buddhas,
Hence we, by tactful ways,
Divide and preach the [natural] results.
Though we also proclaim the three vehicles,
It is only for teaching the *bodhisattvas.*"

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32 *Lotus Sutra*, Sutra on: "Tactfulness."

33 Also translated as the sutra of "Tactfulness"

34 Ibid.
This is a remarkable departure from previous teaching, and accounts for the reason that the bodhisattvas have such a hard time digesting their possible ascension to Buddhahood. Namely, this is a new teaching, prior to this revelation in the Lotus Sutra the emphasis is much less on an ethic for the bodhisattva and there is no instruction that “becoming” Buddha is even a remote potential for laypersons, much less the most pious adherents of the Law. This is a fascinating development, both in the sense of the hope that this teaching instills and in the ethic that provides a platform for much deeper assimilation with the indigenous Chinese culture.

The Lotus Sutra offers much in the way of explication in the form of parables to impart this expanded notion of the availability of something more edifying than mere personal extinction. This treatment models and promotes an understanding of the value of tactful “disassembly” of the perceived myriad worldly things and the pervading belief in subjective self. The “Parable of the Herbs” illustrates this point in demonstrating that there is a natural source of normative truth that serves as the transcending mechanism for those caught in the circle. However, this knowledge must be parcelled out by one with, or approaching, Buddha-wisdom lest ignorance subsume the best intentions and serve only to advance the human predilection toward suffering.

The following passages of the “Parable of the Herbs” show this relationship between the Law, the Law-giver, and the recipients:

“The cloud lowers and spreads
As if it might be caught and gathered;
Its rain everywhere equally
Descends on all sides,
Streaming and pouring without stint,
Enriching all the land.\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\) Lotus Sutra, “Parable of the Herbs.”
Here the Buddha tells of the generous rain supplying the needs of the diverse plants, such as the herbs, flowers, shrubs, and trees. The same rain nourishes them all, yet each grows according to its own particular nature. What is presented here is the means in which diversity (subjectivity) is met from the underlying universal source (in this case, the rain).

The Buddha continues on this point as he states:

"I proclaim this meaning... 
I look upon all [living beings] 
Everywhere [with] equal [eyes], 
Without distinction of persons, 
Or mind of love or hate. 
I have no predilections 
Nor limitations [or partiality]; 
Ever to all [beings] 
I preach the Law equally."\textsuperscript{36}

This passage supports the Buddhist position that behind the apparent diversity of individuals (the variety of plants) there is unity of their sustaining and redeeming source in the common nutrient, the \textit{Law} (the rainwater). The generosity of the sky in supplying the water of life is akin to the Buddha’s tireless message of the great equalizer, compassion, which amounts to redemption.

Though there is an acceptance of the plurality of things within the realm of causation (i.e., the diverse plants), the Buddha avoids the problem of absolute relativity by revealing that there is a fundamental singular truth, a foundation to the universe, that is fully accessible only to Buddha. Nevertheless, achieving Buddhahood is a promised potential and thus the truth is within the grasp of essential possibility, it is explicit that great discipline and compassion are required to go beyond the individual’s limited state of

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
The fundamental transcendent hope to endure the necessary measure of self and world renunciation, is depicted as follows:

“The Way in which you walk
Is the bodhisattva-way;
By gradually practicing and learning,
All [of you] will become buddhas.”

And the Buddha says that those who meet and enter the “bodhisattva-way” will:

“...gain transcendent powers,
Who, hearing the doctrine of the Void,
Greatly rejoice in their minds,
And emitting innumerable rays
Save all living beings...”

Here and in the balance of the Lotus Sutra, the notion of “Void” in itself is not a readily understandable or applicable concept. Ignorance precludes one from truly understanding this fundamental basis for and of the Law. This ethic of “emitting innumerable rays,” is itself an assumption of the sense of the practice of repentance and it entails the process of incarnating compassion. However, without proper teaching and practice this bodhisattva ethic can be warped to impart an active form of penance that retains a sense of suffering.

But the Buddha says there will be great happiness upon learning of “Void” such that

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37 There are numerous statements throughout the Lotus Sutra in which Buddha-wisdom is available and waiting for a personal movement toward faith.

38 Ibid. Note: In both the Chinese to English and Japanese to English translations of the Lotus Sutra, the term “buddhas” in this passage, is translated in lower case. In other places the terms “Buddha” and “Bhuddhas” are translated as titles. The significance of this might be symbolic of a “final” gradation of Buddhahood.

39 Ibid.
compassion will be a natural response and made real through the practice of self-sacrifice.⁴⁰

One should not conclude that a full theoretical or conceptual grasp of “Void” is available, as entertaining that thought alone is indicative of the continuance of personal unenlightenment. To the contrary, what can be ascertained is only an aspect of the innumerable meanings that depict this one central Law in relation to “Void.”

Enlightenment is a process and while sudden enlightenment is available to the most virtuous, Tiantai Buddhism finds through this sutra that the means of comprehension of the Law are not readily knowable. The Buddha’s answer, offered in his treatise on “Discernment by Faith” in the Lotus Sutra, regards a measure of faith necessary to initiate the movement toward transcending ignorance. This measure of faith is the precursory level of enlightenment necessary for the move toward Buddha-wisdom. With faith, one gains the conviction to endure the measure of self-renunciation necessary to effectively bring others into knowledge of the goodness of “Void.”

“Discernment of Faith” contains a parable that is strikingly similar to the biblical story of the prodigal son. There is a father and son relationship in which the boy leaves and ends up poor in every sense of the word and finally returns to work as a servant on his father’s plantation. However, in this case the son does not realize that he is working for his father though his father is fully aware. The son feels unworthy to enter the man’s house and at the same time retains a sense of pride that he cannot submit to the oppression that he feels must come from a man so wealthy. The son remains and for

⁴⁰ In fact, “emitting rays” could be perceived as a non-volitional automatic response requiring no maintenance of a sense of suffering to retain a sense of compassion.
twelve-years he labors while slowly growing a new sense of the beauty of the lack of want of material concerns, thus distancing himself from the ignorance of his covetous heart. The father remained compassionately patient and instructive throughout his transformation and in the end rewarded him with all of his wealth.

"Just as that poor son
Who came to be near his father,
Though he knew all the goods,
Had no hope of possessing them,
[So] we, though we proclaimed
The treasury of the Buddha-law,
Yet had no will or wish for it,
Being also like him.
We, with the extinction of inward [fires],
Considered ourselves satisfied..."

The "faith discernment" in this parable is made manifest on several levels. First, the father, much like the Buddha, demonstrates his faith that benevolent and tactful interaction will reach into the impoverished sense of self that defines his son. Second, the son must release his delusional sense of pride and self-hatred and immerse himself in servitude without full knowledge that his labors constitute the antidote, or the alleviation to his personal suffering. But the son, just as the bodhisattva, works tirelessly out of ever-increasing thankfulness and ever-decreasing self-consideration and consternation. This is an important step to the "extinction of the inward fire" that is the precursory move of faith. However, this personal "extinction of the inward fire" is itself one part of the process to the knowledge of the higher truth of "Void." Thus the main point here may be that the Buddha, in his state of omniscience, imparts faith. The Buddha as an incarnation of knowledge is beyond faith, and thus his assurance of the availability of redemption for

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41 Ibid.
even the seemingly irredeemable, instills faith in living beings. This teaching helps to engender faith and empower the “individual” to move farther along the path from ignorance as the truth is revealed through increased freedom from suffering.

Another parable in the *Lotus Sutra*, the “Parable of the Magic City,” further depicts the purpose of these innumerable “means” of knowledge dissemination. All means and meanings rooted in compassion point to a singular knowledge of the ultimate reality of Buddha-nature. In this passage the Buddha shows another way to urge people on to recognition of the truth when they are weary and in danger of “backsliding” (or deserting faith and compassion):

“At that instant he thinks of a device:
‘Let me exert supernatural power
And make a great magic city
Splendidly adorned with houses,
Surrounded with gardens and groves,
Streamlets and bathing pools,
Massive gates and lofty towers,
Filled with both men and women....’

In this way the weary are provided with reward and rest, but rest for they know not what.

“When the leader knew they were rested,
He assembled and addressed them, saying: ‘Let all of you push forward!
This was only an illusory city....
Seeing the seekers of the Way
Midway becoming wearied
And unable to cross the perilous ways
Of Mortality and earthly cares,
So I by my tactful powers
For their relief preached nirvana....’

Here it is shown that the doctrine of nirvana is but one of the means to the end of knowledge of the real truth. The Buddha continues saying:

“When I knew you had reached nirvana....
Then I gathered you all together
And preached to you the real Law...42
The buddhas, the leaders,
For the sake of giving rest call it nirvana,
But perceiving this rest [should be] ended,
They lead them [on] into Buddha-wisdom.42

This parable is rich with "truth" that the Buddha wishes to impart to those who are
already on the path. The literal end of ignorance is the letting go of the sense of self that
needs rest. Nirvana is not to be perceived as a state of perception. If one views nirvana
as anything less than the knowledge of the oneness of "Void" they will not have attained
Buddha-wisdom.

Incidentally, it is interesting to note some other aspects of this passage including
the equal footing of women in the "Magic City" which is no small point, as this is a new
teaching within Buddhism. Further, the fact that there are "buddhas" (plural) is another
indication of the accessibility of Buddha-wisdom. And not least, the notion of nirvana is
used as one of the means to explaining an aspect of what constitutes Buddha-wisdom.
Again, nirvana itself should not be thought of as the ultimate purpose of the Law.
Extinction or escape from the circle is not the goal in its fullest sense. The previously
extrapolated statement by the Buddha that "extinction of the inner fires" causes humanity
to "consider ourselves satisfied" imparts this resting sense of nirvana but satisfaction at
this level of understanding is indicative of the continuation of a degree of ignorance.43

To summarize the relevance of the parables found within the Lotus Sutra, it
becomes clear with this teaching that the attempt to explicate the particulars of Buddha-

42 Ibid.

43 Note: This is also a severe departure from the Hinayana tradition.
nature is to present but one of its innumerable meanings. Though intellectually, concepts and words serve as symbolic meanings, they are just that, and all constructs are feeble representations of the ultimate reality. Only the Buddha can see the ultimately real just as only the Buddha can reveal the truth. Because of the persistence and the blinding power of ignorance, enlightenment is not the result, but rather, the pre-condition of Buddha-wisdom.

4. Buddhist Ethic: Law as Compassion

The Buddha advises the bodhisattvas that every construct of Law emerges, changes, settles, and vanishes concurrently with the instantaneous evolution of moment to moment. It is obvious that such impermanence renders the Law beyond whatever it is that is defined as knowing; for the commonly held construct of knowledge requires the known be stable enough to remain enduring knowledge. Thus, that which is determined to constitute human “knowing” is known by the framework provided by positing limitations and by the process of distinction or categorization. This kind of knowledge is exclusive and relegates truth claims that specify the known object or phenomena to be “this way” rather than “that.” But whatever is accessible to this kind of knowledge is not the ultimately “Real.” Those meanings that the employed “innumerable meanings” highlight cannot represent the whole truth found in the Law. Thus Buddha-wisdom recognizes that all concepts that are defined and explicated, however “true” they may be, fall short of framing the Law, much less apprehending the truth of its full meaning.

