

Reply to Professor Shea's Comments

Jeu-Jenq Yuann

I am deeply grateful for professor Shea's comments on my paper. I am also extremely thankful for his brief summary of my paper, which accurately unveils the basic ideas of my paper. At the end of his comments, professor Shea proposes two questions. I find them challenging and helpful to my paper as a whole.

The first question asks a metaphysical question concerning the idea of *ren* (仁 humaneness) in Confucian philosophy and the second question is a comparison of *ren* in the tradition of China with love in the Christian tradition in general and in Aquinas's philosophical theology in particular. Both questions are challenging as they consider the metaphysical nature of philosophical arguments and touch upon deep questions in comparative philosophy. The first one is about the human conditions and the second refers to the two most fundamental ideas in both the Christian and Chinese traditions. I begin with the response to the first question.

From the Confucian point of view, is *ren*, a moral ideal prescribes all human behavior, a part of natural instinct? If yes, then what is the point of talking about the idea which belongs to everybody naturally? Or, put the question

differently, is the idea of *ren* a descriptive idea or a normative idea? If it is the former, then as a matter of fact we all have it even without efforts. Or, if the latter, then what are the efforts we need in order to accomplish the virtue that we desire to have?

Professor Shea's question pinpoints the essential parts of philosophical anthropology that concerns human nature in general.

All Confucians, regardless of which school they belong to, stress not just instinctive nature in human beings but also their moral nature. The difference of them is considerable and yet related. The instinctive human nature and the moral nature are different in the sense that the former needs the latter in order to fulfill the obligations of being a person. Without this fulfillment, a human is not complete. Human's moral capability needs to be further developed, and moral education of every person is not merely a part of life but also a fully required duty. Among the many items of moral education, the cultivation of *ren* is the most essential one for the Confucians.

For all humans, if self-preservation is fully protected, then we have the moral obligation to cultivate our moral nature. However, Confucius's idea of *ren* took one step further because he considers morality to be superior to that of mere physical existence. Confucius stresses very much that all humans are by nature moral beings and therefore we should strive for a higher moral standard, even though the needed efforts appear endless. After all, we have the potential to be further cultivated for the full development of our moral nature.

So, we have two different natures: one is our instinctive nature which is based on self-interest and we have the second nature which is our moral nature. These two natures are connected, but the instinctive nature subjects to

the command of the moral nature. According to Confucius, they co-exist in the same person, yet the instinctive one must bow to the moral nature. We all got the potential, but in order to be a moral person equipped with the quality of *ren*, we need to be educated, developed and many times instructed.

About the second question, it's much more difficult as it touched upon the nature of religion which is somehow lacking in the Confucian tradition. When we talk about the idea of Confucian *ren* and the idea of Christian love we need to be extremely careful, otherwise we might be examining things decontextualized. I begin with Aquinas's idea of love.

Admittedly, in my paper, I compare the idea of *ren* with love which is the most essential idea of Christianity. With my very limited knowledge about the Christian theology, I have to acknowledge my ignorance of this misguided comparison. I have to stress that my comparison does not touch the deep nature of the idea of love as I mention it rather casually for the understanding the idea of *ren* in the Confucian context. The way I mention it is indeed like what Aquinas says, love is "willing the good of the other," even "union with the other." But the part of "union with the other" seems to me to be divergent from the Confucian idea of *ren*.

To Christians, love is the heart of morality, and to Confucians, *ren* is the heart of morality. However, Confucian *ren* is different from Christian love in their respective contexts. I personally hold that Christian love as the willing good for the others is a much stronger passion comparing to that of *ren* which is more of a personal cultivation than following a passion. Why is the Confucian *ren* less passionate than Christian? The answer lies in the very nature of religion.

In the Christian tradition, God's love creates everything, including human beings in particular. Analogically, the Confucian tradition talks about *ren*, as being kind towards others or loving the others is a natural part of being human. Here we see the difference immediately. While Christianity regards love as imitation of God (the divine creator), the Chinese people holds *Tian*, which means the heavens, as an impersonal supreme ontological principle. The divergence between a *Creator-God* and an impersonal *principle* tells us precisely that the Christian tradition values a personal relationship with God, while the Chinese tradition holds that *ren* as an essential part of moral virtue that needs to be guided and cultivated, it does not refer to personal bond with God. In Christianity, love originates from God who creates us, yet in the Chinese tradition, we are moral beings because of *Tian* which only exerts its power ontologically as a law of nature.

For the above-mentioned reasons, in my view even though *ren* and love are somehow similar, yet they are not the same. Though they can be compared, the divergence remains crucial to understanding these ideas from their respective contexts.