44 Sutra on “Preaching”
In the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha makes it clear that all derived meanings are not in themselves another independent meaning; rather, the language constructs found in the Buddha's discourse are presented in the text as temporal explication only to be negated later. The Buddha tells of the "Void," the "Formless," the "Absolute Nothingness," and qualities such as the "Ten Merits," but all these are mere aids or devices for reaching the subjective audience. All truth claims will necessarily be transcended, the sense of "Void" voided, and "Truth" abandoned, as the progression of enlightenment unfolds. The paramount principle that can be apprehended and enacted is the practice of compassion which itself transcends the dialectic of enlightenment.

Compassion requires no doctrine. Compassion is not something one objectively knows; it is an action, the subjective action behind unselfish giving and receiving. Thus the path to enlightenment is compassion; and it is the act of compassion rather than hostility and partiality that is the catalyst of the path to enlightenment. The "Parable of the Herbs" is very clear in showing that rain's non-preferential generosity or compassion for thirsty plants is tantamount to the necessary provision for the subjective flourishing of those caught in the circle.

In the *Lotus Sutra*, Buddha nature is recognized in all, be they disciples such as Sariputra, great bodhisattvas, relatives of Buddha Sakyamuni, and even those who are steeped in ignorance such as the impoverished villain, Devadatta. The universality of compassion and generosity will transcend and thus overcome hostility, revenge, judgement and even the human construct of justice. For all these feelings, actions, and laws require limits, emphasize contrasts, create opposition, and ultimately entail either/or thinking. While full enlightenment is the goal, those in the circle of life remain in the
clutches of contrast, thinking, judgement, preference, and hierarchy. The subjective ethical implications of *karma* and even the *karmic* principle are means for subjective understanding. Thus the attempt to define what constitutes enlightenment will always fall short unless it is looked upon as the antithesis of the human constructs of symbolism and moral ordinances of human institutions. And the sense of "beyond" means always practicing compassion, and being mindful that enlightenment is not a concept that can be ascertained through philosophical investigation and some descriptive treatment. If enlightenment is viewed as a concept or even a totality of affirmative concepts, it is not enlightenment. Rather, the "knower" misconstrues temporal knowledge and looses the essence of the *Law*, thus remaining unenlightened.

In the various parables found within the *Lotus Sutra*, such as the examined parables, "The Magic City" and "The Burning House," skillful means are deemed useful and effective for turning the learned and the ignorant from their current belief and desires. All caught in the circle, including those who dwell with a sense of apathy and indifference, maintain some sense of desire or selfishness that entails bad habits. Thus it is due to this habitual ignorance that all of humanity thwart personal movement to their real or natural blissful state of Buddha-wisdom. People cause their own suffering and bring suffering upon others by their refusal to embody compassion.

There are some interesting points regarding the truth of ultimate reality that is depicted in these parables. They go against the grain of rationality in human and philosophical tradition. In the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha reveals that tactfulness and expedient means must be employed to turn the ignorant even when it is against their own will. Thus the Buddha espouses the kind of utilitarian idea that the end, "Void," justifies
the means (the ethic of "skillful means" within the Law of compassion). This could be construed as a form of paternalism, when a form of deliberate deception is employed for the benefit of the ignorant. But the Buddha reveals that the end of suffering justifies psychological manipulation whenever necessary. The parables in the Lotus Sutra are not in and of themselves some particular revelations of absolute truth, but rather, persuasive devices, themselves to be abandoned once a seed of faith is imbedded and compassion is made real through action. Again, all constructs of language and even compassionate actions in this ethic are merely "skillful means" to the end of enlightenment.

This is a general practical approach recognized in Mahayana traditions in which it is claimed that the Buddha Sakyamuni taught different things at different times to different people, in each case saying what would be most beneficial for the given audience. Here the Buddha speaks to this:

"I knew that the natures and desires of all living beings were not equal. Therefore I preached the Law variously. It was with tactful power that I preached the Law variously. In forty years and more, the truth has not been revealed yet."

There is a necessary transcendent value and role of the tactful use of innumerable meanings to elucidate the commonality of Buddha Nature. Even so, in years of teaching, the Buddha has had to continue the use of the means of constructs for understanding and none are yet ready to receive the truth in its entirety. This gives rise to the question of whether the Buddha-nature of each individual is merely an innate potential. The Buddha's answer to this affirms the sense that Buddha-nature is an innate seed and thus will be realized eventually. Certainly that seems to be the intent of the teaching to the

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45 Lotus Sutra: "Sutra of Innumerable Meanings," also titled "Preaching."
individuals to whom Buddhahood is promised in the *Lotus Sutra*. Thus perhaps the transcendence of Buddha-nature is simultaneously immanent in which case individual realization is the change of personal attitude or awakening which in turn amounts to sudden enlightenment. But sudden enlightenment does not seem to be available or the goal in the *Lotus Sutra*. Regardless, if Buddha-wisdom is instantaneous or a process, or if it is imminent or not, the act of imagining and discussing it in these terms is itself an ignorant perception of *either/or* thinking.46

The solution lies in seeing that although rationally the alternatives are disjoint, and make absolute alternative claims, the reality is that both of these ways of seeing can be upheld, and neither is the whole truth. All are substantially one with the Buddha, there is no quantitative distinction, and the divergence is lodged in the qualitative misperception that there are innumerable individual selves. The conception that there are myriad things and that there is a multiplicity of truths is a misconception as everything is part of the one and the same whole. Thus, when compassion replaces striving, the Law completes the division between nature and perceived human want. Since compassion is made real through action, it is an indelible truth that Buddha-nature cannot be fulfilled through rest and inaction.

46 In terms of this passage, to say that something is one thing or another is to categorize it, to define it, and to impose a sense of certainty as to the nature or essence of that thing. The concept of "*either/or*" will be discussed more in the western chapter, specifically in the exegesis of Kierkegaard's thought. It is a term that has particular significance in Existential thought as Hegel spoke about the principle of existence that afforded a kind of thinking about all things in terms of his sense of "*both/and*". *Either/or* is an exclusive principle and thus is indicative of discriminating thinking and therefore making choices within this context is incongruent with basic Buddhist doctrine.
5. **Surpassing Ignorance and the Problem of Evil**

The Buddhist answer to the problem or manifestation of evil is to emphasize the dichotomy between enlightenment and ignorance. Whereas enlightenment (that begets Buddha-wisdom) defines the ultimate in knowledge, or knowledge of unity and oneness of all that is, it follows that ignorance is the instrument of discord of unity. Therein is the interaction of the principle of *yin/yang* except the evil manifest in suffering does not swing the dialectic (into fear and loathing) since the virtue of Buddha-wisdom prevails. On point, the evil or suffering that exists in the world is always a product of ignorance just as the sense of plurality boils down to ignorance. In the Buddhist (*Hinayana*) doctrine of “Dependent Origination,” ignorance is the root cause of suffering as it gives rise in order to: *karma*, consciousness, form, senses and sensation, desire, attachment, existence, birth, aging, and finally, death. Birth itself brings forth sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair.\(^{47}\) When the cycle is viewed in this manner, it becomes clear that the cessation of ignorance is the remedy to arresting this perpetual chain of dependency in the “realm” of suffering.

This is the essence of the *Mahayana* (specifically, *Tientai*) move to employ the *bodhisattva* ethic. One must aspire to live as a *bodhisattva* even if it appears to be the most severe form of self-renunciation. But in this ethic there is purpose, in that there is duty, and a goal, the essence of which is the active practice of the *Law*. And by proceeding on the *bodhisattva* path, the merits of one’s compassion accrue and reap dividends to the benefit of all living beings. This in turn serves as the solace that begets happiness in the transitional “painful” movement from ignorance for the practicing

bodhisattva. Compassionate action is linked with happiness, in that this “personification” of the Law enables one to become the true “self,” Buddha.

Again, here is the fundamental worldview question of an either/or versus both/and character (in western terms) regarding what constitutes reality. With no sense of duality, it follows that there is not any sense of abstruse transcendence. Transcendence is thus limited to imminence, and in this case, imminence is devoid of an externality. Without a transcendent aspect of Buddha-nature, all things are aspects of one thing. The self that perceives itself is either already naturally imbued with a measure of Buddha-wisdom and thus enlightened with the seed of compassion or, there is a moment when the individual who has labored as a bodhisattva and embodied compassion, transcends all the ignorance of the chain of causation and moves through enlightenment to wisdom. Both claims would seem to entail partial and simultaneous truth, but both are necessarily limited claims, and hence cannot encompass the whole truth. Thus Mahayana Buddhism supports its sense that everything partial knowledge comprises, amounts to the both/and claim that all knowledge is oneness or Tathata.⁴⁸

There are moments in temporal existence when each aspect of truth is important but they are always no more or less than tactful and expedient means for maintaining a balance to the weight of suffering. But this sense of other knowledge, the knowledge of how to best apply skillful means loses its “otherness” without transcendence and cannot adequately disclose the problem of evil. Simply, if there is no duality, no “otherness”

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⁴⁸ Tathagata is translated from Sanskrit as “Thusness.” This notion of “Thusness” defies linguistic definition in much the same way as the Daoist treatment of Dao or in the western tradition, the biblical account of God's self-description as “I Am.” In each of these cases the construct of language fails to grasp the essence much less encompass the concept of what entails “Being.”
then there is strife and suffering within the realm of Buddha-nature. Evil would then also
be a manifestation of one aspect of Buddha-nature. So evil cannot be evil and good
cannot be good, because there is no yin/yang principle.

Retreating from that line of thinking, one sees that the Way of compassion and
cessation of self-striving is the way to defeat suffering by embracing everything without
preference. Buddhism has many doctrines of the numerous heavens and hells, but these
places are not the end realms for living beings, they are much like the sense of nirvana,
they are resting places and places of penance. The Law which constitutes Buddha-
wisdom is indescribable similar to the Daoist sense of the Dao. The Law is the truth of
"Void." "Void" is beyond the constructs of good and evil. "Void" is also beyond the
preferential notions of love and hate. With regard to "Void," ignorance in action is never
quite volitional or non-volitional, just as ignorance itself is neither vincible nor
invincible.

This Mahayana notion of Buddha-wisdom is synonymous with Buddha-
omniscience, but omniscience is not omnipotence as seen in the weight of slowly and
wisely transmitting the essence of "Void" to the subjective understanding of another. This
shows that some vestige of ignorance is indispensable because it is the motivational
aspect for the self in the movement toward Buddha-wisdom. Thus the fact that there is
ignorance make ascent possible. In any case, true cognizance of one’s relationship to
"Void" as a oneness can be thought of as the fulfilling sense of absorption rather than the
despair of nihilism that the sense of extinction entails. Thus the promise and ascension to
Buddha-wisdom is the final redemption from the suffrage created in the sense of being a

49 The circularity of this sense of the use of ignorance is self-revelatory here.
self, and the lingering prospect of annihilation experienced even in the bodhisattva state.

The “Final Commission,” in the Lotus Sutra reaffirms this ethic of saving redemption for humanity through the practicing bodhisattva:

“If good sons or good daughters in ages to come believe in the Tathagata-wisdom, do you proclaim this Law-Flower Sutra to them that they may hear and know it, in order that they may obtain the Buddha-wisdom. If there be living beings who do not believe in it, do you show, teach, benefit, and rejoice them with the other [tactful] profound laws of the Tathagata. If you are able thus to act, then you will have repaid the grace of the buddhas.”

Here the Buddha summarizes his teaching in the Lotus Sutra on the sense of movement from ignorance to enlightenment. It is precisely through the sense of empathy and reception or response to “grace” that compassion arises. Thus there is a natural sense of compassion among all living beings because all beings in the realm of life have a primordial connection to Buddha-nature.

50 “The Final Commission” in the Lotus Sutra sums up the transference of wisdom from Buddha to all living beings through the conduit of the bodhisattva.
IV. Western Treatments of Ignorance

1. Greek traditional views of Ignorance

"I tried to demonstrate to him that he thought he was wise, but actually was not, and as a result I made an enemy of him, and of many of those present. To myself, as I left him, I reflected: ‘Here is one man less wise than I. In all probability neither of us knows anything worth knowing; but he thinks he knows when he doesn’t, whereas I, given that I don’t in fact know, am at least aware I don’t know’" (Apology, 21c).

In early Greek thought, ignorance is not limited to base individuals with no education, the Socratic view shows that learned aristocrats are often the worst sort.

From the scholar such as Miletus (to whom the offense in the above passage was committed) to the local blacksmith, simplicity of life’s concerns and mastery of one’s field shows one’s capacity for wisdom from engaged practical wisdom. However, the problem of ignorance for this individual is compounded by arrogance:

"This is without doubt the most reprehensible folly—the folly of thinking one knows what one does not know.” (29b)

Here, Socrates’ relates that the blacksmith’s mastery of his craft serves to aggrandize his self-image such that he assumes the delusion that his depth of knowledge extends beyond his craft.

Socrates does not claim mastery to anything, but he has found the way to live his words with regard to experiential learning. He recognizes that the problem of education and even learned wisdom is one of language and of categorization and that ideas must be investigated. Thus he intimates a form of existential doubt combined with experiential openness and models the freedom he finds in the truth. Ignorance of this

51 Plato’s discourse has Socrates applying his method of instructive questioning to the wise aristocrat Miletus. Resulting in such an offence of ego that Miletus had him indicted and put to death.
truth shapes one’s self-image, and hinders knowledge and the ability to live in consonance with the divine ordinances of the god (or gods). Entertaining the extreme doubt of denying one’s existence is not required, but a healthy skepticism of human conventions, myths and personal conjecture, will clear self-image. Here Socrates addresses this incendiary combination of the abstruse limitation of knowledge and the constructs of the human imagination (e.g. relating to the attachment of fear to the notion of death):

“For all anyone knows, death may in fact be the best thing in the world that can happen to a man; yet men fear it as if they had certain knowledge that it is the greatest of evils…. Compared therefore with the evils which I know to be evils, I shall never fear, or try to avoid, what for all I know may turn out to be good.” (Apology, 29c)

This distinct problem of mortality cannot find resolution in knowing lest it be experiential knowledge and thus the unknowns of death result in anxiety. Cross-culturally, death is feared, but this fear is not a product of subjective or objective knowledge. There is no *apriori* knowledge of death; one cannot make a certain value judgement. For Socrates, the unsubstantiated fear of death is an example of the human predilection to reduce or categorize knowledge prior to complete knowledge. Socrates knows that there are limits on what is and what can be known, but he sees the temporal limits directly attributable to the constraints that humans ignorantly create in the form of dogma.

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52 In various places in the Socratic discourses, including the Apology, Socrates speaks of the “gods,” “god” and “God.” However one of the charges against him was that he failed to give proper deference to the gods of ancient Greek mythology. He pled guilty to not knowing if there were truly “gods” such as these or if there was a sovereign “God.”
This sounds familiar to Confucius' belief in the concern over the individual who
"thinks without learning." Thus, like Confucius, the foundational tenet of the Socratic
ethic is that one will act in accordance with what one knows. In Socratic terms this
translates to his belief that "to know the good is to do the good." This is similar to the
"Golden Rule" insofar as good actions are based upon truthful self-knowledge.
Conversely, failure to live wisely begets actions that are directly linked to mistaken
knowledge of what comprises the good in relation to self. For Socrates (and Plato
alike), bad deeds or evil always results from ignorance of the good.

2. Socrates, Plato on Ignorance and Imagination

Socrates: "what are you doing my friend! Will you go away and destroy
all my hopes of learning from you what is pious and what is not, and so
of escaping Meletus? I meant to explain to him that now Euthyphro has
made me wise about divine things and that I no longer in my ignorance
speak carelessly about them or introduce reforms. And then I was going
to promise him to live a better life for the future." (Apology, 16c)

Socrates' treatment of ignorance seems paradoxical as he often asserts his own
limitations to knowledge yet claims that cognizance of his lack of knowledge is
precisely what sets him apart as "wise." There are countless passages in the Socratic
dialogues where Socrates claims ignorance, but his arguments and discussions with
others are formulated in an interrogative manner exposing disingenuousness in his
claim to ignorance. Through proclaiming his own ignorance, Socrates is a master of
turning the certainty of preconceived conclusions back into genuine questions. This
method leads the individual from self-perceived subjective certitude to psychological
doubt. Thus the Socratic method is ironic in that real knowledge is taught in the guise
of ignorance in order to move one to subjectively recognize their “knowledge” is far from complete.

“I can imagine someone saying, ‘How about keeping your mouth shut, Socrates, and leading a quiet life? Can’t you please go into exile, and live like that?’ Of all things, this is the hardest point on which to convince some of you. If I say that it is disobeying god, and that for this reason I can’t lead a quiet life, you won’t believe me—you’ll think I’m using that as an excuse. If on the other hand I say that really the greatest good in a man’s life is this, to be each day discussing human excellence and the other subjects you hear me talking about, examining myself and other people, and that the unexamined life isn’t worth living—if I say this, you will believe me even less.” (Apology, 38a)

The combination of Socrates’ claim to ignorance and his insistence that “the unexamined life isn’t worth living” are revelatory of his “existential” openness. Distinguishing between human wisdom and true wisdom is precisely the means and the end of disposing ignorance. True wisdom is found in understanding that human knowledge is incomplete and that human mastery falls short. Of course this is not an easily embraced notion and the move to openness to true learning will be offensive to those who seek fulfillment in circumventing existential investigation. This is a problem of human nature and social inculcation, which juxtaposes finite knowledge with a sense of transcendent wisdom. Real wisdom according to Socrates must “come from the god” and thus his call to inward reflection assumes a sense of urgency and ascribes a transcendent value to virtue.53 There is urgency in this need for self-examination because potential in this life is limited by finite existence and whether or not there is some infinite measure of accountability, there is a real sense of justice in “nature.”

In this passage in the *Symposium*, Socrates relates the story of his conversation with the goddess Diotima, and thus exposit the inherent virtue and danger of vice in the licentious use of imagination:

"Take another human characteristic, ambition. It seems absurdly irrational until you remember my explanation. Think of the extraordinary behavior of those who, prompted by Eros, are eager to become famous, and ‘amass undying fame for the whole of time to come.’ For this they will expose themselves to danger even more than they will for their children. They will spend money, endure any hardship, even die for it.... Would they have done these things if they hadn’t thought they were leaving behind them an undying memory—which we still possess—of their courage? Of course not. The desire for undying nobility, and the good reputation which goes with it, is a universal human motive. The nobler people are, the more strongly they feel it. They desire immortality.” (208:d)

This universal human desire for immortality is a product of the imagination. Socrates’ finds that human beings cannot digest the implications of a life of struggle ending in oblivion. Thus there is a move, even more so in the noble person, to envision oneself in a grandiose manner in life and to attain fame that endures long after death. In this way, the existential reality of finite life span prompts the imagination to serve as a self-defense mechanism that entails a measure of self-deification. However, this inflated self-view is precisely the hindrance of pride that is born of ignorance.

Socrates’ illustrates this human struggle with existential reality through de-mystifying those considered to be nobles or intellectuals. Humans are proud and the nobles are more subject to self-aggrandizement as they are publicly esteemed. Therefore, the proper sense of learning is connected to a sense of self that maintains an active though constrained use of the imagination. Human wisdom is defined via the context of learning virtue through introspection, but choices determine one’s disposition toward virtue.
Socrates derives virtue from a sense of abstraction from the subjective and objective aspects of individuality in order to properly view choices; he says:

"Verily we have learned that if we are to have any pure knowledge at all, we must be freed from the body; the soul by herself must behold things as they are." (Phaedo, 66:e)

Thus there is an innate moral sense found in "soul" which comprises subjective human wisdom, but humans are prone to pious hypocrisy because human wisdom is limited by the aspirations of the human "body." Therefore a measure of abstraction is required in introspection. In this way Socrates' method of inquiry establishes a normative form of conscience through introspective abstraction from the social context thus freeing one to see beyond the entrapments and predilections of finite "knowledge."

Plato expanded upon the Socratic notion of the necessity of personal abstraction from the world of conjecture and ignorant self-projection:

"To be self-disciplined," I replied, "is somehow to order and control the pleasures and desires. Hence the opaque expression 'self-mastery'; and there are other expressions which hint at its nature.... anyone who is his own master is also his own slave, of course, and vice-versa, since it's the same person who is the subject in all these expressions." (Republic, 431:a)

According to Plato authentic truth is rooted in the essence of objective forms and manifested through the social setting or cooperative experience. The individual cannot assume self-mastery and thus create personal identity solely through subjective experience. This is especially true for the average citizen, because they will not remotely understand the transcendent goodness of wisdom on their own. Thus, Plato believes that philosophical inquiry and introspection should be reserved for the few who
are only motivated by the search for understanding. In other words, philosophers are the only persons who are not motivated by personal desire and can thus avoid the pitfall of assuming certitude. In this vein, the thought presented in Plato’s *Republic* moves away from Socratic thought, in that he espouses a normative sense of what humans ought to do under the council of trained philosophers.

Plato illustrates his moral and ethical construct with the “Divided Line” analogy in book six of the *Republic*, and in the “Allegory of the Cave” found in book seven. Here it is clear that the dialectical theme of opposites and human development is carried over and expanded from Socrates’ postulation. In these two sections of the *Republic*, Plato describes ignorance in terms of blindness or the state of sleep, and the movement of awakening as the use of sight turned upon oneself to gain insight. In the “Allegory,” Plato asserts that human imagination is not innately flawed but that it is problematic because the human tendency is to view the illusory or mimetic products of thought as wholly representative of reality. He finds that it is natural for humans to elevate the constructs of imagination to the status of authentic reality, and therein lies the need for rational reflection to test one’s thinking. Though one may be awake, it is as though they are sleeping when they rely solely on imagination. Somewhat similar to Confucius, Plato’s notion here shows that the act of thinking without learning diminishes truth to ubiquitous subjectivity:

“And if he were forced to look at the actual firelight, don’t you think it would hurt his eyes? Don’t you think he’d turn away and run back to the things he could make out, and would take the truth of the matter to be that these things are clearer than what he was being shown?” (515:e)

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34 According to Plato, this genuine concern for learning and transmitting virtue is a fundamental for candidacy to government positions.
In the "Allegory," the humans that reside in the cave spend their lives chained to ignorance and their vision becomes tunnel vision. The constructs of imagery to which they are subjected turn the surreal into the real. Actually the world of dim, fire-lit figures, is real for them. But since there is something beyond comprehension and even apprehension, the shadows of "pure conjecture" require more light on the subject.\textsuperscript{55} Those in the cave are mired in misconceptions of reality, fooled by images that are false representations. The shadows of the imagination obfuscate one’s ability to envision the true forms of reality that transcend human constructs. This is ignorance for Plato. Real knowledge requires that the individual transcend words and actions that amount to mere conjecture and speculation. In the "Allegory" Plato speaks to this process of movement into knowledge as one that is often resisted and thus requires assistance:

"The region which is accessible to sight should be equated with the prison cell, and the firelight there with the light of the sun. And if you think of the upward journey and the sight of things up on the surface of the earth as the mind’s ascent to the intelligible realm, you won’t be wrong…. The last thing to be seen—and it isn’t easy to see either—in the realm of knowledge is goodness; and the sight of the character of goodness leads one to deduce that it is responsible for everything that is right and fine…. We must have them make the ascent…and afterwards, once they’ve been up there and had a good look, we mustn’t let them get away with what they do at the moment…. Staying there, and refusing to come back down again to those prisoners to share their [knowledge]…. " (Republic, VII 517b/519d)

This section of the "Allegory" reveals that knowledge of goodness is not real knowledge upon first sight. Even when one’s eyes are opened and they see the light this does not translate to their understanding of the light source. Plato finds that the misconception of self promoted by irrational self-reliance upon the imagination, is so debilitating, that knowledge of goodness is difficult to obtain and is the "last thing to be

\textsuperscript{55} Plato, Republic, Bk. VI: 311.
seen.” However, when seen, goodness is self-revelatory even though it doesn’t quite induce a complete qualitative transformation of the individual. Thus, this personal awakening lacks completion without the sense of doing the good that is realized in the “return to the cave” to lead others into the light. This in essence sums up the Platonic notion of the treatment of ignorance via the installed ethic of bettering the entire community:

“...the point of legislation is not to make one section of a community better off than the rest, but to engineer this for the community as a whole.... and the purpose of all this is not for legislators to leave people to choose their own directions, but for them to use people to bind the community together.” (519:e)

Once the individual finds and crosses the threshold of vincible ignorance, then reason can be employed to realize one’s ultimate potential and role in relation to “The Good.” When one makes the decision (by personal volition or by prompting) to exit the cave it is then that they may understand that the truth is a sense of transcendent goodness, the knowledge of which engenders and culminates in virtue.56 Again, knowing for the sake of knowing is not enough. Rather, once vincible ignorance has been overcome, one must “do the Good to know the Good.” In this way, Plato places his ethical thrust on the notion that real awakening is manifest in relation to others and recognition of the goodness that underlies nature. The duty that defines humanity is to share “Truth” since it is not a self-exclusive principal.

56 Whereas Plato writes extensively about the forms, it is an interest distinction from the Buddhist notion of “Void.” One clearly is affirmative in that there is something that can be known. While the Buddha can understand and is at one with “Void,” it is not similarly accessible as the foundational truth.
This call by Plato for men to rise up out of their ignorance is directly attributable to Socrates’ sense of “divine” vocation. Therefore, the “Socratic Method” did not die with Socrates, but was an intentional cornerstone in Plato and much of the balance of western philosophical thought. This notion that human beings must push and prod one another from the state of ignorance, that all share interpersonal responsibility, is the ethic behind all of Plato’s works and his creation of the Academy.

Plato’s notion of the “noble lie” in the Republic is similar to the art of tactfulness presented in the Lotus Sutra. Here Socrates is depicted in a discussion of how to compel individuals into maintaining virtuous concern for others and society:

“It seems to me that the departure of an idea from a person’s mind can be either intentional or unintentional. It’s intentional if the idea is false and the person learns better, and unintentional whenever the idea is true…. can we devise one of those lies—the kind which crop up as the occasion demands, which we were talking about not long ago—so that with a single noble lie we can indoctrinate the rulers themselves, preferably, but at least the rest of the community?” (Republic, 413:a, 414:c)

Thus, Plato shows that since ignorance is so pervasive in all levels of intellectual ability, intentionality can lead the unaware to the truth. Perhaps not by making personal assertions of ignorance (such as Socrates’ method) but rather, by making grandiose assertions of truth that are unbelievable but give pause to reflection of what is in fact truth.

The discussion of ignorance, wisdom and imagination are all found in Plato’s thought, but his distinction between imagination and reason is key to his departure from the Socratic dialectic. Plato’s view of the imagination is similar to the Hebraic view in

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57 This is a recurrent Socratic and Platonic ethical notion. “Divine” in the sense of the “Oracle’s” decree…. that Socrates would not find a wiser person than himself precisely because of his awareness and profession of personal ignorance.
that, ultimately he distrusts this faculty. Anything less than an authentic attempt to seek and understand “The Good” in itself is a form of idolatry. The imagination will always render a diminished representation of reality that amounts to the perpetuation of ignorance. Reliance upon constructs of the imagination is both a cause and a symptom of low-mindedness even though its possible for one mired in ignorant conjecture to stumble into truth. But imagination stirs thought and here Plato shows that thought without knowledge dilates belief from conjecture:

“But aren’t ideas which aren’t based on knowledge always defective…. The best of them are blind. I mean, don’t people who have a correct belief but no knowledge, strike you as exactly like blind people who happen to be taking the right road?” (Republic, 506c)

The folly of ignorance presented in the Promethean myth found in Hellenic literature is similar to Plato’s concern with the juxtaposition of subjective thought and real knowledge. The definition of “Prometheus” literally means foresight. However just as Prometheus’ mistaken self-perception causes his undoing, imagination becomes the conduit for ignorance through reliance upon mimesis as reality. But in the Platonic tradition, the mimetic function of the imagination can culminate in man’s self-personification of wisdom. Nevertheless, goodness and truth are such that the ignorant can be retrained by “legislators” assigned to build a virtue based community through social inculcation. Even though Plato’s proposes Philosopher Kings, his view of ignorance is ultimately hopeful in that real knowledge will trickle down and eventually replace the human proclivity toward conjecture. For Plato, real knowledge is virtue.

58 The Hebrews had the commandments, of which the first was to have no other gods than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob…. Thus they could have no constructed images or representations of God or gods.
Benevolence wins converts to knowledge and thus, ignorance that serves as the source of evil, will eventually give way to the goodness of truth.

2. Modern treatment of Ignorance: Kierkegaard

Risking redundancy it is nevertheless important to restate the connection of Kierkegaard to this topic. Kierkegaard’s sense of “Mediation” outlines the contrast between the enduring negative connotation of ignorance in secular philosophy (eastern and western) and the theological implications of the original state of ignorance (championed by Kierkegaard). It is important to note that Kierkegaard is a fideist and that this shapes his philosophical views of the constructs of interpretation. His belief that faith is the highest form and the end of human ability places certain limitations on knowledge. Ultimately, “Revelation” replaces the human achievements of rational learning. Thus ignorance in the sense of human rational capability is invincible, though he finds that ignorance in the use of imagination is vincible in relation to the human conception of self. This, in essence, is a complete refutation of the import of formal philosophical study and of humanistic aspirations.

In Kierkegaard’s Journals he shows the value of the Socratic method in reestablishing a proper sense of the limitations of human knowledge:

“Take Socrates.... He has an objective attitude to his own personality, and when he is about to be condemned to death speaks of his condemnation like a third person. He is subjectivity raised to the second power, his attitude is as objective as that of a true poet to his poetic

59 “Mediation” here is the omniscient and omnipotent God of the Bible that serves as creator, definer, and sustainer of humanity. Thus Mediation is distinct in the personal relationship between distinct agents -God and man- as opposed to an impersonal or non-dualistic “mean,” “means,” or “middle path.”
works; he is just as objective to his own subjectivity.... The task is to have an objective attitude to one's own subjectivity."  

In Socrates, Kierkegaard has found a kindred spirit and the basis for his view of the necessity of the individual's synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity to *regain* ignorance. This notion of an original but lost state of untainted ignorance confounds the rationalist prognosticator. This idea that humans have lost the proper balance of imaginative ignorance and must *reacquire* ignorance for a real sense of self is largely unaccepted, as it is paradoxical. However, Kierkegaard is undaunted by his offensively anti-rational philosophical premise that relationship is established and defined in the subjective connection to truth. Objectivity is not a "skillful means," but an ignorance driven movement of abstraction from the subjective understanding of truth.

"The minds of men so often yearn for might and power, and their thoughts are constantly being drawn to such things, as if by their attainment all mysteries would be resolved. Hence they do not even dream that there is sorrow in heaven as well as joy, the deep grief of having to deny the learner what he yearns for with all his heart, of having to deny him precisely because he is the beloved." (*Philosophical Fragments*, 23)

Thus Kierkegaard asserts that truth is subjectively known when the individual understands that they are not the knower, they are the known. The limitations of knowing are such that humans can never obtain knowledge in the manner in which they strive. But it is not a matter of a wrong method of study it is a matter of wrong desire for possessing knowledge, the desire to define oneself as "Knower." Since there is transcendence, an otherness, a "Lover," humans are relegated to the role of "beloved." Because human beings are mired in temporality, and the source of truth is wholly transcendent, comprehensive knowledge of truth is impossible. This is problematic for

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the scholar, the philosopher, and even the theologian as it indicts the attempt to circumvent the truths of "Revelation" with constructs of systematic doctrine.

So there are two kinds of ignorance in Kierkegaard’s estimation. One is an original state something akin to naivete while the other is the ignorance born of the humanistic or pantheistic movement toward claims of absolute knowledge. The first form we’ll call good ignorance and the latter bad. Thus ignorance does exist and is endemic to humanity, but one is a product of contrivance and the other is naturally endowed. Of course to say that there is a natural form of ignorance that is of infinite value to a proper self-view implies ignorance in the usual connotation of the lack of real knowledge. In his *Journals* Kierkegaard writes:

"What our age needs is another Socrates, someone who could existentially express ignorance with the same dialectical simplicity." (*Journals*, 733)

This “simplicity” is an important aspect of the balance that can and must be found with regard to existential introspection. The human constructs of defining knowledge through ascribing teleological purpose and the means of ethical actions, culminate in one’s positivist self-projection as “truth-bearer.” If man places himself as measure of all things, then man renders mystery meaningless and thus leaves no room for faith. This is the form of bad ignorance for Kierkegaard, the kind of which, when met with the reality of human limitations, leads the individual to despair.

Kierkegaard utilizes the Socratic dialectic to show the limitations of the process of *becoming*. Whereas humanism imbues human beings with the propensity for personal growth and change, Kierkegaard believes that one cannot progress toward personal perfection by pure thought or pure actions. Humans are incapable of such
purity, as they are incapable of transcending ignorance of "infinite considerations."
Existence can only be studied in the temporal or finite world, and thus knowledge cannot be complete minus infinite or eternal considerations. All human endeavors fall short in that they are an abstraction, objectifying existence such that truth becomes subjugated to human reason. Thus if a proposition is considered irrational or does not easily fit into a systematic philosophy, it is not deemed true. But excessive or improperly grounded objective or subjective analysis gives rise to self-comparison. The act of comparison is a method that indicates a sense of certitude regarding the state of things and the possibilities of existence, and does not require rationality or reflection for postulation.

Here Kierkegaard speaks to the peril of the "moment of comparison" and the habit of assumption:

"A moment lost, and the chain of the eternal is broken; ... A moment lost, and the eternal is lost.... A moment wasted in comparison - then everything is lost. The moment of comparison is a selfish moment, a moment which wants to be for itself; precisely this is the break, the fall...."  

This "fall" that results from comparison defines the Kierkegaardian notion of "good" or original ignorance. There is a core aspect of humanity that has a transcendent quality, a pre self-indulgent simplicity. This simplicity in conjunction with the comfort of spiritual immortality is subsumed by the loss of the original state of non-comparison or the original naïveté of self-concern. Thus here it is necessary to look further into

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61 Or one's "real" potential.

Kierkegaard's sense of "Mediation" and the "reacquisition" of ignorance that he purports is the basis for re-synthesis of the fallen self.

Some might say that Kierkegaard's view of the role of imagination is fascinating but nevertheless a construct of his imagination. However a careful review of his thought illustrates, at least in the Kierkegaardian sense of it, that ignorance is indeed bliss. This is because Kierkegaard finds that there is a form of ignorance the ignorance of "comparison" that is not synonymous with vice or negative action, be it voluntary or involuntary. In fact, Kierkegaard asserts that there is a form of ignorance that is necessary and even fundamental to synthesizing the knowledge of the good with the right corresponding action. He finds that knowing the good translates to doing the good only if one's knowledge allows for a synthesis of the Socratic notion of wisdom (one's recognition of their ignorance) and the "Mediation" only available through the theistic notion of Grace. It is this form of "Mediation" (grace granted by God) that Kierkegaard recognizes as the key to reforming the synthesis that was lost in the "fall" from the biblical garden.

It is essential for the individual to recognize that personal and social constructs manifest the reality of the human inability to know. The reacquired sense of ignorance from this dis-illusionment forms the sense of subjective openness, which in turn gives rise to the possibility of real understanding. Thus Kierkegaard champions Socrates' belief that one must be careful to distinguish between pure thought and abstract thought. This use of pure thought detaches one from existence, whereas abstract

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63 Kierkegaard's conception of illusion and dis-illusion is discussed in Mark C. Taylor, Journeys to Selfhood, in much greater detail for further clarification of this concept.
thought in this sense, "reflectively examines and describes existence by preserving a relationship with it."  

Here Kierkegaard finds in Socrates the mandate of inward reflection made possible by this form of abstract thought. But this abstraction is not absolute, for the whole point of this reflection process is to understand that while one may have a measure of human wisdom, no one has true wisdom. In this way, Kierkegaard shows that Socrates' sense of abstraction or "objectivity toward oneself" is not a comparative rational move in relation to the humanistic sense of truth. Thus Kierkegaard finds that this personal reflection raises recognition of personal ignorance and becomes the catalyst for "dis-illusionment" which brings the individual to "the question:"

"The question is asked in ignorance, by one who does not even know what can have led him to ask it.... How far does the Truth admit of being learned? With this question let us begin. It was a Socratic question, or became such in consequence of the parallel Socratic question with respect to virtue, since virtue was again determined as insight." (Fragments, 6)

According to Kierkegaard, existence transcends the distinctions of rationalism and irrationalism alike, and cannot be categorized in any such way. Thought is required to understand and realize possibilities and authentic existence, but thought cannot reduce the imagination through principles of "objective" logic. Kierkegaard says:

"the task is not to exalt the one at the expense of the other, but to give them an equal status, to unify them in simultaneity; the medium in which they are unified is existence."  

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64 Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, (313).

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., (311).
The problem is that the post-fall human imagination, or the human “insight” of existence, requires ethics and proscribed virtuous conduct, as it is replete with a sense of self-potential that entails ignorance of the originally endowed authentic potential. Here Kierkegaard asserts that the qualitative opposites between the finite and the infinite are a paradox. Insight as an element of human knowledge cannot resolve this paradox, because by definition, paradox escapes logic. Thus the problem is identified as the feeble human attempt to resolve paradox —to know:

“One cannot seek for what he knows, and it seems equally impossible for him to seek for what he does not know. For what a man knows he cannot seek, since he knows it; and what he does not know he cannot seek, since he does not even know for what to seek.”

With the problem of knowledge defined in this manner, the resolution must be found in the notion of revelation (external truth) or in innate knowledge that entails “remembering” rather than learning. Kierkegaard points to Socrates’ “Doctrine of Recollection” to discuss the merits of innate knowledge as opposed to that of revelation:

“All learning and inquiry is interpreted as a kind of remembering; one who is ignorant needs only a reminder to help him come to himself in the consciousness of what he knows. Thus the Truth is not introduced into the individual from without, but was within him.”

This form of self-knowledge is not self-created—it is internal in the fabric of humanity. In this way the notion of “teaching” Truth is an activity that is rendered beyond human capability. For one to recognize the truth within, it must be a personal recognition.

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67 See Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, (6).

68 Ibid., (7).
Another can attempt to teach or show their conception of truth, but it is not deemed truth to the pupil unless it is subjectively understood, or existentially felt as truth.

Kierkegaard speaks about the person who is in "Error," as one who adheres to societal constructs or is in the state of ignorance as to their natural self-disposition. This ignorance of one's true self-constitution can be revealed by one's teacher, but even God as the "Teacher" cannot force the ignorant to repent by their own volition from selfishness:

"If the Teacher serves as an occasion by means of which the learner is reminded, he cannot help the learner to recall that he really knows the Truth; for the learner is in a state of Error. What the Teacher can give him occasion to remember is, that he is in Error. But in this consciousness the learner is excluded from the Truth even more decisively than before, when he lived in ignorance of his Error." 69

Kierkegaard defines "error" in this passage as sin. But he shows that knowledge of sin does not necessarily engender repentance, and the act of repentance must be volitional. However, if one has knowledge of sin and remains unrepentant this places the individual further from the synthesis of subjective "Truth" because of the human predilection toward continuance of sin. 70 Despair or apathy over one's sin is a continuation of sin as hopelessness and indifference are antithetical to faith. This notion is much like the Buddha's concern over disseminating truth and the individual's potential outright rejection through disbelief. Actually Kierkegaard finds that sin itself is the opposite of faith, in that it is in essence despair and disbelief. However, according to Kierkegaard, indifference is even worse than despair. Thus awareness of

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69 Ibid., (9).
70 This notion is discussed in depth in Kierkegaard's Sickness Unto Death.
ignorance ("Error" or sin) is not the precursor to faith. The post-fall human inclination is to respond to God in a way that is always sinful, as God's "hidden-ness" is used as an excuse for humanity to rebel against, or simply ignore, "Truth."

Here Kierkegaard's "stages" of life help to clarify his sense of the individual's movement from "Error." In the primary stage of "aesthetic" existence, one clings to both-and (yes, you can have it all) thinking. Thus the aesthetic choice is no real choice at all according to Kierkegaard because:

"the act of choosing is essentially a proper and stringent expression of the ethical.... the only absolute either/or is the choice between good and evil, but that is also absolutely ethical."\(^{71}\)

The aesthetic "choice" is entirely one of immediacy there is no inward reflection, nor any forethought. So it is not an ethical either/or choice, but it is a choice made in "Error" because it is a selfish choice.

In the "Ethical Stage," the individual realizes that choosing between possibilities is necessary. Here the imagination becomes more important in the act of recognizing truth. Kierkegaard asserts that the imagination will weigh heavily on the conscience and thus one cannot remain in the aesthetic both/and mode:

"for while there is no power which knows so well how to beautify all things as does the imagination, neither is there any power which can so profoundly disturb everything when it fails one upon coming into contact with real life."\(^{72}\)

Thus the move to the "Ethical Stage" will occur given time, as the individual cannot help but see the either/or choices that apply to real existence. But the ethical consideration

\(^{71}\) Kierkegaard, Either/Or, (105).

that seeing right and wrong in choices entails does not constitute freedom or the end of "Error." Kierkegaard finds that the sense of ethics is a damning concept when it comes to "real" justice. In his view, the very construct of human justice when met with the "Truth" would find everyone guilty of reducing God and goodness, to mere relics for the purpose of validating human choices. Like the practice of Shang divination, the sense of supernatural is invoked for the purposes of human power and control. For Kierkegaard, the ethical person remains ignorant of their real constitution, and thus much like the true junzi, the Buddha, or the Philosopher King, the perception of ethical necessity in benevolent action reduces benevolence to something less.

In the "Religious Stage," the imagination is important, as it is the "infinitizing faculty" which enables a relationship between the finite human being and the infinite "Other." This in turn is a greater recognition or move from ignorance that provides the basis for the individual to see the transcendent implications of their actions. Ethics can remain temporally concerned, but "Truth" in the theistic sense implies transcendence. According to Kierkegaard's pseudonym "Anti-Climacus," humans are not truly free in either the aesthetic or the ethical stage. It is the religious stage that provides the means of necessary transcendence to qualitatively transform one from the world-induced and self-chosen ignorance of heavenly considerations.

Kierkegaard's "Fear and Trembling," illustrates the manner in which freedom from ignorance is found in embracing ignorance. By virtue of the "Paradox," (Christ) and the problem of sin, there is nothing that the individual can do toward self-salvation

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73 Kierkegaardian term found in various works. Here, the "infinitizing faculty"--of the self--is defined as the facet of being that envisions transcendence, i.e....Truth, God, eternity. Conversely the "finite self" is the self encompassed in temporality.
but to believe and acquiesce. Here Kierkegaard’s notion of the “teleological suspension of the ethical” is employed to draw the qualitative distinction more clearly. The idea is that ethics have no validity before God because there is nothing ethically speaking that one can do to redeem oneself from the sin of despair in this life and the torment of Hell thereafter. Kierkegaard asserts that humanly speaking, only humility and faith are possible and thus it is by God’s grace alone that there can be salvation from eternal despair. That said, it is the individual that must choose to renounce the aesthetic sense of both/and and the ethical sense of either/or in order to accept grace and find salvation.

Kierkegaard’s “stages” are not to be mistaken for a dialectical process in which ignorance is transcended by moving from one stage to the next. The three stages are not a prescribed curriculum toward “becoming” or enlightenment. Rather, aesthetics, ethics, and religiosity overlap at any given time. Kierkegaard is predominately concerned with the direction of the movement with regard to genuine synthesis. There is no ultimate canceling out of one or another. Thus the “stages” simply point one inward. Inwardness, which is comprised of reflection, deliberation, and ultimately an either/or choice, is encompassed itself by the imagination.

Kierkegaard believes that the imagination is the faculty of faculties, and has great responsibility. Much like the Hebraic sense, he finds that the imagination must be constrained, but not ultimately distrusted. The imagination must be engaged in the act of choosing. However, if one deliberates too long upon the choice before them, they will surely fail to make the right choice because he believes that human-will always

74 Kierkegaard’s pseudonym “Anti-Climacus” Fear and Trembling, (25).

75 In the manner of Hegel’s “dialectic” -at least in the temporal existence of the individual.
overcomes human-intellect given time. In the instance that no “reasoned” choice is made, the individual still chooses. For, even in not making a decisive choice, one makes a choice by default. Kierkegaard would say that this is the cardinal sin of assuming a both/and view of existence, because without passion in choosing, one “chooses” indifference that in turn leads to self-indulgence. Indifference fails to recognize the “duty” inherent in making choices, and the responsibility of loving both oneself, and one’s neighbor. Most of all, deliberation and indifference reveal the folly of “bad” ignorance in that:

“If anyone thinks he has faith, and yet is indifferent towards this possession, is neither cold nor hot, he can be certain that he does not have faith.”

This supports Kierkegaard’s claim that a passionate decision must be made:

“When subjectivity, (or) inwardness, is the truth, the truth objectively defined becomes a paradox; and the fact that the truth is objectively a paradox shows in its turn that subjectivity is the truth.”

Then it follows that if the choice made is not a passionate one (subjective), then the individual fails to recognize “Truth.” However, by virtue of making an either/or choice, even in ignorance, one may come to recognize a wrong choice from the results of that choice, and can then re-examine that choice.

Kierkegaard would say that humans are not literally “Christ-like” in temporal existence, but they can revitalize imaginative ignorance in relationship to God. This imaginative ignorance of pre-fall man is the naïveté of envisioning oneself as self-

76 Kierkegaard, Works of Love, 42.

77 Kierkegaard’s, “Postscript,” 215. SK’s rebuttal to the claim that “objectivity” defines truth.
constituting, or "Knower" of truth. The "original sin" is a movement of seeking and creating possibility outside of God's ordainment:

"Imagine an arrow flying, as they say, with the speed of an arrow. Imagine that for a second it got a notion of wanting to concentrate on itself, perhaps to see how far it had come, or how high over the earth it skimmed, or how its course was related to that of another arrow which also flew with the speed of an arrow: in that very moment the arrow would fall to the earth."  

Again, Kierkegaard finds that this moment of "comparison" is the human sin of self-deification. This entails the human move to reject God's provision of revelatory "Truth" thus causing ignorance of original and pure self-constitution through selfishness. Kierkegaard discusses the implications of this desire for personal immortality as the antithesis to faith and ultimately responsible for the human condition of ignorance and suffering. In this way Kierkegaard asserts that the qualitative distinction between God and man cannot be ignored or overcome and as a result, man must resign himself to the need for the "Mediation" that is only found in God's grace. This awareness of the post-fall inability of man to turn from sin is the step of "enlightenment" that is the precursor to the real acceptance that self-redemption is impossible. But Kierkegaard finds that individuals, society, and even organized religion tend to lean further toward humanistic aspirations over time.  

Thus he maintains that a classical theistic biblical understanding is one that holds to the assertion that God's grace, exemplified and realized in the atonement of the crucifixion, is the only way to the re-synthesis of self that man seeks.

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79 This is the crux of Kierkegaard's somewhat avant-garde albeit purist indictment of modern "Christendom" for its systematic theology and relativistic practices.
V. Conclusion: The Teleological Suspension of Ignorance....

The mere attempt to define what is deemed to constitute knowledge and ignorance in the various works explicated herein is in itself an ignorant—if optimistic act. The process of learning must by definition be a subjective process. Pearl's of wisdom can resonate and strike any given individual like a flint or they may be dismissed as mere baubles of conjecture. Of course ignorance is closely linked to arrogance, thus to propose synthesis between irreconcilable worldviews and their related dichotomous philosophical suppositions, amounts to folly. But agnosticism cannot satisfy and amounts to staking a claim to invincible ignorance. In postulating that there are no universals, absolutes, or the possibility of "Truth" with a capital "T," the agnostic asserts that ignorance is so great that they cannot be alone in their ignorance but at least they are aware of their lack of knowledge. This appears Socratic in essence, but Socrates believes in the availability of knowledge and the existence of truth so he does not succumb to the arrogant pessimism of the potential for knowledge.

If we are to believe that personal lack of knowledge is indicative of the human condition, then there are universals in nature. All living beings share the universal experience of living and dying and share in the at least temporal ignorance of the origins of life and consciousness that is only exceeded by the unknowns of the after-life. If this is the case then ignorance serves as the tie that bonds human beings as well as the chain that binds them. However, the silver lining of the recognition that ignorance is real and ultimately pervasive, is that the lack of knowledge or thought that defines ignorance implies that there is knowledge to be had. If there were not a sense of striving, a sense of
imagination and consciousness, then ignorance would not have an opposite to breathe life into its' existence. So ignorance manifests real knowledge just as nature manifests truth.

In the study of world philosophies and religions it is apparent that there is a measure or sense of knowledge regarding nature. While views of nature vary, the fact that there is a measure of consistency in nature amounts to natural laws that precede human cognizance and human linguistic constructs. My personal philosophy is that there is a kind of symmetry in nature that strikes the human imagination in the most agreeable way. Without the innate symmetry that constitutes laws of nature, incoherence and chaos would be a teleological certainty. But does symmetry amount to synthesis or monism? That seems difficult to conclude. So turning to propose a systematic philosophy of symmetry would only diminish this body of already wanting textual and philosophical interpretation. Therefore turning to a “recap” should be more productive.

It is difficult to synthesize the various worldviews since they hold distinct fundamental principles that distinguish man, truth, and God as the respective measures for and of human potential. For Confucius, the cessation of ignorance is not a state of bliss, but rather the way to becoming ren. His emphasis on the personal and societal necessity of ren is quite similar to the breadth of importance of the Buddhist ethic of compassion. Later, Neo-Confucian thought expands upon the qualities of ren such as the notion in Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” where ren is discussed as the “principle of love.” If ren defines love in terms of human constitution, then love is a component of a larger principle that is a construct itself. But if ren is seen as the culmination of all principles that impartially permeate everything, there is an immanence of goodness in all things. Thus, in Neo-Confucian thought, Confucius’ notion of ren is developed into a
more complete principle of virtue that encompasses human potential and guides human action.

Forming an image of Zhu Xi’s expanded notion of ren is relevant, even necessary, to understand the advanced Confucian treatment of the problem of ignorance and evil. According to Zhu Xi:

“evil has always existed on earth because of the material dust that darkens the self-bright light (within the mind as li) and the material obstructions that impede correct directional movement of motives and acts.”

With evil defined in this manner, no god is faulted or diminished by its existence, as evil is simply a part of the way things are, a given in the relation of li (principle) to qi (matter). Understanding Zhu’s theory regarding evil in this way reveals both a Confucian and a Buddhist conceptualization of the need for rectifying and clearing qi; that one might cultivate ren, enjoy right relationships, and become an enlightened, compassionately virtuous human being.

If evil has always existed, and is in some sense a natural occurrence in the relationship between li and qi, then is evil really evil and something that must be overcome? In Buddhist and Confucian thought, there is not the western sense of free will or willing agency with regard to the manifestation of good and evil. But how can self-constitution be realized if there is not a willing choice to acknowledge oneself as a self? With self ultimately defined as a product of the material and immaterial interaction of principle and force, it seems to lack a major component. In the western tradition the notion of self always implies agency and agency always proceeds from will. If the faculty

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of the will is removed from what constitutes self, then “self” is rendered an empty concept rather than a state of being (or an ontological imperative).

A Buddhist treatment of this issue is in some ways more clear than that found in Confucian thought. The Buddhist move is to claim that any sense of self is purely illusory and thus, individual agency or willing action is impossible as all changes seen and unseen are limited to an ongoing universally linked process of becoming. The doctrine of “Dependent Origination” ascribes the interpenetration of all things, both material and immaterial. This is turn does not allow there to be independent “principles” like good, evil, agency or selfhood. These notions are all products of unenlightenment or ignorance. Rather than reality being a plurality, there is only monism; “Oneness” or “Thusness.” In this way Chinese Buddhism escapes a sense of nihilism since there is no annihilation. Reality and truth are recognized in the awareness that it is not the case that there is nothing to annihilate, but rather, there is pure “Oneness” and that cannot logically annihilate itself. Thus temporality and infinity cannot be labeled as such. Timelessness means timelessness. And there is no eternity as eternity indicates time—there is only “Void.” Once this “Truth” is known, freedom from all constructs or bonds of suffering is realized.

The “Humanism” of Socrates and Plato has a cross-cultural similarity to Confucian thought with regard to the means of human constructs. Further, while societal hierarchy and social roles are necessary to engender an ethic of learning and social concern, they are means not that dissimilar to the Buddhist means to discovering wholeness and reducing societal evils. As humanistic philosophers, they must find a way to justify self-existence, and the evidentiary plurality of the cosmos. While the Confucian
move is an attempt to reduce the myriad things to the products of \( li \) and \( qi \), the individual in ancient Greek thought is affirmed as an individual. But individual actions amount to agency and thus there is an implicit notion of will in the Greeks, and in Confucian thought. Zhu Xi expands on this in his treatise of what constitutes the self. Zhu says:

“Righteousness and Seriousness must support each other, one following the other without beginning and end.... If the Principle of Nature exists in the human mind, selfish desires will not, but if human selfish desires win, the Principle of Nature will be destroyed. There has never been a case where both the Principle of Nature and human selfish desires are interwoven and mixed. This is where the student must examine and realize for himself.”

This selection is rich with material that is indicative of the potential of human agency to act in accordance with the goodness of the “Principle of Nature” or to choose otherwise. To choose against Heaven, is to allow desire to overcome innate reason. But Confucian thought does not acknowledge a willful choice against the “Principle of Nature” and holds that sincere study of virtue will result in virtue. Zhu Xi offers a more concise description of ren as that which constitutes:

“the character of man’s mind and the principle of love.”

However, if “man’s mind” is conjoined with love in the “Principle of Nature,” then this begs the question of the imperative that man practice “righteousness and seriousness.” It seems that good and loving actions ought to be an automatic response and the continual need to overcome ignorance through perpetually analyzing right and wrong should not be necessary.

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\(^{81}\) Chan., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. (608). Original Text: Selection of Sayings sect. 16-19,3:1b-2a,3:3a

\(^{82}\) Ibid. 591.
Turning to an understanding of the motivation for benevolence:

The Master said, "The noble person is inclusive not exclusive; the small person is exclusive not inclusive."33

Confucius recognizes that employing these principles offers no guarantee that one will experience reciprocity from others. However, the concern of the individual must be on self-learning and selfless giving. To love fellow man regardless of their response is, in the Judeo-Christian ethic, known as agape love. It is an interesting parallel, but Confucius’ notion of ren is different in the basic motivation. While Kierkegaard highlights the sense that the Christian ethic is based upon a similar understanding of the Golden Rule, Theism involves a transcendent notion of a personal God that models this kind of love. In other words, Christian morality is a similar principle to Confucius’ notion of ren but it is to love fellow man because God has imparted a sense of dignity to mankind through demonstrating His love for human beings. Thus, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, reciprocity amongst fellow human beings need not be a motivating concern to the giving or loving individual. The biblical commandment is to love God and others and accordance is the proper human response once there is subjective recognition of God’s provision (much like the Buddhist move of demonstrating gratitude). Theistically speaking, authentic human endeavors toward benevolence or altruism are an attempt to know and share agape love and to try, however feebly, to reciprocate God’s love.

Confucius’ notion of the beloved is different in the sense that the individual must first attain a measure of self-love by loving tradition and ritual, and through this learning the beloved can become people. But ren has limitations in the sense of reciprocity or the lack thereof:
The Master said, "Loyally provide them with information and guide them skillfully. If this is no good, then desist. Do not humiliate yourself through them." (Analects, 12:23)

Here one problem of humanistic philosophy becomes evident in that the lack of transcendence relegates love or compassion to the position of a human construct. While even Jesus tells his disciples to kick the dust off their feet and continue to a house that will openly receive them, Christ's model of love remains beyond human predilections. In the ethics of humanism, love is necessarily defined relative to humanity alone, but this relativity leaves the door ajar for humans to arrive at differing conclusions as to whether they must altruistically love others. Having said all this, Confucius recognizes the problems of preferential love, reciprocity, and of feeble effort in the human condition, and thus his ethical emphasis rooted in tradition purposes to direct humanity to transcend baseness through cultivation.

Buddhist ethics are also relativistic in the sense of the means to enlightenment. The Lotus Sutra teaches that when it is necessary, the Buddha will employ tactfulness to "deceive one into the truth."84 Again, this is similar to the "Noble Lie" in Platonic thought. This relativity in means of transmitting truth is directly linked to subjective understanding. This understanding of personal ignorance, suffering, and need for belief amounts to the empathy of compassion. Compassion in this sense is a response to the truth of "Void:" the Oneness of existence. Compassion for another is predicated on compassion for oneself. This "empathy" is the sense of love in Chinese Buddhism. Thus living compassionately is the temporal manifestation of Buddha-nature.

83 ibid.
84 A statement by Kierkegaard regarding the relationship between one's imagination and either/or choices.
Similarly, Buddha-nature is not achieved in some indefinite future state; it is realized in each instance of compassion and generosity. Living beings and specifically bodhisattvas have gradations of Buddha-nature. The main error made is that humans fear the extinction or disappearance of self in relation to achieving enlightenment. That error stems from mistaken resentment of the transient and impermanent character of being because humans long for immortality and permanence. Since "Void" encompasses happiness and suffering, humans suffer when they seek self-fulfillment apart from cognizance of the source.

When living beings work to repay the "grace of the buddhas" this gratitude assumes compassion and resoluteness with respect to ending suffering. In the meanwhile, every temporal moment needs no redemption and every moment lived in ignorance will vanish and lose its significance. The results of ignorant actions become an occasion for insight and increased empathy thus even suffering serves a positive purpose. In this way all actions and all living beings are redeemable and human evils and tragedies, once understood and accepted, engender compassion.

In Kierkegaard's thought, philosophical commitments block subjective openness to the measure of faith required for true synthesis. Whether or not one wants to believe that the Kierkegaardian sense of faith is necessary, in relation to ignorance reversal, it is an indelible truth that temporal knowledge fails to ascribe absolute meaning to ethical proscription. The ethics that serve as the means of redemptive knowledge in other world religions and philosophies fail with regard to the God of the Bible. But even Christians live in the temporal world and post-fall man must live in accordance with the "Ten Commandments." However, even biblical history shows man's inability to live according
to God's commands. According to Kierkegaard the breakdown is not attributable to God but the warped and ultimately sinful imagination of man. In thinking that they know, human beings bring upon themselves a responsibility that they cannot meet. This in turn gives rise to evil and suffering and diminishes whatever capability human beings have to be compassionate and loving. Self-deification is precisely the cause for the necessity of thinking in terms of the human constructs of ethics. In this way theism provides a foundation for the transcendence of selfishness that escapes the finitude of human conventions.

In the worldviews discussed herein, truth amounts to a belief that requires subjective understanding at least in the temporal phase of existence. Similarly, ignorance amounts to the problem of subjective misappropriation or essential and existential misapprehension. Regardless, it is clear that the diverse ethical means toward the teleological suspension of ignorance are not so diverse. Perhaps human limitations of knowledge should be contemplated in a different way. Rather than an enduring sense of lack that the usual connotation of ignorance provides, a sense of wonder and openness might diminish the need for ethics and the emphasis on "learning." Believing that human knowledge is transitory allows for the subjective understanding that knowing is not in fact the end or highest endeavor for humanity. And if "Love" and "Truth" exist independently or transcend the constructs of human subjectivity, then "knowledge" must be redefined.

In any case, human nature mandates a sense of synthesis because of the inherent symmetry that defines life. To perceive symmetry is to acknowledge the depth of the simultaneous complexity and simplicity of the immanent and transcendent "Natural Law." The human search for personal synthesis is a struggle with nothing less than this
paradox. Determining the limits of knowledge and the means by which human beings seek to know truth and experience love is directly linked to the sense of transcendence in underlying worldviews. It seems clear that the parameters of life temporally known as the reality of birth and the inevitability of death, issue forth the need for personal reflection. Whether one chooses to believe that man, “Void,” or God is the foundation of “Love” and “Truth” is a question of potentially infinite significance. Regardless, at least in the temporal world of existence, ethics remain necessary as long as there is ignorance of self-constitution.
Glossary

This glossary includes the translated definitions of the relevant terminology to this study. It is important to state the author's cognizance of the inherent linguistic difficulties in translation of ancient intellectual texts. Trying to ascertain the meaning and intended meaning of ancient Chinese philosophical texts and terminology is an even greater challenge. The attempt to define Confucian terminology exemplifies this problem as Chinese lacks both inflection and agglutination meaning that words or characters are isolated and incapable of accurate self-disclosure. Further, Chinese has no formal grammar and it lacks gender, case, verb forms and tense thus making definition by context a necessity.

A short list of key terms relevant to this study of Confucian thought shall be included, as well as Buddhist, Greek, and Modern western philosophical terms. Various sources indicated in the bibliography are employed in the translated definitions of these terms, but knowledge of the original textual context can only be achieved insofar as the documents and translations are consistent with the historical record. The following lists are alphabetical and are presented in relation to the chapter or sectional use of these terms in this paper. These terms do not all appear in this paper and the order of terms in no way denotes a hierarchy of importance to this discussion.

Abridged list of important Confucian Terms (Chapter II):

誠 Cheng: sincerity.

道 Dao: road, way. In Confucius' thought it is (the Confucian Way) shown here in three categorical ways:

- Dao as the way of nature or the universe (D. o. M. XXVI, 7,8)
  or the way of earth, heaven and earth, and heaven (Ana. V, xii)

- Dao as the way of man according to the natural order

- Dao as the way or path that man actually follows, subjective nature (Ana. VII, vi, 1)

德 De: virtue

自 Ji: self; -also shen
君子 Junzi: noble person, also wise man or ren zhi

理 Li: propriety, principle, rules and conformity to the moral principles

命 Ming: order, disposition, destiny -or knowledge of natural order, disposition

仁 Ren: humanity, benevolence, also ai ren or loving people

数 Shu: reciprocity

天 Tian: principle of heaven, firmament, or principle of Being

天理 Tian li: natural laws

無 Wu: without, none; used in conjunction with zhi, wu zhi means no knowledge

孝 Xiao: filial piety

心 Xin: heart, mind

性 Xing: man's natural disposition, human nature

義 Yi: righteousness

愚 Yu: foolishness, ignorance

知 Zhi: knowledge, learned knowledge

On the translation of Buddhist terms:

Due to regional growth and directional development (northward), Chinese Buddhism, which relies upon translations and works of predominately Mahayana Buddhism, incorporated terminology that was agreeable to Chinese culture and sensibilities. The following short list of important terms is compiled from William E. Soothill’s “Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms,” “The Buddhist Bible,” edited by Dwight Goddard, and the “Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen,” translated by Michael H. Kohn. Being that Buddhism has a massive vocabulary that spans several languages, only those terms deemed essential to this discussion are included here.
Abridged list of Chinese Buddhist terms (Chapter III):

本覺 běnjué. Innate, or original enlightenment. Enlightenment as an aspect of basic nature, which means that enlightenment is not something to be obtained externally, or as a distant goal, but exists in full reality in the present—all beings need only to awaken to it.

德 dé Goodness, virtuous roots, meritorious virtue; the power of goodness that is accumulated in the course of acting in accordance with nature.

惡 è Evil, bad, wrong, vice, wickedness, immoral.

二諦 èrdì The twofold truth. The absolute truth is the view of reality as experienced by enlightened people. Since it transcends dualistic logic, it cannot exactly be expressed in linguistic constructions. The relative truth is reality as experienced by unenlightened people, and is expressed readily in dualistic linguistic constructions.

二見 èrjiàn The two views of existence.... The view of eternalism and nihilism, also expressed as the view of existence and non-existence.

二我見 èrwò Two views of self.... The belief in the inherent existence of a subjective and an objective self.

二悟 èrwù Two kinds of awakening: sudden and gradual awakening.

分別 fēnbìé Discrimination, decisions, or conclusions made regarding external phenomena. This term is usually used with a negative connotation, referring to the mental action of partial and limiting rationality that hinders the function of the originally enlightened mind. To think in terms of difference... to see plurality rather than oneness.

分別障 fēnbìé zhàng Hindrances of evil passions that arise from discriminatory thought. They arise from following a deluded teacher, deluded teaching, or deluded thoughts.

究竟 jiùjiìng Unsurpassed, final, extreme, best, ideal. To arrive to the highest position of bodhisattvahood --or thorough enlightenment. The final goal is realized by becoming Buddha—especially in Tiantai and Huayan.

滅 miè To finish, end, cease, wipe out, negate, annihilate. In Buddhism, usually refers to the cessation of afflictions -thus, nirvāṇa. A view of the universe as being ultimately nothingness.
The noble truth of the cessation of suffering. The principle espoused by Śākyamuni that all suffering eventually ceases; one of the Four Noble Truths.

Three delusions, or afflictions. Three kinds of basic defilement: craving, anger, and ignorance.

Without, none, not; lacking. A negative. In translating from Sanskrit to Chinese, it is used for the Sanskrit term a.

Unimpeded wisdom; unobstructed wisdom; the wisdom of the Buddha.

Without limit, endless. Spatially unlimited, alludes to the notion of “Void.”

Impermanence.... The fact that all things are impermanent is one of the basic premises of Buddhism.

No perversion, no inversion, no mistaken conception of reality.

Not-two, non-duality. The lack of dualistic opposition, the lack of a second thing.

No wisdom; synonym for ignorance.

Translated as delusion, folly, or ignorance. As the fundamental misunderstanding of reality that underlies all of the sufferings of unenlightened people, it is the first of the twelve limbs of dependent origination. Rather than a lack of factual knowledge it is a basic error in mode of perception that prevents people from seeing things as they really are.

Beginningless ignorance; the basic misapprehension of reality, inherently enacted by living beings from the beginningless past. Synonymous with “innate ignorance.”

The lack of existence of an inherent self, soul, or ego, usually translated into English as “no-self.”

True, actual, real; pure, undiluted, undefiled; correct. The Way or path.
智 智Wisdom as the function of the intellect. An intelligent or wise person with understanding and knowledge.

智滅 智熄灭 Cessation (nirvāṇa) attained by the full understanding of dependent origination.

The following are combined Ancient and Modern Greek terms (Chapter IV):

*agapo*: Benevolent Love, distinguished from Eros and Platonic love.

*agathos*: good; also *kalos*

*agnola*: ignorance, with the connotation of lack of basic learning or high level learning

*alazonela*: arrogance

*alitheia*: truth

*amfiballo*: doubt

*aretē*: virtue

*fantasia*: imagination

*fantazomai*: imagine

*fobos*: fear

*gnomi*: opinion

*gnosi*: knowledge

*idios*: the Greek term for “self”

*ilithios*: stupid, foolish

*kakos*: evil

*katalabaino*: to understand
meletos: to study

merimna: anxiety, worry

ouranos: heaven

pascho: suffer

perifania: pride

psych: soul

skepsi: thought

sofia: wisdom

stigmi: moment, instance of experience

symponia: compassion

telos: principle of existence, root word of teleology

thanatos: death

theos: the god, gods, or God

theoria: theory

Modern philosophical terms:

The following vocabulary list distinguishes Modern western and world philosophies. Some terms are basic to Existentialism and those terms that are significant to the depiction of Soren Kierkegaard's thought herein, are also included. It is important to remember that Modern western philosophy deals with the underlying presuppositions of the Judeo-Christian tradition and thus the vocabulary is reflective of theological consideration with regard to self-constitution.
Terms most relevant to the western portion of this study (Chapter IV):

**Determinism**: The view that every event has a cause and that everything in the universe is governed by causal laws to the exclusion of “free-will.”

**Dialectic**: A logical progression from thesis (order), through antithesis, to synthesis (more inclusive order); then the process is repeated, synthesis becomes thesis and gives rise to a new contradiction, or antithesis; ever upward, on to more and more inclusive orders; an upward movement toward perfection of synthesis. Term itself originates with Hegel, and used by Marx but the pendulum theory of dialectics extends throughout the history of intellectual thought. *Yin* and *Yang* is an early eastern example of a kind of dialectical process.

**Dualism**: Any philosophical theory holding that the universe consists of, or can only be explained by, two independent and separate constituents or substances.

**Epistemology**: The study of the possibility and the nature of what constitutes knowledge. It deals with the scope and limits of human knowledge and is a fundamental topic of modern philosophical formation.

**Ethics**: Based on the Greek term *ethos* (habit or custom). There are multiple branches of ethics, but it is generally known as the practices and principles constituting morally right conduct (social, normative, and descriptive).

**Existentialism**: Philosophical movement beginning with Kierkegaard and growing most notably in the work of Sartre and Heidegger in the mid-twentieth century. Basic principles: the thinking subject’s existence precedes it’s essence, and that subjective existence, is radically free and cannot be objectively construed, and is consequently incapable of any objective scientific characterization. Human beings are viewed as independent agents that have personal responsibility and have freedom from mass mentality through subjectivity. An existence based philosophy typically tempers the “radical freedom” of subjectivity with the awareness of mortality, or the reality of one’s impending death.

**God**: Omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), and perfectly benevolent creator of the universe. The biblical God is the God of *Agape* love, depicted by the Old Testament relationship with the Hebrew people, and the New Testament incarnation, ministry, and atonement of the God-man, Jesus Christ. In western thought, God is
generally conceived of as transcending the created universe. In the Christian tradition it is held that God exists prior to and beyond the universe which He created from nothing (ex-nihilo).

**Humanism:** In the western tradition, humanism is a non or anti-religious worldview. It is based on man's belief in self-cultivation and progress toward personal and social perfection. Secular humanism is a complete refutation of religiosity while humanism has a wide spectrum of adherents including "Christian Humanists" who subscribe to the potential of human beings to affect their own "salvation." In the eastern tradition, humanism is not always characterized as anti-religious, but it is centered on the belief that man—through tradition, learning, and personal ability—is capable of sagacity.

**Imagination:** The faculty of forming mental images, particular sensations or impressions. Opposed to the intellect, the faculty of forming general concepts. In this broad, somewhat technical sense, imagination includes perception as well as imagination proper which includes fantasy, dreams, mimesis, etc. As discussed, Kierkegaard's view of the imagination distinguishes pre-fall and post-fall man in much the same way as the Hebraic sense of this faculty. He distinguishes the imagination by its singular ability to consider infinite as well as finite concerns. While intellect and will are discussed extensively in western thought, and are discussed less explicitly but always treated implicitly in eastern thought, imagination is discussed in certain schools more explicitly but always treated implicitly as it is inseparable from idea formation.

**Immanent (Immanence):** Internal or indwelling as opposed to external or out-dwelling: in particular, what is internal to the material, sensible world as opposed to what is above, beyond, or transcendent. Pantheistic views hold that God is held to be an immanent guiding spirit in and of the sensible material world, not existing apart or beyond it. Orthodox Christian views, by contrast, hold God to be transcendent. Plato asserts transcendence while Aristotle postulates the immanence of the Forms or essences of things.

**Individuals:** Single particular things or persons that defy universal definition. These are distinct from properties or categorized and labeled "kinds" of things; such as "human being" which is universally descriptive. Individuals are typically the sorts of things named by proper names, and humans are distinguished as individuals by the notion of a subjective "self" that has a name to distinguish itself from others.

**Knowledge:** Classically defined: knowledge is justified true belief.
Means: An object or activity sought or pursued not merely for its own sake, but for the sake of a farther reaching end.

Metaphysics: The study of or branch of philosophy concerned with the ultimate nature of reality and with existence as a whole.

Monism: The theory that everything in the universe is composed of, or can be explained by or reduced to one fundamental substance, energy, or force. In the modern era materialists take this one thing to be matter; idealists take the one fundamental “thing” to be mind. Buddhism is an eastern example of a hybrid between monism and pantheism, in that there is immanence as there is only one “thing.”

Nihilism: The view that moral values do not exist; there is no existent foundation for moral statements regarding right and wrong. Ultimately this idea assumes relativism and engenders indifference, as there is nothing upon which to affix passion.

Objective (objectivity): Pertaining to things independent of or external to thought and experience. In terms of thought processing, it is construed as the personal abstraction from subjective conjecture. Kierkegaard finds the notion of “objectivity” to be fallacious in that, while abstraction from self-concern is necessary, the individual cannot transcend their own thought or selfishness without God’s “Mediation” through revelation and redemption.

Ontology: The study of Being. Ontological considerations are rudimentary in philosophical endeavors as they involve the metaphysical study of the nature of being and existence.

Pluralism: The theory that reality is composed or can be explained in terms of two or more fundamental substances, energies, or forces.

Pantheism: The worldview that holds that the world and all things in it are one with the notion of goodness or one and the same with “God.” This worldview can serve to attribute divinity to all living beings, or it can be akin to a form of atheism that finds there to be no entity distinguished as “God.” In the western tradition pantheism is linked more often with atheism. In eastern thought such as Buddhism, “Buddha-nature” is evidence of the underlying pantheistic strand of thought. The
notion of “Void” can be construed as an atheistic belief, or it may be seen as a divine
monism.

Rationalism: The philosophic approach that holds that reality is knowable by the use of
reason or thinking alone, starting with innate ideas, without the need for recourse to
external observation or experience.

Realism: View that affirms the existence of universals. Extreme or Platonic realism
holds that universals “forms” or “ideas” exist independently of both particular things
and human minds.

Reason: The unique human intellectual power of grasping concepts and drawing
inferences.

Reflection: The inner perception by which minds are aware of their own thoughts.
Fundamental to Kierkegaard’s call to subjective “inwardness.”

Revelation: General revelation is held to be the truth commonly manifest in nature.
Special revelation is “Truth” about God that can only be revealed by supernatural
means and cannot be discovered by the unaided exercise of reason and perception.

Subjective (subjectivity): Pertaining to the deepest personal sense of processing
thoughts and experiences. For Kierkegaard “Truth” is subjectivity as it is only known
as truth when it is believed on an individual subjective basis. This is not to be confused
with solipsism (reality in mind alone) or radical relativism, in that Truth exists
externally just as there is transcendence. However, it is the individual’s relationship to
truth that makes truth personally manifest.

Teleology: Purpose or direction. The doctrine that serves to explain phenomena by its
end or purpose. It is the way and the sense of the direction of movement toward the end
to the means of the course of any given thoughts or actions. Can infer design or the
purposeful inception and execution of phenomena in nature. Also relates to the study of
history or intellectual history in addressing the summation of events. In the title of this
paper it is a simple play on Kierkegaard’s “teleological suspension of the ethical” in
that the “teleological suspension of ignorance” is simply a move toward not having to
think in terms of knowledge or the lack thereof in relation to human merit or ethical
considerations.
Theism: The worldview belief in the existence of one God as the creator that is personal and perfect. Traditionally western religions have been categorized as monotheistic as opposed to polytheistic. Theism generally holds there to be dualism in nature in that God is distinct from the world and its occupants. God is held to be the only being worthy of worship and is simultaneously immanent and transcendent. Theism is common to Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Transcendent: Surpassing or apart from sensible or material reality. In Theism, God is held to be transcendent beyond the world. In Pantheism, “God” is held to be an immanent guiding spirit or the Natural Laws in and of the sensible material world, not existing apart from or beyond it.

Universal: Pertaining to “all:” All times, all places, and all things.

Vice: An undesirable or despicable personality trait, such as cruelty, or cowardice. The antithesis of virtue.

Virtue: A desirable or admirable personality trait—such as kindness or courage. In western and eastern humanistic thought, virtue is the “mean” or “means” for human activity and social development.
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